

A Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma

by
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw
of
Burma



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Editor's Foreword

As with my other editions of the translated works of the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, I have removed many of the Pāli words or moved them to parentheses for the benefit of those who are not familiar with Pāli technical terms. Where Pāli passages are explained word by word, using the **Nissaya** method, a Pāli word or phrase is highlighted in blue, followed by its translation in English.

The original translation was published in Rangoon in December 1981, about nineteen years after the Sayādaw gave the Dhamma talks, which spanned a period of several months. To transcribe and translate many hours of tape-recordings is a huge task, but one productive of great merit as it enables a much wider audience to benefit from the late Sayādaw's profound talks.

This edition aims to extend the audience further still by publishing the book on the Internet. Since my target audience may be less familiar with Buddhism than most Burmese Buddhists, and many may know little about the late Mahāsi Sayādaw, I have added a few footnotes by way of explanation.

References are to the Pāli text Roman Script editions of the Pali Text Society — in their translations, these page numbers are given in the headers or in square brackets in the body of the text thus [254]. This practice is also followed by modern translations, like that below:

254 *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta: Sutta 26* i.162

Thus a reference to M.i.162 would be found on page 162 of volume one in the Pāli edition, but on page 254 of Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation. It would be on a different page in Miss I.B. Horner's translation, but since the Pāli page reference is given, it can still be found. In the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition of the Pāli texts on CD, the references to the pages of the PTS Roman Script edition are shown at the bottom of the screen, and can be located by searching.

I have attempted to standardise the translation of Pāli terms to match that in other works by the Sayādaw, but it is impossible to be totally consistent as the various translations and editions are from many different sources. In the index you can find the Pāli terms in brackets after the translations, thus the index also serves as a glossary.

The Dhammacakka Sutta, being the Buddha's First Discourse, is of great significance and importance. However, being given to the five monks who had accompanied the Bodhisatta on his strenuous

search for the truth, it is also profound and not easily understood by the average lay person who is still addicted to sensual pleasures, and unfamiliar with meditation practice. The group of five monks had, in fact, been practising meditation even longer than the Bodhisatta. Some Commentaries say that they were the royal astrologers who were present at his birth, others say that they were their sons, but either way they had renounced household life to become ascetics, with firm confidence in the imminent awakening of the Bodhisatta to Buddhahood in the not too distant future.

So, these five ascetics were exceptionally gifted individuals, with many years of prior experience in meditation when they listened to the Buddha's First Discourse. Nevertheless, only one of them, the Venerable Koṇḍañña, realised the Dhamma and attained nibbāna, thus becoming a Stream-winner at the end of this brief discourse. The other four all had to practise meditation under the personal guidance of the Buddha for one, two, three, and four days respectively, before gaining the Path of Stream-winning. They had to strive very hard too, probably not even pausing to sleep, while the group of six including the Buddha lived on the almsfood brought back by two or three of them.

These days, it is hard to find meditators who are willing to strive hard in meditation. Although I schedule fortnightly one-day retreats, only rarely does anyone attend. These retreats are only twelve hours, so they are, in fact, only half-day retreats — not even a full one-day retreat as practised by the Venerable Vappa to gain the Path.

As the Sayādaw stresses in the last of this series of discourses, in [A Matter for Consideration](#), the realisation of the Dhamma can only come about through actual practice, not merely by listening to discourses (nor by reading books). Yet, some do a great disservice to the Buddha's practical teaching by discouraging the practice of concentration and insight meditation. I have heard two extreme views: one that listening to discourses is sufficient so there's no need to practice, and the other that nibbāna cannot be attained in this era, so there's no point in practising. These very dangerous wrong views should be dismissed, and one should practise meditation earnestly in the expectation of developing the path of insight leading to nibbāna.

Bhikkhu Pesala
September 2021

A Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma Part One

Delivered on Saturday, 29th September, 1962.¹

Preface to the Discourse

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

Today is the new-moon day of September. Beginning from today, I will expound the the Blessed One's first discourse, namely the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta — the Great Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma.

Being the first discourse ever delivered by the Blessed One, it is the most straightforward of his teachings. Rare is the person, among the laity of this Buddhist country of Burma, who has not heard of this discourse. Numerous are those who have committed this Sutta to memory. In almost every town and village, there are religious groups under the name of "The Wheel of Dhamma Reciting Society," devoted to the recitation of the Sutta and listening to it. Buddhists regard this Sutta with great esteem, and venerate it because it was the first teaching of the Blessed One.

There are numerous Nissaya or other forms of translation, explaining and interpreting the Pāḷi of the Sutta in Burmese. However, there is scarcely any work that explicitly shows what practical methods are available from the Sutta and how they could be utilised by ardent, sincere meditators who aspire to gain the Path and its Fruition. I have expounded this Sutta on numerous occasions, emphasising its practical application to meditation. I formally opened this (Rangoon) Meditation Centre with a discourse of this Sutta and have repeatedly delivered the discourse here. Elsewhere too wherever a new meditation centre was opened, I always employed this Sutta as an inaugural discourse.

The Buddhist Canon has three main divisions — the three baskets or Tipiṭaka in Pāḷi. These are the Sutta Piṭaka — the collection of discourses, the Vinaya Piṭaka — the rules of discipline, and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka — the Analytical teachings. The Discourse on the Wheel of Dhamma is included in the Sutta Piṭaka, which consists

¹ New-moon day of Tawthalin, 1324 Burmese Era (ed.)

of five sections (*nikāya*): the Dīghanikāya, the Majjhimanikāya, the Saṃyuttanikāya, the Aṅguttaranikāya, and the Khuddakanikāya. The Saṃyuttanikāya is divided into five groups (*vagga*): a) Sagāthāvagga, b) Nidānavagga, c) Khandhavagga, d) Saḷāyatanavagga, and e) Mahāvagga. The Mahāvagga is divided into twelve chapters such as the Maggasamyutta, the Bojjhaṅgasamyutta, the Satipaṭṭhānasamyutta, the last of which is the Saccāsamyyutta. The Wheel of Dhamma appears as the first discourse in the second group of the Saccāsamyyutta and was recited as such in the proceedings of the Sixth Buddhist Council (Saṅgāyana). In the Sixth Buddhist Council edition of the Tipiṭaka, it is recorded on pages 368-371 of the third volume of the Saṃyutta Piṭaka.¹ There, the introduction to the Discourse reads: “*Evaṃ me sutam, ekaṃ samayaṃ...* Thus have I heard. At one time...” These were the introductory words uttered by the Venerable Ānanda when interrogated by the Venerable Mahākassapa at the First Buddhist Council held just over three months after the passing away of the Blessed One. The Venerable Mahākassapa said to the Venerable Ānanda:—

“Friend Ānanda, where was the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta delivered? By whom was it delivered and on whose account? And how was it delivered?” The Venerable Ānanda answered, “Venerable Mahākassapa, thus have I heard:—

“At one time the Blessed One was staying at the Sage’s Resort, the Pleasance of Isipatana, (where Pacceka Buddhas and Enlightened Ones alighted from the sky), in the Deer Sanctuary, in the township of Benares. Then the Blessed One addressed the group of five monks. ‘These two extremes, monks, should not be followed by one who has gone forth from the worldly life.’

The Date of the Discourse

This introduction lacks a definite date of delivery of the discourse. As in all other Suttas, the date was mentioned merely as “At one time.” Precise chronological data as to the year, month, and day on which each discourse was delivered would have been very helpful. However, chronological details may have been an encumbrance to committing the Suttas to memory, and to their recitation. Thus it is not easy to place a precise date for each the Suttas. It should,

¹ S.v.421 in the Roman script edition of the PTS (ed.)

however, be possible to work out the exact date on which the Dhammacakka Sutta was delivered because it was the first discourse of the Blessed One, and also because reference could be made to internal evidence provided in other Suttas and the Vinaya Piṭaka.

The Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment on the night of the full-moon of May in the year 103 of the Great Era. Then he taught this Dhammacakka Sutta in the early evening of the full-moon day of the following July. It is exactly 2,506 years now in this year 1324 of the Burmese Era since the Buddha's final *parinibbāna* took place. Adding on the 45 years of the dispensation before the *parinibbāna*, it would total 2,551 years. Thus it was on the first watch of the full-moon of July, 2,551 years ago that this first discourse was delivered by the Blessed One. Western scholars regard this estimation as 60 years too early. According to their calculation, it was only 2,491 years ago that the first discourse was taught. As the event of the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma took place in the East, I would prefer to go by the oriental calculation and regard the first discourse as being taught 2,551 years ago.¹

The deer park, in which deer were given sanctuary, must have been a forested area with deer roaming about freely. At present, however, the area has been depleted of forest trees and has become an open plain with cultivated patches surrounding human habitations. In ancient times, Paccakabuddhas travelled through the sky by supernatural powers from the [Gandhamādana](#) mountain and descended to earth at this isolated place. Likewise, the Enlightened Ones of the distant past came here by psychic powers and alighted on this same spot to teach their first discourse. Hence the name, "The Sage's Resort."

The introduction to the Sutta says that the Blessed One taught the first discourse to the group of five monks while he was staying in the pleasure of the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares. That is all the information that could be obtained from the introductory statement, which is bare and inadequate. It needs some elaboration, which I propose to provide by drawing on material from other Suttas.

Three Kinds of Introduction

The introduction to a Sutta explains on whose account it was taught by the Buddha. Introductions are of three kinds.

¹ In 1962, so 2,610 years ago in 2021 when this edition was published (ed.)

1) An introduction that gives a background story of the remote past. This provides an account of how the Bodhisatta, the future Buddha, fulfilled the perfections required of an aspirant Buddha, beginning from the time of prophecy proclaimed by Dipaṅkara Buddha to the time when he was reborn in the Tusita heaven as a king of the deities named Setaketu. There is no need, nor enough time, to deal more with this background story of the distant past.

2) An introduction touching on the background story of the intermediate period. This deals with the account of what passed from the time of existence in the Tusita heaven to the attainment of Full Enlightenment on the Throne of Wisdom. I will give attention to this introduction to a considerable extent.

3) An introduction that tells of the recent past, just preceding the teaching of the Dhammacakka Sutta. This is what is learnt from the statement, "Thus have I heard. At one time..." quoted above. I will deal now with relevant extracts from the second category of introductions, drawing material from the Sukhumāla Sutta¹ of the Tikanipāta, Aṅguttaranikāya; the Pāsārāsi or Ariyapariyesanā Sutta,² and Mahāsaccaka Sutta³ of the Mūlapaṇṇāsa, Majjhimanikāya; Bodhirājakumāra Sutta⁴ and Saṅgārava Sutta⁵ of Majjhimaṇṇāsa, Majjhimanikāya; Pabbajjā Sutta,⁶ Padhāna Sutta⁷ of the Suttanipāta, and many other Suttas.

The Bodhisatta and Worldly Pleasures

After the Bodhisatta had passed away from the Tusita heaven, he entered the womb of Mahāmāyā Devī, the Principle Queen of King Suddhodana of Kapilavatthu. The Bodhisatta was born on Friday, the full-moon day of May in the year 68 of the Great Era, in the pleasure-grove of Sal trees called the Lumbini Grove and was named Siddhatta. At the age of sixteen, he was married to Yasodharā Devī daughter of Suppabuddha, the Royal Master of Devadaha. Thereafter, surrounded by forty thousand attendant princesses, he lived in enjoyment of royal pleasures in great magnificence. While he was thus wholly given over to sensual pleasure amidst pomp and splendour, he came out one day accompanied by attendants to the royal pleasure-grove for a garden feast and merry-making. On the way to the grove, the

¹ A.i.145.

² M.i.162.

³ M.i.237.

⁴ M.ii.91.

⁵ M.ii.209.

⁶ Sn.vv.407-426.

⁷ Sn.vv.427-451.

sight of a decrepit, aged person gave him a shock and he turned back to his palace. As he went out on a second occasion he saw a person who was sick with disease and returned greatly alarmed. When he sallied forth for the third time, he was agitated in heart on seeing a dead man and hurriedly retraced his steps. The agitation that set upon the Bodhisatta are described in the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta.

The Ignoble Search

The Bodhisatta pondered thus; “When oneself is subject to aging to seek and crave for what is subject to aging is not befitting. What are subject to aging? Wife and children, slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, elephants, horses, cattle, gold and silver, all objects of pleasures and luxuries animate and inanimate are subject to aging. Being oneself subject to aging, to crave for these objects of pleasures, to be enveloped and immersed in them is improper.”

“Similarly, it does not befit one, when oneself is subject to disease and death, to crave for sensual objects that are subject to disease and death. To go after what is subject to aging, disease, and death is improper, and constitutes an ignoble search (*anariyāpariyesanā*).”

The Noble Search

“Being oneself subject to aging, disease, and death, to go in search of that which is not subject to aging, disease, and death constitutes a noble search (*ariyāpariyesanā*).”

That the Bodhisatta himself was engaged at first in the ignoble search was described in the Sutta as follows:-

“Now bhikkhus, before my Enlightenment while I was only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, being myself subject to birth I sought after what was also subject to birth; being myself subject to aging I sought after what was also subject to aging.”

This was a denunciation of the life of pleasure he had lived with Yasodharā amidst the happy society of attendant princesses. Then, having perceived the wretchedness of such a life, he resolved to go in search of the peace of nibbāna, which is free from birth, aging, disease, and death. he said, “Having perceived the wretchedness of being myself subject to birth, aging, it occurred to me it would be fitting if I were to seek the incomparable, unsurpassed peace of nibbāna, free from birth and aging.”

Thus it occurred to the Bodhisatta to go in search of the peace of nibbāna, which is free from aging, disease, and death. That was a very laudable aim and I will consider it further to see clearly how it was so. Suppose there was someone who was already old and decrepit. Would it be wise for him to seek the company of another man or woman who, like himself, was aged and frail; or of someone who though not advanced in age yet would surely be old in no time? No, it would not be wise at all. Again, for someone who was himself in declining health and suffering, it would be quite irrational if he were to seek the companionship of another who was afflicted with a crippling disease. Companionship with someone who though, enjoying good health presently, would soon be troubled with illness, would not be prudent either. There are those who, hoping to enjoy each other's company for life, got married and settled down. Unfortunately, one of the partners soon becomes a bed-ridden invalid, imposing on the other the onerous duty of looking after their stricken mate. The hope of a happy married life may be dashed when one of the partners passes away leaving only sorrow and lamentation for the bereaved. Ultimately both of the couples would be faced with the misery of aging, disease, and death.

Thus it is extremely unwise to pursue sensual pleasures, which are subject to aging, disease, and death. The most noble search is to seek out what is not subject to aging, disease, and death. Here at this meditation centre, it is gratifying that the devotees, monks, and laymen, are all engaged in the noble search for the unaging, the unailing, and the deathless.

On his fourth excursion to the pleasure grove, the Bodhisatta met a monk. On learning from the monk that he had gone forth from the worldly life and was engaged in spiritual endeavour, it occurred to the Bodhisatta to renounce the world, become a recluse and go in search of what is not subject to aging, disease, and death. When he had gained what he had set out for, his intention was to pass on the knowledge to the world so that others would also learn to be free from misery of being subject to aging, disease, and death. A noble thought indeed, a noble intention indeed!

On that same day, about the same time, a son was born to his consort Yasodharā Devī. When he heard the news, the Bodhisatta murmured, 'An impediment (Rāhula) has arisen, a fetter has been

born." On learning this remark of the Bodhisatta, his father King Suddhodana had his newborn grandson named as "Rāhula" (Prince Impediment), hoping that the child would prove to be an impediment to the Bodhisatta and hinder his plan of renunciation.

However, the Bodhisatta had become averse to the pleasures of the world. That night he remained disinterested in the amusements provided by the entertainers and fell into an early slumber. The discouraged musicians lay down their instruments and went to sleep there and then. The sight of recumbent, sleeping dancers that met him on awakening in the middle of the night, repulsed him and made the magnificent apartment seem like a cemetery full of corpses.

Thus at midnight the Bodhisatta went forth on the Great Renunciation riding the royal horse Kanthaka and accompanied by his groom Channa. When they came to the river Anomā, he cut off his hair and beard while standing on the sandy beach. Then after discarding the royal garments, he put on the yellow robes offered by the brahmā god Ghaṭikāra and became a monk. The Bodhisatta was only twenty-nine then, an age most favourable for the pursuit of pleasures. That he renounced with indifference the pomp and splendour of a sovereign and abandoned the solace and comfort of his consort Yasodharā and retinue at such a favourable age, while still blessed with youth, is really awe-inspiring.

Approaching the Sage Āḷāra

At that time the Bodhisatta was not yet in possession of practical knowledge of leading a holy life. So he made his way to the famous ascetic Āḷāra. He was no ordinary person; of the eight stages of mundane *jhānic* attainments, he had personally mastered seven stages up to the absorption dwelling on nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana jhāna*) and was imparting this knowledge to his pupils.

Before the appearance of the Buddha, such teachers who had achieved *jhānic* attainments served as trustworthy masters giving practical instructions on the method to attain *jhāna*. Āḷāra was famous like a Buddha in those times. The Theravāda literature is silent about him, but in the Lalitavistara, a biographical text of the northern School of Buddhism, it was recorded that the great teacher had lived in the state of Vesāli and that he had three hundred pupils learning his doctrine.

Taking Instructions from Āḷāra

How the Bodhisatta took instructions from the sage Āḷāra is described thus: “Having gone forth and become a recluse in pursuit of what is holy and good, seeking the supreme, incomparable peace of nibbāna, I drew to where Āḷāra Kālāma was and addressed him thus: ‘Friend Kālāma, I wish to lead the holy life under your doctrine and discipline.’ When I had thus addressed him Āḷāra replied. ‘Friend Gotama is welcome. Of such a nature is this doctrine that in a short time, an intelligent man can realise for himself and abide in what his teacher has realised as his own.’” After these words of encouragement, Āḷāra gave him practical instructions on the method.

Reassuring Words

Āḷāra’s statement that his doctrine, if practised as taught, could be realised soon by oneself was very reassuring, and inspired confidence. A pragmatic doctrine is trustworthy and convincing only if it could be realised by oneself, and in a short time. The sooner the realisation is possible, the more heartening it will be. The Bodhisatta was thus satisfied with Āḷāra’s words, and this thought arose in him. “It is not by mere faith that Āḷāra announces that he has learned the Dhamma, Āḷāra has surely realised the Dhamma himself, he knows and understands it.”

That was true. Āḷāra did not cite any texts as authority. He did not say that he had heard it from others. He clearly stated that he had realised himself what he knew personally. A meditation teacher must be able to declare his conviction boldly like him. Without having practised the Dhamma personally, without having experienced and realised it in a personal way, to claim to be a teacher in meditation, to teach and write books about it, after just learning from the texts on meditation methods, is most incongruous and improper. It is like a physician prescribing medicine not yet clinically tested and tried by him, and which he dare not administer on himself. Such teachings and publications are surely undependable and uninspiring. However, Āḷāra taught boldly what he had realised himself. The Bodhisatta was fully impressed by him, and the thought arose in him. “Not only Āḷāra has faith, I also have faith; not only Āḷāra has energy, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, I also have them.” Then

he strove for the realisation of that Dhamma that Āḷāra declared he had learned and realised for himself. In no time he learned the Dhamma that led him as far as the *jhānic* stage of nothingness.

He then approached Āḷāra Kālāma and asked him whether the realm of nothingness, which he had claimed to have realised himself and live in possession of, was the same stage that the Bodhisatta had now reached. Āḷāra replied, "This is as far as my teaching leads, which I have declared to have realised and abide in the possession of it, the same stage as friend Gotama has reached." Then he uttered these words of praise. "Friend Gotama is a supremely distinguished person. The realm of nothingness is not easily attainable. Yet you have realised it in no time. It is truly wonderful. Fortunate we are that we should meet such a distinguished ascetic as your reverence. As I have realised the Dhamma, so you have realised it too. As you have learnt it, so I have learnt to the same extent as you. Friend Gotama is my equal in Dhamma. We have a large community here. Come, friend, let us together direct this company of disciples."

Thus Āḷāra, the teacher, set up the Bodhisatta, his pupil as a complete equal to himself and honoured the Bodhisatta by delegating to him the task of guiding one hundred and fifty pupils, which was exactly half of the disciples under his instruction.

However, the Bodhisatta stayed there only for a short time. While staying there, this thought occurred to him, "This doctrine does not lead to aversion, to the abatement and cessation of passion, to quiescence for higher knowledge and full enlightenment nor to nibbāna, the end of suffering, but only as far as the attainment of the realm of nothingness. Once there, a long life of 60,000 world cycles follows and after expiring from there, one reappears in sensual realms, and undergoes suffering again. It is not the doctrine of the undying that I seek." Thus becoming indifferent to the practice that led only to the *jhānic* realm of nothingness he abandoned it and departed from Āḷāra's meditation centre.

Approaching the Sage Udaka

After leaving that place, the Bodhisatta was on his own for some time, pursuing the supreme path of tranquillity to reach the deathless nibbāna. Then the fame of Udaka Rāmaputta, (the son of Rāma, the disciple of the sage Rāma) reached him. He came to where

Udaka was and sought to lead the religious life under the dhamma and discipline of the sage Rāma. His experiences under the guidance of Udaka, how Udaka explained the dhamma, how the Bodhisatta was impressed with that doctrine, and practised it, how he realised the dhamma and recounted to Udaka what he had gained, is described in almost exactly the same words as before.

We have, however, to note carefully that Udaka Rāmaputta, as his name implied, was a son of Rāma or a disciple of Rāma. The sage Rāma was accomplished to go through all the eight stages of *jhāna* and reached the highest *jhānic* realm of neither perception nor non-perception. However, when the Bodhisatta reached where Udaka was, the old sage Rāma was no more. Therefore in asking Udaka about Rāma's attainments, he used the past tense *pavedesi*. "How far does this doctrine lead concerning which Rāma declared that he had realised it for himself and entered upon it?"

Then there is the account of how this thought occurred to the Bodhisatta: "It is not only Rāma who had faith, industry, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I also have them." There is also this passage where it was stated that Udaka set him up as a teacher. "You know this doctrine and Rāma knew this doctrine. You are the same as Rāma and Rāma was the same as you. Come, friend Gotama, lead this following and be their teacher." Again the passage where the Bodhisatta recounted "Udaka, the disciple of Rāma, although my companion in the holy-life, set me up as his teacher."

These textual references make it clear that the Bodhisatta did not meet the sage Rāma, but only with Rāma's disciple, Udaka who explained to him the doctrine practised by Rāma. The Bodhisatta followed the method as described by Udaka and was able to realise the stage of neither perception nor non-perception. Having learnt the doctrine himself and realised and entered upon the realm of neither perception nor non-perception like the sage Rāma, he was invited by Udaka to accept the leadership of the company.

Where Udaka resided and how big his following was, is not mentioned in the Theravāda literature. However, the Lalitavistara, the biography of the Buddha of Northern Buddhism, states that Udaka's centre was in the district of Rājagaha and that he had a company seven hundred strong. It is to be noted that at the time of meeting the Bodhisatta, Udaka himself had not yet attained the

jhāna of neither perception nor non-perception. He explained to the Bodhisatta only what Rāma had achieved. So when the Bodhisatta proved himself to be the equal of his master by realising the stage of neither perception nor non-perception, he offered the Bodhisatta the leadership of the whole company. According to the Subcommentary (*Ṭikā*) he later strove hard, emulating the example set by the Bodhisatta, and finally attained the highest *jhānic* stage of neither perception nor non-perception.

The Bodhisatta remained as a leader of the company at the centre only for a short time. It soon occurred to him, "This doctrine does not lead to aversion, to absence of passion nor to quiescence for gaining knowledge, supreme wisdom, and nibbāna, but only as far as the realm of neither perception nor non-perception. Once there, a long life of 84,000 world cycles is enjoyed only to come back again to the sensual realm, and be subject to much suffering. This is not the doctrine of the deathless that I seek." Then becoming indifferent to the doctrine, which leads only to the realm of neither perception nor non-perception, he gave it up and departed from Udaka's centre.

Extreme Austerities in the Uruvela Forest

After he left the centre, the Bodhisatta wandered about the land of Māgadha, searching on his own the peerless path of tranquillity, the deathless nibbāna. During his wanderings he came to the forest of Uruvela near the large village of Senānigama. In the forest he saw clear water flowing in the river *Nerañjarā*. Perceiving a delightful spot, a serene dense grove, a clear flowing stream with a village nearby, which would serve as an alms resort, it occurred to him: "Truly this is a suitable place for one intent on striving," and he stayed on in the forest.

At that time the Bodhisatta had not yet worked out a precise system of right struggle. austere practices were, of course, widely known and in vogue throughout India at that time. Concerning these practices three similes came to the mind of the Bodhisatta.

A log of sappy wood freshly cut from a sycamore tree and soaked in water cannot produce fire by being rubbed with a similar piece of wet sappy wood or with a piece of some other wood. Just so, while still entangled with objects of sensual desires such as wife and family, while delighting in passionate pleasures and lustful

desires are not yet silenced within, however strenuously someone strives, he is incapable of wisdom, insight, and incomparable full awakening. This was the first simile that occurred to the Bodhisatta.

Even if the sycamore log is not soaked in water, but is still green and sappy being freshly from the tree it will also not produce any fire by friction. Just so, even if he has abandoned the objects of sensual desires such as wife and family and they are no longer near him, if he still delights in thoughts of passionate pleasures, and lustful desires still arise in him, he is incapable of wisdom, insight, or full awakening. This is the second simile.

According to the Commentary this simile has a reference to the practices of the Brahmahammika ascetics. Those Brahmins led a holy ascetic life from youth to the age of forty eight when they went back to married life in order to preserve the continuity of their clan. Thus while they were practising the holy life, they would have been tainted with lustful thoughts.

The third simile concerns a dry sapless log not soaked in water. A log of dry wood will kindle fire when rubbed against another. Similarly, having abandoned objects of sensual desires and weaned himself of lustful thoughts and cravings, he is capable of attaining wisdom, insight, and full awakening, whether he practises extreme austerity or whether he strives painlessly without torturing himself.

Extreme Austerity of Crushing the Mind

Of the two methods open to him according to the third simile, the Bodhisatta considered following the path of austerity, "What if, with my teeth clenched and my tongue cleaving the palate, I should press down, constrain, and crush the naturally arising thoughts with my mind."

The Pāli text quoted here corresponds with the text in the Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta.¹ However, the method of crushing the thought with the mind as described in the Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta was one prescribed by the Buddha after attaining Enlightenment. As such, it involves banishment of a lustful thought that arises of its own accord by noting its appearance as an exercise of insight meditation in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and other similar texts. The method of crushing the thought with the mind

¹ M.i.119.

as described here refers to the practical exercises performed by the Bodhisatta before he attained the knowledge of the Middle Path and is, therefore, at odds with the Satipaṭṭhāna method.

However, the Commentary's interpretation implies suppression of evil thoughts with moral thoughts. If this interpretation is correct, this method, being in accord with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and other texts, would have resulted in Enlightenment for the Bodhisatta. Actually, this method led him only to extreme suffering and not to Buddhahood. Other austere practices taken up afterwards also merely led the Bodhisatta into wrong paths.

The austere practices followed by the Bodhisatta at that time appear to be somewhat like that of mind annihilation being practised nowadays by followers of a certain school of Buddhism. During our missionary travels in Japan, we visited a large temple where a number of people were engaged in meditation exercises. Their meditation method consists of blotting out the thought whenever it arises. Thus emptied of mental activity, the end of the road is reached, namely, nothingness. The procedure is as follows:-

Young Mahāyāna monks sat cross-legged in a row, about six in number. The abbot went round showing them the stick with which he would beat them. After a while he proceeded to administer one blow on the back of each meditator. It was explained that while being beaten it was possible that mind disappeared altogether resulting in nothingness. Truly a strange doctrine. This is, in fact, annihilation of thought by crushing it with mind, presumably the same technique employed by the Bodhisatta to crush the thought with the mind by clenching the teeth. The effort proved very painful for him and sweat oozed from his armpits, but no superior knowledge was attained.

Absorption Restraining the Breath

Then it occurred to the Bodhisatta, "What if I control respiration and concentrate on the breathless *jhāna*." With that thought he restrained the in and out breaths through the mouth and nose. With the holding of respiration by the mouth and nose, there was a roar in the ears due to the rushing out of the air just like the bellows of a forge making a roaring noise. There was intense bodily suffering, but the Bodhisatta was relentless. He held his breath, not only of the mouth and nose, but also of the ears. As a result, violent winds

rushed up to the crown of the head, causing pains as if a strong man had split open the head with a mallet, as if a powerful man were tightening a rough leather strap around the head. Violent winds pushed around in the belly causing pain like being cut by a sharp butcher's knife. There was intense burning in the belly as if roasted over a pit of live coals. The Bodhisatta overcome physically by pain and suffering, fell down in exhaustion and lay still. When the deities saw him lying prone, they said, "The monk Gotama is dead." Other deities said, "The monk Gotama is neither dead nor dying. He is just lying still, dwelling in the state of Arahantship." In spite of all these painful efforts no higher knowledge was gained.

Extreme Austerity of Fasting

So it occurred to him, "What if I strive still harder entirely abstaining from food." Knowing his thoughts, the deities said, "Please, dear Gotama, do not entirely abstain from food, if you do so, we will infuse heavenly nourishment through the pores of your skin. You can live on that." Then it occurred to the Bodhisatta, "If I claim to be fasting completely, but these deities should thus sustain me, that would be for me a lie," thus the Bodhisatta rejected the deities' offer, saying that he refused to be infused with divine nourishment.

Then he decided to take less and less nourishment, only as much bean soup as will fit the hollow of one hand. Living, thus, on about five or six spoonfuls of bean soup each day, the body reached a state of extreme emaciation. The limbs withered, only skin, sinews, and bones remained. The vertebrae protruded. The widely separated bones juttied out, presenting an ungainly, ghastly appearance just as in images of the Bodhisatta undergoing extreme austerity.¹ The eyes, shrunk down in their sockets, looked like the reflection from water sunk deep in a well. The scalp had shrivelled up like a gourd withered in the sun. The emaciation was so extreme that if he attempted to feel the belly skin, he touched the spine; if he felt for the spine, he touched the belly skin. When he attempted to evacuate the bowels or make water, the effort was so painful that he fell forward on his face, so weakened was he through this extremely scanty diet.



¹ **Illustration:** Fasting Buddha (Emaciated Buddha), Kushan Dynasty, Gandhara (Pakistan), 2nd-3rd century, schist. Lahore Museum, Punjab, Pakistan.

Seeing this extremely emaciated body of the Bodhisatta, people said, "The monk Gotama is black." Others said, "The monk Gotama is dark brown." Others said, "The monk Gotama has the brown blue colour of a torpedo fish." So much had the clear, bright, golden colour of his skin deteriorated.

Māra's Persuasion

While the Bodhisatta strove hard and practised extreme austerity to subdue himself, Māra came and addressed the Bodhisatta persuasively in beguiling words of pity. "Friend Gotama, you have gone very thin and assumed an ungainly appearance. You are now in the presence of death. There is only one chance in a thousand for you to live. Friend Gotama! Try to remain alive. Life is better than death. If you live, you can do good deeds and gain merits."

The meritorious deeds mentioned here by Māra have no reference whatsoever to the merits accruing from acts of charity and observance of precepts, practices which lead to the path of liberation; nor to merits that result from the development of insight and the attainment of the Path.

Māra knew only about merits gained by leading a holy life, abstaining from sexual intercourse and worshipping holy fires. These practices were believed in those times to lead to a noble, prosperous life in future existences. However, the Bodhisatta was not enamoured with the blessings of existences, so he replied to Māra, "I do not need even an iota of the merits of which you speak. Go and talk of merit to those who need it."

A misconception has arisen concerning this utterance of the Bodhisatta that he was not in need of any merits. It is that "meritorious deeds are to be abandoned, not to be sought for nor carried out by one seeking release from the cycle of existences like the Bodhisatta." A person once approached me and sought elucidation on this point. I explained to him that when Māra was talking about merit, he did not have in mind the merits accrued from acts of charity, observance of precepts, the development of insight through meditation or attainment of the Path. He could not know of them. Nor was the Bodhisatta in possession then of precise knowledge of these meritorious practices; only that the Bodhisatta was then engaged in austerities, taking them to be noble. Thus when

Bodhisatta said to Māra, “I do not need any merit,” he was not referring to the meritorious practices that lead to nibbāna, but only to such deeds as were then believed to assure pleasurable existences. The Commentary supports this view. It states that in saying, “I do not need any merit,” the Bodhisatta meant only the merit of which Māra spoke, namely, acts of merit that are productive of future existences. It can thus be concluded that no question arises of abandonment of meritorious practices that will lead to nibbāna.

At that time the Bodhisatta was still working under the delusion that austere practices were the means of attaining higher knowledge. Thus he said, “This wind that blows can dry up the waters of the river. So while I strive strenuously why should it not dry up my blood? When the blood dries up, bile and phlegm will run dry. As the flesh gets wasted too, my mind will become clearer — mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom will be more firmly established.”

Māra was also under the wrong impression that abstention from food would lead to liberation and higher knowledge. It was this anxiety that motivated him to coax the Bodhisatta away from following the path of starvation. With the same wrong notion, the group of five ascetics waited upon him, attending to all his needs, hoping that this abstemious practices would lead to Buddhahood and intending to be the first recipients of his teaching on liberation. It is clear therefore that it was a universal belief in those days that extreme self-mortification was the right path to Enlightenment.

Right Reasoning

After leading the life of extreme self-mortification for six years without any beneficial results, the Bodhisatta began to reason thus: “Whatever ascetics or brahmins in the past had felt painful, racking, piercing feeling through practising self-mortification, it may equal this suffering, but not exceed it. Whatever ascetics or brahmins in the future will feel painful, racking, piercing feeling though the practice of self-mortification, it may equal this suffering, but not exceed it; whatever ascetics or brahmins in the present feel painful, racking, piercing feelings through the practice of self-mortification it may equal this suffering, but not exceed it. However, by this gruelling asceticism I have not attained any distinction higher than ordinary human achievements. I have not gained the Noble One’s

knowledge and vision, which could uproot the defilements. Might there be another way to Enlightenment apart from this path of self-mortification?

Then the Bodhisatta thought of the time when, as an infant, he sat alone under the shade of a rose-apple tree, entering and absorbed in the first *jhānic* stage of meditation, while his father King Suddhodana was engaged in the ceremonial ploughing of the nearby fields. He wondered whether this method might be the right way to truth!

Absorption While an Infant

The Bodhisatta was born on the full moon of May. It appeared that the royal ploughing ceremony was held sometime in June or July a month or two later. The infant child was laid down on a couch of magnificent cloths, under the shade of a rose-apple tree. An enclosure was then formed by setting up curtains around the temporary nursery, with royal attendants respectfully watching over the royal infant. As the royal ploughing ceremony progressed in magnificent pomp and splendour, with the king himself partaking in the festivities, the royal attendants were drawn to the splendid scene of activities going on in the nearby fields. Thinking that the royal baby had fallen asleep, they left him lying secure in the enclosure and went to enjoy the ceremony. The infant Bodhisatta, on looking around and not seeing any attendant, sat up from the couch and remained seated with his legs crossed. By virtue of habit-forming practices throughout many life-times, he instinctively started contemplating the incoming and outgoing breathes. He was soon established in the first absorption, which is characterised by five factors: initial application, sustained application, joy, bliss, and one-pointedness.

The attendants had been gone for some time, lost in the festivities. When they returned, the shadows of the trees had moved with the passage of time. However, the shade of the rose-apple tree under which the infant was left lying was found to have remained steadfast without shifting. They saw the infant Bodhisatta sitting motionless on the couch. King Suddhodana, when informed, was struck by the spectacle of the unmoving shadow and the still, sitting posture of the child and in great awe, he made obeisance to his son.

The Bodhisatta recalled the experience of absorption in breathing meditation he had gained in childhood, and thought, "Might

that be the way to the truth?" Following up that memory, there came the realisation that method was the right way to Enlightenment.

The *jhānic* experiences were so pleasurable that the Bodhisatta thought to himself. "Am I afraid of the pleasures of *jhāna*?" Then he thought: "No, I am not afraid of such pleasures."

Resumption of Normal Meals

Then it occurred to the Bodhisatta: "It is not possible to attain absorption with a body so emaciated. What if I take some solid food, like I used to take. Thus physically nourished and strengthened, I will be able to work to attain the absorptions." Seeing him partaking of solid food, the group of five ascetics misunderstood his actions. They were formerly royal astrologers who had predicted, at the time of his birth, that he would become a Fully Enlightened Buddha.

There were eight royal astrologers at his birth. When asked to predict what the future held for the royal infant, three of them raised two fingers each and made pronouncements that the infant would grow up to be a Universal Monarch or an Omniscient Buddha. The remaining five raised only one finger each to give a single interpretation that the child would undoubtedly become a Buddha.

According to the *Pāsārāsi Sutta Commentary*,¹ these five court astrologers forsook the world before they got enchained to the household life and took to the forest to lead a holy life. However, the *Buddhavaṃsa Commentary* and some other texts stated that seven astrologers raised two fingers each giving double interpretations while the youngest Brahmin, who would in time become the Venerable Koṇḍañña, raised only one finger and made the definite prediction that the child was a future Buddha.

This young Brahmin together with the sons of four other Brahmins had gone forth from the world and banded together to form the group of five ascetics, who were awaiting the Great Renunciation of the Bodhisatta. When news reached them that the Bodhisatta was practising extreme austerities in the Uruvela forest, they journeyed there and became his attendants, hoping that when he achieved Enlightenment, he will share his knowledge with them, and they would be the first to hear the message.

¹ MA.i.187.

When the five ascetics saw the Bodhisatta partaking of solid food, they were disappointed. They thought, "If living on a handful of pea soup has not led him to higher knowledge, how could he expect to attain that by eating solid food again?" They misjudged that he had abandoned the struggle and reverted to the luxurious way of life to gain riches and personal glory. Thus they left him in disgust and went to stay in the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares.

The Enlightenment

The departure of the five ascetics afforded the Bodhisatta the opportunity to struggle for final liberation in complete solitude. The Commentary on the Mahāsaccaka Sutta¹ gives a description of how, working alone with no one near him, for a full fortnight, seated on the throne of wisdom, under the tree of Enlightenment, he attained Omniscience, the Enlightenment of a Buddha.

The Bodhisatta had gone forth at the age of twenty-nine and spent six years practising extreme austerity. Now at the age of thirty-five, still youthful and in good health, within fifteen days of resuming regular meals, his body recovered its former strength, and he regained the thirty-two physical characteristics of a great man. Having thus regained his strength through normal nourishment, the Bodhisatta practised the in-breathing and out-breathing meditation, and remained absorbed in the bliss of the first *jhāna*, which was characterised by initial application, sustained application, joy, bliss, and one-pointedness. Then he entered the second *jhāna*, which was accompanied by joy, bliss, and one-pointedness. At the third stage of *jhāna*, he enjoyed only bliss and one-pointedness, and at the fourth stage, only equanimity and one-pointedness.

Early on the full moon day of May in the year 103 of the Great Era *i.e.* 2,551 years ago counting back from 1962, he sat down under the Bodhi Tree near the market town of Senānigama awaiting the hour of going for alms. At that time, Sujātā, the daughter of a rich man from the village, was making preparations to give an offering to the tree-spirit of the Bodhi tree. She sent her maid ahead to tidy up the area under the spread of the sacred tree. At the sight of the Bodhisatta seated under the tree, the maid thought that the deity had made himself visible to receive their offering in person. She

¹ M.A.i.291.

ran back in great excitement to inform her mistress. Sujātā put the milk-rice that she had cooked early in the morning in a golden bowl worth a hundred thousand pieces of money, covering the same with another golden bowl. She then proceeded with the bowls to the foot of the Banyan tree where the Bodhisatta remained seated and put the bowls into the hands of the Bodhisatta saying, "May your wish succeed as mine has." So saying she departed.

Sujātā, on becoming a maiden, had made a prayer at the banyan tree; "If I get a husband of equal status with myself and if my first born is a son, I will make an offering." Her prayer had been fulfilled and her offering of milk-rice that day was intended for the tree deity in fulfilment of her promise. However, later when she learnt that the Bodhisatta had gained Enlightenment after taking the milk-rice offered by her, she was overjoyed with the thought that she had done a noble deed of the greatest merit.

The Bodhisatta then went down to the river Nerañjarā to bathe. After bathing, he formed the milk-rice offered by Sujātā into forty-nine morsels and ate it. The meal over, he discarded the golden bowl in the river saying, "If I am to become a Buddha today, let the bowl go upstream." The bowl drifted upstream for a considerable distance against the swift flowing current, and on reaching the abode of the nāga-king Kāla, sank into the river below the bowls of the three previous Buddhas (*tiṅṅaṃ buddhānaṃ thālāni ukkhipitvā aṭṭhāsi*).

The Bodhisatta rested the whole day in the forest glade near the bank of the river. As evening fell, he went towards the Bodhi tree, meeting on the way a grass-cutter named Sottiya who gave him eight handfuls of grass. In India, holy men used to prepare a place to sit and sleep on by spreading sheaves of grass. The Bodhisatta spread the grass under the tree on the eastern side. Then with the solemn resolution, "I will not stir from this seat until I have attained supreme wisdom," he sat down cross-legged, facing east.

At this point Māra appeared and contested for the seat under the Bodhi tree with a view to oppose his resolution and prevent him from attaining Buddhahood. By invoking the virtues he had accumulated through ages, fulfilling the ten perfections such as charity, he overcame the obstruction made by Māra before the sun had set. After thus vanquishing Māra, the Bodhisatta acquired through *jhāna*, in the first watch of the night, the knowledge of

previous existences; in the middle watch of the night, the divine eye; and in the last watch of the night he contemplated the law of Dependent Origination followed by the development of insight into the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates of attachment. This insight gave him in succession the knowledge pertaining to the four Paths, finally resulting in full Enlightenment or Omniscience.

Having become a Fully Enlightened One, he spent seven days on the throne of wisdom under the Bodhi tree and seven days each at six other places, forty-nine days in all, enjoying the bliss of the Arahantship and pondering his newly discovered Dhamma.

Extreme Austerity Is a Form of Self-mortification

The fifth week was spent under the Goat-herd's Banyan tree (Ajapāla) and while there he reflected on his abandonment of the austere practices:- "Delivered am I from the austere practices that cause physical pain and suffering. It is well that I'm delivered of that unprofitable practice of austerity. How delightful it is to be liberated and have gained Enlightenment."

Māra, who had been closely following every thought and action of the Bodhisatta, ever alert to accuse him of any lapses, immediately addressed the Buddha, "Apart from the austere practices, there is no way to purify beings; Gotama has deviated from the path of purity. While still defiled, he wrongly believes that he has achieved purity."

The Buddha replied, "All the extreme practices of austerity employed with a view to achieve the deathless are useless, unprofitable much as oars, paddles, and pushing poles are useless on sand banks. Fully convinced that they are unprofitable, I have abandoned all forms of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*)."

The Commentary also mentions that extreme practices such as fasting or nakedness constitute self-mortification. That extreme austerity is a form of self-mortification should be carefully noted here for better comprehension of the Dhammacakka Sutta when we deal with it.

Considering to Whom to Give the First Discourse

Having spent seven days each at seven different places, he went back to the Goat-herd's Banyan tree on the fiftieth day. Seated under the tree, he considered, "To whom should I first teach the Dhamma?"

Who would quickly comprehend it?" Then it occurred to him, "There is Āḷāra Kālāma who is learned, intelligent, and wise. He has long been a person with little dust of defilement in his eye of wisdom. If I teach the doctrine to Āḷāra Kālāma first he would quickly comprehend this Dhamma.

It is significant that the Buddha tried to seek out someone who would understand his teaching quickly. It is vital to inaugurate new meditation centres with devotees who are endowed with faith, energy, energy, mindfulness, and wisdom. Only such devotees as possess these virtues can achieve insight quickly and become shining examples for others to follow. Devotees lacking ability or enfeebled in mind and body through age can hardly be a source of inspiration to others. When I first started teaching Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā Meditation, I was fortunate in being able to start with three persons (my relatives actually) endowed with exceptional faculties. They acquired the [knowledge of arising and passing away \(udayabbaya-ñāṇa\)](#) within three days of practice and were overjoyed with seeing lights and visions accompanied by feelings of rapture and bliss. Such speedy attainment of results has been responsible for the world-wide dissemination of the Mahāsi Vipassanā Meditation technique.

Thus the Buddha thought of first teaching someone who would quickly grasp it. When he considered Āḷāra Kālāma, a deity addressed him, "Lord, Āḷāra Kālāma passed away seven days ago." Then knowledge and vision arose to the Buddha that Āḷāra had indeed passed away seven days ago and had by virtue of his *jhānic* achievements reached the realm of nothingness, (*ākāṅkamaññāyatana*).

Missing the Path and Fruition by Seven Days

"Great is the loss to Āḷāra the Kālāma," thought the Buddha. Āḷāra was developed enough to readily understand. Had he heard the teaching he could have gained the Path and attained Arahantship instantly. However, his early death has deprived him of this opportunity. In the realm of nothingness, where only mental states exist without any forms, he could not benefit even if the Buddha had gone there and taught him the Dhamma. The life-span in the realm of nothingness is also very long being sixty thousand aeons. After expiring there, he would be reborn in the human realm, but would miss the teachings of the Buddha. Thus as a common

worldling, he would remain in the cycles of existence, sometimes sinking to the nether world to face great sufferings. Thus the Buddha saw that the loss to Ālāra was very great.

It is possible in present times that there are people deserving of higher attainments, passing away without the opportunity of hearing about the Satipaṭṭhāna meditation method, or though having heard it taught, who have not yet made the effort to practise it. The good people assembled here now listening to what I am teaching should be careful that a rare opportunity for their spiritual development is not wasted.

Missing the Great Chance by One Night

Then the Buddha thought of teaching the first discourse to Udaka, the son (pupil) of the great sage Rāma. Again a deity addressed the Buddha, “Lord, Udaka Rāmaputta passed away last night.” Knowledge and vision arose to the Buddha that the hermit Udaka had indeed died last night in the first watch and by virtue of his *jhānic* achievements had reached the realm of neither perception nor non-perception, (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*). This realm is also a state of immateriality, a formless state and its life-span extends to eighty-four thousand world cycles. This is the noblest, the loftiest of the thirty-one planes of existence, but the Dhamma cannot be heard there. On appearing again in the human world, Rāmaputta was already so highly developed that he could instantly attain Arahantship if he could but listen to the Dhamma. However, he would get no such opportunity, having missed it by dying one night too early. The Buddha was thus moved again to utter in pity, “Great is the loss to the hermit Udaka, the son (pupil) of the great sage Rāma.”

The Buddha thought again to whom he should give his first discourse. The group of five ascetics appeared in his divine vision and he saw them living then in the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares.

Journey to Give the First Sermon

The Blessed One set out to go there. Some previous Enlightened Ones had made the same journey by means of psychic powers. However, our Buddha, Gotama, proceeded on foot for the purpose

of meeting, on the way, the naked ascetic Upaka to whom he had something to impart.

The Buddhavaṃsa and Jātaka Commentaries state that the Blessed One started the journey on the full-moon of July. However, as the deer sanctuary, Benares, was eighteen leagues (*yojana*) or about 144 miles away from the Bodhi tree and as the Blessed One was making the journey on foot, the distance could not have been covered in one day unless done with the help of psychic powers. It would be appropriate, therefore, if we fixed the starting date on the sixth waxing of July.

Meeting Upaka the Naked Ascetic

The Blessed One had not gone far from the Bodhi Tree on the way to Gayā (6 miles) when he came upon the naked ascetic Upaka, a disciple of the naked ascetic Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta. On seeing the Blessed One he addressed him, "Your countenance friend, is clear and serene, your complexion is pure and bright, in whose name have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? Whose teaching do you profess?" The Blessed One replied:-

*"Sabbābhibhū sabbavidūhamasmi,
sabbesu dhammesu anūpalitto.
Sabbañjaho taṇhākkhaye vimutto,
sayamaṃ abhiññāya kamuddiseyyamaṃ."*

"I am one who has overcome all,¹
One who knows all, I am detached from all things;
Having obtained emancipation by the destruction of desire.
Having by myself gained knowledge.
Whom should I call my master?"

The Blessed One made known his status more emphatically as follows:-

*"Na me ācariyo atthi, sadiso me na vijjati.
Sadevakasmiṃ lokasmiṃ, natthi me paṭipuggalo."*

"I have no teacher, one like does not exist,
In the world of men and gods, none is my counterpart."

Upon this Upaka wondered whether the Blessed One had gained Arahantship. The Buddha replied:-

¹ While common worldlings are affected by what is seen or heard, ending up in suffering, the Blessed One transcends all and remains serene, countenance clear.

*“Ahañhi arahā loke, ahaṃ satthā anuttaro.
Ekomhi sammāsambuddho, sītibhūtosmi nibbuto.”*

“I, indeed, am the Arahant in the world.
A teacher with no peer,
The sole Buddha, Supreme, Enlightened.
All passions extinguished, I have gained the peace of nibbāna.”

Upaka then asked the Blessed One where he was going, and on what purpose.

*“Dhammacakkaṃ pavattetuṃ, gacchāmi kāsinaṃ puraṃ.
Andhībhūtasmiṃ lokasmiṃ, āhañchaṃ amatadundubhi”nti.*

“To set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma,
I go to the town of Kāsi (Benares).
In the world of blind beings,
I will beat the drum of the Deathless.”

Upon this Upaka asked:- “By the way in which you profess yourself are you worthy to be called an infinite conqueror (*anantaḥjino*)?” The Buddha replied:-

*“Mādisā ve jinā honti, ye pattā āsavakkhayaṃ.
Jitā me pāpakā dhammā, tasmāhamupaka jino”ti.*

“Those are conquerors who, like me, have reached the extinction of cankers. I have vanquished all thoughts, ideas, and notions of evil (sinfulness). For that reason, Upaka, I am a conqueror, a victorious one.”¹

Upaka belonged to a sect of naked ascetics under the leadership of Nāṭaputta who was addressed by his disciples as “The Conqueror.” The Blessed One in his reply was explaining that only those who have really extinguished the cankers, eradicated the defilements, like him, are entitled to be called a conqueror.

Truth Is Not Seen if Blinded by Misconception

After this declaration by the Blessed One that he was truly an infinite conqueror, the naked ascetic Upaka muttered, “It may be so, friend,” shook his head, and giving way to the Blessed One continued his journey.

¹ Vin.i.8.

It is important to note carefully this event of Upaka's meeting with the Buddha. Here was Upaka coming face to face with a Fully Enlightened Buddha, but he did not realise it. Even when the Blessed One openly declared that he was indeed a Buddha, Upaka remained sceptical because he was holding fast to the wrong-views of the naked ascetics. In these days too there are people who, following wrong paths, refuse to believe when they hear about the right method of practice. They show disrespect to, and talk disparagingly about, those practising and teaching the right method. Such misjudgements arising out of false beliefs should be carefully avoided.

Even though he did not express complete acceptance of what the Buddha said, Upaka seems to have departed with some faith in the Buddha, as he returned after some time. After leaving the Buddha, he later got married to Cāpā, a hunter's daughter, and when a son was born of the marriage, he wearied of the household life and became a recluse under the Blessed One. Practising the Buddha's teaching, he became a Once-returner (*anāgāmi*). On passing away he reached the Pure Abode of Avihā, where he soon attained Arahantship. Foreseeing this beneficial result that would accrue out of his meeting with Upaka, the Blessed One set out on foot on the long journey to Benares and answered all of the questions asked by Upaka.

Arrival at Isipatana

When the group of five ascetics saw the Blessed One at a distance coming towards them, they made an agreement among themselves saying, "Friends, here comes the monk Gotama who has become self-indulgent, who has given up the struggle, and reverted to a life of luxury; let us not pay homage to him, nor greet him, and relieve him of his bowl and robes. However, as he is of noble birth, we will prepare a seat for him. He will sit down if he is so inclined."

However, as the Blessed One drew near, because of his illustrious glory, they found themselves unable to keep to their agreement. One went to greet him and receive the bowl, a second took his robe, a third prepared a seat for him, a fourth brought water to wash his feet, while the fifth arranged a foot stool. However, they all regarded the Blessed One as their equal and addressed him as before by his name Gotama and irreverently with the appellation "Friend (*āvuso*)."

The Blessed One sat on the prepared seat and spoke to them.

“Monks, do not address me by name as Gotama nor as friend. I have become a Perfect One, worthy of the greatest reverence. Supremely accomplished like the Buddhas of former times, and Fully Enlightened. Listen, monks! The Deathless has been gained, the Immortal has been won by me. I will teach you the Dhamma. If you practise as instructed by me, in no long time, in the present life, you will, through your own direct knowledge, realise, enter upon, and abide in Arahantship, the ultimate and noblest goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen of good families go forth from household life into homelessness.”

Even with this bold assurance, the group of five monks remained incredulous and retorted: “Friend Gotama, even with the abstemious habits and stern austerities that you practised before, you did not achieve anything beyond the attainments of ordinary men nor attain the sublime knowledge and insight of the Noble Ones, which alone can destroy the defilements. Now that you have abandoned the austere practices and are working for gains and benefits, how will you have attained such distinction, such higher knowledge?”

This is something to ponder. These five monks were formerly court astrologers who were fully convinced and had foretold, soon after his birth, that the Bodhisatta would definitely attain Supreme Enlightenment. However, when the Bodhisatta gave up privations and stern exertions, they wrongly thought that Buddhahood was no longer possible. It could be said that they no longer believed in their own prophecy. They remained incredulous now that the Blessed One declared unequivocally that he had won the Deathless, had become a Fully Enlightened One, because they held to the wrong notion that extreme austerity was the right way to Enlightenment. Likewise, nowadays, too, once a wrong notion has been entertained, people hold fast to it and no amount of explaining the truth will sway them and make them believe. They even turn against those who try to bring them to the right path and speak irreverently and disparagingly of their well-wishers. One should avoid such errors and self-deception.

With great compassion for the group of five monks the Blessed One spoke to them thus:- “Monks, the Perfect One, like those of former times, is not working for worldly gains, he has not given up the struggle, nor abandoned the true path that eradicates the defilements; he has not reverted to luxury;” and declared again that he had become

a Perfect One, worthy of great reverence, supremely accomplished and Fully Enlightened. He urged them again to listen to him.

A second time, the group of five monks made the same retort; and the Blessed One, realising that they were still suffering from illusion and ignorance, and out of great pity for them gave them the same answer for the third time.

When the group of five monks persisted in making the same remonstrations, the Blessed One spoke thus, "Monks, ponder upon this. You and I are not strangers, we lived together for six years and you waited on me while I was practising extreme austerities. Have you ever known me speak like this?" The five monks reflected on this. They came to realise that he had not spoken thus before because he had not attained Higher Knowledge then. They began to believe that he must have acquired the Supreme Knowledge now to speak to them thus. They replied respectfully, "No. Venerable sir (*bhante*), we have not known you speak like this before."

Then the Buddha said, "Monks, I have become a Perfect One worthy of the greatest respect (*Arahant*), supremely accomplished like the Buddhas of former times (Tathāgata) by my own effort I have become Fully Enlightened (Sammāsambuddha), I have gained the Immortal, the Deathless (*amatamadhiḡataṇṇi*). Listen, monks, I will instruct you and teach you the Dhamma. If you practise as instructed by me, you will in no time and in the present life, through your own direct knowledge, realise, enter upon, and abide in Arahantship, the ultimate and the noblest goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen of good families go forth from the household life into homelessness." Thus the Blessed One assured them again.

The five monks became receptive and prepared to listen respectfully to what the Buddha would say. They awaited with eagerness to receive the knowledge to be imparted to them by the Blessed One.

What we have stated so far constitutes events selected from the second type of introduction, from the intermediate period. We now come to events of the recent past, introduced with the words, "Thus have I heard," which gives an account of how the Blessed One began to set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma by giving the first discourse.

The time was the evening of the full moon of May 2,551 years ago counting back from this year of 1962. The sun was about to set, but still visible as a bright, red sphere; the bright full-moon was rising

in the East. The Commentary on the Dhammacakka Sutta in the Saṃyuttanikāya mentions that the first discourse was given while both the sun and the moon were simultaneously visible in the sky.¹

The audience consisted of only the five monks from the human world. However, there were 180 million brahmās, and innumerable deities, according to the Milindapañha. Thus when the five monks together with brahmās and deities, who were fortunate enough to hear the first discourse, were respectfully awaiting with rapt attention the Blessed One began teaching the Dhammacakka sutta with the words: *“Dve me, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevittabbā.”*

“Monks, one who has gone forth from the worldly life should not indulge in these two extreme parts.”

Here, *“antā,”* according to the Commentarial interpretations, connotes grammatically *“koṭṭhāsa”* or *“bhāga,”* which means a share or portion of things. However, in view of the doctrine of the Middle Path taught later in the discourse, it is appropriate to render *“antā”* as extreme. Again *“Part or portion of things”* should not be taken as any part or portion of things, but only those parts that lie on the two extremes. Hence our translation as two extreme parts. The Sinhalese and Siamese Commentaries render it as *“Lammaka Koṭṭhāsa”* meaning *“bad part,”* which is somewhat similar to the old Burmese translation of *“bad thing or practice.”* Thus it should be noted first that one who has gone forth from the worldly life should not indulge in two extreme parts or practices.

“Katame dve? Yo cāyaṃ kāmesu kāmasukhallikānuyogo hīno gammo pothujjaniko anariyo anattasaṃhito, yo cāyaṃ atakilamathānuyogo dukkho anariyo anattasaṃhito.”

“What are the two extreme practices? Delighting in desirable sense-objects, one pursues sensual pleasure, makes efforts to produce such pleasures and enjoys them. This extreme practice is inferior; vulgar, being the habit of villagers; common and worldly, being indulged in by ordinary individuals; ignoble, hence not pursued by the Noble Ones; profitless and not pertaining to one’s true welfare. Such pursuit of sensual pleasures is one extreme practice to be avoided.”

¹ *Pacchimadisāya sūriyo atthameti, pācīnadisāya āsāḷhanakkhattena yutto puññacando uggacchati.*

Pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches constitute desirable sense-objects. Taking delight in such objects and enjoying them physically and mentally, one pursues sensual pleasures. This practice, which forms one extreme practice, is low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and unprofitable. It should, therefore, not be followed by one who has gone forth from household life.

The other extreme practice is concerned with inflicting torture on oneself, which can result only in suffering. Abstaining from food and clothing, which one is normally used to, is a form of self-mortification and is unprofitable. Being ignoble, this practice is not pursued by the Noble Ones. Neither does it pertain to one's true welfare. Thus the practice of self-mortification, being another extreme practice, should also be avoided. Avoiding these two extremes, one arrives at the true path known as the Middle Path. Thus the Blessed One continued:—

*“Ete kho, bhikkhave, ubho ante anupagamma, majjhimā paṭipadā
Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā, cakkhukaraṇi ñāṇakaraṇi upasamāya
abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati.”*

“Bhikkhus, avoiding these two extreme practices, the Tathāgata has gained the higher knowledge of the Middle Path, which produces vision and knowledge, leads to tranquillity (the stilling of defilements), to higher knowledge, and nibbāna (the end of all suffering).”

Avoiding these two extremes, by rejecting wrong paths, the Middle Path is reached. By following this true path, Enlightenment is gained, and nibbāna realised.

How the Middle Path, which is also known as the Noble Eightfold Path, produces vision and knowledge, and how it leads to tranquillity and Enlightenment will be dealt with in my discourse next week.

May all good people present in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this Great Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, with its introductions, be able to avoid the wrong path, namely, the two extremes and follow the Noble Eightfold Path, thereby gaining vision and higher knowledge which will soon lead to the realisation of nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part Two

Delivered on Saturday, 6th October, 1962.¹

This discourse was delivered beginning on the new-moon of September. The introduction to the discourse took most of my time on that occasion. I could deal only with the opening lines of the Sutta. Today I will pick up the thread from there.

Avoiding the Two Extremes

“Dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā.”

“Monks, these two extreme practices should not be followed by one who has gone forth from household life.”

Why shouldn't they be followed? Because the main purpose of one who has gone forth from household life is to rid himself of defilements such as lust and anger. This objective could not be achieved by indulging in these two extreme practices, because they will tend to promote further accumulations of lust and anger.

What are the two extreme practices? Delighting in desirable sense-objects, pursuing and enjoying sensual pleasures constitutes one extreme practice. This practice is inferior; vulgar, being the habit of villagers; common and worldly, being indulged in by ordinary individuals; ignoble, hence not pursued by the Noble Ones; profitless and not pertaining to one's true welfare. Such pursuit of sensual pleasures is an extreme practice that should be avoided.

There are five kinds of desirable sense-objects: namely pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches; in brief, all the material objects, animate or inanimate, enjoyed by people in the world. Delighting in a seemingly pleasurable sight and enjoying it constitute the practice and pursuit of sensuality. Here the sense-object of sight means not merely a source of light or colour that comes into contact with the eye, but the man, woman, or the whole of the object that forms the source or origin of that sight. Similarly all sources of sound, smell, and touch, whether a man, woman, or material objects constitute sensual objects. As regards taste, not only the various foods, fruits, and delicacies, but also men and women who prepare and serve them are classified as objects of taste. Listening to a pleasant sound, smelling a fragrant smell

¹ The 6th Waxing of Thadingyut, 1324, M.E.

are as sensual as enjoyment of good, delicious food, the luxury of a comfortable bed or physical contact with the opposite sex.

Sensual Indulgence Is Inferior and Vulgar

Delighting in sensual pleasures and relishing them is regarded as a vulgar practice because such enjoyments lead to the formation of base desires, which are clinging and lustful. It promotes conceit, with the thought that no one else is in a position to enjoy such pleasures. At the same time one becomes oppressed with thoughts of avarice, not wishing to share the good fortune with others, or overcome by thoughts of jealousy or envy, *i.e.* wishing to deny similar pleasures to others.

It arouses ill-will towards those who are thought to be opposed to oneself. Flushed with success and affluence, one becomes shameless and unscrupulous, bold and reckless in one's behaviour, no longer afraid to do evils. One begins to deceive oneself, with the delusion (*moha*) of well-being and prosperity. The uninformed worldling (*puthujjana*) may also come to hold a wrong-view of a living soul (*atta*) or entertain disbelief in the effects of one's own actions. Since these are the outcome of delighting in and relishing sensual pleasures, they are regarded as inferior and vulgar.

Furthermore, indulgence in sensual pleasures is the habitual practice of lower forms of beings such as animals or hungry ghosts. Bhikkhus and recluses, who belong to a higher class of existence should not stoop so low as lower forms of life in the vulgar practice of base sensuality.

The pursuit of sensual pleasures does not lie within the province of one who has gone forth. It is the concern of the town and village folks, who regard sensual pleasures as the greatest bliss; the greater the pleasures, the greater the happiness. In ancient times, rulers and wealthy people engaged in the pursuit of sensual pleasures. Wars were waged and violent conquests made, all for the gratification of sense-desires.

In modern times too, similar conquests are still being made, in some areas, for the same objectives. However, it is not only the rulers and the wealthy who seek sensual pleasures; the poor are also ardent in the pursuit of worldly goods and pleasures. In fact, as soon as adolescence is reached, the instinct for mating and sexual

gratification makes itself felt. For the householder who is oblivious to the Buddha's teaching, the gratification of sense desires appears to be the pinnacle of happiness and enjoyment.

The Doctrine of Ultimate Bliss in This Very Life

Even before the time of the Buddha, there were people who held the belief that heavenly bliss could be enjoyed in this very life. (*ditṭhadhamma nibbāna vāda*). According to them, sensual pleasure was blissful, and there was nothing to surpass it. Sensual pleasure was to be enjoyed in this very life. It would be foolish to let precious moments for enjoyment pass, waiting for bliss in a future life, which does not exist. The time for full gratification of sensual pleasure is in this very life. Such is the belief of *ditṭhadhamma nibbāna vāda*. This is one of the sixty-two wrong-views expounded by the Buddha in the Brahmajāla Sutta, the first discourse of the *Dīghanikāya*.

Thus enjoyment of sensual pleasure is the preoccupation of town and village people, not the concern of recluses and bhikkhus. For them to pursue sensual desires would mean reverting back to the household life, which they have renounced. People show great reverence to them believing that they are leading a holy life, undisturbed by worldly distractions or the allurements of the opposite sex. People offer the best food and clothing, often at the sacrifice of the needs of their family. It would be most improper for bhikkhus to seek worldly pleasures just like householders, while living on the charity.

In addition, bhikkhus renounce the world with a vow to work for release from the suffering inherent in the rounds of rebirth and for the realisation of nibbāna. It is obvious that these noble ideals cannot be attained by bhikkhus if they pursue sensual pleasures like householders. Thus one who has gone forth from household life should not indulge in, or delight in sensual pleasures.

The Practice of Ordinary People

The majority are ordinary common folk engaged in seeking a living and enjoying sensual pleasures. There are only a few who can rise above the common crowd, who can see the Dhamma and live a holy life. It is not for them to indulge in coarse, worldly pleasures, which is the main concern of the lower class of beings.

Not the Practice of the Noble Ones

Enjoyment of worldly pleasures is not the practice of the Noble Ones. One may then ask why the Noble Ones like Visākhā, Anāthapiṇḍika and Sakka, the king of Tāvatiṃsa, who had already reached the stage of a Stream-winner, engaged in the pursuit of sensual pleasures. Stream-winners, have not yet eradicated lust and passions; the perception of the agreeableness of carnal pleasures (*sukha saññā*) still lingers in them. This point is illustrated in the Gradual Sayings (*Āṅguttaranikāya*) by the example of a person who is fastidious in the habits of cleanliness, seeking shelter in a filthy place filled with excrement to avoid attack by an elephant in must.

This coarse habit, being ignoble and impure, should be avoided by recluses and bhikkhus.

Not Leading to One's True Welfare

This practice does not lead to one's own welfare (*anattasaṃhito*). In the popular view, accumulating wealth, establishing a family life with a circle of friends, in short, striving for success and prosperity in this world, appears to be for one's own welfare.

Actually, however, such worldly success and prosperity do not amount to one's true welfare. One's true welfare lies in seeking ways to overcome aging, disease, and death, and attaining release from all forms of suffering. The only way to escape from all forms of suffering is through the development of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Only seeking these is in the interests of one's true welfare.

The pursuit of sensual pleasures cannot lead to the conquest of aging, disease, death, or other forms of suffering. It only tends to breaches of morality, such as committing sexual misconduct. Seeking worldly success through killing, theft, or fraud also amounts to the violation of moral precepts. Not to speak of physical actions, the mere thought of enjoying sensual pleasures prohibits the development of concentration and wisdom, and thus forms a barrier to the realisation of nibbāna, the cessation of all suffering.

The failure to observe the moral precepts is a sure way to the four lower realms. It should also be noted that undertaking and maintaining moral precepts without the simultaneous development of concentration and wisdom will not lead to nibbāna. It only

encourages repeated rebirth in happy existences, where manifold sufferings such as aging, disease, and death are still encountered repeatedly.

Recluses and bhikkhus, having renounced the world, with the avowed purpose of achieving nibbāna, where all sufferings cease, should have nothing to do with the pursuit of sensual pleasures, which only obstruct the development of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

To recapitulate, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is low and vulgar, being the preoccupation of common people of low intelligence. It is impure, ignoble, and not practised by the Noble Ones. It is detrimental to spiritual progress and thus obstructs the true welfare of those intent on achieving the deathless nibbāna.

May Householders Indulge in Sensual Pleasures?

The text only says, “One who has gone forth from household life should not indulge in sensual pleasures.” The question, therefore, arises whether ordinary householders who remain amidst the worldly surroundings could freely pursue sensual pleasures without any restraint. Since the gratification of sense desires is the preoccupation of common people, it would be pointless to enjoin than from doing so. However, the householder intent on practising the Noble Dhamma, is advised to avoid these pleasures to the extent necessary for practice. Observing the five precepts requires abstaining from committing any sins of the flesh. Likewise, wealth should not be sought through killing, theft, or fraud.

Four Kinds of Sensual Indulgence

In the Pāsādika Sutta,¹ the Buddha enumerated four kinds of sensual indulgence (*sukhallikānuyogo*). “Cunda, in this world there are some foolish people who takes pleasure and delight in the slaughter of animals. This practice constitutes the first form of sensual indulgence. Taking what is not given constitute the second form of sensual indulgence, while telling lies constitute the third. The fourth form of is indulgence in the five strands of sensual pleasures.

¹ D.iii.131. The translation of the Sayādaw’s discourse differs from the text here (ed.)

The discourse states that the Buddha's disciples were free from these forms of sensual indulgence. Lay people, who are observing the eight or ten precepts also have to maintain chastity and abstain from partaking of food after midday, dancing and singing — all of these being forms of sensual indulgence.

When one is engaged in meditation practice, one has to forgo all kinds of sensual enjoyments, just like the bhikkhus who have gone forth from the worldly life, because they hinder the development of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Even a lay meditator must not indulge in sensual pleasures. This should suffice regarding one form of extreme practice, namely, sensual indulgence.

The Practice of Self-mortification

The practice of self-mortification, which forms the other extreme practice, results only in self-mortification and suffering. It is not the practice of the Noble Ones, hence it is ignoble, impure, profitless and does not pertain to one's true welfare. This extreme practice should also be avoided.

Self-mortification, which leads only to suffering, was practised by those who held the belief that luxurious living would cause attachment to sensual pleasures, and that only austere practices such as denying oneself food and clothing would remove sensual desire. Then only the eternal peace, the unaging, disease free, deathless state could be achieved. Such was the belief of those who practised self-mortification.

Methods of Self-mortification

Modest bhikkhus cover themselves with robes for the sake of decency and to protect themselves from heat and cold, from insects, flies, and mosquitoes. However, self-mortifiers go about without any clothing; when the weather is cold, they immerse themselves in cold water, when it is hot, they expose themselves to the sun, standing amidst four fire-places, thus subjecting themselves to heat from five directions. This is known as the five-fold penance by heat.

They have no use for regular beds, lying on the bare earth. Some resort to lying on thorns covered only by a sheet of cloth. Some remain in a sitting posture for days, while others keep to standing only, neither lying down nor sitting. Another form of self-affliction

is to lie hanging down, suspended from a tree branch by two legs; to stand on one's head is another.

Whereas it is the normal habit of bhikkhus to assuage hunger by partaking of food, some self-tormentors completely abstain from food and water. There are some who eat only on alternate days, while others eat once in two days, three days, *etc.* Some practitioners abstain from food for 4 days, 5 days, 6 days, 7 days; some even for 15 days on end. Some reduce their meals to just one handful of food, while others live on nothing but green vegetables and grass, or on cow excrement.

In the [Lomahaṃsa Jātaka](#)¹ it is stated that the Bodhisatta himself followed these practices in one of his previous existences, 91 aeons ago. He realised his mistake when he saw signs of a future miserable life as death approached. By abandoning the wrong practices he managed to attain the deva realm.

All such self-imposed penances constitute self-mortification. These practices were followed by the sect of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta long before the time of the Buddha. The present day Jains are the descendants of Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta. Their practice of self-mortification was commonly acclaimed and well-thought of by the multitude in those days. Hence when the Bodhisatta gave up austere practices and resumed normal meals, his intimate colleagues, the group of five ascetics forsook him, misjudging that the Bodhisatta had given up the right practice, right exertion (*padhānavibbhanta*) and that he would not attain Enlightenment.

The Nigaṇṭha Teachings

According to the teachings of the Nigaṇṭha, emancipation from the suffering of *saṃsāra* is achieved by two means:

1. Restraint (*saṃvara*). This consists in restraining sense-objects such as sight, sounds, smell, taste, touch from entering the body, where it is their belief, they will conjoin with the soul (*atman*) to produce fresh kamma. These fresh kammās are believed to form, in turn, new existence.
2. Annihilation (*nijjara*). The destruction of the results of past kamma through torturous penance. Their belief is that the

¹ The original edition says the Lomahaṃsa Sutta, Ekanipāta Commentary, but I could not find this account there (ed.)

results of past misdeeds (*akusala kamma*) are expiated, and redemption gained by submitting oneself to self-mortification.

The Buddha asked the naked ascetics who were practising self-mortification: "You state that you go through physical sufferings to exhaust the results of unwholesome kamma from past existences. However, do you know for certain that you had indeed committed unvirtuous acts in previous existences?" Their reply was in the negative. The Buddha further questioned them whether they knew how much unwholesome kamma they had done previously; how much of it they had expiated through self-mortification, and how much of it remained." The replies were all in the negative ... they did not know. Then the Buddha explained to them, to give them the seed of intellectual advancement, that it was fruitless to practise torturous penance, not knowing if there were any past misdeeds, nor how many of them they had expiated. The Buddha stated further that these who were trying to absolve themselves from the past misdeeds through self-mortification may truly have committed large amounts of unwholesome deeds.

The Bodhisatta previously adopted extreme measures of practice not with a view to expiate his past misdeeds, if any, but thinking that they would lead to higher knowledge. However, after six years of strenuous efforts, as stated above, realising that extreme practice would not lead to knowledge or insight and wondering whether there was another way that would lead to his cherished goal, he abandoned the practice of self-mortification.

Physical Suffering

The practice of self-mortification results only in physical suffering. However, it was regarded by naked ascetics as being holy. In order to spare their sensibilities, as explained in the Commentary to the Paṭisambhidāmagga the Buddha did not denounce the practice as being low or base; nor was it described as vulgar, being practised by ordinary village folk, nor as common because ordinary common people do not indulge in self-mortification. The Buddha described the method simply as painful (*dukkho*), ignoble (*anariyo*), not followed by the Noble Ones, and not beneficial (*anattasamhito*).

Effort without Any Benefit

The practice of self-mortification does not lead to one's own welfare. Not only is it not concerned with the higher ideals of morality, concentration, and wisdom, it does not even give mundane benefits. Being without benefit, and resulting only in physical suffering, the austere practices may even prove fatal to the over-zealous practitioner.

Before the appearance of the supremely Enlightened Buddha it was widely held throughout the middle country of India, that self-mortification was a noble, holy practice that led to liberation from the evil effects of unwholesome kamma. The group of five ascetics also held that view.

However, the Buddha said that self-mortification produced only suffering, and so was not practised by Noble Ones, being impure and ignoble. It did not lead to one's own welfare. The Buddha therefore clearly advised those who had gone forth from the world to avoid it.

A definite pronouncement regarding the unworthiness of the extreme practice of self-mortification was necessary at that stage because not only was it universally held that only self-mortification would lead to higher knowledge, the group of five ascetics had also accepted this belief. As long as they held fast to this view, they would not be receptive to the doctrine of the Noble Eightfold Path. Hence the open denunciation by the Buddha that self-mortification was profitless, leading only to physical suffering.

The first extreme practice gives free rein to the mind and body and is therefore to be regarded as too lax. A mind that is not controlled by concentration or insight meditation is liable to sink the into pursuit of sensual pleasures. I heard that some teachers teach the practice of relaxing the mind, giving it a free rein. However, the nature of mind is such that it requires constant guarding. Even when constantly guarded by mediation, the mind wanders to objects of sensual pleasures. It is obvious that left to itself, unguarded by meditation, the mind will engage in thoughts of sensual pleasures.

The second extreme practice inflicts suffering on oneself through denial of normal requirements of food and clothing. It is too rigid, unbending, depriving oneself of ordinary comfort and is thus to be avoided too.

Wrong Interpretation of Self-mortification

A wrong interpretation as to what constitutes self-mortification is made by some teachers in contradiction to the teaching of the Buddha. According to them, the earnest, tireless effort required for meditation amounts to self-mortification. This view is diametrically opposed to the exhortation of the Buddha who advised strenuous, unrelenting exertion even at the sacrifice of life and limb to attain concentration and insight. "Let only the skin, sinews, and bones remain. Let the flesh and blood dry up. I will exert incessantly until I achieve the Path and Fruition." Such must be the resolute determination, as urged the Buddha, with which the goal must be pursued.

Strenuous and relentless effort in meditation practice to achieve concentration and insight should not be misconstrued as a form of self-mortification. Leaving aside meditation practice, even keeping the precepts, which entails some physical discomfort, is not to be regarded as a practice of self-mortification. Young people and young novices suffer from pangs of hunger in the evenings while keeping the eight precepts. However, as fasting is done in fulfilment of the precepts, it does not amount to mortification.

For some people, the precept of abstaining from taking life is a sacrifice on their part, since they suffer certain disadvantages as a consequence, but as it constitutes the good deed of keeping the precept, it is not to be viewed as a form of self-mortification. In the *Mahādhammasamādāna Sutta*,¹ the Buddha explains that such acts of self-sacrifice in the present are bound to produce beneficial results in the future. The Buddha said, "In this world, some people abstain from taking life, causing some physical and mental sufferings to themselves. They adopt the right-view (of not killing) for which they have to suffer physically and mentally. These people, thus voluntarily going through suffering to keep the precepts will, after passing away, attain the higher abodes of the deities. These ten meritorious deeds are known as good practices that produce beneficial results after death through suffering in the present.

Any practice that promotes morality, concentration, and wisdom is not profitless, and is not self-mortification, but is beneficial and in line with the Middle Path, which should certainly be followed. It should definitely be noted that those practices that do not develop

¹ M.i.309.

morality, concentration, and wisdom, but which only result in physical suffering, constitute self-mortification.

Misconception about Contemplation on Feeling

There are some who hold the view that contemplating pleasant feeling constitutes indulgence in sensual pleasures, while contemplating painful feeling constitutes self-mortification. Thus, they hold that one should avoid both of them and only on contemplate equanimity. This is an irrational misconception, unsupported by any textual authority.

The Buddha definitely stated in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta that pleasant feeling, painful feeling, and equanimity are all objects for contemplation. The same statement was repeated in many other Suttas. Thus it should be definitely noted that any object in the category of the five aggregates is a legitimate object for contemplation.

The View of a Meditation Teacher

A lay meditation teacher is reported to have said, “While engaged in the practice of meditation, taking up any posture, if one begins to feel tired, painful, numb, hot, or unpleasant sensations in the limbs, one should change posture at once. If one persists in the practice of mindfulness in spite of unpleasant sensations, one is engaging in self-mortification.”

This statement was apparently made, considering the welfare of meditators, nevertheless it must be said that it is unsound and ill-advised. In the practice of concentration or insight meditation, patience (*khanti*) and restraint (*saṃvara*) play an important role. They are important for the successful practice of concentration or insight meditation. One-pointedness of mind can be achieved only through patiently bearing some bodily discomfort. It is within the experience of anyone who has practised meditation in earnest that continually changing the posture is not conducive to the development of concentration. Physical discomfort has to be borne with patience. Self-control is not self-mortification, in as much as the goal is not suffering, but the promotion of morality, concentration, and wisdom in accordance with the wishes of the Buddha.

The Blessed One desired, if possible, an even more relentless effort to achieve the highest goal of Arahantship in one continuous sitting, uninterrupted by any change of posture. In the Mahāgosinga Sutta,¹ the Blessed One stated: “A bhikkhu who meditates after making a firm resolution: ‘I will not break this crossed-legged sitting posture until, through not clinging, my mind is liberated from the taints (*āsava*). Such a bhikkhu would adorn this Gosinga forest grove.”

Thus to state that patient contemplation of painful feeling is a form of self-mortification is to denounce those meditators who are following the instruction of the Buddha. It amounts to the rejection of the Buddha’s words, and discourages the efforts of meditators who could achieve concentration and insight only through patiently bearing the pain brought about by not changing their posture.

It should be carefully noted that the Blessed One advised in the Sabbāsava Sutta² to endure suffering that is severe enough to cost even one’s life. In the Commentary to the Sutta, it is mentioned that the Elder Lomasanāga persisted in his meditation practice even when enveloped by snowflakes while sitting in the open, round about the full moon of January/February. He overcame the cold enveloping him, without giving up his meditation posture, simply by contemplating the intense cold of Lokantarikaniraya.³ Such examples of forbearance while engaged in meditation abound in the Suttas.

Thus comparatively mild forms of pain such as stiffness of limbs, or hot sensations, should be borne with patience, without changing the meditation posture. If possible, persistence should be maintained even at the risk of one’s life, as it will promote self-control, concentration, and insight. However, if the pain becomes unbearable, the posture may be changed very slowly and gently to avoid disturbing mindfulness, concentration, and insight.

¹ M.i.219.

² M.i.10. “What taints, bhikkhus, should be abandoned by enduring? Here, a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely, bears cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and creeping things; he endures ill-spoken, unwelcome words and arisen bodily feelings that are painful, racking, sharp, piercing, disagreeable, distressing, and menacing to life. While taints, vexation, and fever might arise in one who does not endure such things, there are no taints, vexation, or fever in one who endures them. These are called the taints that should be abandoned by enduring. (Trns. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi).

³ Hells of inter-galactic regions where no light can penetrate (ed.)

Those practices that are not concerned with the promotion of morality, concentration and wisdom, but which are undertaken only for more suffering are definitely forms of self-mortification. On the other hand, arduous efforts, however painful and distressing they may be, if they are made for the development of morality, concentration and wisdom, do not constitute self-mortification. It must be definitely regarded as the Middle Path or the Noble Eightfold Path, taught by the Blessed One. The Blessed One himself, after avoiding the two extreme practices — indulgence in sensual pleasures, which is too lax; and self-mortification, which is too rigid — reached Enlightenment by following the Middle Path.

The Middle Path

Ete kho, bhikkhave, ubho ante anupagamma majjhimā paṭipadā Tathāgatenā abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇi nāṇakaraṇi upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati."

"Bhikkhus, avoiding these two extreme practices, the Tathāgata has gained the penetrative knowledge of the Middle Path, which produces vision and knowledge, leads to peace, to higher knowledge, enlightenment, and the realisation of nibbāna."

With these words, the Blessed One let the group of five ascetics know that after giving up the two extreme practices, he had found the Middle Path by means of which he had personally gained vision, knowledge, tranquillity, and enlightenment.

For thirteen years from the age of sixteen to the age of twenty-nine, he had indulged in sensual pleasures, the path of extreme laxity. At the age of twenty-nine, he had given up the lax way of living by going forth from the worldly life. After that, for six years he had practised extreme austerity through self-mortification. After six years of rigorous training, he had not gained any higher knowledge, he had not benefited in any way from the training, and he realised that he had been pursuing the wrong path. Accordingly he gave up the austere practices and resumed normal meals to fortify his physical strength to work for *jhānic* attainments through breathing exercises. The resumption of meals was a well-considered action taken purposely to enable him to engage in meditation on breathing, which is part of the Middle Path. As the food was taken

in moderation in a mindful way, it should not be regarded as enjoyment of sensual pleasure, nor was it self-mortification, there being no suffering through denial of food. Thus it was definitely the middle path, unrelated to the two extreme practices.

On regaining physical strength through taking normal meals, the Blessed One worked for and won the four *jhānic* attainments. These absorptions are the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), or the foundation for insight meditation, and thus constitute Right Concentration, one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. Based on this foundation of Right Concentration, the Blessed One, with his fully concentrated mind, developed insight and Right Understanding. In this way he personally realised the four paths of sainthood, and discovered the Noble Eightfold Path, not through rigorous abstention from food nor through the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, but by following the Middle Path. He stated therefore “Bhikkhus, avoiding these two extreme practices, the Tathāgata has gained the penetrating knowledge of the Middle Path,” by which he meant that he had gained the knowledge of the Middle Path, which is neither too lax nor too rigorous, by abandoning the two extreme practices. The two extreme paths are wrong, and must be avoided.

How to Avoid the Two Extremes

Of the five sense-objects, namely sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, those objects that would not violate observance of the precepts or which would be helpful to the practice of Dhamma may be enjoyed. Eating suitable food and wearing suitable clothing contributes to the comfortable practice of the Dhamma, thus avoiding the extreme austerity of self-mortification.

Necessary material goods such as food, clothing, medicine, and shelter should be used, accompanied either by wise reflection, or the practice of concentration or insight meditation. Every time contact is made with the five sense-objects, they should be noted as objects of insight meditation. By adopting a reflective mood, or by noting these sense-objects as objects of insight meditation, partaking of necessary food, clothes does not develop into enjoying them with delight or pleasure, thereby avoiding the other extreme of sensual indulgence. The Blessed One therefore declared, “Having avoided these two extreme practices, I have understood the Middle Path.”

Antidote for Indigestible Food

Wise reflection or insight meditation amount to the development of mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, which are factors of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is like taking antidotes after taking indigestible, unsuitable food. A convalescent, after a serious illness, has to be careful about his diet. He has to avoid the wrong kind of food, which might be harmful. If he can't resist the temptation to take unsuitable, indigestible food, he has to take digestive medicine to counteract the harmful effects of the food he has taken. In this way, he could satisfy his desire to eat what he wants, and at the same time avoid getting the bad effects from it. Similarly, by reflecting on the material goods we use or by noting them as objects of meditation, we have prevented the development of sensual indulgence.

For the meditator who notes every time he or she sees, hears, touches, or cognises, and understands the nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self in every phenomenon that arises and vanishes, greed and hatred cannot develop concerning objects that have been cognised. When using any of the four essential requisites — food, clothing, medicine, and shelter — if one notes every time they are used, no defilements can develop in connection with them. Thus one can make use of the four requisites to abide in comfort, while avoiding the development of delight and pleasure through wise reflection and insight meditation. In this way, the two extremes are avoided. Wise reflection and insight meditation while taking food or using other requisites amounts to practising the Middle Path.

With this practice of the Middle Path by noting every object appearing at the six sense-doors, thereby knowing their true nature, vision will arise, the eye of wisdom will open up leading to the realisation of nibbāna. Such are the benefits that accrue from following the Middle Path. The Buddha continued to explain: "The Middle Path understood penetratingly by the Tathāgata produces vision, produces knowledge."

How Vision and Knowledge Are Developed

Whoever practises the Noble Eightfold Path, gains vision and knowledge. Here vision and knowledge have the same meaning. The Dhamma is seen clearly, as if by the eyes, hence it is called vision.

Vision and knowledge cannot arise through sensual indulgence nor through self-mortification. They appear only by following the Middle Path. The development of vision and knowledge is very important. In the teaching of the Buddha, meditation is practised for the purpose of developing the Eightfold Path.

When the Eightfold Path is developed, the true nature of mind and matter is clearly discerned as if seen by the eyes. The arising and vanishing of mind and matter is also discerned truly as they occur. The impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of all material and mental phenomena also becomes very clear, not through reading or listening to the teacher, but intuitively by experiencing it oneself. Finally the nature of nibbāna, the quiescence of all physical and mental formations, the cessation of suffering in the cycle of existence, will be clearly seen and fully realised by one's own experience. It is important to scrutinise whether such personal realisation has been attained.

To meditators engaged in insight meditation, noting mind and matter at the moment of each arising and vanishing, the appearance of vision and knowledge is vivid. At the beginning of meditation, although the meditator notes the rising and falling of the abdomen, and sitting, touching, seeing, hearing, *etc.*, every time each phenomenon occurs, no extraordinary knowledge is gained, as the power of concentration is not established yet.

After the lapse of a few days, the mind becomes tranquil and the power of concentration grows. The mind practically stops wandering to other sensual objects. It remains riveted on the chosen object of meditation. At that time the distinction between matter (*rūpa*), the object of awareness, and mind (*nāma*), the mental quality that takes note of it, becomes very pronounced.

At the start of the meditation exercise, the meditator can hardly distinguish between the physical phenomenon of the rising and falling of abdomen and the mental act of noting the phenomenon. He or she remains under the impression that these separate phenomena are one and the same. As the concentration increases, the object of awareness becomes automatically differentiated with every noting from the mind that notes it. They appear separate and unmixed.

The knowledge then arises that this body is made up of only mind and matter; there is no living entity, only the two elements of material

object and the knowing mind co-existing. This knowledge appears not through imagination, but as if it is presented on the palm of the hand; hence it is described also as vision — as if seen by the eyes.

As concentration increases, the understanding arises that there is seeing because there is the eye and a sight to be seen; there is hearing because there is the ear and a sound, bending because of the desire to bend, stretching because of the desire to stretch, movement because of the desire to move; there is craving because of ignorance about reality, there is attachment because of craving; and attachment motivates action, which in turn leads to beneficial or harmful results.

As concentration continues to grow, it is vividly seen that the object of awareness and the act of noting it, arise and vanish as if under one's own eyes. Thus the meditator will come to know very clearly that nothing is permanent, everything is unsatisfactory, and that there is only ungovernable, uncontrollable phenomena without any self, individual, or ego entity.

When the meditator has fully developed this knowledge about the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of things, he or she will realise *nibbāna*, the cessation of all mental and physical formations, the end of all suffering, through the knowledge of the Noble Path (*ariya magga ñāna*), which constitutes higher vision, and higher knowledge.

Thus the meditator who note mind and matter constantly as they arise, in accordance with the teaching of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, becomes personally convinced that the Eightfold Path produces vision and knowledge as stated in the discourse.

It is clear that such direct personal experience of the truth, which constitutes higher knowledge, cannot be gained just by learning the *Abhidhamma* and pondering over its contents. No higher knowledge will arise by mere reflection on texts. In time, when reflective contemplation is neglected, even the texts will fade from memory, because it is only superficial knowledge gained through the exercise of intellect, not personal realisation.

Knowledge Deepens through Practice

If the Middle Path is practised to gain direct personal experience, it is usual that knowledge deepens as time goes on. At one time,

Venerable Ānanda paid a visit to the bhikkhuṇī's monastery, who recounted to him that they dwelt practising the four foundations of mindfulness and that their knowledge of the Dhamma deepened with the passing of time. Venerable Ānanda agreed and said, "It is usually so." When Venerable Ānanda reported this to the Blessed One, the Blessed One said, "It is so, Ānanda, if any bhikkhu or bhikkhuṇī dwells in the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness, it is to be expected that they will come to know the Noble Truths more deeply."

The Explanation of the Commentary

The Commentary explained that the knowledge gained at first was concerned with the discernment of the four primary elements, whereas the later enhanced knowledge arose out of discernment of the derived elements (*upāda rūpa*). Similarly knowledge about all the material elements (*rūpa*) is allowed by the contemplation and discernment of mental elements (*nāma*). Likewise knowledge about mind and matter is followed by discernment about their cause. Knowledge about the causes that gives rise to mind and matter is followed by discernment of the three characteristics of their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality. Thus the knowledge that arises first leads on to higher knowledge later.

In the practice of body contemplation (*kāyānupassanā*) according to the Sotāpanna Sutta, one begins with noting material forms while in the process of going, standing, sitting, lying, bending, stretching, moving *etc.* This amounts to noting the characteristics of the air element (*vāyodhātu*), namely, its quality of pushing, distending, and moving. Only after thoroughly understanding the nature of the primary elements, can one discern the workings of the derived elements such as the eye, sight, ear, sound, by noting seeing, hearing, *etc.* Having mastered the nature of all material forms, attention is next given to the arising of mind and mental formations. In this way, superior knowledge appears in sequence.

Starting from Any Stage

Having learnt the definition and descriptions of mind, matter, *etc.*, from the Abhidhamma texts, one can start from the derived elements instead of from the primary elements. It is possible too to begin with mind before investigating matter. Putting aside mind

and matter, one can start considering causes and effects according to the Law of Dependent Origination, or contemplating the phenomena of arising and vanishing; or the three characteristics of the phenomena of arising and vanishing; or the three characteristics.

Some say that it is a slow process to begin with the analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ñāṇa*). It would be much quicker to begin with the awareness of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), and the knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). They even say they prefer the quicker method.

However, studying mind and matter and their definitions and descriptions from the texts and beginning to contemplate them, starting from wherever one wishes, will not give rise to true insight. Consequently the arising of a later knowledge superior to the precedent one, in accordance with the teaching, cannot be experienced this way. Just as a student increases the retentive power of the text he has learnt by rote, by repetitive recitation, so too such practice will help only remember the definitions and descriptions of mind and matter. No extraordinary insight will result from such practice.

It has come to our knowledge that at a well-known meditation centre, attempt was made to go through the whole series of various stages of knowledge development, just by following the stages step by step as they have learnt from the texts. After reaching the stage of knowledge of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), a difficulty was encountered when they come to the stages of knowledge of adaptation (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), maturity knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*), path knowledge (*magga-ñāṇa*), and fruition knowledge (*phala-ñāṇa*). So they had to go back to the beginning. This is an example to show that insight cannot be realised by shortcuts.

By practising meditation in accordance with Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and developing the Noble Eightfold Path, one is bound to experience deeper knowledge after each precedent knowledge as stated in the Dhammacakka Sutta: “Vision arose, knowledge arose.”

Leading to Peace

The Middle Path also leads to peace (*upasamāya*), the tranquillising of defilements. In one who develops the Eightfold Path, the defilements are tranquillised. The path of insight produces momentary tranquillity while the Noble Path brings about the complete annihil-

ation of defilements. Sensual indulgence does not lead to the cessation of defilements, but helps to increase them. Once one gives in to the temptation of sensual enjoyment, craving for repeated gratification results. Getting one sense-object leads to the desire to possess more. Satisfying one craving develops more craving, and there is no end to craving. One only has to observe the rich people of developed countries. They have everything that they need. Yet they are never satisfied. There is no end to their desires. It is obvious that sensual indulgence does not promote the cessation of defilements, but only multiplies them.

Self-mortification also does not lead to the end of defilements. The practitioners of this method may believe that exposure to extreme cold, extreme heat, and strict fasting tend to remove defilements, but in fact, it is one's lowered vitality, as a result of extreme practices, that keeps the defilements in check. During serious illness or suffering from painful diseases, when the physical strength is at a low ebb, defilements remain dormant. However, once normal health and strength is regained, after the illness, desires for sensual gratification make their appearance as usual.

Thus after giving up the practice of self-mortification, or stopping the practice for some time, when vitality returns, defilements also return as before. Even while self-mortification is being practised, although gross defilements remain suppressed, subtle defilements continue to arise. There will be desire for comfort, free from the discomfort and pain of austerity. Defilements of wrong-view of self, "I practise austerity," are bound to arise. The wrong-view of conceit, "No one else can do such practice;" and the wrong belief that the practice will lead to liberation.

Wrong Belief in the Practice

Regarding a wrong practice as a right practice is called attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbataparāmāsa*). According to the teaching of the Buddha, apart from the Noble Eightfold Path, which leads to the development of morality, concentration, and wisdom, all other practices are wrong practices, and taking them to be right practices amounts to attachment to rites and rituals. Not seeing the truth, leaving aside the right path, hoping for lasting happiness, is attachment to rites and rituals.

Everything that appears at the six doors of senses constitutes the five aggregates of attachment, namely, mind and matter, which is the truth of suffering. Meditating on mind and matter is practising the Path by which the Four Noble Truths will be understood. Believing in and practising any other method, which leaves aside the Path and which does not lead to understanding the Four Noble Truths is attachment to rites and rituals.

There are those who teach, “It is unnecessary to practise meditation or to observe the precepts. It is sufficient to listen to discourses and learn by heart the nature of mind and matter.” We should consider whether such views amount to attachment to rites and rituals. In my opinion, such teachings amount to teaching attachment to rites and rituals as this method excludes the three disciplines of morality, concentration and wisdom.

A Stream-winner being well established in the knowledge of the right practice is not liable to hold the wrong-view of attachment to rites and rituals. In future existences there is no danger for a Stream-winner to fall into this wrong belief. This is calming the defilements by virtue of the Noble Path.

Temporarily Putting Away

When a sense-object being contemplated is noted as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, the mental defilements that would accrue by wrongly regarding them as permanent, pleasant, and self, would have no chance to arise. This amounts to temporarily putting away defilements, just as light dispel darkness by virtue of mutual opposition, as explained in the Visuddhimagga.

This is how defilements lying dormant in the sense-object (*ārammaṇanusaya-kilesā*), which would have risen if not noted, are removed by means of momentary insight. Wise people should ponder well over this illustration given in the Visuddhimagga.

If, as some people maintain, contemplating the knowledge acquired by mere learning (*sutamayapaññā*) leads to insight, the question arises, “Which defilements lying dormant in which sense-objects is eradicated by that insight?” It would be difficult to answer that question in the absence of a definite object of awareness.

For the meditator who, following the Satipaṭṭhāna method, observes the mental and physical phenomena in the process of their

formation, there are definite objects of awareness to note. At the same time there are also objects of awareness that escape being noticed. Thus one can eradicate the defilements lying dormant in the objects one has noted; while those lying dormant in the objects one failed to note, remain. The answer is very simple for that case.

After eradicating temporarily the defilements lying dormant in the objects noted, there remain in the meditator latent defilements that are removed only by the Noble Path. Thus the Stream-winner has reached the stage where he or she has eradicated personality-view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), and attachment to rites and rituals, and all defilements that are liable to cause rebirth in the lower realms. In the Once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*), the coarse forms of lust and ill-will are eradicated. The Non-returner (*anāgāmi*) becomes free from subtler forms of lust and ill-will while the Arahant is fully liberated from all forms of defilements.

In this way the path of insight and the Noble Path are capable of either putting away defilements temporarily or uprooting them permanently. The Blessed One had this in mind when he said that the Middle Path leads to peace (*upasamāya saṁvattati*).

The Arising of Higher Knowledge

The Middle Path also leads to higher knowledge (*abhiññāya saṁvattati*). Higher knowledge is akin to vision or knowledge, but its effect is more pronounced, hence it is mentioned separately. The Four Noble Truths become known by virtue of this higher knowledge in consequence of the path of insight and the Noble path. The path of insight developed beforehand enables the insight knowledge that is developed later to know the Four Noble Truths. Actually only the truth of suffering or the aggregates of attachment that are noted in the course of meditation are concerned here.

Mind and matter, or the truth of suffering, are seen as impermanent, unsatisfactory, or not-self. Every time they are seen thus, there is no chance for craving and attachment to appear. Thus there is liberation from craving and attachment. It is called full comprehension by abandoning (*pahānābhisamaya*), which is knowing the cause of suffering (*samudaya*) by abandonment, though not by realisation. Every time mind and matter become subject to awareness, the meditator is free from ignorance (*avijjā*) that could lead to the wrong

path. Being thus free from ignorance, one is free from the ills of mental formations (*saṅkhārā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). This is the truth of the temporary cessation of suffering (*tadaṅga nirodha saccā*). This temporary cessation of suffering is realised by insight at every instant of noting, but not as its object of contemplation.

Every act of awareness develops the path of insight headed by right-view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). This is called full comprehension by development (*bhāvanābhisamaya*), knowing the truth of the path of insight by developing it in oneself. However, this knowledge is not achieved by contemplating at the moment of noting. However, having developed it in oneself, it can be clearly perceived through reflection. Knowing the truth of suffering through noting the mental and physical phenomena leads simultaneously to the knowledge of the three remaining truths too. This is knowing the four truths by means of special insight knowledge. Hence the Middle Path is said to produce higher knowledge of the truths. Furthermore, it also causes the arising of the higher knowledge of the Noble Path (*ariya magga ñāṇa*). As insight knowledge attains full maturity, nibbāna is realised and the Noble Paths are developed. Then the four truths become known as they should be known by means of Noble Path knowledge. For this reason too the Middle Path is said to lead to higher knowledge (*abhiññāya saṃvattati*).

Penetrative Insight

The Middle Path also leads to penetrative insight (*sambodhāya saṃvattati*). “*Abhiññā*” means higher knowledge about insight and the Noble Path that was not previously developed. “*Sambodha*” refers to penetrative insight. Things hidden behind thick curtains or walls become visible when the barriers are removed if the curtains are opened or if windows are added. Likewise the Four Noble Truths are kept hidden behind the veil of ignorance, which notices that which is wrong, but covers up that which is right. By developing the Eightfold Path through the practice of meditation, truths that were not known before become apparent through insight knowledge and knowledge of the Noble Path. Thus ignorance has been penetrated and the Noble Truths become plain by means of penetrative insight.

It is quite obvious that sensual indulgence and self-mortification can never give rise to higher knowledge or penetrative insight.

The Realisation of Nibbāna

Finally, the Middle Path leads to realisation of nibbāna (*nibbānaya saṃvattati*). Penetrating the Four Noble Truths by means of the Path Knowledge of Arahantship amounts to the realisation of nibbāna. However, as nibbāna is the final and the noblest goal of those who work for liberation from the cycle of existence it was mentioned again as a separate attainment by the Blessed One.

By developing the Noble Eightfold Path, penetration of the Four Noble Truths will be attained by means of the Noble Path. Finally, nibbāna will be realised through the fruition of Arahantship. Having thus realised nibbāna, the last conscious moment before *parinibbāna* will not lead to any new existence of new forms of mind and matter. It is the cessation of all suffering. In this way the Eightfold Path leads to the realisation of nibbāna, the cessation of all suffering.

To summarise the benefits to be derived from practising the Middle Path: one will avoid sensual pleasures, one will avoid self-mortification, one will avoid both extremes, which are wrong paths, one will follow the Middle Path, which is the right path, by following the right path, insight will be developed and nibbāna will be realised.

The benefits that will accrue from following the Middle Path have been exhaustively expounded. They represent the highest goal aimed at by all who are working for liberation from the suffering of the cycle of existence. There is nothing more that they should need.

It now remains only to know what constitutes the Middle Path. To explain the Path, the Blessed One began with a question in accordance with the traditional usage of the times.

“Katamā ca sā, bhikkhave, majjhimā paṭipadā Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī ñāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya saṃvattati?”

“What, monks, is the Middle Path understood by the Tathāgata, that produces vision, produces knowledge, and leads to peace, higher knowledge, penetrative insight, and nibbāna?”

The answer was supplied by the Blessed One himself:

“Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ — sammādiṭṭhi sammāsaṅkappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammā-ājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati sammāsamādhi.”

“Only this Noble Eightfold Path,¹ namely: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.”

These, then, are the factors of Eightfold Path, the Middle Path, which when fully understood by the Tathāgata produced vision, produced knowledge, and lead to peace; higher knowledge, penetrative insight, and to nibbāna.

The definition of the Middle Path has now been given. The detailed exposition of this Eightfold Path will have to wait until next week.

By virtue of having given respectful attention to this Great Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, may all you good people present in this audience be able to avoid the wrong path, namely, the two extremes, and follow the Noble Eightfold Path, or the Middle Path, thereby gaining vision and higher knowledge, which leads to the realisation of nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

¹ The Blessed One pointed out the Path, as if by pointing a finger at visible objects or holding them in the palm of his hands.

Part Three

Delivered on Saturday 13th October, 1962.¹

Today is the full-moon day of October. The monks have observed the Rains Retreat (*vassa*) for three months since the first day after the full-moon of July. Today is the last day of the three month retreat. During the Rains Retreat monks are enjoined not to make overnight journeys except for special reasons as approved by the Buddha. They can leave their residence up to seven days for such special reasons. At the termination of tonight, starting from early dawn of tomorrow, the period of three months comes to an end. Monks can henceforth, move about freely for overnight journeys.

The Invitation Ceremony

Accordingly, monks who have business to attend to elsewhere are leaving the residence tomorrow. On the eve of their departure, that is, this evening, they have to observe the invitation (*pavāraṇā*). It is a ceremony in which a monk invites criticism from his fellow monks in respect of what they have seen, heard, or suspected about his conduct. There may be lapses or faults that one is unaware of oneself, but which are noticed by others. If any fault or offence has been committed unwittingly, the other monks of the assembly can point it out now and suitable corrective measures can be taken, making amends in consequence of such criticisms constitutes the observance of discipline leading to the [Purification of Conduct](#) (*sīla visuddhi*). Only when purification of conduct is assured, one starts practising meditation for the attainment of Purification of Mind (*citta visuddhi*) and Purification of View (*diṭṭhi visuddhi*).

Inviting criticism is highly conducive to maintaining the purity of Buddha's dispensation and to spiritual attainments such as *jhāna*, the Path and its Fruition. That is why the Buddha laid down the rule requiring formal invitation to the Saṅgha for criticism when there are five bhikkhus in residence on the full-moon day of October, or to one another if there are fewer than five bhikkhus. This is a rule of discipline that a virtuous bhikkhu should pay great heed to, and in conformity with it should earnestly invite criticism concerning his conduct and behaviour. If any criticism is forthcoming, it should be warmly welcomed in the spirit in which it is given and the necessary atonement should be made accordingly.

¹ The full-moon day of Thadingyut, 1324 M.E.

It is just like being pointed out a smudge or stain on one's face by a friend when one is about to leave for a social function or a public gathering. The friendly intimation is received with appreciation and the smudge on the face is removed in time to avoid derision or sniggering. One is thankful to the friend for having the kindness to point out the stain on one's face. Likewise, a bhikkhu should welcome with gratitude any fault of his being pointed out by his fellow monks, and attend to its removal. This practice is essential for maintaining the purity of the Buddha's teaching. Not just following the tradition as a mere formality, but sincerely wishing to eradicate one's own faults and failings, a bhikkhu should invite criticism from his fellow monks and welcome them. At the same time he should also offer in turn criticisms to other bhikkhus if he happens to see any faults in them. By thus pointing out each other's faults and making sincere efforts to remove them, the holy life can be maintained in a state of faultless purity. That was the reason behind the Buddha's laying down of this code of discipline for the bhikkhus.

Today fifty bhikkhus who resided here during the Rains Retreat assembled in the Uposatha hall to make formal requests to the Saṅgha for criticism. Each monk participated in this invitation ceremony, which has taken nearly an hour. I have come here straight from the assembly to continue the discourse that I gave last week.

Elaboration of the Eightfold Path

Last week we dealt with only the headings of the Middle Path otherwise called the Eightfold Path. I will now elaborate on them.

1. Right View (*Sammā Ditṭhi*),
2. Right Thought (*Sammā Saṅkappa*),
3. Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*),
4. Right Action (*Sammā Kammantā*),
5. Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*),
6. Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyama*),
7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*),
8. Right Concentration (*Sammā Samādhi*).

The Eightfold Path can be summarised under three groups: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood form the morality group

or path factors of morality (*sīla maggaṅga*). By practising Right speech, Right Action, and Right livelihood, morality is established. Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration are the path factors of concentration (*samādhi maggaṅga*). By practising them concentration is established. Right View and Right Thought are the path factors of wisdom (*paññā maggaṅga*). Developing Right View and Right Thought leads to wisdom of insight (*vipassanā paññā*), wisdom of the Path (*magga paññā*), and wisdom of Fruition (*phala paññā*), that is both mundane and supramundane wisdom. I will now describe each of the path factors in detail, emphasising the practical aspects.

The Path Factor of Right Speech

“What, monks, is Right Speech? It is the avoidance of telling lies, of slander, of harsh, abusive language, of idle chatter. This, monks, is called Right Speech.”¹

In this definition given by the Buddha, abstinence or avoidance constitutes Right Speech. Thus, it should be noted that, even when occasion arises for one to utter false speech, slander, abuse, or idle chatter, if one restrains oneself from doing so, one is then establishing the practice of Right Speech. In reality, Right Speech is “*sammāvācā virati*,” one of 52 mental concomitants (*cetasikā*), a member of the class called abstinenes (*virati*). However, when one refrains from false speech *etc.*, one will be engaged only in speech that is truthful, gentle, beneficial, and which promotes harmony. The essential point here is that abstinence from wrong speech amounts to the wholesome deed of observing morality. One who takes the vow of refraining from false speech in observance of the five, eight, or ten precepts has to refrain at the same time from three evil vocal acts of slandering, abusing, and idle chatter too.

In addition, whenever one sees, hears, smells, touches, or thinks, if one realises by contemplation the real nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self concerning these sense-objects, no defilements can arise which would cause the utterance of wrong speech. This amounts to temporarily dispelling latent defilements (*anusaya kilesā*) including wrong speech by means of insight.

As insight knowledge gets fully developed, nibbāna is realised through the knowledge of the Noble Path. When that happens, wrong

¹D.ii.312, Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta, S.v.9. *et.al.*

speech will have been completely eradicated by virtue of Right Speech of the Noble Path. The Visuddhimagga Commentary, therefore, states that the first Path, that of Stream-winning, dispels false speech; the third Path, that on Non-returning, dispels slander and abusive language. Here by speech or language is meant volition, (it is possible to utter harsh language unaccompanied by volition). The fourth Path, that of Arahantship, dispels idle chatter. (It should be understood here, however, that all kinds of lying, slander, and abusive language that would have caused rebirth in the lower realms have already been got rid of by the first Path). The path factor of right speech (*sammāvācā maggaṅga*) has to be followed until all four Noble Paths have been established.

To summarise: uttering false speech, slander, abuse, and idle chatter is indulgence in wrong speech; the avoidance of wrong speech is right speech.

The Path Factor of Right Action

“What, monks, is Right Action? It is the avoidance of killing, stealing, and unlawful sexual intercourse. This, monks, is called Right Action.”

Here too, in the definition of Right Action given by the Buddha, avoidance of the three evil physical acts constitutes Right Action. Thus even when occasion arises for one to commit killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, if one restrains oneself from committing them, one is establishing the practice of Right Action. For example, just scaring away and not killing the mosquito that is biting you amounts to Right Action. Similarly it should be understood with regard to avoidance of stealing or avoidance of sexual misconduct.

An explanation is needed here as to what constitutes unlawful sexual intercourse. There are twenty kinds of females with whom no male person should have sexual intercourse. Any male who has sexual intercourse with such persons as are under the protection of father, mother, brother, sisters, relatives, clan elders, and colleagues in meditation or a married woman or a betrothed girl, commits the evil deed of sexual misconduct. A married woman or a betrothed girl, having sexual relation with another man also commits this evil deed. Avoidance of such evil deeds is Right Action.

To summarise: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are Wrong Actions. Avoidance of these evil deeds is Right Action.

The Path Factor of Right Action should be developed by observing the precepts. It should be developed by practising insight meditation until the four Noble Paths have been established.

The Path Factor of Right Livelihood

“What, monks, is Right Livelihood? In this teaching, the noble disciple avoiding a wrong way of living, gets his livelihood by a right way of living. This, monks, is called Right Livelihood.”

Wrong Livelihood is earning one’s living through unlawful, unwholesome means such as killing and stealing. The three evil deeds and four kinds of evil speech amount only to Wrong Action (*micchā kammantā*) and Wrong Speech (*micchā vācā*) when they have no connection with earning one’s livelihood. They are not Wrong Livelihood. Thus, for instance, killing flies, mosquitoes, spiders, snakes, or an enemy through anger or fear amounts to an evil deed, which is Wrong Action, but it is not Wrong Livelihood. Killing animals such as poultry, pigs, goats, or fish for the market or for one’s own use definitely constitutes Wrong Livelihood.

In general, stealing or fraud is motivated by economic reasons. These will therefore be classed as Wrong Livelihood. When however, the reason is not economic, but for revenge or just a compulsive habit, these deeds are merely Wrong Action. Illicit sexual intercourse usually has nothing to do with earning a livelihood; but seduction of women and ruining them for employment in the sex trade are, of course, Wrong Livelihood.

Lying is just Wrong Speech when not motivated by economic reasons; but when falsehood is employed in commercial transactions or in law courts to promote business, it amounts to Wrong Livelihood. Similarly slander, devoid of economic interest, is Wrong Speech. However, nowadays false charges or denunciation are common methods employed to bring discredit to rivals and as they are mostly concerned with business, this may be regarded as Wrong Livelihood. Harsh speech or abusive language is rarely employed in business transactions and is therefore usually just Wrong Speech. Writing novels, science-fiction, stories, plays, dramas, or films may mostly be regarded as Wrong Livelihood. Such wrong ways of earning a livelihood (by means of killing, stealing, and lying) are deeds that are bereft of moral principles maintained by upright people.

Seeking Wealth Unethically Is Wrong Livelihood

One who observes the five precepts has to avoid the above seven (three physical and four verbal) evil ways of earning a livelihood. In the Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth (*ājivaṭṭhamaka sīla*), avoidance of wrong livelihood is included as one of the factors of the eight precepts. Thus avoiding wrong means of livelihood and earning one's livelihood in accordance with the moral principles of upright people constitutes right livelihood.

Seeking Wealth Ethically Is Right Livelihood

Just like Right Speech and Right Action, Right Livelihood is also a practice of avoidance. Therefore, avoidance of Wrong Livelihood is to be regarded as Right Livelihood. Right livelihood should be developed by observing precepts. It should also be developed by practising insight meditation until the path factor is fulfilled. For further elaboration on Right Livelihood, please refer to my [Discourse on the Sallekha Sutta](#).

These three factors Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood belong to the morality group of the Noble Eightfold Path. I will now proceed to discuss the constituents of the concentration group.

The Path Factor of Right Effort

“What, monks, is Right Effort? Here, monks, a monk rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind, and strives for the non-arising of evil, unwholesome states that have not yet arisen. He rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind, and strives to overcome evil, unwholesome states that have already arisen. He rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind, and strives for the arising of wholesome states that have not yet arisen. He rouses his will, makes an effort, stirs up energy, exerts his mind, and strives to maintain wholesome states that have already arisen, not to let them fade away, but to bring them to greater growth, to the full perfection of development. This, monks, is called Right Effort.”¹

What is meant by the effort to prevent unarisen unwholesome states from arising is this: whenever one notices, sees, or hears about killing,

¹ D.ii.312, Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, trans. Maurice Walshe.

stealing, lying, *etc.*, being done by others, one must strive to put oneself above these unwholesome acts. It is just like trying to safeguard oneself against contagious diseases such as influenza during epidemics.

Regarding the effort to dispel and overcome evil, unwholesome states that have already arisen, these are of two kinds: unwholesome deeds or speech such as killing, stealing, or lying that one may have already committed (*vitikkama akusala*) and arisen unwholesome thoughts (*pariyutthāna akusala*) of anger or sensual desires; latent unwholesome states (*anusaya akusala*) that have not yet arisen, but which will arise when the conditions are ripe.

Of these two kinds, unwholesome deeds and speech are dispelled by moral training. Meticulous observance of the precepts automatically dispels evil deeds and speech. Evil thoughts of anger or sensual desire are dispelled by concentration and insight meditation. Latent defilements may be momentarily dispelled by insight meditation. They can be entirely rooted out only when the knowledge of the Noble Path is attained. It is with a view to completely uprooting latent defilements, that insight meditation should be practised. This point is subtle and profound and can be fully grasped only by those who have practised insight meditation effectively and adequately.

The effort to rouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen means that one should, to the best of one's ability, perform meritorious deeds that one has not done yet. Giving alms (*dāna*), undertaking and observing precepts, the practice of tranquillity meditation, and the practice of insight meditation are all meritorious deeds.

Some distort the true teaching of the Buddha by teaching that meritorious deeds will prolong the cycle of existences. According to them, meritorious deeds are volitional actions (*saṅkhārā*), which are conditioned by ignorance (*avijjā*). The Law of Dependent Origination says, "Conditioned by volitional actions rebirth consciousness arises (*saṅkhāra paccayā viññāṇam*)."¹ Therefore, according to them, meritorious deeds (*kusala saṅkhārā*) will cause the arising of rebirth-consciousness, so they must be abandoned. Such an assertion contradicts the true meaning of the Buddha's teaching and is very misleading. In fact, if meritorious deeds were to be given up, one would be left entirely with demeritorious deeds, which would not only prolong the cycle of existences, but would surely lead to the four lower realms. The real cause for the ceaseless rounds of rebirths is rooted in the defilements of ignorance and craving. These

defilements can be removed by meritorious deeds, which should therefore be performed with a view to eradicating these defilements.

A simple meritorious deed can lead to rebirth in a fortunate abode (*sugati*), whereas Dhamma can be studied and practised to become a Noble One, thus escaping from the suffering of the lower realms and the endless cycle of existence. The story of the frog deity serves to illustrate this point.

The frog deity was a frog in his previous existence when he happened to hear a discourse given by the Blessed One. Without understanding a word of the discourse, the frog listened to it with respectful attention and devotion, for which meritorious deed, he was reborn in the deva realm. As a deva he gained the opportunity of listening to the Buddha's teaching again, by virtue of which he attained the stage of a Stream-winner.

Thus effort should be made to rouse any kind of wholesome states that have not yet arisen, especially the meritorious deeds that would lead to the Noble Path. Every time such an effort is made, one is developing the path factor of Right Effort.

The effort to maintain wholesome states that have already arisen, not to let them fade away, but to bring them to greater growth, to the full perfection of development is plain enough. A meditator noting everything at the moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or knowing is making an effort to prevent unwholesome states from arising. It also means striving to remove the unwholesome states that have already arisen. At the same time the meditator is striving to develop the higher wholesome deeds of insight and knowledge of the Noble Path, meritorious deeds that have not yet arisen. He or she is also striving to maintain and to bring to perfection the wholesome deeds of insight that have already arisen. Thus every time one is noting each phenomenon as a meditation exercise, one is developing the path factor of Right Effort, or the enlightenment factors of the four right exertions (*sammappadhāna*), which can be summarised as follows: the effort to prevent unarisen unwholesome states from arising, the effort to dispel unwholesome states that have already arisen, the effort to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen, the effort to maintain, develop, and to bring to perfection wholesome states that have already arisen. These are called the four right exertions.

Every time one is engaged in the meritorious deeds of charity, morality, and meditation one is developing the path factor of Right Effort, or the four right exertions. It is especially so when one performs these deeds with a view to escaping from the suffering of the cycle of existence. The meritorious deed of insight meditation is, needless to say, synonymous with the path factor of Right Effort. Striving to perform meritorious deeds is Right Effort.

The Path Factor of Right Mindfulness

“What, monks, is the path factor of Right Mindfulness? Here, monks, a monk dwells contemplating the body as the body,¹ ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness (*abhijjhā*) and sorrow (*domanassa*) for the world.

“He dwells contemplating feelings as feelings ... the mind as mind,² mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having overcome covetousness and sorrow for the world. This, monks, is called Right Mindfulness.”

These are the Buddha’s words elaborating Right Mindfulness.

Was the Noble Eightfold Path Taught in Detail?

In the Dhammacakka Sutta, as we find it today, the Eightfold Path is just mentioned in the form of headings. When this Dhammacakka discourse was first given by the Buddha, did the Venerable Koṇḍañña together with brahmās and deities who attained to higher knowledge then, understand merely by the words “Right Mindfulness” that it meant the Four Foundations of Mindfulness by means of which the nature of the body, feelings, the mind, and mind-objects are clearly comprehended? Did they also understand that noting every bodily action, every feeling, every mental phenomenon, every thought or mind-object constitutes Right Mindfulness, and that this should be developed by noting every physical and mental phenomenon?

This is a moot point that needs to be pondered, for unless they had a clear comprehension about it, they would not be able to develop

¹ Seeing it as impermanent, painful, uncontrollable, unbeautiful, unpleasant material aggregates.

² Noting it merely as a process of thinking and consciousness, impermanent, painful, uncontrollable, *etc.*

Right Mindfulness. In the absence of Right Mindfulness, attaining higher knowledge of the Noble Path and its Fruition is impossible.

Two considerations are possible here. The first one is that the Venerable Koṇḍañña and the brahmās and deities who were already fully ripe with unique perfections (*pāramī*), destined for final liberation, on just hearing the words “Right Mindfulness,” they at once understood that they should note every bodily action *etc.*, to develop the path factor of Right Mindfulness. They accordingly did so and in this way attained higher knowledge.

The second consideration is that when the discourse was first given, for clear understanding by his audience the Blessed One elaborated the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path and expounded on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. However, at the time of the First Buddhist Council, when reciting the Dhammacakka Sutta, the Noble Eightfold Path, as a component of the Four Noble Truths, was condensed in the form of headings only, there being in existence expositions on them separately in other suttas being recited in condensed form at the First Council. The answer is yes. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta in the Majjhimanikāya is a condensation of the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta in the Dīghanikāya, only the first portion of which was recited at the First Council. However, at the proceedings of the Sixth Buddhist Council, the missing portions of the suttas have been filled in and recorded, although the latter portions of the sutta were not mentioned in the Majjhimanikāya Commentary. Similarly, some long suttas belonging to some other collections (*nikāya*) were recorded in condensed form in the Khuddakanikāya.

Thus it may be taken here that the exposition on Right Mindfulness given at the time of the first discourse was omitted and the sutta recited in brief during the First Council. Thus the question need not arise as to how the deeper, detailed meaning of the Noble Eightfold Path could be known from mere headings. Nowadays, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are well known by many. There is the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta itself which supplies elaborations on the summarised title of the Noble Eightfold Path. There exist also many Commentaries on this sutta. Yet, in spite of them, there are only a few who know how to develop the path factor of Right Mindfulness. Therefore, my opinion is that the Blessed One expounded the path factors in full detail when he was giving the first discourse for the benefit of many.

It must be firmly noted that the path factor of Right Mindfulness is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. How this path factor should be developed is provided in the Pāli text just quoted. This Pāli text is exactly the same as the summarised introductory passage to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Finding this brief account inadequate for full understanding, one can have recourse to deep study of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta itself.

According to the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) may be carried out in two ways: either by contemplating respiration (*ānāpānasati*), i.e. watching the in-breath and out-breath, or contemplating the thirty-two constituent parts of the body such as head-hair, body hair, etc. The Commentary states that these two sections of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta are meditation objects producing the attainment of absorption (*appanā jhāna*). The remaining nineteen sections of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta are meditation objects producing access concentration (*upacāra kammaṭṭhāna*), by which insight meditation is meant, which produces only access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*).

It is only required to select any of the meditation objects mentioned in the remaining nineteen sections for development of the path factor of Right Mindfulness (*sammāsatī maggaṅga*). In accordance with the instructions in the section on body postures, "While walking, the bodily movements involved in the act of walking should be noted (*gacchanto vā gacchāmi'ti pajānāti*)." While standing, sitting, lying down, the bodily movements involved in each action should be noted. In accordance with the instruction to note however the body is disposed (*Yathā yathā vā panassa kāyo paṇihito hoti tathā tathā naṃ pajānāti*) if there are other postures or movements, they should also be noted carefully. Here special attention should be paid to the grammatical tense employed in "*gacchanto vā gacchāmi'ti*," etc. It definitely refers to noting the present action only. It should be thoroughly understood that learning by rote and pondering the types of materiality, as enumerated in the Abhidhamma, does not amount to contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*). In addition, as mentioned in the section on mindfulness with clear comprehension (*sampajānapabbhaṃ*) all bodily movements involved in going forward or coming back, looking ahead or looking aside, bending or stretching the limbs, should be noted.

Momentary Concentration for Insight

According to the section on attention to the elements (*dhātu-manasikārapabbam*), the four primary elements should be noted as they become manifest. The Visuddhimagga explicitly states that when the hindrances are completely overcome by contemplating the four primary element, access concentration arises. This access concentration, as explained in the Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā, is not in the neighbourhood of absorption (*appanā samādhi*) and as such, is not true access concentration. Nevertheless, since it is akin to access concentration in its capacity to overcome the hindrances and producing tranquillity, it assumes the name of access concentration by virtue of its capacities.

For the purposes of insight meditation, we have used the term momentary concentration for insight (*vipassanā khaṇika samādhi*) to describe the said concentration. Some people find it difficult to understand this usage and criticise its use. They maintain that insight cannot be developed by means of momentary concentration. They argue that, if it were possible, monastic students studying the scriptures should be able to acquire insight knowledge. We could accept this view if the student's concentration were strong enough to dispel the hindrances and if, at the same time, they were contemplating on the mental and physical phenomena at the moment of their arising, in accordance with the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta. However, it is plain that the concentration involved in the recitation of, and reflection on, the scriptures that students have learnt by heart is not intense enough to overcome the hindrances nor are they noting mental and physical phenomena at the moment of their arising. Our critic is therefore obviously not conversant with the correct practice of insight meditation.

In the Visuddhimagga, momentary concentration for insight is mentioned as momentary unification of the mind (*khaṇika-cittakaggatā*);¹ in its Subcommentary² it is referred to as concentration lasting for a moment (*khaṇamattaṭṭhitiko samādhi*). Thus based on the authority of the Commentary and the Subcommentary, we have employed the term "momentary concentration for insight" to describe the concentration which is, by virtue of identity, access concentration. Once these explanations are well understood, confusion will surely cease in the minds of our critics.

¹ Vism.289, Path of Purification p.282. ² Vism.Ṭ.278.

As stated above, if contemplation of materiality is accomplished by noting it as it arises, in accordance with the sections on postures (*iriyāpathapabbam*), clear comprehension (*sampajānapabbam*), and attention to elements (*dhātumanasikārapabbam*), access concentration, which may be termed momentary concentration, is developed. Together with it, insight knowledge, which is also known as the right-view of insight (*vipassanā sammādiṭṭhi*), is also developed. These are then the path factors of Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration, and Right View, otherwise called the foundation of mindfulness with regard to contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*).

With regard to the above statement that attention to elements is an object of meditation for access concentration, we have the authority of the Visuddhimagga, which mentions this meditation object as [analysis of the four elements](#) (*catudhātuvavatthāna*). No doubt should also be entertained about our assertion that contemplation of body postures and clear comprehension leads to access concentration, because the Commentary to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta definitely confirms them to be meditation objects for access concentration.

In addition, according to the section on contemplation of feelings, mindfulness of feelings, the mind, and mental-objects at the moment of their arising will lead to the development of access concentration and insight knowledge. Therefore the Visuddhimagga gives, at the beginning of the chapter on Purification of View, a description of how a person who begins practising bare insight straight away contemplates the four primary elements followed by discernment of eighteen elements, twelve bases, and the five aggregates. This is in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha as provided in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta.

By now, having heard the above explanations and considerations, it should be possible to understand how to develop the path factor of Right Mindfulness in conformity with the discourses of the Blessed One. Having understood, one should be able to determine whether mere recitation of, and reflection on, what one has learnt from the scriptures, instead of mindfully noting the body, feelings, the mind, and the mental-objects at the moment of their arising, leads to the Right Mindfulness. It is plain too that in the absence of the proper path factor of Right Mindfulness that the path factor of Right View can never be established.

Genuine Insight Only by Mindful Noting

In order to further strengthen the argument, I will quote a passage from the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta Commentary:¹

“Yasmā pana kāyavedanācittadhammesu kañci dhammaṃ anāmasitvā bhāvanā nāma natthi, tasmā tepi imināva maggena sokaparideve samatikkantāti veditabbā.”

“It should be understood that there is no development of insight pertaining to knowledge of the Noble Path, without contemplating the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects.”

Therefore it should be realised that the minister Santati and Paṭācārā Therī (who were said to have attained the higher knowledge of the Noble Path and Fruition while listening to a discourse had overcome their sorrow and lamentation only through the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness.

The Commentary is very clear on this point. It is not just listening to the teaching, but contemplation on the body, feelings, mind, and mental-objects that helped them to attain higher knowledge. Without contemplating on any of them, it is impossible to develop insight, nor knowledge pertaining to the Noble Path and its Fruition. It is very clear therefore that mere learning of the definition and classifications of mind and matter and reflecting on them without actually noting them as they arise within one’s body, will never develop the proper path factor of Right View otherwise called insight knowledge or the knowledge pertaining to the Noble Path.

Here, Right Mindfulness alone will not bring about the desired objective. Having achieved Right Mindfulness, it is only by comprehending the truth as it really is that the desired end is attained. Therefore in the summarised introduction to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta cited above, it is mentioned to maintain ardent mindfulness with clear comprehension. In the exposition of this summarised introduction terms such as *“pajānāti”*— to know in different ways, or *“sammudaya dhammānupassi”* — to know the cause of arising and ceasing, are employed.

We have therefore, summarised this path factor of Right Mindfulness as follows: to develop Right Mindfulness, there must be: ardent mindfulness with clear comprehension of every bodily movement,

¹ MA.ii.339.

every mental action, every feeling, whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, whichever manifests, and every mental-object as it appears.

I have taken time to discuss in detail the path factor of Right Mindfulness as it is very important for the understanding of many people. I will proceed with the consideration of the path factor of Right Concentration. For that, I will confine myself only to the most essential points of the teaching concerning the path factor of Right Concentration. To give all expositions on the subject would cover too wide a scope, and would be hard to grasp by those with limited knowledge.

The Path Factor of Right Concentration

“What, monks, is Right Concentration? Here, monks, a monk, being detached from all desires and other unwholesome states, enters into and abides in the first absorption accompanied by initial (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), filled with joy (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*), born of detachment from unwholesome thoughts ... he enters into and abides in the fourth absorption accompanied by equanimity and purified by mindfulness. This, monks, is called Right Concentration.”

Here, absorption (*jhāna*) means not allowing the mind to wander about, but fixing it on a single object to remain tranquil. According to the Suttas, there are four absorptions:

Five factors accompany the first absorption: initial application (*vitakka*), directing the mind towards the meditation object: sustained application (*vicāra*), repeated investigation of the object, which has manifested; joy (*pīti*), rapture or delight, happiness (*sukha*), bliss or pleasant feeling, one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), a calm, unified mind.

In the second absorption: with the fading away of initial and sustained application, only three factors remain, joy, happiness, and one pointedness.

In the third absorption: with the fading away of joy, only two factors, happiness and one-pointedness remain.

In the fourth absorption: happiness is replaced by equanimity, so that only equanimity and one-pointedness remain.

These four absorptions may be mundane (*lokiya*), also known as form (*rūpavacara*) and formless (*arūpavacara*) *jhāna*, or supramundane (*lokuttara*), if accompanying Noble Path consciousness. Supra-

mundane absorption is the genuine path factor of Right Concentration, mundane absorption may be classed as the path factor of Right Concentration if it forms the basis for the development of insight.

Insight without Absorption

Hanging on to this statement, some say that insight can be developed only after achieving purification of mind through attaining absorption (*jhāna*). Without absorption, purification of mind cannot be attained, and so insight cannot be developed. This is a one-sided, dogmatic view. That access concentration in the neighbourhood of absorption, having the capacity to suppress the hindrances, can help attain the purification of view, leading to the development of insight. That many have achieved Arahantship by thus developing insight, is explicitly stated in the *Visuddhimagga*. In the *Suttanta Piṭaka*, for example in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, there is very clear teaching that Arahantship may be achieved by contemplating objects such as body postures, which can only give rise to access concentration. The *Anussatiṭṭhāna Sutta*¹ of the *Āṅguttaranikāya* states that the concentration developed by recollecting the virtues of the Blessed One² is adequate to use as a basis for the development of higher knowledge up to the state of Arahantship. The Commentaries that expound on the section on clear comprehension also definitely affirm that joy (*pīti*) can be aroused by recollecting the virtues of the Blessed One and the Saṅgha; and that the joy so aroused can be contemplated as being perishable, as being impermanent, resulting subsequently in the attainment of Arahantship.

These authorities state further that innumerable people, hundreds of thousands, millions, and tens of millions, who became liberated during discourses given by the Buddha were not all skilled in absorptions. It is probable that many of them were unequipped with any such attainments. However, they must have achieved purification of mind because their minds were described as responsive, tender, free from hindrances, exultant, and pure. The Commentaries clearly state that it was at such opportune moments

¹ A.iii.312.

² The eight reflections (*anussati*) consisting of the subjects of Recollection of the Attributes of the Buddha to Contemplation of the inevitability of death, reflection on the loathsomeness of food, and analysis of the four elements will lead to neighbourhood-concentration. ([Buddhist Meditation and its Forty Subjects](#))

that the Blessed One delivered the most exalted, sublime teaching of the Four Noble Truths, which the Buddhas alone can expound. They also clearly state that his audience attained higher knowledge as a consequence of listening to such teachings.

In view of such consideration, the definition given in the teachings on Right Concentration in terms of the four absorptions should be regarded as a superlative method of description; access concentration, although described as an inferior way, may also be taken as Right Concentration, which can accomplish purification of mind. The said access concentration has the same characteristics of suppressing the hindrances as the first absorption. It is also similar in having the same five *jhāna* factors of initial application, sustained application, joy, happiness, and one-pointedness. Consequently we take it that the Blessed One had included both the proper access concentration and the nominal access concentration under the category of the first *jhāna* as an inferior way of definition.

Absorption means closely observing an object with fixed attention. Fixed attention to a selected object of meditation such as respiration for tranquillity concentration gives rise to *samatha jhāna*, whereas noting the characteristics of mind and matter, while contemplating their three characteristics, gives rise to *vipassanā jhāna*. I give the following summary for easy recall:-

1. Close observation with fixed attention is called *jhāna*.
2. There are two types of *jhāna*: *samatha jhāna* and *vipassanā jhāna*.
3. Fixed attention to develop tranquillity is called *samatha jhāna*.
4. Contemplating the three characteristics is *vipassanā jhāna*.
5. There are three kinds of concentration: momentary (*khaṇika*), access (*upacāra*), and absorption or fixed (*appanā*) concentration.

The momentary concentration mentioned above refers to the fairly calm state before access concentration is attained in the course of meditating on objects of tranquillity meditation (*samatha kammaṭṭhāna*), and also to concentration for insight (*vipassanā samādhi*). Of these two, concentration for insight, having the same characteristic as access concentration — suppressing the hindrances — is also called access concentration as explained earlier. That this momentary concentration, when it becomes well developed, can keep the mind tranquil just like absorption, is borne out by the personal experience of meditators practising Satipaṭṭhāna meditation.

In the Visuddhimagga Mahā Tikā we find: “Momentary unification of mind is concentration that lasts only for the duration of the moment of each arising (*khaṇikacittekaggatāti khaṇamattaṭṭhitiko samādhi*).” When this momentary concentration for insight occurs without interruption with mind and matter as its object maintaining tranquillity in a single mode at a stretch and not being overcome by opposing defilements, it fixes the mind immovably as if in absorption.

Accordingly a person engaged in insight meditation and intent on developing himself up to the Path and Fruition stage, should endeavour if possible to attain the first, second, third, fourth *jhāna*, or all four *jhānas*. Having attained any of them, one should train oneself to maintain them and to be skilful with them. Failing, however, to reach the *jhānic* stage, one should strive to bring about access concentration in the neighbourhood of the *jhāna*.

A meditator whose vehicle is pure insight (*vipassanā yānika*), on the other hand, who begins with the contemplation of mind and matter, such as the four primary elements, should try to establish momentary concentration, which is capable of suppressing the hindrances just like the access concentration. When it is fully established, progressive insight will arise beginning with analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ñāṇa*). Thus momentary concentration and access concentration are also to be regarded as the path of Right Concentration.

I have dealt fairly comprehensively with the path of Right Concentration. I will now proceed to elaborate on the wisdom group, beginning with the path factor of Right View.

The Path Factor of Right View

“What, monks, is Right View? It is, monks, knowledge of suffering, knowledge of the cause of suffering, knowledge of the cessation of suffering, knowledge of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This, monks, is called Right View.”

In short, rightly knowing the Four Noble Truths is the path factor of Right View. This should be developed as explained above in the development of Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. Further elucidation will be provided here for clearer understanding.

According to the Aṅguttaranikāya Commentary there are five types of right-view: right-view about ownership of kamma (*kammas-*

sakatā sammādiṭṭhi), right-view of absorption (*jhāna sammādiṭṭhi*), right-view of insight (*vipassanā sammādiṭṭhi*), right-view of the Path (*magga sammādiṭṭhi*), and right-view of the Fruit (*phala sammādiṭṭhi*).

The Commentary on the Mahācattārisaka Sutta mentions also five types similar to the above, but instead of *jhāna sammādiṭṭhi*, there is the right-view of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa sammādiṭṭhi*). Combining the two lists, we have six types of Right View.

In the above list, right-view of the fruit accompanies the four Fruits that are the results of four Paths. The knowledge of the Noble Path is spontaneously followed by knowledge of Fruition; there is nothing special to be done to attain it. Right view of reviewing also occurs spontaneously after attaining the Path and its Fruition, so no effort is needed to bring it about. One should strive only to gain the first four types of right-view, which we will therefore elaborate.

Right View About the Ownership of Kamma

“*Kammassakatā sammādiṭṭhi*” means belief in and acceptance of the view that there is kamma and there are results of that kamma. Any action is kamma, which produces good or bad results. For instance, doers of evil deeds reap evil consequences. Criminals have to face punishment for their crimes, the lightest of which may be condemnation by society. Abusive language is likely to lead to a retort; a stern look charged with ill-will, will likely be reciprocated, while a happy smile begets a happy smile. A friendly greeting is likely to be met with a friendly response.

A well-behaved child who has had a good education will grow into a prosperous and successful adult. Following a lucrative trade or industry leads to wealth and prosperity, unprofitable endeavours such as gambling surely leads to ruination. Instances of good or bad results following good or evil actions are within our daily experience.

Throughout the endless cycle of existence, this law of kamma prevails, good action leading to good results, evil action leading to bad consequences. As a result of evil deeds done in past existences one has to suffer evil consequences such as a short life-span with various ailments, ugliness, poverty, and lack of attendants in the present life. Evil acts such as killing, torturing, stealing, robbing, or lying done in this life will bear fruit in future existences by being born in the lower realms accompanied by evil retribution.

Good deeds done in previous existences, come to fruition in the present life as good results, so one enjoys longevity free from ailments, endowed with beauty and wealth, and attended by many followers. Avoiding evil acts of killing, torturing, stealing, robbing, and being well disposed to generous deeds and helping others, one is reborn in higher existences, enjoying the fruits of these good deeds. Good and bad results are evident realities. The belief that these realities are the results of good and bad actions is the right-view that one's own kamma is one's own property. This right-view is not brought about by one's own penetrative intuition like insight knowledge. It is mere acceptance of the view based on faith in the words of the elders and scriptures after weighing the evidence of known instances and their credibility. This right-view is included in the list of ten meritorious deeds and is known as meritorious right-view (*sucarita sammādiṭṭhi*). The wrong-view (*micchādiṭṭhi*) that denies the truth of kamma and its result is one of the ten demeritorious deeds and is called demeritorious wrong-view (*duccarita micchādiṭṭhi*). Please refer to my [Discourse on the Sallekha Sutta](#) for further elucidation.

Meritorious right-view or right-view about the ownership of kamma forms the root of all wholesome actions. Based on this root, evil deeds are avoided and wholesome deeds such as generosity and morality are done. The meritorious deeds of tranquillity and insight meditation may also be cultivated. For this reason, this right-view and morality are said to be preliminary requirements for the wholesome deeds of concentration and insight.

“Since you have asked for a brief teaching to practise in solitude, I urge you to work first for the purification of those states that form the basis to develop concentration and insight. What are these preliminary requirements? They are purified morality and right-view. When you have purified morality and established right-view, then depending on morality, you may go on to develop the four foundations of mindfulness in three modes: contemplating internal objects, contemplating external objects, and contemplating internal and external objects.”

From these words of the Blessed One, it is obvious that right-view about ownership of one's kamma and the path factors of morality

are the preliminary requirements that have to be established before a meditator starts practising meditation. It is clear also that for the development of insight, *jhāna* and access concentration are prerequisites to achieve purification of mind. Further, it is evident that in order to establish the Noble Path, the path of insight, otherwise called the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), which is the precursory to it, must first be developed. What I have described is the three stages of the Path: the basic path (*mūla magga*), the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), and the Noble Path (*ariya magga*). Developing them leads to nibbāna.

The Path in Three Stages

Pious Buddhists customarily wish for the speedy realisation of nibbāna whenever they perform any meritorious deed. The highest goal will not, of course, be attained immediately by merely wishing for it. It will be attained only in one of the higher planes, which they will reach by virtue of their good deeds; and then only if they actually develop the Noble Eightfold Path. So, why wait for a future existence? Why not start now and work for liberation in this very life? Consider how liberation may be achieved.

Liberation may be achieved by developing the Noble Eightfold Path which must be preceded by the preliminary path. However, to develop this path, the basic requirements must first be fulfilled, that is, the establishment of right-view, the three path factors of morality and the three path factors of concentration.

For those who take refuge in the Buddha's dispensation, right-view about the ownership of kamma has already been established. As for path factors of morality, if they are not yet already established in it, lay people can accomplish it by observing the precepts on the eve of starting the meditation practice. If a bhikkhu entertains any doubt about the purity of his morality, he should, at the very outset, strive for its purification by undergoing probation (*parivāsa*) and rehabilitation (*mānatta*). If he possesses unallowable property, he should discard it, and confess his offence. After thus ensuring the purity of his morality, a bhikkhu should strive to attain one, two, three, or all four *jhānas*. If unable to do so, he should work to gain at least access concentration in the neighbourhood of *jhāna*. If he cannot work for *jhāna*, he must try to achieve the momentary

concentration for insight, which has the same characteristics of suppressing the hindrances as the access concentration, by contemplating the four primary elements, etc. This does not involve establishment of concentration as such, but by keeping close awareness of the true nature of mind and matter, concentration automatically arises. However, by having the attention dispersed over many objects or having it fixed on objects which are not easily discernible, concentration takes a long time to arise. Confining the attention to a limited number of objects that can be distinctly noted will facilitate and hasten the development of concentration.

Therefore we instruct our meditators to start with noting the element of motion (*vāyo dhātu*), the characteristics of which — stiffness, pressure, and motion — manifest in the abdominal region. As the abdomen rises, note “rising,” as it falls, note “falling.” Begin by noting just these two motions, rising and falling. However, this is not all that needs to be done. While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, if thinking arises, note that as “thinking,” and then revert to noting the rising and falling. If some painful feeling appears in the body, note that, and when it subsides or has been noted for some time, revert to noting rising and falling. If there is bending, stretching, or moving of the limbs, note “bending,” “stretching,” or “moving.” Whatever bodily movement there is must be noted. Then revert to the nothing the abdominal movements. When you see or hear anything clearly, note “seeing,” or “hearing” for some time, then return to the rising and falling movements.

By thus noting every phenomenon attentively, the mind becomes calm and concentrated. At every moment of awareness, the object observed (*rūpa*), will appear separately from the mind (*nāma*), that cognises it. It is the beginning of the development of the insight knowledge that distinguishes mind from matter by virtue of the concentrated, calm mind. This insight knowledge was meant when the Blessed One said “Vision arose, insight arose . . .” Elders meant the same when they uttered, “Preceding knowledge is superseded by the knowledge following it (*pubbenāparaṃ viśesaṃ sanjānanti*).”

How Jhāna Attainers Develop Insight

If the meditator strives hard, in the way stated, until attaining *jhāna*, the knowledge that accompanies the absorption is the

right-view of *jhāna sammādiṭṭhi*, which is not noteworthy for the purposes of insight. What is noteworthy is the *jhāna* concentration that is useful for purification of mind and as the basis for insight. By employing *jhāna* as a base the meditator emerges from absorption and starts contemplating on the mental states involved at the moment of *jhānic* attainment, namely, initial application, sustained application, joy, happiness, one-pointedness, contact, volition, attention, *etc.* These mental states become very clear to the meditator, as do the physical states on which the absorption depends. Each moment of their existence presents itself clearly, followed at once by its dissolution. The meditator knows easily that because of its incessant passing away, it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self.

The meditator alternately enters absorption and emerges from it to contemplate the mental and physical phenomena involved. While repeating this procedure several times, the path factors of wisdom become strongly developed, soon leading to the realisation of nibbāna. The possibility of such realisation is described thus in the Jhāna Sutta:¹

“Monks, here, a monk enters and abides in the first *jhāna*. When he emerges from that state, he contemplates the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness that exist during the absorption and sees them as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Seeing thus he stays with the insight knowledge so gained and attains Arahantship, the cessation of all corruptions.”

This is how an attainer of *jhāna* attains the Noble Path by insight meditation on the *jhānic* mind and mental concomitants — mental and physical phenomena that have actually arisen and passed away in himself. Here serious consideration should be given to the fact that it is not mere reflection on what one has learnt from books, but actually observation of the arising and passing away of phenomena as it actually happens inside oneself.

It is obvious, therefore, that just the attainers of *jhāna*, after entering and emerging from *jhānic* states, have to meditate on the arising and passing away of phenomena that actually occurred in the immediate preceding moment, so too meditators not endowed with *jhāna*, have to contemplate the arising and passing

¹ A.iv.422.

away of sensual desires *etc.*, as they occur in the immediate preceding moments.

It is indeed very clear. Therefore, those who have not attained *jhāna* should note firmly that genuine insight cannot be developed by mere reflection on book knowledge, learnt by rote; it can be developed only by watching closely every action of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, in oneself and discerning their arising and passing away as it occurs in the immediate preceding moment.

Contemplating Miscellaneous Mental Formations

There is another method of meditation employed by the attainers of *jhāna*. Entering into absorption and emerging from it, the meditator contemplates the *jhānic* mind, mental states, and matter, whatever is easily discernable, paying attention to seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking as they occur. This is known as contemplation of miscellaneous mental formations (*pakiṇṇaka saṅkhārā*). This is the same method employed by bare insight meditators devoid of *jhānic* attainments. The difference lies in using the *jhāna* as a basis for insight, and in the ease with which mental and physical phenomena can be contemplated as they appear by virtue of the solid foundation of deep concentration. These are the only differences between the two methods.

When fatigue overtakes a meditator while contemplating miscellaneous objects that appear at the sense-doors, he or she reverts to the absorption. After recuperating, he or she continues contemplating mind and matter wherever they appear. In this way, based on absorption, he or she develops insight until it is strong enough to lead to the realisation of nibbāna through Path knowledge.

This method of contemplation is described in exposition on Dvedhāvitakka Sutta in the Commentary to Mūlapaṇṇāsa as follows:

“In these words the Buddha talked about the time when Bodhisatta developed insight meditation based on *jhāna*. Truly, when both concentration and insight of a meditator are not yet fully mature, if he sits very long developing insight meditation fatigue overwhelms him, there is burning sensation in the body as if flames are bursting, sweat oozing out from the arm-pits; he feels as if hot steamy gas is rushing forth from the top of his head. The tortured mind twitches

and struggles. The said meditator reverts back to the *jhānic* state to reduce the mental and physical strain to get relief from them; and thus refreshing himself, he returns to the task in hand of meditation. By sitting long at it he again fatigues himself. Then he seeks relief once more by re-entry into *jhānic* state. Indeed he should do so. Entering the *jhānic* state is greatly beneficial to insight meditation.

This is how miscellaneous volitional activities are used as objects for meditation starting with *jhāna*, which the meditator maintains as a base. Meditators not endowed with *jhāna*, contemplate miscellaneous volitional activities such as seeing, hearing, thinking, *etc.* When fatigue overtakes them while doing so, they cannot, of course, seek relief by entering *jhāna*. They revert to the limited objective of noting the rise and fall of the abdomen. By limiting the objects of meditation, mental and physical fatigue are alleviated. Thus refreshed they go back to the continuous observation of the miscellaneous volitional activities. In this way when concentration for insight becomes strengthened, the meditator can engage in continuous meditation, day and night, without physical discomfort or mental distress. The meditation objects seem to arise by themselves. With effortless mindfulness, the process of knowing reality as it is, flows smoothly. The truth about the three characteristics appears spontaneously. As this knowledge gains momentum, both the sense-objects and the knowing mind plunge into the state of dissolution and cessation. This is rushing headlong into nibbāna by means of the Noble Path. I have now summarised the basic, preliminary, and Noble Paths. Developing them leads to nibbāna.

Beginning the Path of Insight

As has been stated above, of the three stages of the path the basic path comprising right-view and morality has to be accomplished before starting meditation practice. The meditator who uses tranquillity as a vehicle (*samatha yānika*) has to develop concentration first, before beginning insight meditation, either access concentration or absorption. The meditator whose path is bare insight (*suddhavipassanā yānika*), on the other hand, accomplishes the basic path factor of concentration while contemplating the four primary elements, *etc.*, by virtue of fixed attention being placed on every sense-object under contemplation. Then the mind does not wander

to other objects. Being solely occupied with the task of contemplation, the mind gets purified. After purification of mind is achieved, every act of contemplation is the development of the path of insight.

How the Factors of Concentration Are Developed

Effort that is put forth to note each phenomenon of rising, falling, sitting, touching, thinking, knowing, feeling hot, feeling painful, *etc.*, constitutes the path factor of Right Effort (*sammā vāyama maggaṅga*). Mindfulness of bodily actions, feelings, mind, and mental-objects involved in the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is the path factor of Right Mindfulness (*sammā sati maggaṅga*). Having the mind fixed on the sense-object under contemplation is the path factor of Right Concentration (*sammā samādhi maggaṅga*), also called momentary concentration for insight (*vipassanā khaṇika samādhi*). These three are the path factors of concentration.

How the Factors of Wisdom Are Developed

Knowing the sense-object under contemplation according to its true nature is the path factor of Right View (*sammā diṭṭhi maggaṅga*). Just after attaining the purification of mind, knowledge arises that is able to distinguish sense-objects from the knowing mind. This analytical knowledge of mind and matter constitutes the Purification of View. This is followed by discernment of the nature of cause and effect while in the course of contemplation. There is bending because of the desire to bend, stretching because of the desire to stretch, movement because of the desire to move. One sees because there is the eye and the sight. One hears because there is the ear and the sound. There is wealth because of good kamma, *etc.*, thus discerning clearly the law of cause and effect as it truly is.

As meditation continues, the meditator discerns with each noting the origination as well as the dissolution of each phenomenon. This results in realising the truth of impermanence with respect to both the sense-object and the knowing mind. The incessant arising and passing away without any break leads to the conviction that it is all dreadful suffering, insubstantial, and not amenable to one's will. Such clear conviction constitutes the path factor of Right View.

Therefore the Buddha had said that knowledge of the truth of suffering is the path factor of Right View. When the truth of suffering is discerned at every contemplation by means of the three characteristics the task of comprehending the remaining three truths is accomplished. How this is accomplished will be dealt with later in the section on the truth of the path.

Inclining the mind to know the true nature of mind and matter, and their origination and dissolution by way of the three characteristics, constitutes the path factor of Right Thought (*sammā saṅkappa maggaṅga*). The two path factors of Right View and Right Thought are the path factors of the wisdom group.

The three factors of Right Concentration explained before, plus these two factors of insight form the five path factors that are classified as the five workers (*kāraka maggaṅga*). These factors are responsible for accomplishing the task of noting and knowing every phenomenon. Hence they are called the workers in the Commentary.

The path factors of morality — Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood — were established even before meditation started, and they remain firm, getting more refined during the course of meditation. With these three factors, all eight path factors of the preliminary path are being developed with each act of noting.

The Path Factor of Right Thought

I have dealt elaborately with seven path factors. I will now proceed with the consideration of the remaining one, the path factor of Right Thought (*sammā saṅkappa maggaṅga*).

“What, monks, is Right Thought? The thought of renunciation (*nekkhamma saṅkappa*), the thought of non-violence (*abyāpāda saṅkappa*), the thought of non-cruelty (*avihiṃsā saṅkappa*). This is Right Thought.”

All wholesome thoughts of performing meritorious deeds, seeking ordination, listening to discourses, and practising meditation are thoughts of renunciation. (See also [A Discourse on the Sallekha Sutta](#)).

*“Pabbajjā pathamaṃ jhānaṃ, nibbānañca vipassanā
Sabbepi kusalā dhammā, nekkhammanti pavuccare.”*

According to the above verse, it is clear that practising insight meditation fulfils the renunciation aspect of right thought. Thoughts of non-killing and wishing others well form are thoughts of non-violence. Especially when loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) is being developed this factor is being fulfilled. Thoughts of considerateness and mercy are non-cruelty, which is especially fulfilled while engaged in meditation on compassion (*karuṇā bhāvanā*).

In the course of insight meditation, since no thoughts of killing or cruelty with respect to the sense-object under contemplation get the opportunity to arise, it should be considered that these two factors of Right Thought are fulfilled with every act of noting. However, the thought involved in insight meditation is not deliberate cogitation or conceiving, it is just inclining the mind towards perceiving the true reality of mind and matter, the nature of their origination and dissolution, and the truth of the three characteristics.

I have fully explained the basic path (*mūla magga*) as well as the eightfold factors of the path of insight, otherwise known as the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*). When the path of insight is fully developed, it gets transformed into Noble Path (*ariya magga*) leading to the realisation of nibbāna. The preliminary path may be called the forerunner of the Noble Path, which follows it. In other words, they form the first and last parts of the same path. To attain the Noble Path, which forms the last part of the path, the initial part, namely the path of insight first has to be accomplished. In this way, the last stage of the Path, the Noble Path, will develop by itself.

To give a simile, to jump across a stream, one should run at full speed and jump. Once one has jumped, no further effort need be exerted. One will automatically land on the other side of the stream. Developing the path of insight may be compared to running at speed and jumping. Landing on the other side is like realising the Noble Path in consequence of the momentum gained from the path of insight.

May all the good people in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this Discourse on the Wheel of the Dhamma, be able to develop the Middle Path, otherwise called the Noble Eightfold Path and by means of the Path and its Fruition according as you wish, attain nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part Four

Delivered on Sunday 21st October, 1962.¹

For the past eight weeks I have been expounding the Dhammacakka Sutta, dealing with definitions and explanations of the two extreme practices, how the Blessed One discarded these two extremes and discovered the Middle Path, otherwise called the Noble Eightfold Path, by means of which vision and insight arose in him. I have also explained how the path leads to the calming of the defilements, and to higher knowledge, which gives penetrative insight into the Four Noble Truths and leads to the realisation of nibbāna. I have also given a comprehensive exposition of the Eightfold Path and how it may be developed. I will now start considering the Four Noble Truths, which the Blessed One penetrated by adopting the Middle Path.

The Truth of Suffering

‘Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ — jātipi dukkhā, jarāpi dukkhā, byādhipi dukkho, maraṇampi dukkhaṃ, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ — saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā.

This Pāli passage, which gives the definition and enumeration of the truth of suffering (*dukkha saccā*), is quoted from the Dhammacakka Sutta, as it is now extant. The phrase “*byādhipi dukkho*” in this passage appears to be extraneous, not being found in the Pāli definitions of the truth of suffering found in other suttas. At the same time, the words “*soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyasāpi,*” which come after “*marañam pi dukkhaṃ*” in other suttas are missing in the current text of the Dhammacakka Sutta. There is this difference between the Dhammacakka Sutta and other suttas in the definition of the truth of suffering.

A Critical Examination of Disparities in the Texts

The Sāratthadīpanī, a Subcommentary on the Vinaya, has made the following critical remarks on the disparity of the sutta texts mentioned above:

“The phrase ‘*byādhipi dukkho*’ does not appear in the detailed definition of the truth of suffering given in the Vibhaṅga of the

¹ The 8th waning of Thadingyut, 1324 M.E

Abhidhamma Piṭaka. Accordingly, the Visuddhimagga, in giving a comprehensive definition of the truth of suffering, does not include this sentence, which exists only in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta text. A careful investigation should be made as to why this sentence appears only in Dhammacakka Sutta and not in any other suttas." It goes on to state: "Again, in the comprehensive definition of the truth of suffering in the Vibhaṅga, the words *'soka parideva dukkha domanasupāyasa pi dukkha'* come immediately after *'maranampi dukkhaṃ.'* These words are missing in the Dhammacakka Sutta. Why it this is so should also be closely examined."

The author of the Subcommentary did not seem too happy over these various definitions in the texts. He did not therefore give any exposition on these words "*byādhipi dukkho,*" which are not present in other suttas and on which the Commentary remained silent. I took up the suggestion made by the author of the Subcommentary to conduct an enquiry into these differences and have made the following findings as to how these differences came about.

It cannot be that the Buddha did not give a consistent definition of the truth of suffering in every discourse on the subject. I have come to the conclusion that the Vinaya masters who made a specialised study of the Vinaya, not being equally well-versed in matters pertaining to the Suttas and Abhidhamma, had caused the insertion of the words "*byādhipi dukkho*" and the deletion of the words "*soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsāpi dukkha*" in the Dhammacakka discourse in the Vinaya Mahāvagga. Their version of the Dhammacakka Sutta in the Vinaya thus differs from that in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma.

My conclusion is based on the consideration that the Commentaries on the Sutta and Abhidhamma that give expositions on the short definition of the truth of suffering do not provide any explanatory note on "*byādhipi dukkho,*" though they do on "*soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsa pi dukkha,*" and on the fact that neither the Commentaries nor the Subcommentaries made any mention of the differences in the Pāli Texts.

The author of the Sārattadīpanī Subcommentary was Sāriputta Thera who lived during the reign of [King Parakkamabāhu I](#) between A.D. 1153 and A.D. 1186. Counting back from 1962, it was about seven or eight hundred years ago. The commentators and subcommentators

from the Venerable Buddhaghosa down to the Venerable Dhammapāla lived about 1300 to 1600 years ago. These ancient commentators and subcommentators who wrote exegeses on the Dhammacakka Sutta in the Saṃyuttanikāya,¹ did not mention the disparity in the texts. Their silence was simply because the Dhammacakka Sutta as it existed then was no different from that in the Pāli texts of other Suttas and Abhidhamma. However, by the time the author of the Sāratt hadīpanī came upon the scene about 500 years later, the disparity had cropped up between the various Pāli texts, which he duly discovered. He therefore strongly urged for a critical examination and close investigation of the cause for the disparity.

If we were to accept that the Buddha gave a definition of the truth of suffering in his very first discourse that differs from other versions, it would amount to maintaining that the Buddha gave the first discourse with one definition of suffering, then changing it later to a different version. This view would be highly improper. A proper method of consideration would be that the Buddha, whose knowledge of all things was unimpeded, being blessed with Omniscience (*sabbaññūta ñāṇa*), had given the same definition consistently throughout, but later the Vinaya masters, owing to defective intelligence and memory, had caused these discrepancies to creep into the texts in the course of handing them down from generation to generation. Instances of textual discrepancies are well known in modern times. The Commentary and Subcommentary texts are found to vary from country to country. It is obvious that such disparities were not present in the original texts, but only developed later.

After careful scrutiny as set out above, I have concluded that other texts are accurate and that the Dhammacakka Sutta, now in extent, has, in its section in the definition of the truth of suffering, supplemental words of “*byādhipi dukkho*” while the words “*soka parideva dukkha domanssupāyāsa pi dukkha*” are missing. My conclusion is based on the consideration that disease (*byādhi*) is embraced by the word *dukkha* in the phrase “*soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsa pi dukkha*,” whereas grief (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), sorrow (*domanassa*) and despair (*upāyāsa*) are not embraced by the term disease (*byādhi*).

I therefore believe that the texts containing “*soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsa pi dukkha*,” without the words “*byādhi pi dukkho*” are

¹ S.v.421.

accurate and in accord with the Canonical teachings of the Buddha. I have scrutinised these disparate texts above, as I intend to use in my discourse the following version, which I believe to be accurate.

Accurate Definition of the Truth of Suffering

“Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccam: jātipi dukkhā, jarāpi dukkhā, maranampi dukkhaṃ, soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsapi dukkha, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yampiccam na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ, saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandā dukkhā.”

“This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering: birth (new becoming) is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair are suffering, association with the unloved is suffering, separation from the loved is suffering, not getting what one wants is also suffering, in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering.”

The Four Noble Truths

Many religious beliefs exist in the world, each expounding its own view of what it considers to be the essential truth. The teachings in other systems of religions are not based on personal realisation of the truth, but merely on speculation. Their followers accept such teachings not through personal experience either, but only on faith. All such teachings that fall outside of Buddhism are included in the sixty-two kinds of wrong-views enumerated by the Blessed One in the Brahmajāla Sutta. However, speculation has no place in the Buddha’s teachings. The truth that he taught was discovered through his own insight. The Four Noble Truths he taught with their definition had been gained through his superior penetrative insight, developed by following the Noble Eightfold Path, which, as stated above, leads to higher knowledge, producing penetrative insight. These Four Noble Truths are: the truth of suffering (*dukkha saccā*), the truth of the origin of suffering (*samudaya saccā*), the truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha saccā*), and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*magga saccā*).

It is vital to know these Four Noble Truths. Only with the comprehension of the truth of suffering, may suffering be avoided, for which the cause of suffering must also be known. Again, to

achieve the cessation of suffering, there must be knowledge of what the cessation of suffering really is. Finally, the cessation of suffering cannot be brought about without practical knowledge of the way to accomplish it. Hence knowledge of the four truths is indispensable.

Having discovered these four essential truths, the Buddha enumerated them in sequence. The first truth dealt with was the truth of suffering, which he described as: birth (new becoming), aging, death, grief, lamentation, physical pain, sorrow or mental pain, despair, association with the unloved, separation from loved ones, not getting what one wants, in brief, the five aggregates of attachment. This is the translation of the Pāli passage quoted above.

Suffering of Rebirth

By new becoming (rebirth) is meant the dissolution of mind and matter at the last moment in the previous existence and, after death, the first moment of genesis of new mind and matter in the next existence as conditioned by kamma. This first genesis, which serves as a connecting link with the past life is termed relinking or conception (*paṭisandhi*), the initial formation of fresh mind and matter. If this formation takes place in a mother's womb, then it is conception in a womb (*gabbhaseyyaka paṭisandhi*), which may be of two types: oviparous (*aṇḍaja paṭisandhi*), when the conception takes place in an egg, and viviparous (*jalābuja paṭisandhi*), when the embryo freely develops in the womb until birth occurs.

Conception in a womb, according to the Buddhist scriptures, has its origin in the semen and blood of the parents. Western medical science holds the view that conception results from the union of the father's sperm and the mother's ovum. The two views may be reconciled by accepting that the father's sperm and mother's blood are involved in a conception. This union of sperm and blood of the parents, leading to the formation of new mind and matter, constitutes what is known as rebirth which may occur either in lower realms (*apāya*) or in the human world as conditioned by past unwholesome kamma or wholesome kamma respectively.

Conception in moisture-laden media such as moss (*saṃsedaja*), represents the coming into existence of some larvae. Beings invisible to human eyes such as deities, demons, ghosts, and denizens of the

woeful states assume spontaneous rebirth (*opapātika*), with the conscious mind and physical body already fully developed.

In all these four types of conception, the first moment of conception or genesis definitely constitutes beginning a new existence or birth (*jāti*). No suffering or pain exists, of course, at the first moment of genesis, but since the origination of life serves as a basis for the later appearance of physical pain and mental suffering throughout the whole of the ensuing existence, birth is called suffering. It is like putting one's signature on a document as a guarantor of some questionable transactions. There is no trouble, of course, at the time of signing the document, but because it is sure to cause difficulties later, the act of signing the document amounts to involvement in dreadful trouble or, in other words, in suffering.

For further elucidation, suffering may be classified under seven categories: 1) the suffering of pain (*dukkha-dukkha*), 2) the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*) and 3) the suffering of conditioned states (*saṅkhāra dukkha*) — these three forming one group, 4) concealed suffering (*paṭicchanna dukkha*) and 5) unconcealed suffering (*apaṭicchanna dukkha*) — these two forming another group, 6) indirect suffering (*pariyāya dukkha*) and 7) direct suffering (*nippariyāya dukkha*) — these two forming the third group.

Of these seven types, bodily aches, pains, and discomfort are one physical suffering and worry, misery, unhappiness, and sorrow are mental suffering. The two constitute the suffering of pain (*dukkha-dukkha*). Its nature is suffering, its name is suffering, hence it is dreaded by every sentient being.

- Unendurable physical and mental suffering is *dukkha-dukkha*.

The Suffering of Change

Physical pleasure (*kāya sukha*) arising from agreeable tactile impressions and mental pleasure (*cetasikā sukha*) arising from considering pleasant sense-objects are two forms of happiness liked by every sentient being. All beings pursue happiness day and night, even risking their lives, and when happiness is attained, it knows no bounds. Nevertheless, if the sense-objects that have given them such intense delight and enjoyment disappear while they are rejoicing with blissful contentment, their agitation and distress is as intense as their previous happiness.

When the wealth they have accumulated in the form of gold, money, or property suddenly get lost through one reason or another, or when death or separation comes to one's beloved member of the family, whether one's spouse or children, then intense grief and distress ensue, and may even cause mental derangement. Thus these two forms of mental and physical happiness are suffering of change (*vipariṇāma dukkha*). While they last, they may seem very enjoyable, but they are replaced by intense grief and despair when they vanish. Hence they are suffering.

- Happiness arising from comfort and joy is *vipariṇāma dukkha*.

Suffering of Conditioned States

The ordinary everyday scene that one sees, hears, or comes into contact with, neutral sense-objects inspire neither pleasure nor pain. This neutral condition, which by nature is neither painful nor pleasurable is called neutral feeling (*upekkhā vedanā*). This equanimity does not, however, exist permanently. It needs constant maintenance of its necessary conditions for continuity of this medial state. This implies laborious effort which, of course, is suffering. Hence this equanimous feeling, which is neither painful nor pleasurable, is called the suffering of conditioned states (*saṅkhāra dukkha*). In addition to this equanimous feeling, all other mental and physical formations of the mundane sphere are also called suffering, because they need constant maintenance.

- Neutral feelings, and mental and physical formations of the mundane sphere are *saṅkhāra dukkha*.

Feelings of happiness also requires constant conditioning for its maintenance and as such should also be classified as *saṅkhāra dukkha*, but the commentators omitted it from this classification as it has been given a separate name as *vipariṇāma dukkha*. Nevertheless, it should be regarded as *saṅkhāra dukkha* too since it is obvious that considerable effort is needed for its maintenance.

The three types of suffering explained above should be thoroughly understood as a firm grasp of these types will help in understanding the truth of suffering.

Concealed and Unconcealed Suffering

Physical ailments such as ear-ache, tooth-ache, head-ache, flatulence, and mental afflictions arising out of unfulfilled desire, rage, disappointment, misery, and worry are called concealed suffering (*paṭicchanna dukkha*), because they are known only to the suffering individual and become known to others only when intimated by them. As such suffering is not openly evident, it is also called unapparent suffering (*apākata dukkha*).

Physical affliction such as from sword cuts, spear thrusts, or bullet wounds is not hidden, but quite apparent and evident. It is therefore called unconcealed suffering (*apaṭicchanna dukkha*) or apparent suffering (*pākata dukkha*).

Direct and Indirect Suffering

All mental and physical formations that can give rise to physical and mental afflictions are not in essence suffering, but as they are the basis of suffering of one form or another, they are known as indirect suffering (*pariyāya dukkha*). They are dreadful in view of the suffering that will surely arise from them. As in the example just given, it is dreadful like giving one's guarantee to a transaction by signing a bond for which compensation has to be paid later.

The suffering of pain (*dukkha-dukkha*) is intrinsic. There is no doubt as to its action. It is therefore known as direct suffering (*nipariyāya dukkha*).

Of these seven types of suffering, taking birth in a new existence comes under indirect suffering according to the above classification. All kinds of suffering in hell such as subjection to millions of years of incineration by hell-fire, or tortures by the wardens of hell, arise because of birth in hell as a consequence of past unwholesome kamma. All kinds of suffering in the realm of hungry ghosts such as starvation or scorching fires for billions of years arise because of birth in that realm as a consequence of unwholesome kamma. Hardships and troubles in the animal kingdom suffered by cattle, elephants, horses, dogs, pigs, chickens, birds, goats, sheep, insects, etc., arise because they happen to take birth in animal existences.

Human misery characterised by scarcity of the essentials for living such as food and clothing is brought about by the fact of taking birth in a human existence. Even when well provided for as

in the case of affluent people, there is no escape from suffering, which is inflicted on them in the form of physical and mental distress due to illness and disease, unfulfilled desires, fear of oppression by their enemies, aging, *etc.* All these miseries come about because of birth in the human world. Thus, being the foundation for all the sufferings that ensue throughout the whole span of life, taking birth in a particular existence, birth is regarded as suffering.

Suffering in a Mother's Womb

When one takes conception in a mother's womb, one comes into being in the disgusting womb, which is situated in between the stomach, filled with undigested food, and the rectum, the receptacle for excreta, faeces and urine, depending for one's body substance on the parent's sperm and blood, which is loathsome indeed! The very thought of having to stay amidst a filthy mass of sperm and blood is revolting and nauseating. There is no knowing whether one has descended into a human womb or the womb of a cow or a dog.

Twenty or thirty years ago, a certain elder used to recite a verse "Dhamma cradle, Emerald cradle," in the course of his discourses. The verse gave a description of various kinds of cradles ranging from emerald-studded golden cradles for royal infants to the miserable wicker baskets of poverty-stricken families. In one stanza of the verse was the query, "Aging is gradually creeping. For which cradle are you heading?" This question is quite apt since after aging comes finally death, and if craving still remains, death will inevitably be followed by rebirth in a new existence. Even if one is reborn in the human plane, one is bound to start life in one cradle or another. The question is, "Which kind of cradle?" An emerald-studded golden cradle awaits those with an abundance of wholesome kammās, while those burdened with unwholesome kamma will head straight for a wicker basket in a wretched home. The verse was an exhortation urging people to do meritorious deeds to assure a high class cradle in their next existence.

I would also urge you to ponder a while on the question of which kind of mother's womb you are heading for, to become mindful of the dreadful suffering attendant upon birth, and to strive for the cessation of the cycle of rebirth. Even if one cannot strive for complete liberation yet, at least try to avoid a lowly rebirth.

What I have described is how one is faced with dreadful suffering of rebirth from the moment of descent into the mother's womb, then during the period of gestation for nine months, other sufferings follow. When the mother suddenly moves, sits down, or stands up, the extreme suffering one undergoes is like a kid being whirled around by a drunkard, or a young snake fallen into the hands of a snake-charmer. The young baby in the womb of a modern mother inclined to athletic exercises, is likely to be subject to more intense sufferings. When the mother happens to drink something cold or swallow something hot or acid, the suffering becomes a real torture.

Suffering at Birth

It is said that the obstetric pains of a mother at child-birth can be so excruciating as to prove fatal; the child's agony could be no less, and could prove fatal too. The pain that arises after birth when its delicate body is taken in by rough hands, washed and rubbed with rough cloths, is like scrapping the sore spots of a very tender wound. The pains described so far relate to suffering endured from the moment of conception to the time of birth.

Suffering Throughout Life

Thereafter, there will be distress and discomfort such as stiffness, heat, cold, or itchiness while one is too young to alleviate them oneself by changing postures. Innumerable difficulties are bound to follow when one grows up and has to face the problems of earning a livelihood. One will become subjected to maltreatment and oppression by others, to diseases, and injuries.

One goes through all these sufferings simply because one happens to take a new existence. Accordingly, rebirth, being the foundation of all the miseries of the whole existence, is defined as suffering by the Buddha. A careful consideration will confirm the accuracy of this definition. Rebirth is really dreadful, like signing a document which later will give rise to difficulties. Thus birth is suffering because of its dreadfulness. To summarise, the physical and mental afflictions arise because of birth in each existence. Only when there is no more rebirth will there be total release from these inflections. Thus the Blessed One taught that the very origination of new existence, birth is suffering.

- Suffering is met with in every existence.
- If there is no birth, there is no suffering.
- The origination of a new existence is therefore suffering.

Suffering Because of Aging

Aging means becoming grey-haired, toothless, wrinkled, bent, deaf, and short-sighted. In other words, decay that has set in is easily recognisable in the mental and physical aggregates. However, the aging of the mental aggregates are not so apparent. Indications, such as failing memory and dotage become noticeable only when one is very old and then only to close associates.

The physical aging goes on all throughout life quite unmistakably, but becomes very noticeable only when one is getting fairly old and no longer youthful. A child doesn't have the same body as a teenager. There is continuous change in physical appearance. Young adults assume an appearance quite different from that of their teenage years. These changes are indications of the aging that is taking place. However, here, by aging (*jarā*) we mean decay in the sense of getting grey-haired, *etc.*, which are clearly discernible.

Aging is concerned with just the static moment (*thiti*) of the mental and physical aggregates and has no essence of pain or suffering as it is. However, because of aging, there occurs failing of vital force in the whole system of the body, impairment of eyesight and hearing, fading of the senses of smell and taste, declining physical strength, unattractiveness, vanishing of youthfulness, loss of memory and intellectual power, disrespect or contempt by young people (being addressed as old fogey, granddad, grandma, *etc.*), being regarded as a burden on society. Such disabilities, of course, give rise to physical and mental suffering. Since it forms a source of physical and mental suffering, the Buddha said that aging is dreadful suffering. People are really afraid of old age. They are forever seeking ways and means of stemming the advent of old age. However, it is all in vain. With grey hairs and missing teeth *etc.*, decay sets in inexorably. That aging is dreadful suffering is so obvious that I do not need to elaborate any further.

Death as Suffering

Death means the extinction of vitality (*jīvita*) or the life principle, which has been in ceaseless operation since the time of conception as conditioned by individual kamma in a particular existence. Referring to this, the Buddha said, “All mortals are in constant fear of death (*sabbe bhāyanti maccuno*).” Death as conditioned by birth, death by violence, death by natural causes, death from termination of the life-span, death from the exhaustion of wholesome kammic results, are all synonymous terms describing the same phenomenon of extinction of the life principle.

Death means just the moment of dissolution of the life-faculty and is not by itself pain or distress. However, when death comes, one has to abandon the physical body and leave behind one’s near and dear ones, relatives and friends, together with all of one’s property. The thought of leaving the present existence is very frightening, and every mortal is seized with the fear of death. Uncertainty as to which existence one is bound to after death causes great fear too. Because of its dreadful nature the Buddha described death as suffering.

According to the Commentary, the wicked who are burdened with an unwholesome past, see on their death-bed, the evil deeds they have done (*kamma*), or signs of their evil deeds (*kamma nimitta*), or signs of the realm of misery in which they are doomed to take rebirth (*gati nimitta*), all of which give them intense mental anguish. However, good people with accumulations of wholesome kamma suffer too as they dwell on their approaching death, because they cannot bear to part from all that they hold dear, beloved ones and property. As death draws near, all beings are subject to severe illnesses, which rack the body with unbearable pain. Death being the basis of all such physical and mental pains, has thus been called suffering by the Blessed One.

Grief as Suffering

Grief (*soka*) is the worrying and the state of being distressed in one affected by some loss: 1) loss of relatives (*ñātibyasana*) through crime, epidemics, fire, floods, or storms, 2) destruction or loss of property (*bhogabyasana*) by the action of kings or governments, theft, or fire, 3) loss of health (*rogabyasana*) and longevity brought about

by pernicious diseases, 4) loss of morality (*silabyasana*), and 5) loss of right-view (*diṭṭhiyasana*).

Sorrow with intense worry and distress is felt especially when one is bereaved of loved ones such as a spouse, sons or daughters, brothers, sisters, *etc.*, or when disastrous economic misfortune befalls the household. This grief is, strictly speaking, unpleasant feeling or sorrow (*domanassa vedanā*), and as such is intrinsic suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*). Overwhelming distress occasioned by grief is liable to cause heartburn, which may contribute to premature aging and death. Being thus a basis for other physical pains, too, grief is dreadful and is therefore called suffering by the Blessed One.

Everyone fears grief and sorrow. Capitalising on this fear, many books have been written on the subject of "Freedom from Sorrow." However, real freedom from sorrow may be achieved only through the practice of mindfulness meditation. By developing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, complete freedom from sorrow can be enjoyed as exemplified by the minister Santati and Paṭācārā Therī. In the present times too, distressed persons, having lost husbands or troubled by business failures, have come to our meditation centre to practise meditation. Daily their sorrow gradually diminished, and finally they gained complete freedom from sorrow.

Lamentation as Suffering

Lamentation (*parideva*) is the sound produced by wailing on the part of one affected by the loss of relatives or property. Absent-mindedly and hysterically the distressed one clamours, proclaiming the virtues of the dead and the quality of the property lost, or denouncing the person responsible for their loss.

In the abstract sense, lamentation is the material quality of sound and therefore not suffering in essence. However, such willing and hysterical proclamations produce physical discomfort and pain. The Buddha therefore declared lamentation to be suffering. To cry is to be subject to pain, which is suffering.

Physical Pain as Suffering

Physical discomforts in the body such as stiffness, feeling hot, aching, tiredness, or itchiness, are suffering. These physical pains are intrinsic suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*), which everyone knows and

is afraid of. Even animals such as dogs, pigs, or fowl run away to safety at the slightest hint of getting beaten or shot at because they are afraid of physical pain. That physical pain is suffering needs no elaboration. It is important to know that sickness or disease (*byādhi*), comes under this category of physical pain (*dukkha*). Physical pain is generally followed by mental distress and for thus serving as a cause of mental pain too, it is dreadful suffering.

If physical pain is mindfully noted in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna method, mental pain is averted. Only physical pain is then felt. The Blessed One spoke in praise of this practice by which mental pain is averted and one suffers only physical pain. Permitting mental suffering to arise by failure to take note of the physical pain was denounced by the Buddha. "It is like," he said, "attempting to remove a thorn that is hurting with another thorn, when the second thorn breaks and remains embedded in the flesh. One suffers then two pains, one from the first thorn and additional pain from the second thorn." This illustration deserves careful consideration.

Sorrow as Suffering

Sorrow (*domanassa*) denotes mental pain such as displeasure, anxiety, misery, sadness, fear, *etc.* Sorrow is also intrinsic suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*). All mortal beings are well acquainted with it and fear it, which therefore needs no elaboration. Sorrow not only oppresses the mind but may also torture the body. When one is fiercely gripped by sorrow, one goes about dejectedly without sleep or food for days on end, with the consequent impairment of health and even advent of death. It is truly a formidable suffering from which only Non-returners (*anāgāmi*), and Arahants are exempt. Individuals who practise Satipaṭṭhāna meditation can overcome sorrow if they make strenuous efforts to note it as it arises. In this way they can reduce the pain of sorrow to a considerable extent even if they cannot overcome it completely.

Despair as Suffering

Despair (*upāyāsa*) is bitterness produced by excessive mental pain in one affected by the loss of relatives, *etc.* It causes repeated bemoaning over the loss resulting in burning of the mind and physical distress. Despair is therefore suffering because of the

intense burning of the mind and physical pain accompanying it. People accordingly recognise despair as dreadful suffering.

The Commentary illustrates the differences between grief (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), and despair (*upāyāsa*) as follows:

Grief is like cooking oil or dye in a pot over a slow fire. Lamentation is like its boiling over when cooking over a quick fire. Despair is like what remains in the pot after it has boiled over and is unable to do so any more, going on cooking in the pot until it dries up.

Suffering as Association with the Unloved

Association with the unloved means meeting with disagreeable beings and mental formations. Such meeting is not itself unbearable pain, but when one meets with disagreeable beings or undesirable objects, a reaction sets in at once in the form of mental disturbance and physical discomfort. As it serves as a cause of mental and physical distress, association with the unloved is designated by the Buddha as dreadful suffering. The world in general also recognises such encounters as undesirable suffering. Some people may go to the extent of praying not to have the misfortune of encountering undesirable person or things throughout the cycle of existence. However, in the world where pleasantness and unpleasantness co-exist, one has to face both according to circumstance. One's wish may be fulfilled, if at all, only partially by having fewer occasions to face unpleasant people and objects.

The important thing is to meet unpleasant situations with the right mental attitude. The best course of action is to rely on the practice of mindfulness, that is noting incessantly so that the mental process remains at the stage of just "hearing," "seeing," etc. When unpleasant sensations are felt in the body, mental distress must be averted by continuously noting "touching," "knowing," "pain," etc.

Suffering as Separation from the Loved

Separation from the loved means to be parted from agreeable beings and mental formations. Such separation is not itself a painful feeling. However, when separation takes place, by death or while still alive, from loved ones such as one's spouse or children, or when parted from one's treasured possessions, mental distress sets in at once. It may even develop into grief, lamentation, and despair. One

is bound to be overwhelmed with grief under such circumstances. As it promotes such mental afflictions, the Blessed One called the separation from loved ones and desirable objects dreadful suffering. The world also recognises such separation as painful suffering. Some even pray to be always together with their loved ones throughout the succession of existences. Such wishes may be fulfilled when there is sufficient good kamma.

The family of the millionaire Menḍaka, comprising his wife, his son, and daughter-in-law, together with their servant, once made such a wish, to be always together in future existences, by offering food to a Paccekabuddha. As a result of this wholesome kamma, their wish was fulfilled and the five were born together at the time of our Buddha Gotama. However, such wishes tend to promote clinging, so is very inappropriate for an individual with the firm resolve to obtain complete release from the cycles of existence.

Suffering as Not Getting What One Wants

The suffering of not getting what one wants is the suffering that arises from desire for some unobtainable object. Without practising and developing the Noble Eightfold Path, the desire may arise, "If only I were not subject to birth, aging, disease, and death. If only I were not subject to sorrow and lamentation." Of course, these wishes will not be fulfilled merely by wishing, and not getting what one wants causes mental anguish. Therefore the Buddha described such desires as dreadful suffering. Here, the object of one's desire is not limited only to *nibbāna*, which is free from birth, aging, *etc.*, but includes worldly gains and wealth, which also cannot be obtained merely by wanting them. Not getting what one wants is suffering.

Suffering as the Five Aggregates

The eleven types of suffering starting from the suffering of birth to the suffering of not getting what one wants arise only because there are the five aggregates of attachment (*upādānakkhandhā*), and they arise dependent on these five groups. In brief, therefore, the five aggregates of attachment are dreadful suffering.

The material and mental formations, which form the objects of attachment are called aggregates of attachment. These five aggregates are: 1) the aggregate of material forms, 2) the aggregate of

feelings, 3) the aggregate of perceptions, 4) the aggregate of mental formations, and 5) the aggregate of consciousness.

All sentient beings exist as such only with these five groups forming their substantive mass. They cling to their body, which is merely an aggregate of material forms, regarding, it as "I," "my body," as permanent, *etc.* Hence the group of material form is called the aggregate of attachment.

The mental phenomena made up of consciousness and mental concomitants (*cetasikā*) are also grasped at, taken to be "I," "my mind," "it is I who thinks," as permanent. So the mental states are also known as aggregates. This is how attachment occurs on the groups of mind and matter as a whole.

The Aggregates of Attachment on Seeing

To consider each separate phenomenon in detail, the aggregates of attachment are conspicuous every time one sees an object, Likewise, they are prominent on every occasion of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. At the moment of seeing, the seeing eyes, the object of sight and consciousness of seeing are quite conspicuous. This consciousness of seeing is comprised of pleasant or unpleasant feeling, perception or recognition of the object seen, striving and inclining the mind to see and the knowledge that an object is seen.

People who cannot practise insight meditation, or those practising who have not yet advanced to the stage of appreciating the nature of the three characteristics, remain attached to the eye, the sight, *etc.* They regard clear eye-sight as "I," as "my eye" and as permanent. When they see the body and the limbs, the attachment arises, "I see my own body; this is my hand, it exists permanently." Seeing other people, they appear as a person, a being, as enduring. Because of such arousal of attachment, the material forms of the eye and the object of sight are called the aggregate of attachment to form (*rūpupādānakkhandha*).

In addition to pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling in seeing an object, there is also neutral feeling, which is not considered separately here to economise space. What is concerned with wholesome neutral feeling is included in pleasant feeling; what is concerned with unwholesome neutral feeling is included in

unpleasant feeling. Both pleasant and unpleasant feelings give rise to attachments: "It is I," "It is my feeling," "It is everlasting," "I feel well," "I feel terrible." Causing attachments in this way, pleasant or unpleasant feeling in seeing an object, is called the aggregate of attachment to feeling (*vedanupādānakkhandha*).

On perceiving an object, attachment arises in this way too: "I recognise it," "I don't forget it," so it is called the aggregate of attachment to perception (*saññupādānakkhandha*).

The will to see an object is volition (*cetanā*). In the vocabulary of the texts, it is termed "incitement," "exhortation," or "urging." However, will or volition expresses its meaning quite clearly. Attention (*manasikāra*), which goes along with volition, is pondering or inclining the mind towards an object. Then there is contact (*phassa*), which comes into play too, but as volition and attention are the predominant factors, I will mention only these two. There is attachment towards, them too, as "I" or as enduring, hence these two mental concomitants of willing and inclining the mind involved in an act of seeing are called the aggregate of attachment to mental formations (*saṅkhārupādānakkhandha*). By mental formations is meant conditioning. In the case of seeing, it means bringing about conditions to accomplish the act of seeing.

Just knowing that an object is seen is eye-consciousness, which is also attached to as "I see," "I know," the I that sees is everlasting. Because of the possibility of such attachment, consciousness is called the aggregate of attachment to consciousness (*viññāṇupādānakkhandha*).

To recapitulate: 1) At the moment of seeing the eye and sight are the aggregate of attachment to form. 2) Pleasant or unpleasant feeling is the aggregate of attachment to feeling. 3) Recognising or remembering the object is the aggregate of attachment to perception. 4) The will to see and inclining the attention to the object is the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. 5) Just knowing that an object is seen is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

To note as "seeing, seeing," every time an object is seen enables one to know the five mental and physical aggregates as they really are; and having known them, to remain at the stage of just seeing not becoming attached to them as "I," or "mine," as permanent, pleasant, as self, *etc.* To understand the purpose of noting every phenomenon, I have coined the following aphorism:

Fundamentals of Insight Meditation

1. By contemplating what, is insight developed?
2. By noting as they really are the five aggregates, which may cause attachment.
3. When and for what purpose should they be noted?
4. They should be noted at the moment of arising to cut off attachment.
5. Failing to note at the moment of arising opens the way to attachment to them as permanent, pleasant, or self.
6. Noting the five aggregates every time they arise, dispels attachment. Thus clear insight as to their impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality is developed.

In 5), "at the moment of arising," means at the moment of seeing, hearing, etc. In 6) "every time they arise," connotes every act of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, as it occurs.

The Aggregates of Attachment on Hearing

At the moment of hearing, obviously there is the ear that can hear; there is also sound that is audible, and consciousness that knows that a sound has been heard. In this consciousness of hearing are included pleasant or unpleasant feeling, perception of the sound, willing and inclining the mind towards the sound to accomplish the act of hearing, and just knowing that a sound has been heard.

One who has not had the opportunity to practise mindfulness and, therefore, who does not have the true knowledge of reality, becomes attached to all phenomena prominent at the moment of hearing as "I," "mine," *etc.* Because of the liability of such attachment, the ear and the material body of sound are known as the aggregate of attachment to form. The pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the sound is the aggregate of attachment to feeling. The perception of sound is the aggregate of attachment to perception. Exercise of the will to hear a sound and inclining the mind towards it is the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. Just knowing that a sound has been heard is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

To recapitulate: 1) At the moment of hearing, the ear and sound are the aggregate of attachment to form. 2) The pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the sound is the aggregate of attachment

to feeling. 3) Recognising or remembering the sound is the aggregate of attachment to perception. 4) Willing to hear the sound and inclining the attention towards it is the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. 5) Just knowing that a sound has been heard is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

To note as “hearing, hearing,” every time a sound is heard enables one to know the said five mental and physical aggregates as they really are; and having heard the sound, to remain at the stage of just hearing, and not to become attached to it as “I,” or “mine,” as permanent, pleasant, self, *etc.*

The Aggregates of Attachment on Smelling

At the moment of smelling, there is clearly the material sense-base in the nose, there is also the smell and the consciousness that knows the odour. In this consciousness of smelling is comprised the pleasant or unpleasant feeling of smelling, recognition of the odour; exercise of the will to smell and inclining the attention towards the odour, and just knowing the odour.

Failure to note as “smelling, smelling,” and to know the phenomenon of smelling as it truly is, results in attachment to it as “I,” “mine,” *etc.* Because of the possibility of such attachments, the nose, the smell, and the consciousness of smelling are known as the aggregate of attachment to form.

To recapitulate: 1) At the moment of smelling, the nose and smell are the aggregate of attachment to form. 2) The pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the odour is the aggregate of attachment to feeling. 3) Recognising or remembering the odour is the aggregate of attachment to perception. 4) Exercise of the will to smell and inclining the mind towards the odour is the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. 5) Just knowing the odour is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

To note as “smelling, smelling,” every time an odour is smelt is to know the said five mental and physical aggregates as they really are; and having smelt the odour, to remain at the stage of just smelling, and not to become attached to it as “I,” “mine,” as permanent, pleasant, or self, *etc.*

The Aggregates of Attachment on Tasting

At the moment of knowing the taste through tasting, there is clearly the tongue, the taste, and the consciousness of the taste. In this consciousness of taste are included the pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the taste, recognition or remembering the taste, exercise of the will and inclining the attention towards the object to accomplish the task of tasting and just knowing the taste.

Failure to note as “tasting, tasting,” at the moment of tasting; and to know the phenomenon of tasting as it truly is results in attachment to it as “I,” “mine,” *etc.* Because of the possibility of such attachments, the tongue, the taste, and the consciousness of taste are known as aggregates of attachment.

To recapitulate: 1) At the moment of tasting, the tongue and the taste are the aggregate of attachment to form. 2) The pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the taste is the aggregate of attachment to feeling. 3) Recognising or remembering the taste is the aggregate of attachment to perception. 4) Exercise of the will to taste and inclining the attention towards the taste is the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. 5) Just knowing the taste is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

While eating, preparing a morsel in the hand, bringing it up to and putting it into the mouth, and chewing it, are all actions concerned with knowing the sensation of touch. Knowing the taste on the tongue while chewing the food, however, is consciousness of the taste. Thus, noting the taste on every occasion of tasting the food has to be carried out to know the five mental and physical aggregates that manifest at the time of tasting as they really are, and to remain at the stage of just tasting so that no attachment to it as “I,” “mine,” permanent, pleasant, self, *etc.*, can arise.

The Aggregates of Attachment on Touching

The sense of touch encompasses a wide field. Throughout the whole body, wherever flesh and blood are in good condition, is diffused the sensitive body base (*kāya-pasāda rūpa*), which provides the sense of touch. Both inside the body, in the flesh, in the blood, in muscles, bones, *etc.*, and on the surface of skin, this sensitive principle lies spread out not leaving an area the size of a pin-point.

Wherever this sensitive principle exists, the sense of touch may be felt. At the moment of touching, the sensitive principle, which has the ability to seize the tactile materiality, is prominent. It becomes evident as the site of contact, but not as any shape or form. Likewise, the sensitive parts of the ear, nose, and tongue become evident as sites of contact wherever hearing, smelling, and tasting manifest.

Also prominent at the moment of contact is the tactile materiality, which may be any of three elements: earth (*pathavi*), fire (*tejo*), or air (*vāyo*). The hardness, roughness, smoothness, and softness that one feels is the earth element; the heat or cold felt is the fire element; stiffness, pressure, or motion is the air element. Such sensations of touch may arise due to friction between different elements within the body, or through contact with clothing, bedding, seats, earth, water, wind, fire, or the heat of the sun. Such contacts produce very vivid sensations of touch. The consciousness of touch comprises pleasant or unpleasant feeling, perception of the touch, exercise of the will, and inclining of the mind to accomplish the act of touching, and just knowing that a contact has been established. The feeling of pleasure or pain is especially vivid. Physical pain is the suffering (*dukkha vedanā*) that arises through disagreeable contacts.

Failure to be mindful at the moment of touch and to know the reality as it truly is results in attachment to it as “I,” “mine,” *etc.*, towards all these objects that become prominent at the moment of touching. Accordingly, the site of touch, the sensitive-base, the feeling of touch, and knowing that a contact has been made, are called the aggregates of attachment.

To recapitulate: 1) At the moment of touching, the sensitive-base, and the touch are the aggregate of attachment to form. 2) The pleasant or unpleasant feeling of touch is the aggregate of attachment to feeling. 3) Recognising or remembering the touch is the aggregate of attachment to perception. 4) Exercising the will and turning the attention to accomplish the act of touching are the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. 5) Just knowing that a contact has been made is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

Noting the postures such as going, standing, sitting, lying down, bending, stretching, moving, rising and falling, *etc.*, is done just to be mindful of these aggregates. When noting these postures, the specific characteristic of the air element, which causes stiffness,

pressure, and motion, is seen as it truly is, just a material phenomenon without any power of cognition. The knowing mind that notes the postures is also seen as it truly is, just a mental phenomenon that cognises an object. Thus at every occasion of noting, there is always a pair: an object (*rūpa*) that is taken note of and the knowing mind (*nāma*) that takes note of it. After perceiving this fact clearly, the knowledge of cause and effect arises. There is “going” because of the desire to go. Then perceiving clearly that the object noted and the knowing mind arise and vanish afresh at the very moment of noting, the meditator realises that these phenomena are transient, painful and unsatisfactory, and happen according to their own nature, being uncontrollable. Because of this realisation there is no longer any attachment to going, standing, sitting, *etc.*, as “I” or “mine.”

This is how attachment is cut off in accordance with the Mahāsatipaññāna Sutta, which says, “And he abides detached, not grasping to anything in the world (*anissito ca viharati, na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*).” To be thus free from attachment, mindfulness of the body, feelings, the mind, and mental objects has to be developed.

Painful feelings such as stiffness, feeling hot, aching, or itching become evident at the point of contact. Failure to note the distress as it occurs and to see its true nature results in attachment: “I feel stiff,” “I feel hot,” “I feel painful,” “I am distressed.” It is to avoid such attachments that mindful noting of unpleasant feelings has to be done to realise their true nature. Continuous and close observation of painful feelings will reveal clearly how they appear afresh one after another. Then the personal conviction will arise that these painful feelings come into existence only for a moment then vanish instantly, and are therefore impermanent. They are no longer grasped at as “I,” “mine,” or as permanent. One becomes free from attachment. Hence the need for mindful noting.

The Aggregates of Attachment on Thinking

Mental activities such as thinking are very extensive in scope and very frequent. In waking moments, the mind is almost constantly active. Even in the absence of any attractive, pleasant objects in one’s surroundings, imagination creates them, as if they really exist. The five hindrances — sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and sceptical doubt — are

concerned with such mental activities. So are thoughts of lust, ill-will, and cruelty. Unless these mental activities are noted mindfully as they occur, they are liable to be identified as a self, a living entity. Hence it is vital to note each mental activity as it occurs.

When carefully analysed, mental activities are also the five aggregates of attachment. Thinking may be accompanied by a pleasant feeling (*somanassa*) an unpleasant feeling (*domanassa*), or by a neutral feeling (*upekkhā vedanā*). When there is no mindfulness of these three types of feeling as they occur, they are liable to be grasped at as "I feel pleasant, I feel fine, I feel miserable, I feel bad. I feel neither pleasant nor unpleasant." Due to this liability of causing such attachments, these three types of feeling are known as the aggregate of attachment to feeling.

Then, there is sense-perception, which recognises the object the mind is pondering. This perception (*saññā*) is especially pronounced when trying to remember facts to speak about, or when engaged in calculating while checking accounts. Concerning this perception, wrong notions may arise such as, "I remember," "I have a good memory," hence it is called the aggregate of attachment to perception.

At the moment of thinking, there comes into consciousness, a clear impression of the object (*phassa*), initial application (*vitakka*) inclining the mind towards the object, the fixing of attention on the object (*manasikāra*), intention (*cetanā*) that incites and urges, "Let it be like this, let it be like that." The role of volition is especially prominent if an important matter occurs at night when it cannot be attended to. The driving urge of intention, "Go now and tell him," is very prominent. It is also clearly discernible that immoral thoughts are accompanied by greed, ill-will, *etc.*, and moral thoughts are accompanied by generosity, kindness, wisdom, faith, mindfulness, *etc.*

The mental concomitants of contact, volition, and attention are inciting agents responsible for the arising of thoughts in rapid succession. They are also behind every act of speaking and bodily movements such as going, standing, sitting, lying down, bending, or stretching. The incitement concerned with each mental, vocal, or physical activity are mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), which condition acts by prompting, inducing, directing, *etc.* This conditioning role of mental formations may result in its being identified as a person or being and wrongly cleaved to as "I." The notions, "I think,"

“I speak,” “I go,” “I do,” are wrong attachment to these conditioning mental formations. Such attachment is known as clinging to self as the doer (*kāraka atta*). Therefore the mental formations: contact, volition, attention, *etc.*, are called the aggregate of attachment to mental formations.

Then at the moment of thinking, consciousness of thinking is also evident. Burmese people regard consciousness and mental concomitants together as just mind (*citta*). This consciousness of the act of thinking is very commonly viewed as soul, ego, or self, for which reason consciousness is also known as the aggregate of attachment to consciousness. In addition, at the moment of thinking, the material body that provides the base for thinking is also so evident that the uninformed people believe it is the material body that is thinking. For this reason, the material body that provides the base for thinking is known as the aggregate of attachment to form.

The object of thought may be material, mental, or conceptual (*paññatti*). These also serve as objects of attachment. The material object belongs to the aggregate of attachment to form. The mental object is classified under the four mental aggregates. Concepts may be included in the material or mental group whichever it corresponds. For instance, in “Not getting what one wants is suffering (*yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ*)” not getting what one wants is neither material nor mental, just conceptual. The note in the Subcommentary on this point says that the desire for the unattainable should be regarded as suffering.

I have now made a complete analysis of the five aggregates that become evident at the moment of thinking.

To recapitulate: 1) The material body that forms the basis of thinking while thinking is the aggregate of attachment to form. 2) The pleasant or unpleasant feeling about the thought is the aggregate of attachment to feeling. 3) Recognising or remembering the object of thought is the aggregate of attachment to perception. 4) Urging and inclining the mind to accomplish thinking, saying, or doing is the aggregate of attachment to mental formations. 5) Just being conscious of thinking is the aggregate of attachment to consciousness.

It is very important to realise the true nature of thought by being mindful of it every time thinking occurs. Failing to take note of it and thus failing to recognise its real nature will lead to attachment

to it as “I,” “mine,” as permanent, pleasant, self, *etc.* The majority of people these days are cling almost constantly to mental objects. Such attachments give rise to becoming (*upādānapaccaya bhavo*) in accordance with the Law of Dependent Origination. In every new becoming there awaits old age, disease, and death accompanied by the suffering of grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair.

However, if mindfulness is developed on each occurrence of a thought, its true nature will become evident. Having thus known its true nature, no attachment to it will arise, hence no active processes for new becoming will occur. When there is no new becoming, the mass of suffering represented by aging, disease, death, grief, lamentation, *etc.*, is completely eliminated. This cessation of suffering as a result of mindfulness of each thought as it occurs is momentary. However, if the practice of noting every thought is continued, gaining temporary cessation on each noting, by the time the Noble Path becomes fully developed, the mass of suffering will have been completely eradicated. Thus, while occupied with the exercise of noting rising, falling, sitting, touching, if any thought or idea intervenes, it should be noted as “thinking,” or “imagining.”

The detailed analysis I have made above demonstrates clearly that what becomes prominent at the moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking are merely five aggregates of attachment. To common people who cannot practise this exercise of mental noting at the moment of seeing, the subject that sees is regarded as obviously some substantial body, the external object that is seen is also regarded as a woman, a man, as a substantial body. Likewise with the phenomena of hearing, *etc.* In reality, however, there is no such substance or mass to form a physical body, only the five aggregates of attachment. Nothing exists except at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.* They become evident only at the moment they occur, and what become evident then is just the five aggregates.

Suffering Because of the Five Aggregates

Dreadful sufferings of new becoming, aging, death, grief, *etc.*, arise because of the five aggregates of attachment. As long as these five aggregates of attachment exist, dreadful sufferings of becoming, aging, death, *etc.*, will persists. Therefore the five aggregates are themselves dreadful suffering. In short, because there is a physical

body, physical and mental sufferings dependent upon it arise. Because there is the knowing mind, physical and mental sufferings based on it, arise. Therefore, mind and matter, which constitute the five aggregates, are dreadful suffering.

In other words, the unbearable physical and mental distress are dreadful intrinsic sufferings known as the suffering of pain (*dukkha-dukkha*). Everyone fears them. Thus, painful feeling, otherwise known as the aggregate of attachment to feeling is the real truth of suffering.

Pleasant sensations in the body and mind are agreeable, delightful, and enjoyable while they last, but when they vanish, they are replaced by discomfort and dissatisfaction, which of course is suffering. This kind of suffering, known as the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma dukkha*), occurs through change from a pleasant condition to something different, and is terrible. To the Noble Ones, pleasant sensations are like an ogress who bewitches people with her beauty and makes them insane. For them, pleasant sensations are dreadful aggregates of attachment just the same and constitute the real truth of suffering. At the same time, pleasant sensations are transitory and require constant conditioning effort to maintain the status quo. This of course is burdensome and is therefore also real suffering.

The remaining neutral feeling and the aggregates of attachment to form, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are always in a state of flux, always transitory, and therefore to the Noble Ones they are also dreadful. As death awaits constantly, having to rely on the impermanent aggregates of attachment for support is dreadful, like living in a building that shows signs of collapsing at any moment.

The transitory nature of the aggregates of attachment requires constant effort at conditioning for the maintenance of the status quo. This suffering of conditioned states (*sankhāra dukkha*), the burdensome task of conditioning, is also dreadful. Therefore to the Noble Ones, not only the pleasant or unpleasant feelings, but also the remaining aggregates of attachment are also the truth of suffering.

As all the five aggregates are regarded by the Noble Ones as really terrible suffering, the Blessed One said in conclusion of the definition of the truth of suffering, "In brief, the five aggregates of attachment (otherwise called mind and matter, which could cause

attachments as “I,” “mine,” regarding them as permanent, blissful, self, or ego) are just dreadful suffering.”

Attachment and the Aggregates of Attachment

Now I will describe the difference between attachment and the aggregates of attachment. Attachment (*upādāna*) means tenaciously clinging or grasping of which there are four types:

1) Attachment to sensual pleasures (*kāmuṇupādāna*), which is attachment born of craving for sensual desires.

2) Attachment to wrong-view (*diṭṭhupādāna*), which is the attachment to the view that there is no kamma and no results thereof, no after-life, no Supreme Buddha, no Arahants. All other wrong-views, apart from self-view (*attadiṭṭhi*), and attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbataparāmāsa*), are known as attachment to wrong-views.

3) Attachment to rites and rituals (*silabbatupādāna*), which is the practice of certain rituals or ceremonies that have nothing to do with understanding the four Noble Truths nor the development of the Noble Eightfold Path, believing that they will lead to release from the suffering of the cycle of existence, and to permanent peace, free from aging, disease, and death. It is a type of wrong-view (*micchādiṭṭhi*), maintaining that what is wrong is right.

4) Attachment to the soul-belief (*attavādudupādāna*), which is attachment to the belief in a soul, ego, or a living entity. It is the same as the wrong-view of personality-view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), and self-view (*attadiṭṭhi*).

Of the four types of attachment, attachment to sensual desire is craving. The remainder are all various kinds of wrong-views. Thus they can be summarised as just two kinds: attachment to wrong-views and attachment to sense desires. The objects of such attachments consist of mind and matter known as the aggregates of attachment. To summarise: the two objects that can cause attachments as “I,” or “mine” are aggregates of attachment.

Attachment as “I” is the wrong-view of self, which opens the way to the remaining two wrong-views. When attachment arises out of desire, the objects of desire, which may not even belong to oneself, are grasped at as if they are one’s own. The Pāli texts describe how this desire leads to grasping possessively as, “This is mine (*etaṃ mama*).”

The mental and physical aggregates that can cause attachment through wrong-view as a self, a being, or clinging to possessively as mine are called the aggregates of attachment. The mental aggregates that cannot give rise to clinging through desire or wrong-view are just called aggregates and not aggregates of attachment. Such mental aggregates are the feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness of the four supramundane Paths and Fruitions. They are merely mental aggregates and not aggregates of attachment.

The mundane types of materiality, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness that we have repeatedly mentioned above are the aggregates which incite attachment and are therefore called aggregates of attachment.

The mundane mental and physical aggregates are the material forms and the sense-door consciousness (*kāmāvacara citta*) and mental states (*cetasikā*) that manifest at the six sense-doors to a person of no *jhānic* attainments every time he or she sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks. To a person of *jhānic* attainments, consciousness of the realms of form (*rūpavacara jhāna citta*) and formless consciousness (*arūpavacara jhāna citta*) also manifest at the mind's door in addition to the above aggregates. All these five aggregates of attachment are the truth of suffering, which form suitable objects for insight meditation. The Blessed One later described them as phenomena (dhamma) that should be understood rightly through insight and knowledge of the Path. In the third part of my discourse, I defined path factor of Right View as the knowledge of the truth of suffering, that is, the knowledge accruing from contemplation of these five aggregates.

Here it must be stressed that the aggregates of attachment should be personally realised as the real truth of suffering by clearly perceiving their nature of arising, vanishing, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality by mindfully observing the material aggregates — eye and sight, ear and sound, *etc.* — and mental aggregates — eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, *etc.* — when they manifest at the six doors of senses on every occasion of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking.

It is a matter for gratification that some meditators of this centre have seen reality as it is by the practice of mindfulness in accordance

with the Satipaṭṭhāna method, that is, by taking note of every manifestation as it occurs at each of the six doors of senses. They should congratulate themselves that they have come to know the Dhamma as taught by the Blessed One: “In brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering,” and strive all the more strenuously to attain more complete knowledge.

To recapitulate: I will repeat the twelve types of suffering.:-

1. Birth (*jāti*), or new becoming is suffering.
2. Aging (*jarā*) is suffering.
3. Death (*maraṇam*) is suffering.
4. Grief (*soka*) is suffering.
5. Lamentation (*parideva*) is suffering.
6. Physical pain (*dukkha*) is suffering.
7. Sorrow (*domanassa*) is suffering.
8. Despair (*upāyāsa*) is suffering.
9. Association with the unloved (*appiyehi sampayogo*) is suffering.
10. Separation from loved ones (*piyehi vippayogo*) is suffering.
11. Not getting what one wants is suffering (*yampiccham na labhati*).
It is futile to wish for freedom from aging, disease, and death without developing the Noble Eightfold Path; that wish will never be fulfilled. Thus wishing to get something that is unattainable is suffering. In the mundane realm, too, hankering for what is unattainable is suffering.
12. In brief, the five aggregates of attachment (*saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā*), which can incite attachment as “I,” “mine,” are suffering.

I have fully dealt with the definition and enumeration of the Truth of Suffering and have taken sometime over it. I will end the discourse here for today.

May all of you good people in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this Great Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, be able to develop the Middle Path otherwise called the Noble Eightfold Path, by contemplating the five aggregates of attachment — the Truth of Suffering — which should be clearly and completely understood, and by means of the Path and its Fruition according to your wish, attain and soon realise nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part Five

Delivered on Sunday 28th October, 1962.¹

Last week on the 21st October, when I gave a discourse on the fourth part of the Sutta, I dealt with the exposition on the truth of suffering. Today I will continue with the exposition of the truth of the origin of suffering. First, I will repeat the four truths:

1. The truth of suffering (*dukkha saccā*). 2. The truth of the origin of suffering (*samudaya saccā*). 3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha saccā*). 4. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*magga saccā*).

As explained in the fourth part of this discourse, after defining the truth of suffering, which he had discovered personally by penetrative insight, the Blessed One went on to define the truth of the cause of suffering.

The Truth of the Origin of Suffering

“Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ — yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandini, seyyathidaṃ — kāmatanḥā, bhavatanḥā, vibhavatanḥā.”

“This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering: it is this craving that gives rise to fresh rebirth and is bound up with delight and passion, seeking delight now here, now there. Namely, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.”

Craving for existence (*bhava taṇhā*), is holding the eternity-belief; craving for non-existence (*vibhava taṇhā*) or self-annihilation, is believing that nothing exists after death. These three kinds of craving are the truth of the origin of suffering.

Craving, the origin of suffering, is the causal agency responsible for all the twelve kinds of suffering previously explained, starting from the suffering of birth or fresh becoming and ending with the suffering of the five aggregates of attachment. To eliminate suffering it is essential to know its cause. It is like making a diagnosis to know the cause of a disease so that it may be cured. The Blessed One had personally penetrated to this truth of the cause of suffering and had consequently entirely eradicated suffering by removing its cause. The truth of the origin of suffering is nothing but craving or thirst. It is

¹ The New Moon of Thadingyut, 1324 M.E.

like feeling thirsty or hungry. “*Tañhā*” is the thirst or hunger for sense-objects. The craving for sensual pleasure (*kāmatañhā*) gives rise to fresh becoming (*ponobbhavikā*). As long as one remains in the grip of craving, continuous rebirths will occur. Later, I will discuss how fresh rebirths take place. This craving finds pleasure in sense-objects and clings to them. It is delighted with seemingly pleasant sense-objects and like oil or dye absorbs onto any surface with which it happens to come into contact, craving grasps sense-objects tenaciously. This craving finds gratification everywhere. There is never any boredom or monotony in the pursuit of pleasure. Any seemingly pleasurable sense-object, wherever it presents itself gives delight.

In the human world, life in the lower classes seems anything but attractive to people of a higher class. Yet we can see people, unfortunately born into poor circumstances, nevertheless enjoying their lives wherever they may be. Likewise, to the human mind, animal life is unpleasant, repulsive, or horrible. To assume the physical body of a snake or an insect is an abominable thought for a human being. Yet if unfortunately rebirth takes place in an animal world, a being is quite pleased with its body and finds delight in its life. This is due to the nature of craving, which finds gratification in every existence, in every sense-object, wherever it may be. The Blessed One therefore described craving as finding pleasure now here, now there, in every existence, in every sense-object. This is well illustrated by the stories of [Campeyya](#) the Nāga king and [Queen Ubbari](#).

The Story of Campeyya the Nāga King

In one existence, the Bodhisatta was born into a poor family in the vicinity of the river Campā. Envious of the life of pleasure enjoyed by the Campeyya nāga king, the Bodhisatta engaged himself in the good deeds of giving alms and observing the precepts. As a result, when he passed away, he was reborn spontaneously in the realm of the nāgas, and found himself seated on the throne of the Campeyya nāga king, in the full shape and form of a nāga. A nāga is a species of snake. To be reborn as a snake from the human existence is really frightful and abominable. The Bodhisatta, looking at his repulsive, horrible new form, reflected thus: “As a result of my good deeds of charity and observance of morality, I could have been reborn in any of the six realms of the deities. However, because

I wished for the pleasures of the nāga king, I am reborn into this world of reptiles. Oh! It would be better to die than to live the life of a snake,” and he even thought of committing suicide.

Meanwhile, a young female by the name of Sumanā gave a signal to other young nāga females to commence entertaining their new king. The young nāga females, assuming the appearance of beautiful goddesses, started singing and dancing and playing various musical instruments. Seeing the beautiful goddesses entertaining him with song, dance, and music, the Campeyya nāga king imagined his nāga abode to be the palace of the king of the gods and felt very pleased. He also took on the appearance of a god himself and joined the female nāgas in their revelries with much delight.

However, being a Bodhisatta, he easily regained the sense of reality, and resolved to be born again as a human being so that he could further develop the perfections (*pārami*), the virtuous qualities of generosity, morality, *etc.* In pursuance of this resolution, the Campeyya king later came to the human world and seeking solitude in a forest, kept observance of the moral precepts.

The point that I wish to make is that from the human point of view, the body of a reptile is horrible and repulsive. At the initial stage of the nāga life, the Bodhisatta also viewed his new life with horror and revulsion, but the sight of the attractive female nāgas brought about a change in his outlook, which kept him revelling and delighting in the nāga existence as if it were the home of the gods. It is craving, which seeks delight now here, now there, wherever rebirth takes place, that made the Bodhisatta enjoy his nāga life after his initial revulsion. There was also the wish that he had made, while he was a poor man in the human world, for the pleasurable life of a nāga king. This wish was also craving, which landed him in the nāga realm, in accordance with the words of the Blessed One, “Gives rise to fresh rebirth (*ponobbhavikā*).”

The Story of Queen Ubbari

Queen Ubbari was the chief queen of King Assaka who once ruled over the country of Kāsi at its capital, Pāṭali. She was said to be of great beauty. Ancient kings used to select the most attractive maidens of their kingdom to become their queens. Consequently all their queens were noted for their charm and loveliness. Queen

Ubbarī was outstanding amongst them because of her raving beauty and enchantment. Bewitched by her alluring comeliness, King Assaka had lost his heart to her.

Much adored by the monarch and while still in the prime of her beauty and charm, Queen Ubbarī “went to the abode of the gods,” which is a Burmese euphemism for the death of royalty. Likewise, “Flying back” means the passing away of a Buddhist monk, which is merely a cultural usage. In fact, a dead person takes rebirth in the next existence as conditioned by kamma, their previous volitional activities. As it happened, Queen Ubbarī, in spite of the saying according to cultural usage that she “went to the abode of the gods,” actually took rebirth as a dung-beetle.

With the passing away of his adored queen, King Assaka was consumed by the raging fires of grief and lamentation. He had the corpse of the queen embalmed in oil, placed in a glass coffin, and kept by his bedstead. Overwhelmed by grief, the king lay on the bed without food or sleep, wailing and moaning over the loss of his beloved queen. His relatives and wise ministers tried to console him by reminding him of the impermanent and conditioned nature of existence, but it was to no avail. The corpse in the coffin, being embalmed in oil, would remain well-preserved just like one treated with chemical preservatives in modern times. The queen would therefore appear to the king as if she was sleeping in the coffin. The sight of the corpse acted as fuel to his grief, which continued to consume him for seven days.

At that time, the Bodhisatta was a hermit endowed with supernormal powers (*abhiññā*), living in a Himalayan forest. He happened to survey the world using his powers, and saw King Assaka in the throes of intense grief. He knew also that no one but himself could save the king from his misery. He therefore made his way to the royal garden of King Assaka by means of his powers.

There, a young Brahmin came to see the hermit who made enquiries about King Assaka. The young man told him how the king was overwhelmed by grief and requested him to save him. He replied, “I do not know the king. However, if he came and asked me, I could tell him about his wife’s present existence.” Thereupon the young man went to the king and said to him, “Your majesty, a hermit endowed with the celestial eye and celestial ear has arrived in the

royal garden. He said that he knows and could show the present existence of the departed queen. It would be good to go and see him.”

Upon hearing that the hermit could show him the queen in her present existence, the king immediately took off for the royal gardens in a carriage. Arriving there, he paid respectful homage to the hermit and addressed him. “Venerable sir, is it true that you claim to know the present existence of Queen Ubbarī?” On the hermit admitting his claim, the king wanted to know where she was reborn now.

“Oh, great King, Queen Ubbarī took delight in her beautiful appearance and was very vain. She spent her time engaged only in beautifying herself to make herself more attractive, forgetting all the while to perform meritorious deeds, to give alms and observe moral precepts. In consequence, she has passed to a lowly existence. She is presently reborn as a female dung-beetle in this very garden.” The hermit told the whole story very frankly.

Those favoured by fortune who enjoy privileges of wealth, family, education, rank, physical beauty, *etc.*, are prone to exhibit haughtiness in their dealings with others. Shrouded in their own vanity and self-esteem, they become negligent in their performance of meritorious deeds. Humility plays no part in their psyche. The Blessed One taught in the Lesser Discourse on the Analysis of Kamma, the Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta, that such vain-glorious, haughty persons are liable to be reborn in lowly inferior existences. On the other hand, unpretentious persons who show humility and pay due respects to those deserving of homage will be reborn in noble families.

Queen Ubbarī of our story was extremely beautiful, and being the chief queen of the ruling monarch was of very high status in life. Her head was turned by these pre-eminent qualities, so she looked down with contempt on those to whom she should have shown respect. For such unwholesome attitudes and actions, it may be presumed she was reborn as a female dung-beetle. On hearing this account of rebirth of his beloved queen as a female beetle, King Assaka promptly rejected it, saying “I don’t believe it.”

The hermit replied, “I can show you the female beetle and make her talk too.” The king said, “All right. Please do so and make her talk too.” The hermit used his supernormal powers to make both the male and female beetles appear before the king.

When the male and female beetles emerged from the heap of cow-dung into the presence of the king, the hermit said, "Oh King, the female beetle which is following from behind was your chief queen, Ubbari. Having abandoned you, she is now trailing the male dung-beetle wherever he goes. Oh King, have a good look at the female beetle who was your chief queen Ubbari."

The king refused to believe the hermit. "I can't believe that such an intelligent being as my queen Ubbari was reborn as this female beetle," said the king.

It is only natural for those who do not believe in the laws of kamma and its effects, who do not understand the principles of conditionality or causal relations, as explained in the Law of Dependent Origination. It would be difficult to accept that a being of the human world could have gone down so low as to become a mere dung-beetle. Even in the days when the Buddha's teachings are widely prevalent, there are some who hold the view. "When a man dies, he cannot descend into an existence inferior to that of a human being." It is not surprising, then, that during the dark ages when the Buddha's dispensation was unheard of, such stories were received with scepticism.

Nevertheless, according to the teachings of the Buddha, as long as one has not yet attained the status of a Noble One, one can descend from the human world or the celestial realm into the four lower realms of existence, as conditioned by unwholesome kamma and the mental reflex just before death. On the other hand, conditioned by wholesome kamma and wholesome mental attitude on the threshold of death, ascent may be made from an inferior sphere of existence into the higher realm of human and celestial beings.

There is the story of a bhikkhu named Tissa who developed attachment to his robes when he was about to die. As a consequence, he was reborn a louse making its home in those very robes. There is another story of a frog who met its death while listening to a discourse by the Buddha. He became a celestial being in Tāvātimsa. These are just a few examples that serve as evidence of various transformations at the time of rebirths.

However, King Assaka, not having heard such discourses, could not accept that his queen had become a female beetle. Accordingly he refused to believe it. The hermit therefore proposed that he

would make the female beetle talk. The king accepted the proposal. Thereupon the hermit made the vow, using his supernormal powers, to have the conversation between him and the female beetle comprehensible to the king and his audience.

“Who were you in your past life?” the hermit asked.

“I was the chief queen Ubbarī of King Assaka,” replied the female beetle.

“What now, female beetle, do you still love King Assaka or do you love only this dung-beetle?”

To this the female beetle replied: “True, the Assaka king was my husband in my past life. At that time, I used to roam about in this garden, in his company, enjoying the five sense-pleasures. However, now that I am in the new existence, I have nothing to do with the King Assaka.”

The version of the female beetle’s reply in the Commentary is as follows: “In my present existence, I would relish killing King Assaka, and with the blood from his throat, washing the feet of the dung-beetle who is my present beloved husband.” This exposition makes the beetle’s reply sound very harsh and unfeeling, but as she was talking in the presence of her dear husband, the male beetle, it is natural that she wanted to please him. We can easily see, in everyday life, many conspicuous examples of estrangement between couples, who get separated not through death, but in this very life on grounds of incompatibility, and examples of loving tenderness heaped on their new partners. The remarks in the Commentary appears therefore to be quite in order.

The Jātaka Pāli texts describe the female beetle’s reply thus: “Venerable sir, I roamed about in this garden many times with King Assaka who loved me and was my beloved husband then, enjoying each other’s company. However, now, the joys and troubles of the present new life have obscured the joys and troubles of the old life. The new joys and troubles having transcended the old joys and troubles, I love my present husband, the male dung-beetle more than I did King Assaka.”

The Commentary’s exposition of the words “love more than” makes interesting reading. It says “love more than” means “love hundred times more, love one thousand times more,” indicating the intensity of love in favour of her new husband.

King Assaka was greatly distressed to hear the harsh, unfeeling words from the female beetle. He thought to himself: "I loved and adored her so much that I could not bear to throw away her dead body. However, she has become so antipathetic and nasty to me."

He felt so disgusted with the late Queen Ubbari that, even while sitting there, he ordered: "Go and have that woman's body removed." Then having bathed and washed himself, the king went back to the palace. He made another lady of the court his chief queen and carried on ruling his country wisely. The hermit, the Bodhisatta, after giving good advice to the king, went back to the Himalayan forest.

The moral of this story is that Queen Ubbari, while in the human world, had taken delight in being a human being, and a queen at that. She would never even have dreamt of being reborn as a female beetle. However, in accordance with her past kamma, when she happened to be reborn as a female beetle, she at once took to the life and delighted in the physical body of a beetle. She esteemed and adored the physical body of the male beetle a hundred times, a thousand times more than that of King Assaka. That she felt quite at home in her lowly existence as a dung beetle is due to craving, which finds delight everywhere; that is why the Buddha said, "Craving seeks delight now here, now there (*tatrataṭṭābhinandini*)."

A dog takes delight in a dog's existence; if reborn as a pig or a chicken, there is always delight in each existence. Even having been born of affluent parents of the upper social class, there are cases of children sinking down to poverty-stricken existences and yet enjoying their new lives. Some even resisted the efforts of their parents to take them back into the family, since they find their new life quite enjoyable. It is craving again that gives them pleasure wherever they are, delighting in whatever sense-object presents itself.

How Rebirth Takes Place

I will now deal with "Gives rise to fresh rebirth (*ponobbhavikā*)," which I earlier postponed considering.

Since craving has the nature of delighting and clinging, a being finds delight in whatever existence it is born into and enjoys any sense-object that presents itself. Because it finds its existence so delightful and pleasurable, the wish arises for this existence to remain stable and everlasting, and for pleasurable objects to be enduring. In

striving to maintain them as one wishes, volitional activities come into play. These volitional activities (*kamma*), which may be wholesome or unwholesome are the cause of rebirths in new existences.

Thus when a person is about to die, one or another of these meritorious or demeritorious actions (*kamma*) may present itself before the mind's eye; or it may be a sign of the kamma (*kamma-nimitta*), which is any sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or idea associated with the commission of that kamma; or a sign of destiny (*gati-nimitta*), a sign of the next existence where one is destined to begin a new life in consequence of the aforesaid kamma. The kamma, sign of kamma, or sign of destiny, which presents itself to the dying person is tenaciously grasped because of craving and cannot be dispelled from the mind. Just like the shadows of a mountain thrown by the evening sun falling on the surface of the land and covering it, so too these sense-objects that present themselves at the sense-doors completely occupy the mind. They are clung to tenaciously by the decease thought-process (*maraṇasanna-javana*) otherwise called the kamma-forming consciousness (*abhisāṅkhāra viññāṇa*).

In accordance with the teaching in the Paṭhamabhava Sutta¹ kamma is the field for the appearance of rebirth-consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāṇa*) of the new becoming, consciousness is the seed, and craving is the moisture. Meritorious or demeritorious kamma serves as a field in which it may grow. Storing consciousness serves as the seed for the growth of the birth-consciousness, and craving, which delights in every sense-object in every existence, may be likened to the moisture that promotes its growth. Here, kamma-forming consciousness (*abhisāṅkhāra viññāṇa*) that conditions new becoming is, according to the Commentary, consciousness accompanying the volitional kamma (*cetanā*). In the same way as it arises together with the first volitional kamma, so too it accompanies the later kamma activities and as such, the consciousness that appears later should also be designated as kamma-forming consciousness. In particular, the decease though-process consciousness, which takes as its object kamma, a sign of kamma, or a sign of destiny should be called the kamma-forming consciousness because it is from this that birth consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāṇa*) arises. In addition, in the same way as a seed germinates only when it comes into contact with

¹ A.i.223. "kammaṃ khettaṃ, viññāṇaṃ bijaṃ, taṇhā sineho."

moisture, the seed of consciousness receiving support and encouragement from craving, which accompanies or precedes it in close proximity, tenaciously holds onto kamma, a sign of kamma, or a sign of destiny as its object and gives rise to birth consciousness.

Then immediately after the dissolution of the decease thought-process aggregates of mind and matter, the birth consciousness, holding on to the kamma, sign of kamma, or sign of destiny as its object, arises in a new existence complete with the physical base upon which it depends. With each consciousness its mental concomitants also arise. The re-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāṇa*), is followed by life-continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga*), which goes on continuously throughout life as prescribed by one's own kammic energy. The arising of a new existence is brought about by two factors: one's own kamma and craving. Without craving, however, kamma by itself cannot bring about new becoming.

For an Arahant, past meritorious deeds will come to fruition as good results before *parinibbāna*. The multifarious gifts gained by Venerable Sivalī, and the perfect health enjoyed by Venerable Bākula are examples of the fruition of wholesome kamma. Demeritorious deeds will, however, bear bad fruits as for instance, lack of almsfood for Venerable Losaka Tissa, or the fate met by the Venerable Moggallāna who was bludgeoned to death by thugs. These kammās, however, do not have any more potential for causing fresh rebirth as they are devoid of craving. Lacking the support and encouragement of craving at the time of the decease thought-process, the kamma-forming consciousness cannot arise and hence there can be no rebirth. For this reason, only craving is attributed as the cause of fresh existence (*ponobbhavikā*).

Therefore, craving forms the root cause of fresh becoming. For this reason too, the Blessed One pointed out craving as the cause of new existence. These are the words that the Blessed One used in the very first discourse to teach the existence of an after-life. In spite of this clear teaching, there is a group of people who maintain that the Blessed One taught only about present existence, and did not touch on future life. We cannot be certain whether these people are attempting to associate the Buddha's teaching with the annihilationist belief (*uccheda vāda*), a very misguided effort we must say! In reality, however, as long as craving endures, through

failure to develop the Noble Eightfold Path, or even if developing it, not being fully advanced in accomplishment, so long this craving will continue to serve as the cause for fresh existence.

When the Noble Eightfold Path has been fully accomplished and Arahantship is attained, craving will be completely eradicated and there will be no more rebirth. Thus when exercising retrospection on the attainment of Enlightenment as a Buddha or an Arahant, the thought always occurs to the Noble Ones: “This is my last existence, there will be no more rebirth (*ayamantimā jāti, natthidāni punabbhavo*”ti). This reflection is also included in the later section of the Dhammacakka Suta. Such reflections make it obvious that unless craving is completely rooted out, continuous fresh existences are inevitable.

How this craving brings repeated rebirths will now be illustrated by a few stories. There are thousands of stories illustrating this fact, but it will suffice to take three stories from the Commentaries and four or five from the modern period.

A Brahmā Finds Delight In A Pig’s Pen

At one time the Blessed One went into Rājagaha for alms. On seeing a young sow, the Blessed One smiled. Noticing the white radiations that shone forth from the teeth of the Buddha, the Venerable Ānanda knew that the Buddha was smiling. Accordingly he asked, “Venerable sir, why did you smile?”

The Blessed One pointed out the young sow to Venerable Ānanda and said, “See that young sow? She was a young woman during the dispensation of Kakusandha Buddha. When she died, she was reborn as a hen in the neighbourhood of a monastic feeding-hall. The small hen fell victim to an eagle. However, earlier she happened to have heard the recitation by a meditating monk of a meditation subject, which aroused in her wholesome thoughts. By virtue of these merits, the small hen was reborn as a princess named **Ubbari** in a royal family. The princess Ubbari later left the household life and became a wandering mendicant. Residing in the mendicants’ residence she happened one day to gaze at the maggots in the latrine. The worms served as an object for meditation on the contemplation of foulness of a worm-infested corpse by which she attained the first *jhāna*. When she passed away, she was reborn in the brahmā world. On expiry from the brahmā world, she became the daughter of a millionaire in

the human world, which she left again only to be reborn as a pig in this existence. I saw all of these events, which made me smile.”

On hearing this story of repeated births in various existences, Venerable Ānanda and the other monks became greatly agitated with religious emotion. The Blessed One stopped walking, and while still standing on the road side, taught the Dhamma in six verses the first one of which stated.

*“Yathāpi mūle anupaddave daḷhe,
Chinnopi rukkho punareva rūhati.
Evampi taṇhānusaye anūhate,
Nibbattati dukkhamidaṃ punappunam.*

“If the main roots of a tree remains undamaged and in good condition, even when the upper branches are cut off, that tree will grow again developing new buds and shoots. Likewise, if defilements remain lying dormant that are not yet eradicated, this suffering of rebirth will arise time and again repeatedly.”

What is conveyed by this verse is that during her existence as princess Ubbarī, she renounced the world to become a wanderer. By practising meditation, she attained the first *jhāna*, which could dispel by abandoning (*vikkhambhana pahāna*), only the arisen defilements (*pariyuṭṭhāna kilesā*), that is the craving for sensual pleasures that appear as sensual thoughts at the mind-door. By means of dispelling by abandoning, *jhāna* can eradicate defilements only to a certain extent and for a certain period. Thus she was able to dispel the craving for sensual pleasures when she attained the first *jhāna*, and later in the brahmā world. However, when she was born again in the human realm as the daughter of a millionaire, the craving for sensual pleasures reappeared because it had not been rooted out by the Noble Path. The craving for existence, of course, persisted even when she had attained *jhāna*. Thus because the latent defilements had not been completely uprooted, she had to descend from the brahmā world, through the human world, into a pig's existence. So long as the craving persists, repeated rebirths will take place in this way in various existences.

In reference to this story of descent from the brahmā world to a pig's existence, the Sayādaws of ancient times have left an aphorism “In the brahmā world, she shines bright; in pig's pen too she finds

delight.” However, it is not possible to be reborn as a pig directly from the brahmā world: nor as any other animal nor in the lower realms. By virtue of the access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) previously attained, rebirth can take place only as a human being or in a celestial abode. The young sow of the above story also passed through human life where she was born as the daughter of a millionaire. It is quite possible that she landed in a pig’s existence after being the daughter of a millionaire because of the bad kamma she had committed at that time by being haughty and insolent to those to whom she should have shown respect.

When the young sow died, she was reborn in a royal family (*rājakula*) of Suvaṇṇabhūmi, which is generally taken to be the country of Thaton. Some scholars, however, take Suvaṇṇabhūmi to be the island of Sumatra, relying on the bronze inscriptions made by King Devapāla, about 1500, Buddhist Era.

From being a princess of Suvaṇṇabhūmi, she passed over to Bārāṇasī, India, as a woman. She then became a woman in Vanavāsī,¹ south-east of Bombay. From there, she was reborn the daughter of a horse-merchant (*assavāṇija*) in the sea port of Suppāraka north-west of Bombay. Next she became the daughter of a ship-owner (*nāvika*) at the port of Kāvira in the south-eastern most part of the Indian peninsular. This is the coastal district inhabited by the Tamil people formerly called Damiḷa. After that life, she was reborn in the family of a government official (*issarakula*) at Anurādhapura of present day Sri Lanka. Her next life was as a daughter of a man of property (*kuṭumbika*) named Sumana from Bhokkanta, a village south of Anurādhapura. She took the name Sumanā, after her father. Later her father left that village and settled down in the Mahāmuṇi village of the [Dighavāpi](#) district. One day a minister of King Duṭṭhagāmiṇi, named Lakuṇḍaka Atimbara happened to visit the Mahamuṇi village on some business. Upon seeing the young lady Sumanā, he fell madly in love with her. He married her with great pomp and ceremony and carried her off to his village of Mahāpuṇṇa.

The Venerable Mahā Anuruddha who resided at the Mahāvihāra happened to visit her village for alms. While waiting for almsfood at the gate of her house, he saw Sumanā and said to his companion monks: “Monks, how wonderful, how marvellous!

¹This rebirth is not found in the Dhammapada Commentary account (ed.)

The young sow of the Blessed One's time is now the wife of the minister Lakunḍaka Atimbara."

On hearing this exclamation, Sumanā, the wife of the minister, developed knowledge of her previous existences (*jātissara-ñāṇa*), and recalled the previous existences she had passed through. In consequence, she became agitated with fear at the prospect of repeated births in the cycle of existences. Asking permission from her husband, she went to a *bhikkhuni* monastery and got ordained. After ordination, she listened to a discourse on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta at Tissa Mahā Vihāra. Practising mindfulness meditation in accordance with the sutta, she became a Stream-winner, well established in the first stage of the Path and its Fruition. Then when King Duṭṭhagāmiṇi came on the throne, she went back to her native village, Bhokkhanta, where at the Kalla Mahā Vihāra monastery, she heard the discourse on the Āsivisopama Sutta and become an Arahant, free from all corruptions.

Reflecting on the thirteen existences of Sumanā thoughtfully and mindfully, one could get aroused with religious emotion. When the young woman at the time of the Kakusandha Buddha died, she left behind her family, possessions, and her own physical body. The bereft family and friends would have grieved over her death. She became a hen — what a frightful thought, that a human being could be reborn a hen! That hen would have had a family and friends too. She met with a terrible death from decapitation when an eagle seized her and struck her fiercely with its beak. There is this consolation, however, that she was reborn as a princess for the merit accrued from having heard a discourse on meditation. The hen would not, of course, know anything of the Dhamma, but as she had given devout attention to the discourse, certain merit would have accrued to her for which she was reborn a princess. Listening to a Dhamma discourse is thus very beneficial and fruitful.

It is a matter for gratification that she became a brahmā after being a princess by virtue of her *jhānic* attainments. It is gratifying too that from the brahmā world she was reborn in the human world in a wealthy family. However, it is very distressing to know that she left behind her family, friends, and possessions reluctantly to be reborn as a sow. It is really awful to think of descending to the human plane from the brahmā world and then to sink further still into the animal kingdom as a pig. This should be enough to excite alarm and

religious emotion, because so long as the Noble Path has not been established, anyone is liable to land in the lower realms. It was with the intention of arousing religious emotion and exhorting the bhikkhus to practise the Dhamma in all earnestness that the Blessed One told them the account of the female hen's succession of existences.

How the young sow met her death was not mentioned in the texts, but it may be presumed that she was slaughtered by her breeder as in modern times. The young sow must have had a family and friends, which she left behind causing grief to them. It was comforting that she was reborn afterwards as a human being in six places from Suvannaṅghūmi to Anurādhapura. However, in each of these existences, every time she departed from one life, there must have been considerable suffering from sorrow, lamentation, and grief for her and for her dear ones. That she finally became the Arahant Bhikkhuṇī Sumanā Therī is the most heartening part of the story.

The cause of the succession of her existences departing from one life to be reborn in another is craving or the truth of the origin of suffering. Other people who are not yet rid of craving will likewise go through the cycle of rebirths, dying from one life to be reborn in another. It is extremely important, therefore, to get established in the practice of the Noble Path in order to eradicate craving, otherwise called the truth of the origin of suffering. Sumanā Therī first heard the discourse on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Then she practised mindfulness in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna method, which enabled her to attain the status of a Stream-winner. Then, on hearing the Āsivisopama Sutta, she devoted herself more ardently to the practice and attained Arahantship. Craving was then completely eradicated. Therefore there would be no more rebirth for her and she would be enjoying peace after her *parinibbāna*.

Sumanā Therī, therefore, declared to her colleagues that she would finally pass away (*parinibbhuto*), after the vital principle (*āyusankhāra*) for her present existence was exhausted. Thereupon her colleagues, the bhikkhus and bhikkhuṇīs asked her to relate the story of her existences. "I was a woman at the time of the Kakusandha Buddha. When I died from there, I became a hen. I was killed by an eagle which broke off my head and devoured me. Then I became a princess in the human world ..." She continued to recount her past existences until the time of her final existence

at Bhokkanta village. She concluded, “Thus have I passed through thirteen existences encountering the vicissitudes of life in each existence. In this last existence, being weary of the cycle of rebirths, I have become an ordained bhikkhuṇī and finally attained Arahantship, I urge all of you, dear virtuous bhikkhus and bhikkhuṇīs, to put forth effort to mindfully become fully accomplished in morality, concentration, and wisdom.” Then she passed away causing religious agitation in the minds of her audience, consisting of men, women, bhikkhus and bhikkhuṇīs. This story of the young sow is fully described in the Commentary to the Dhammapada.

The Story of Samaṇa Deva

Even if one were engaged in meditation practice to dispel craving, until one became fully developed in the knowledge of the Path, craving could still give rise to rebirth. This fact is borne out by the story of a deva named Samaṇa.¹

During the lifetime of the Buddha, a certain young man, having established faith in the dispensation of the Buddha, got himself ordained and stayed with his preceptor for five Rains (*vassa*). He performed all the major and minor incumbent duties for his preceptor (*upajjhāya*) and learnt thoroughly the two codes² of the Pāṭimokkha discipline. He also mastered the procedure for purifying himself from serious as well as trifling offences. Then taking a meditation object of his choice, he repaired to a solitary abode in the forest and devoted himself incessantly to the practice of meditation.

His efforts at meditation were very strenuous. Even at midnight, which the Blessed One had allowed as the time for rest and sleep, he continued with the practice. Thus striving day and night and getting weak due to lack of sufficient nourishing food, he was suddenly seized with a cutting pain, a paralytic stroke, which ruptured the spinal nerve causing instant death. He was meditating while walking and thus said to have passed away in the course of performing the duties of a bhikkhu.

According to the Commentary, if any bhikkhu, while engaged in walking up and down the cloister walk or standing leaning against the leaning post, or sitting or lying down at the head of the cloister walk with the double robe on his head, passes away, he is

¹ SA.i.77, the Commentary to the Accharā Sutta, S.i.46.

² *Dve mātikā*: The Pāṭimokkha for bhikkhus and bhikkhuṇīs (Path of Purification).

said to “die in harness.” So too, a bhikkhu dies in harness if he passes away in the course of teaching a discourse, particularly, on liberation from the cycle of existences.

As the bhikkhu of our story was engaged in meditating while walking up and down the cloister walk, we could take it that he passed away while he was contemplating the mental and physical phenomena of the body postures in accordance with the teaching in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Although he had put in a great deal of effort in the practice of meditation, he passed away without attaining the Arahantship, because he was not yet fully endowed with the supporting perfections (*pāramī*) necessary for such attainments.

Complete eradication of craving is not possible unless Arahantship has been attained. That this bhikkhu had not yet developed even the stage of a Stream-winner will become clear later. Therefore, because of craving which can cause rebirth, he was reborn in the celestial abode of Tāvātimsa. A magnificent celestial palace awaited him in consequence of the merit he had acquired in the practice of meditation. By spontaneous rebirth, he appeared as if just awakened from sleep, at the entrance of the palace, a celestial being resplendent in full celestial attire.

At that moment, about one thousand celestial princesses who had been awaiting the arrival of the master of the palace, saying, “Our Lord has arrived. Let us entertain him,” gathered round him, holding musical instruments in their hands to welcome him joyously. The deva lord of the palace, however, did not even realise that he had taken a new existence in another realm. He was under the impression that he was still a bhikkhu in the human realm. On the sight of the celestial maidens, he took them to be female visitors to his monastery. He covered up his bare left shoulder with the upper garment and remained seated, his eyes lowered and assuming a dignified and reserved pose.

Realising at once that the new being must have been a bhikkhu in his previous existence, the celestial ladies addressed him, “My lord, this is the abode of celestial beings. It is not the time to be observing the code of monastic discipline. It is the occasion for enjoyment of celestial pleasures.” However, he continued on maintaining solemn reserve and dignity. “This deva has not realised that he has become a celestial being in the realm of the

deities. Let us drive home this fact to him by our welcoming revelries." So saying, the celestial damsels started playing the musical instruments accompanied by songs. The deva all the more tightened his retiring disposition, maintaining his dignified solemnity, thinking that the female visitors had come to his forest abode to abandon themselves to frivolous merriment.

Whereupon the celestial ladies brought out a body-length mirror and placed it in front of the deva. On seeing his reflection in the mirror, he finally realised that he had left the bhikkhu's existence and taken rebirth in the celestial realm. Samaṇa deva was greatly perturbed. He reflected: "I did not take up meditation to be reborn in this celestial realm. My objective was to attain the most profitable goal of Arahantship. However, I am like a boxer who entered the boxing competition aiming at a championship gold medal, but was awarded only a bundle of turnips." Extremely agitated in mind, he thought: "The celestial pleasures are easily attainable. The life-time of an Enlightened One is a rare occasion. To hear the teaching of the Buddha and to attain the Noble Path is of utmost importance. By wallowing in celestial pleasures, there is the danger of losing the opportunity of meeting the Buddha." So without taking the trouble of entering the palatial building, he repaired hastily to the presence of the Buddha while the morality he had observed as a bhikkhu remained intact. His celestial damsels also accompanied him as if they were anxious not to lose sight of him. On reaching the presence of the Blessed One, he addressed him:

"Venerable sir. In what way will it be possible to avoid and proceed past the Nandavana garden otherwise known as the Mohana garden, "the grove of stupidity" because it encourages foolish behaviour in the celestial beings who visit it, where thousands of female celestial beings indulge in singing and yodelling, where numerous demons, goblins and spirits haunt."

Here the deva referred to the celestial females as demons and goblins and to the Nandavana glades as the grove of stupidity because he was still in a repulsive mood towards sensual pleasures as a consequence of his intense efforts at insight meditation. The Commentary explanation of the deva's query as to "how to proceed along" was that he was requesting the Blessed One for guidance on insight, which provides access to Arahantship.

The Buddha reflected on all the circumstances concerning the deva and taught him the Noble Eightfold Path in three verses:

*“Ujuko nāma so maggo, abhayā nāma sā disā.
Ratho akūjano nāma, dhammacakkehi saṃyuto.”*

“Oh, deva, who is anxious to flee away, the straight path for a quick escape is the Eightfold Path of insight you already trod while a bhikkhu.”

Here, we have given, for the benefit of the present audience, the explanatory meaning of the first line in the verse which just says, “the straight path is that path.” That bare translation would have been quite incomprehensible to this audience, but to the deva who looked as if he had come straight from the monastery, where he had devoted himself to meditation, the meaning was quite clear. The exposition of the Commentary is as follows:

On giving meditation training to someone not yet established in morality, *etc.*, the Blessed One always advised him: “Purify your moral conduct; develop mindfulness and concentration, straighten out your views on kamma and its effects,” and directed the meditators to get firmly established in these fundamental practices initially. To one already engaged in meditation, he instructed him only in insight, the proximate cause to Arahantship. The deva was already practising meditation and his morality remained unimpaired. It was only the Noble Path that he needed to accomplish having already developed its precursor the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*) and the path of insight (*vipassanā magga*). Thus in order to instruct him in insight, the Blessed One taught him the three verses.

In this Commentary exposition, the fact of his morality remaining unimpaired even after he had passed over from a bhikkhu’s existence to that of a celestial being, should be well-noted. It meant that having not breached any of the precepts such as killing, stealing, sexual relationships, *etc.*, he continued to maintain his morality. It should be understood, therefore, that even without a formal vow of keeping the precepts, morality remains unimpaired if one abstains from evil deeds, which one should not commit. It should also be noted that these verses taught insight meditation.

As we had explained above, “The best and straightest way of quick escape from the Nandavana garden of the celestial realm with

its celestial nymphs is the path of insight, which he had practised while he was a bhikkhu."

Regarding the next query on the place of refuge free from danger, the Buddha said, "The place of refuge free from danger is the sanctuary of nibbāna, which you aspired to as a bhikkhu." This meant that he had to strive on until he attained nibbāna.

As to what type of vehicle should be employed to make the journey, the Blessed One said, "For a silent escape with no one becoming aware of it, you need a silent carriage, which is the carriage fitted with the two wheels of physical and mental exertion."

The mental effort involved in noting every physical and mental activity is mental exertion (*cetasikā viriya*). When noting the bodily actions of going, standing, sitting, the physical effort required to maintain the body in respective posture is called physical exertion (*kāyika viriya*). Meditation while lying down involves only mental exertion, not physical exertion. Here as the use of a carriage with wheels of mental and physical exertion was advised, it must be taken to mean insight meditation that requires mindful noting of walking, standing, and sitting. Thus to ride the silent carriage of the path of insight fitted with the two wheels of physical and mental exertion, we must engage in mindful noting while walking up and down. That is to say, we must note "walking," "lifting," "stepping forward," "dropping" as prescribed in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta as, *"gacchanto vā gacchāmi'ti pajānāti."*

While striving thus, as the concentration gets strengthened, the meditator will come to distinguish with each noting, the matter, which causes stiffness and moves, from the mind, the mental act of noting it. As the concentration gets strengthened further, the meditator will come to distinguish the cause from the effect. He or she knows: Because of the intention to go, the physical process of going appears; because there is the object to know, there is knowing. With further progress, the arising of each phenomenon for a moment: the intention to go, the physical process of going, the noting mind, followed by its dissolution is clearly perceived as if it is grasped in one's own hand. It is then realised plainly that what arises momentarily only to vanish immediately is not permanent; that what arises and vanishes incessantly is dreadful suffering. The meditator will also comprehend clearly that the phenomena

are occurring of their own accord, following nobody's will and, therefore, are not subject to anyone's control. Then the mindful noting should continue while standing or sitting occasionally.

The silent carriage mentioned here is a reference to the horse-drawn vehicles of ancient days. Some carriages are by themselves noiseless, but when burdened with many passengers or heavy loads, they are liable to produce a creaking sound. However, the "path vehicle" is able to carry an unlimited number of passengers without producing a sound. Sometimes, while listening to the teachings of the Buddha, passengers numbering eighty-four thousand rode on this vehicle, piloted by the path of insight, which transported them noiselessly to their final destination of nibbāna. Thus this carriage was admired as a silent vehicle. Intimation was in this way given by the Buddha to the deva that it would be possible to make his silent escape, without letting the celestial nymphs know, by means of this transport.

*"Hiri tassa apālambo, satyassa parivāraṇaṃ.
Dhammāhaṃ sārathin brūmi, sammādiṭṭhipurejavanaṃ."*

The sense of shame (*hiri*) and revulsion of avoid evil deeds serves as the leaning board on the seats of the carriage, without which passengers are liable to fall backwards when the carriage moves. The "path vehicle" has excellent leaning-boards of shame (*hiri*) and dread (*ottappa*) of wrong-doing.

The meditator feels repelled and horrified at the possible arising of unwholesome thoughts concerning some objects that may be missed while heedfully noting. It is like the revulsion that one feels towards coming into contact with filth after having a bath. The conscientious concern for the non-arising of unwholesome thoughts and revulsion towards them is shame (*hiri*). There is also the fear of unwholesome thoughts leading to evil actions that will yield unwholesome effects, and hinder escape from the cycle of existences. This fear of evil deeds and its unwholesome consequences is called dread (*ottappa*).

Due to this sense of shame and fear of evil deeds a meditator is reverentially devoted to the task of noting every physical and mental phenomenon without missing any. Thus, the path is keeps developing with each passing moment. This is like the way in which the leaning

boards of the carriage prevent the passengers from falling backwards, maintaining them in their positions. That is why the Blessed One described shame and dread as the leaning boards of the carriage.

Then the Blessed One went on to explain how mindfulness is like the awning of the carriage. As the awning fitted to a carriage guards against stones or sticks being thrown in, mindfulness of every mental and physical phenomenon, as it arises, keeps oneself secure from the danger of demeritorious deeds. Therefore the four foundations of mindfulness such as the contemplation of the body are called the awning of the carriage.

The Blessed One continued: "I call right-view of the Noble Path preceded by the right-view of insight, the driver of the carriage."

Of the six kinds of right-views — right-view about ownership of kamma, right-view of absorption, right-view of insight, right-view of the Path, right-view of the Fruit, and right-view of reviewing — right-view of the Fruit is the result of the Path. Similarly, right-view of reviewing is the reflective knowledge that appears after attaining the Path and its Fruition. Therefore it needs no particular effort to develop them. The right-view concerning kamma and its effects, has to be established even before one starts the practice of meditation. The right-view concerning absorption is related to the purification of mind, which is the basis for insight. Thus the proximate knowledge that has to be developed for the promotion of right-view of the Path is the right-view of insight. When insight knowledge is fully developed the knowledge of the Path, *i.e.* the right-view of the Path, arises spontaneously. It is just like a royal procession coming along after the roads have been cleared by the police and military escorts. Therefore, it is said that the right-view of insight proceeds first, followed by Noble right-view. While engaged in insight meditation, insight knowledge leads the way for the development of the other path factors. At the moment of attaining the Noble Path, Path knowledge gives the lead to the other path factors. For this reason, the Buddha called the right-view of insight and the right-view of the Noble Path, the drivers of the carriage. The last verse runs as follows:—

*"Yassa etādisaṃ yānaṃ, itthiyā purisassa vā.
Sa ve etena yānena, nibbānasseva santike"ti.*

“Any woman or man possessing this eightfold path vehicle can get to the presence of nibbāna by means of it.”

In accordance with this last verse, the owner of the eightfold path vehicle, irrespective of sex, is definitely bound to reach nibbāna. So it is very clear that anyone wishing to reach nibbāna must develop the Noble Path based on the path of insight.

It is common knowledge that in this mundane world, the owner of some form of transport is able to reach the required destination by using it. However, just knowing about the mechanics of a vehicle without actually possessing it will not get anyone anywhere. Likewise, by just knowing how to enumerate the various types of mental and physical phenomena, or the eight path factors, no one can reach nibbāna. It must be firmly remembered that only by getting the path vehicle through contemplation of the actual arising and dissolution of mind and matter and riding on the carriage of the Noble Eightfold Path, one can reach nibbāna. The three verses explained above are summarised as follows:—

1. The straight path is the Noble Path, the destination is nibbāna, which is free from danger. Fitted with two wheels of physical and mental exertion the carriage is silent.
2. Shame and dread of wrong-doing serve as the leaning-board, while mindfulness forms the awnings of the carriage. Path knowledge preceded by insight knowledge is the driver of the carriage.
3. The owners of such a carriage, whether man or woman, may ride comfortably in it to reach nibbāna.

After teaching the three verses, the Buddha also gave a discourse on the Four Noble Truths, which I will discuss again when we come to the section on the truth of the path (*magga saccā*).

While listening to the discourse Samaṇa deva reflected on the meditation practices of his former existence. Although he had not been able to attain higher knowledge as a bhikkhu in spite of his strenuous efforts, in the existence of a deva whose physical body was free from impurities, he was quickly able to develop the successive stages of insight until he attained the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning, and realised nibbāna, thus becoming a Stream-winner.

The main point of this story of Samaṇa deva is that, although the bhikkhu had been engaged ardently in insight meditation, because the Noble Path, which could cut off craving, had not yet been attained, this craving, otherwise called the truth of the origin of suffering (*samudaya-saccā*) had caused rebirth in a new existence as a celestial being. The story also shows how the Noble Path could be developed and how as a deva, higher knowledge could be attained with ease.

Another point brought out in the story is that, if attachment lingers in an individual or on an object, craving for existence is likely to cause rebirth in the vicinity of such a person or object. How attachment to an object will lead to renewed existence in close proximity to it is borne out by the well-known story of the bhikkhu Tissa, who died with great craving for his robes, and consequently was reborn in the form of a louse in those very robes.

Now I will deal with the account of how attachment to one's wife caused rebirths as a snake, a dog, and a cow.

Attachment Leading to Animal Rebirths

In a Sri Lankan village lived a man who was misbehaving with the wife of his elder brother. The woman was more passionately attached to her lover than to her husband. She therefore instigated her lover to get rid of his elder brother. The man remonstrated, "Woman! Don't ever talk like that." However, after she had repeated her evil suggestions three times, he asked, "How would I go about it?" She replied, "Go with an axe and wait for him at the riverside near the big caper tree. I'll send him there." Thereupon, the man proceeded there and lay in wait for his elder brother, hiding among the branches of the tree.

When the husband came back from his work in the forest, the wife made a show of loving affection for him and fondly brushing his hair said, "Your hair needs cleaning, it is too dirty. Why not go and shampoo it at the river side near the big caper tree?" Happy with the thought, "my wife is very affectionate for me," he accordingly went to the bathing place at the riverside. He was preparing to wash his hair, bending his head down, when his young brother came out from his hiding place and cruelly chopped his head off with the axe.

Because of the clinging attachment to his wife, he was reborn as a green snake (a rat snake according to Sinhalese scholars). Still

attached to his wife, the snake took to dropping himself down from the roof of the house upon the woman. Realising that the snake must have been her former husband, she caused it to be killed and removed. Even after passing away from the snake's existence, his attachment for his former wife still remained strong, and he was reborn as a dog in his old house. As a dog he was still clinging to his former wife, following her everywhere even when she went out to the forest. People made derisive remarks, "The hunter woman with the dog is going out. I wonder where she is headed!" The woman then asked her lover to kill the dog. His attachment still intense and persisting, the dog was reborn as a calf in the same house. The young calf also followed her everywhere, drawing laughter and ridicule from the people again, "Look, the cowherd has come out. I wonder which pasture her cattle are going to graze in!" Again the woman asked her lover to kill the young calf. Again his tenacious attachment to his wife caused rebirth, this time in her womb.

In the human world that he had regained, he was endowed with the faculty of recalling previous existences. Exercising this faculty, he recollected the previous four existences and was greatly distressed when he came to know that they were all terminated at the instance of his former wife. "What an irony to have taken rebirth in the womb of such an enemy," he lamented.

He would not let his mother touch him. Whenever the mother tried to hold him, the baby cried vociferously. So the grandfather had to take over the task of bringing up the child. When the child reached the age when he could speak, the grandfather asked him, "My dear child, why do you cry whenever your mother tries to hold you?"

He replied, "This woman is no mother to me. She is my enemy who killed me for four successive existences." So saying, he recounted to his grandfather the story of his previous lives. On hearing this sad tale, the old man wept, embracing the child and said. "Come, my poor grandchild, let us get away, I see no gain in staying here." They went away and stayed in a monastery where both of them received ordination and in time, through the practice of meditation, were able to attain the Path and Fruition of Arahantship.

The moral to be drawn from this episode is that attachment gives rise to repeated new existence at the very location of that attachment. This story clearly bears out the truth of the teaching, that attachment

brings about fresh existences (*ponobbhavikā*). However, after meeting a violent death in successive existences as a snake, a dog, and a calf, in his final life as a human being he attained Arahantship, and so craving was completely extinguished. There would be no mere rebirth for him, and he would be free from all forms of suffering.

It would be well to take to heart the moral of this story and strive for freedom from all suffering through the practice of insight meditation. There would be no end of quoting similar stories from the Pāli texts and Commentaries. Let us now come to the experiences and episodes met with in modern times.

A Dhamma Teaching Sayādaw

From 1937 to 1939,¹ I resided at Taungwine Taikkyang monastery of Mawlamyaing. At that time there was a Dhamma teaching Sayādaw of great repute. At the traditional alms-giving ceremony, a week after the death of a lawyer donor of his, he gave the following discourse as the merit-sharing service for the departed one.

“This life of mine is uncertain, but my death is certain. I must inevitably die. My life will end only in death. Life is impermanent, and unstable; death, on the other hand, is definite and permanent.”

This contemplation on death was the theme of his discourse. I was present on that occasion and heard his discourse personally. Within a few days of this event, we heard the sad news of demise of the Dhamma teaching Sayādaw. We thought then that he would have passed away contemplating death as he had taught only a few days ago. We heard that the Sayādaw had met a violent death at the hands of assassins who had stabbed him with a dagger.

About three years later, a certain young boy from Magwe came to Mawlamyaing accompanied by his parents. He had been nagging his parents, asking them to take him to Mawlamyaing. On arriving at the monastery of the former Sayādaw, the boy informed his parents that he was, in a previous existence, the presiding Sayādaw of that monastery. He could tell everything about the monastery and whatever he said was found to be true. He remembered all the leading monks from the nearby monasteries and addressed them by the names he had used to call them by previously.

¹ 1291 to 1301 M.E.

When he was asked by mentioning the name about a certain man, who was a close disciple of the late Sayādaw, the boy replied, "I am afraid." When questioned what he was afraid of, he recounted how that man in association with some others had stabbed him to death, how he had run away from them, and coming to the river bank and finding a boat, he made his escape riding on the boat. Later arriving at a village on the Magwe coast, he said he entered the house of his present parents. The visions he saw of how he had fled from his assassins, how he found a boat on the river bank, how he took a ride on it and came to the house of his parents were all signs of destiny (*gati nimitta*) that had appeared to him as death approached. This is also a notable incident that confirms that attachment brings forth new existence.

Born as a Buffalo for Forty Kyats

In a certain town in Monywa District, there lived a man who was engaged in the business of money-lending during the British regime. He asked for the return of a loan from a certain farmer who replied that he had already repaid the money he had borrowed from the man. The money-lender repeatedly insisted that the farmer had not yet repaid the loan. Finally, he declared, "May I become a buffalo in your house if I have really asked for a double payment of the forty kyats, which you say you have already repaid." With this oath, he pressed again for the return of his loan. The poor farmer was thus obliged to knowingly repay again the loan he had taken.

Soon afterwards, the money-lender passed away. A young buffalo was born in the house of the farmer who had made the double payment of his loan. Guessing that the money-lender had taken rebirth in his house as a buffalo, the poor farmer called out to the young buffalo, "Sayā, Sayā, please come," in the same way that he used to address the old money-lender. The young buffalo answered his call and came to him. Believing now that the old money-lender had really become a buffalo in his house according to his oath, the farmer started to talk about this incident. Thereupon, the daughter of the departed money-lender went to the court suing the poor farmer for defaming her father.

The judge who heard the case sent for the appellant, the defendant and the young buffalo together with witnesses for both sides. In the

court, the farmer called out, "Sayā, please come" to the buffalo in the same way that he used to address the money-lender. The buffalo responded to his call by coming to him. The money-lender's daughter used to address her father as "Shin, Shin." When she said in the court "Shin, Shin," the buffalo went to her. The judge came to the conclusion that the poor farmer was making an honest statement (without any intention of defamation) and accordingly discharged the case. From this story, it is not hard to believe that a human being may be reborn a buffalo. It is plain therefore that craving will cause rebirth. It should be observed also that swearing a false oath is liable to lead to calamity.

Nga Nyo's Small Measure of Rice

There was a village of about four hundred houses called Chaungyo, ten miles north-west of Taungdwingyi. Two young men of the village, Nga Nyo and Ba Saing, who were friends, earned their living by going around villages selling betel leaves. Coming back one day from their rounds, Ba Saing went short of rice on the way. He borrowed a small measure of rice from Nga Nyo to cook his dinner. After dinner, while they made their way back to the village leisurely in the moonlit night, Ba Saing was bitten by a poisonous snake and met with instant death. It was some time between 1926 to 1936,¹ when the two friends were about twenty or so.

Probably because Ba Saing clung to the thought of the loan of the small measure of rice at the time of his death, he was reborn as a cockerel in Nga Nyo's house. Nga Nyo trained it to become a fighting-cock and entered it into a fight. In one of the first three fights, but unfortunately lost the fourth fight because its opponent was bigger and stronger than itself. Nga Nyo vented his disappointment and anger by holding his cock by its leg and thrashing it against the ground. Bringing the half-dead cock home, he threw it down near the water-pot where Nga Nyo's cow came and touched it with her lips (as if expressing her sympathy.)

The poor cock died afterwards and took conception in the womb of the cow. When the calf had grown up considerably, it was bought for four kyats by his friends for a feast, which Nga Nyo would also join. While they were butchering the calf and cutting up the meat in preparation for their feast, a couple from Taungdwingyi, a clerk and

¹ 1270 and 1280 M.E.

his wife, happened to arrive on the scene. Expressing her sympathy for the calf, the clerk's wife said, "If it were my calf, I wouldn't have treated it so cruelly. Even if it had died a natural death, I wouldn't have had the heart to eat its flesh, I would have just buried it.

Sometimes afterwards, a son was born to the clerk's wife. The child remained without speech until he was seven when, one day his father told him, "Son please talk to us. Today is my pay-day. I'll buy and bring back some nice clothes for you." Keeping his promise, the father came back in the evening with some pretty garments for his son. He said, "Son, here, these beautiful clothes are for you. Do speak to us now." The boy then uttered, "Nga Nyo's measure of rice."

The father said, "Son, just talk to us. Not only a measure, I will buy a whole bag of rice for you." Thereupon the boy said "If so, put the bag of rice on the cart. We will go to settle my debt." Putting a bag of rice on the cart as requested, they set off on their journey. The father asked the son, "Now where to?" The child directed his father to drive towards the north of Taungdwingyi. Eventually they came to Chaungyo village when the son said, "That's it. That's the village," and kept on directing his father through the village lanes until they came to Nga Nyo's house. Upon inquiring whether it was indeed U Nyo's house. U Nyo himself confirmed it by coming down from the house as he approached the cart, the child hailed him, "Hey, Nga Nyo, do you remember me?" The elderly man was offended to be addressed as Nga Nyo by a mere child, the age of his son, but was pacified when the clerk explained, saying, "Please do not be offended, U Nyo. This child is under some strange circumstances."

When they got into the house, the boy began, "So, Nga Nyo, you don't remember me? We were once together selling betel leaves going around the villages. I borrowed a small measure of rice from you. Then I was bitten by a snake and died before I could return the loan. I became a cockerel in your house. After winning three fights for you, I lost the fourth because my opponent was much stronger than I was. For losing that fight you beat me to death in anger. Half dead, you threw me down near the water-pot and a cow came and kissed me. I took conception in her womb and was reborn as a cow. When I became a heifer, you killed me to eat. At that time the clerk and his wife who are my father and mother now, came by and expressed sympathy for me. After my death as a cow, I was born

as a son to my present father and mother. I have now come to repay my debt of the measure of rice." All that the child recounted was found to be true by U Nyo who wept, feeling repentant for all the ill-treatment he had meted out to his former friend.

With this story I want to stress again that unless craving has been rooted out, repeated rebirths in new existences are unavoidable.

Terrible Life as a Demon and a Cow

In about 1956 in the Payāgyi monastery of Mandalay there resided a student bhikkhu called U Ar Seinna. He was of good build, clear complexion and full of faith in Dhamma. He was a good student too, devoting himself wholeheartedly to the study of the texts. One day while washing his almsbowl, he addressed his colleagues, "I urge you to take care, friends, to be of good behaviour while you are living on the almsfood of donors. I am living a heedful life, having had personal experiences of three existences."

One of his colleagues, becoming curious, asked him about his previous lives and he replied, "I passed away from human life to become a female demon. I suffered terribly in that life, having scarcely anything to eat, no decent place to live, roaming here and there to find a resting place. From a female demon, I became a draught ox. I was herded in the same pen with a team mate, whose nostrils were running with putrid nasal fluid. Its nasal smell becoming unbearable, I goaded it to keep it away from me. The owner beat me, thinking that I was bullying the other ox. When I passed away from that existence, I regained human life and becoming agitated with religious emotion, and have now taken up the life of a bhikkhu."

This story also serves to emphasise the fact that as long as craving persists, rebirth is inevitable. It also shows what a horrible life is that of a demon and how, handicapped by the inability to communicate, an ox is liable to be misunderstood and could be maltreated in consequence. These accounts should serve to cause terror and incite religious emotions in us.

Regaining Human Life after Being a Cow and a Dog

About 1948, the Sayādaw of a village monastery in Monywa District was shot dead by a rebel leader who accused the Sayādaw of "ill-treating" his underling. The Sayādaw is now in human

existence, a bhikkhu again. We hear that he had even passed some of the scriptural examinations. This bhikkhu recounted, "I became a cow after being shot, then a dog and now I am a human being again." To go down from the level of a bhikkhu in human life to that of a cow, and then a dog, seems very degrading. However, if craving is not eradicated, it is possible to descend the ladder of existence lower still. There is the instance of Bhikkhu Tissa who became a louse in the time of the Buddha. Thus realising that anyone who has not eradicated craving (and with personality-view and doubt also still intact), is liable to take lower rebirths, so it is essential to strive for the complete eradication of craving, or at the very least, to work for the elimination of personality-view) and doubt.

Even Rebirth as a Crowing Lizard Is Possible

In about 1961, there appeared in Pha Aung We village near Daik-U, a strange young child, who said that he was previously the presiding monk of the Ywā Waing village about 2 miles away. The child was intelligent with a retentive memory. When taken to the monastery, which he said he resided in, he appeared to know all the articles in the building and was able to identify each object, recalling the name of its donor. What he said was found to be true. He said he had become a crowing lizard in the monastery when he died as the presiding monk. As the crowing lizard, he met his death when he leapt across from the monastery to a palm tree nearby. He missed the tree and fell to the ground breaking his thigh. The injury caused his death. When he died, he rode on the cart of a farmer from Pha Aung village who had his field near the monastery, and he stayed in the house of the farmer. What he said about riding on the cart was the appearance of a sign of destiny as death approached.

This story should also cause the realisation that with craving still lingering, fresh existence could arise, and taking fright at this realisation, one should develop the Noble Path to rid oneself of craving. The reason why I bring up these stories of modern times is because there are some people who maintain that there is no such thing as an after-life. Some are undecided and perplexed, not being able to conclude whether there is or not. In spite of clear accounts of renewed existences in the scriptural literature, many are sceptical of what was written about ancient times. Thus in order to arouse

faith in kamma and its effects, and belief in the after-life and to remain steadfast with such conviction, I have recounted these stories. There are many similar stories that I could tell, but enough has been said to accomplish my aim.

Three Kinds of Craving

As stated above, because craving can cause rebirth, the Blessed One taught, “This craving that gives rise to fresh rebirth and is bound up with delight and passion, seeking delight now here, now there.” He further elucidated this craving. “What is this craving? Firstly, there is craving for sensual pleasures. Secondly, there is craving for existence, or attachment to eternalism. Thirdly there is craving for non-existence, or clinging to the view that there is no after-life.” These three types of craving are the truth of the origin of suffering.

Sensual Craving

Of these three types, sensual craving is craving for pleasurable sense-objects, whether belonging to oneself or to others. The craving that arises on seeing a beautiful sight is sensual craving. Here object of sight relates not only to appearance, colour *etc.*, but to the whole form or body of a man or woman, which serves as the basis of the sight, the clothes worn and other associated objects. Likewise, pleasurable sounds and sound-producing objects, delightful odours and their source, delicious taste and food producing the taste, men and women who prepare and serve delicious food, tactile sensations of rapture and objects producing such sensations — all of these constitute objects of pleasure, and craving for them is sensual craving. In short, desire for any pleasurable sense-object is sensual craving.

Wishing to become a human being, a celestial being, wishing to be born a man or a woman; longing to enjoy sensual pleasures as a human being, as a celestial being, as a man or a woman — all of these cravings are also sensual craving. Therefore we say that taking delight in any pleasurable thought or object is sensual craving.

On seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching a sense-object, if one considers it to be pleasant, a liking is at once developed for it. Thinking it to be pleasant amounts to ignorance (*avijjā*), which conceals the true nature of the sense-object and gives rise to false views about it. Ignorance regard what is transitory as permanent;

it takes what is suffering, because of incessant arising and vanishing, to be pleasant: it takes mere physical and mental phenomena, which are neither a soul nor a living entity, to be a soul or living entity; and it considers one's own body or other's bodies, which are repulsive and disgusting, as beautiful and pleasing.

Regarding what is unpleasant to be pleasant, liking for it develops. Liking it and desiring it leads to craving, which drives one to perform activities to fulfil that craving. Such volitional activities are kamma (*saṅkhārā*), which are responsible for the formation of new mental and physical aggregates of a new existence. Thus each instance of liking or desiring a sense-object amounts to embarking on a new round of becoming.

Influenced by craving, kamma-forming consciousness otherwise called de cease thought-moment impulsion tenaciously clings to the kamma, sign of kamma, or sign of destiny, the three signs that appear as death approaches. Because of this tenacious clinging to the objects seen at death's door, the moment after de cease consciousness vanishes rebirth-linking consciousness arises holding onto the last seen objects, to give rise to a new birth. Hence this craving is described as liable to give rise to new becoming.

Craving for Existence

According to the Commentary, craving for existence (*bhava taṇhā*) is the craving that is accompanied by eternalism (*sassata diṭṭhi*). Here, "bhava" means becoming or being. Hence craving for existence is craving based on the belief in the permanence and stability of existence. Eternalism is the wrong-view believing that the soul or the living-being does not disappear. Although the physical body perishes, the soul, the living entity is thought not to be subject to dissolution. It enters into a new body and remains there. Even if the world crumbles and breaks up, it remains eternally and never perishes.

Religious faiths outside of the the Buddha's teaching mostly hold this view of eternalism. Some of them believe that, after death, man remains permanently in heaven or suffers eternal damnation in hell according to God's wish. Others take the view that a being migrates from one existence to another according to kamma and exists permanently. Again, others believe that a being exists eternally changing from one life to another on a predetermined set course.

In short, any belief that holds the view that a soul or living-entity moves on without dissolution to new existences is the wrong-view of eternalism (*sassata diṭṭhi*). For instance, a bird on a tree flies away to another tree when the first tree falls down. When the second tree falls down again, it flies on to a third tree. Likewise, the soul or living entity, on the dissolution of a physical body on which it depends, moves on to another body, itself remaining everlasting.

Craving accompanied by the wrong-view of eternalism is called craving for existence (*bhava taṇhā*). This craving takes delight in the view that the soul or living entity is permanent, enduring. "This I, which has been in permanent existence since eternity, feels the sensations and will continue feeling them." Believing thus, one takes delight in every object seen, heard, touched, or known and also in the objects that one hopes to enjoy in the future; wishing to enjoy a prosperous happy life now and in future, to be born in good, happy existences to enjoy the prosperous life of human or celestial beings. Some wish to be born always as a man, others as a woman. All of these are craving for existence.

Every time craving arises for the sense-objects that are presently available or for the present existence, or in looking forward to the existence one wishes to be in, because of this craving, a conditioning influence or potential power is being built up for the arising of a new life. That is why the Buddha taught: "Liable to give rise to new birth (*ponobbhavikā*). I have summarised it thus: craving for existence with the idea that it is eternal is craving for existence.

Craving for Non-existence

In the term "*vibhava taṇhā*," *vibhava* means non-becoming, non-being, annihilation of existence. Craving for the view that there is existence only while alive, that there is nothing after death, is craving for non-existence (*vibhava taṇhā*). This is the craving that is accompanied by the wrong-view of annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*), which maintains that nothing remains after death, there is complete annihilation. It is the doctrine taught by Ajita, the leader of a sect during the Buddha's lifetime. His teaching runs thus:-

An individual is made up of the four primary elements. When he dies, the earth element of his body goes into the mass of the earth element that exist in inanimate external bodies. (It means the element

of earth that manifested as hardness or coarseness while in the living body, merges with the inanimate external earth element, the earth element of the dead body. In time it turns into earth, which is again converted into earth element in trees and plants, *etc.*) The water element of the living body flows into the inanimate mass of water. (That is to say, the fluidity of the dead body becomes the moisture of the mass of water.) The fire element of the living body merges with the mass of inanimate external heat and the living air element flows into the mass of inanimate external air. All knowing faculties (sense-organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, *etc.*) move over into space. (Those holding the annihilationist view do not recognise the separate existence of eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, *etc.* They hold that the material forms of the sense-organs, otherwise called the faculties, themselves see, hear, taste, touch, *etc.*, and mind itself thinks. They explained the cessation of consciousness in terms of the six faculties of sense, which, according to them, disappear into space. Whether he is a fool or a wise man, when he dies, he completely disappears. Nothing is left after death. The fool does not suffer in a new existence for his past misdeeds. The wise man does not get a new existence in which he enjoys the fruits of his good kammās. After death every thing disappears.

This is then some of the teachings of Ajita who held the view of annihilationism. This ideology may find ready acceptance by those who are reluctant to avoid evil or to do good. As it is postulated by this ideology that there is no life after death, it amounts to the admission that there is life before death. Then one may ask, "What exists before death?" The answer, according to their line of reasoning, could only be that it is the living self (*atta*), or a being (*satta*). Thus although Ajita maintained that an individual is made up of the four great primaries, it must be said that, for him, the self or a being exists. Because of this attachment to self, holders of this view argue that instead of wasting time doing good deeds for future existences, full opportunity should be taken of the present moment for the enjoyment of pleasures. The craving accompanied by this view that nothing remains after death is craving for non-existence. To summarise: craving that arises accompanied by the annihilationist view is craving for non-existence (*vibhava taṇhā*).

This craving for non-existence likes the idea that, after death, existence is annihilated without any special effort. The reason is that

one who holds this view shrinks from the practice of meritorious deeds and does not abstain from doing evil deeds. The evil deeds committed are also innumerable. If new life occurs after death, these evil deeds will bear unwholesome fruits which, of course, they cannot relish. Only if nothing happens after death, and there is no new existence, their misdeeds will be expunged; they will have to bear no responsibility for them and escape scot-free from all consequences of their evil actions. Hence the great appeal of this ideology.

At the same time, holding that the time for enjoying is now, the present life before death, they are too eager to pursue any desirable objects of pleasure. Consequently they go all out in the pursuit of what they consider to be pleasurable. This ardent pursuit of pleasure leads to commission of kamma and mental formations, every act of which is contributing to formation of new life.

Every time there is delight in, and enjoyment of, pleasures of the present life, the impulse of craving is imparted to the stream of consciousness. Consequently, impulsion proximate to death, otherwise called the kamma-forming consciousness (*abhisankhāra viññāṇa*) clings to the death signs: kamma, sign of kamma, and sign of destiny. While clinging to these objects, when the death follows the decesso-consciousness, rebirth-consciousness arises for a new existence, conditioned by one of the three signs. Thus a person holding the annihilationist view is reborn whether he or she likes it or not, in a new existence, because of craving for pleasurable objects. This new existence is very likely to be in inferior and miserable states because he or she had developed nothing but evil deeds previously.

The Buddha taught, therefore, that this type of craving for non-existence, also gives rise to new existence. Thus all the three types of craving, sensual craving, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence lead to new life and suffering. Therefore, I have summarised: the true cause of suffering is the three types of craving.

The above mentioned three types of craving are the origin of suffering starting from birth, up to the five aggregates of attachment, and are therefore called the truth of the origin of suffering.

As to where these cravings arise and take root, the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta states: "Wherever in the world, there are delightful and pleasurable things, there this craving arises and takes root." Here, by "craving arises" is meant the actual arising of

the craving because of delightful and pleasurable things. This is known as arisen defilements (*pariyuṭṭhāna kilesā*). By “taking root” is meant that, failing to contemplate the impermanent nature of pleasurable things, craving for them lies dormant, taking root and waiting to arise whenever favourable circumstances permit. This latent craving, lying dormant in sense-objects that escape contemplation, is known as latent in the object (*ārammaṇanusaya*). Insight meditation eradicates this defilement.

The delightful and pleasurable things from which craving arises are described elaborately in the Mahāsatiपाṭṭhāna Sutta and may be summarised as:

1. Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind — the six sense-doors.
2. Sights, sounds, odours, tastes, touches, and ideas — the six sense-objects.
3. Eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, *etc.*, — six types of consciousness.
4. Six types of sense impressions -- six contacts (*phassa*).
5. Six types of feeling born of sense impressions, *etc.*

These delightful and pleasurable things should be contemplated in the practice of meditation. Failing to recognise them as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, through mindful noting will result in them becoming the breeding grounds for craving. These two types of craving: dormant craving for pleasurable objects (*ārammaṇanusaya taṇhā*), which have escaped being noted as they really are, at the time of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, and the craving that has actually arisen (*pariyuṭṭhāna taṇhā*) from the pleasurable things, constitute the noble truth of the origin of suffering. This fact should be thoroughly understood and remembered.

I have explained the truth of the origin of suffering sufficiently, so I will end my discourse on it here.

May all you good people present in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this Great Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, be able to dispel temporarily or eradicate completely, the craving otherwise called the truth of the origin of suffering by incessant contemplation and through whatever Path and Fruition you have chosen, achieve speedy realisation of nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part Six

Delivered on 11th November, 1962.¹

Today is the full-moon day of November. It used to be a great holy day, marked with festivities, in central India at the time of the Buddha, being the end of the month, the end of the rainy season, and the end of the year according to the tradition of that time. In Burma we celebrate the day with the festival of lights and paying homage to the Blessed One.

Today I will discuss the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*nirodha saccā*) and the Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*magga saccā*) as taught in the Dhammacakka Sutta. I will now recite the Four Noble Truths:

1. The Truth of suffering (*dukkha saccā*).
2. The Truth of the Origin of Suffering (*samudaya saccā*).
3. The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*nirodha saccā*).
4. The Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*magga saccā*).

The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

“Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ — yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo.”

“This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: it is the complete fading away and cessation of that craving without remainder, its forsaking and abandonment, liberation and detachment from it.”

The truth of the cessation of suffering is the cessation of craving, otherwise called the truth of the origin of suffering. By virtue of insight knowledge and Path knowledge, that craving gets no opportunity to arise, and vanishes. It is like darkness being dispelled by sunlight. When the Path knowledge of Arahantship appears, craving has no chance to arise and gets extinguished entirely. With the cessation of craving, the mental and physical aggregates for a new life cannot appear and completely cease to exist. This non-arising or cessation of craving is the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. Cessation of craving by virtue of Arahantship is its complete extinction without remainder and is the noblest form of cessation.

¹ The Full Moon of Tazaungmon 1324 M.E.

There are inferior forms of cessation, for instance cessation by virtue of the Path of Non-returning, which completely extinguishes only sensual craving; cessation by the Path of Once-returning, which eliminates only the grosser forms of sensual craving; cessation by virtue of Stream-winning, which removes the sensual craving that will give rise to rebirth in the lower realms. These cessations are concerned with only partial extinctions of craving and may be regarded as inferior grades of the truth of cessation. Then there is another form of cessation, which comes about through contemplating impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. During the period of contemplation, craving gets no chance to arise, so there is temporary cessation of craving. It may be regarded as partial cessation of craving by means of the partial development of insight. Every time one is engaged in insight meditation, it may be said that one is realising the temporary cessation of craving.

The Pāli texts provide the following exposition of the truth of cessation of craving by answering the question, “Where may this craving be discarded, where may it be extinguished?” “Wherever in the world there are delightful and pleasurable things, there this craving may be discarded, there it may be extinguished.”¹

Here, delightful and pleasurable things means, as explained earlier, the six sense-doors, the six sense-objects, and the six types of consciousness. For further details, please refer to the text and translation of the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta.

Discarding (*pahiyati*) and extinguishing (*nirujjhati*) are alike in meaning. Similarly, giving up or relinquishing (*cāgo*), forsaking or rejection (*paṭinissaggo*), release, freedom, or emancipation (*mutti*), aversion, disenchantment (*analayo*), all connote the same meaning as cessation or extinction (*nirodha*).

How Cessation of Craving Is Brought about

When the meditator becomes convinced of the true nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self by noting “seeing, seeing” at the moment of seeing, he or she will not be blinded by the delusion of permanence, happiness, and self in the sense-doors, sense-objects, and sense-consciousness. He or she is momentarily free from ignorance (*avijjā*) or delusion (*moha*). Having seen reality

¹ D.ii.310.

as it is and being free from delusion, no pleasurable feeling arises towards these objects. This is then the temporary cessation or fading away of craving. Through the fading away of craving, attachment (*upādāna*), kamma and mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), which come trailing after it cannot arise. Consequently consciousness (*viññāṇa*), mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), the six-senses (*saḷāyatana*), contact (*phassa*), and feeling (*vedanā*), the unwholesome resultants of kamma and mental formations, cannot appear. This is how craving together with suffering are momentarily extinguished, which is called momentary cessation or momentary nibbāna.

Similarly, by noting "hearing," "smelling," *etc.*, at the moment of hearing, smelling, *etc.*, the meditator becomes convinced of the three characteristics with respect to the ear and sound, the nose and odour, the tongue and taste, *etc.* He or she will be free from delusions of permanence, happiness, or self in connection with these objects. Thus there will be the momentary cessation of craving and suffering, otherwise called momentary nibbāna.

Through insight, which promotes temporary cessation as higher knowledge is developed, nibbāna is realised by means of the knowledge of Stream-winning. This knowledge extinguishes the strong sensual craving that can give rise to rebirth in the lower realms. The meditator becomes fully liberated from the miseries of the lower realms (*apāya*) and sufferings of more than seven existences in fortunate destinies of the sensual sphere (*kāma sugati*). This is then the extinction of suffering as a result of the extinction of craving. However, it must not be regarded that Path and Fruition of Stream-winning takes the cessation of craving as its object of contemplation. It dwells merely on cessation as a result of the complete extinction of suffering inherent in the mental and physical aggregates.

When nibbāna is realised by means of the Path knowledge of Once-returning, the grosser forms of sensual craving, together with the suffering of more than two existences in the sensual realm are extinguished. When the Path knowledge of Non-returning is realised, subtle forms of sensual craving, together with suffering in more than one existence in the fine material realms (*rūpa loka*), or in the formless realms (*arūpa loka*) are extinguished. These are also extinction of suffering as a result of the extinction of craving. In these Paths too, the mind dwells merely on cessation consequent

upon the complete extinction of suffering inherent in the aggregates. When nibbāna is realised through the Path knowledge of Arahantship, all forms of craving and all kinds of suffering are completely eradicated. This is also extinction of suffering as a result of extinction of craving. We can summarise: “When craving is eradicated suffering is extinguished.”

Only when craving is completely eradicated, true liberation from suffering is achieved. Escape from suffering, obtained through other means, is not true liberation but just temporary relief; in due course there is the recurrence of suffering. For example, take stretching the limbs to relieve the stiffness due to bending. The discomfort is temporarily removed only to return as tiredness due to stretching. Likewise stiffness due to prolonged sitting may be relieved by standing up or walking about only to be replaced soon by fatigue. When one is assailed by hunger, the suffering may be relieved by partaking of some food; but the trouble will start again after a lapse of a few hours. Illness or disease may be cured with suitable medical treatment, but other ailments are bound to arise sooner or later to give trouble again.

Difficult circumstances of living may be solved by engaging in suitable employment or business, which may prove so successful and prosperous that one may come to occupy a very high position in one’s profession or become wealthy. Yet with the vicissitudes of life, one may fall down from that high position or become poverty-stricken. Even if the whole life has been smooth and plain sailing, one inevitably faces suffering at the time of death. As a result of meritorious deeds such as giving alms and observing moral precepts, one may be reborn as a human being in happy prosperous circumstances or one may be born as a powerful celestial king. Yet when the wholesome effects of previous wholesome deeds are exhausted, a return to miserable existences is inevitable. If one strives for a happy and long existence by means of the *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna* by practising tranquillity meditation, one may attain the *rūpa brahmā* and *arūpa brahmā* realms where one may live happily for many world-cycles. However, a time comes when the merits of *jhāna* are exhausted. Then one faces the possibility of descending once again into miserable lower existences, as for instance, the experience of the young sow mentioned in the chapter on the origin of suffering.

Thus unless craving is completely eradicated, no form of liberation is a guaranteed, true liberation. Complete and irreversible liberation from all kinds of suffering is achieved only when craving has been entirely extinguished. Thus the Buddha taught, "The complete fading away and cessation of that craving without remainder (*tassayeva tañhāyaasesa virāganirodhā*) is the truth of the cessation of suffering."

This is in accordance with the doctrine of dependent origination, which states that when the causative conditions such as ignorance cease, their effects also cease. Thus, in the *Āṅguttaranikāya* it is taught, "What, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? Through the total fading away and extinction of ignorance, kamma formations are extinguished; through the extinction of kamma the resultant consciousness of a new existence is extinguished; through the extinction of consciousness, mental and physical phenomena are extinguished; through the extinction of mental and physical phenomena, the six senses are extinguished; through the extinction of the six senses, sense impressions (contact between the six senses and the sense-objects) are extinguished; through extinction of sense impressions, feelings are extinguished; through the extinction of feelings, craving is extinguished; through the extinction of craving, attachment is extinguished; through the extinction of attachment, becoming is extinguished; through the extinction of becoming, rebirth is extinguished: through the extinction of rebirth, death and decay, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair are extinguished. Thus this whole mass of suffering (which is neither a soul, living-entity nor has any connection with happiness) is extinguished. This, monks, is the noble truth of extinction of this mass of mere suffering."

In the above text, the sequence of cessation is given in serial order to demonstrate the correlation of each cause with its effect. However, the important point is that once ignorance vanishes all its effects, such as mental formations are extinguished.

The word cessation (*nirodha*) in the texts mean cessation only, not the place or the condition of cessation. Although Commentaries mention cessation figuratively as a place or condition of cessation, it must be carefully observed that its true meaning is non-arising of inter-related conditions of cause and effects such as ignorance, mental formations, consciousness, *etc.*, their total cessation and annihilation, in other words, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

I have dealt with the truth of the cessation of suffering sufficiently. For further details, please refer to “[On the Nature of Nibbāna](#).” I will now go on to the exposition of the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

The Truth of the Path

“Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaḡāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ — ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ — sammādiṭṭhi sammāsankappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammā-ājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati sammāsamādhī.”

“This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. It is this very Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.”

I have dealt with the Truth of the Path fairly fully before. I propose to repeat some things that need emphasising. Of the eight factors of the Path, Right View and Right Thought constitute the wisdom group; Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood constitute the morality group; while Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration constitute the concentration group.

I need not elaborate the path factors of morality, nor the path factors of concentration. Of the wisdom group, right-view needs further exposition. Accordingly I quote the following exposition on right-view given by the Blessed One.

Exposition of Right View

“What, monks, is right-view? Monks, to understand suffering or the truth of suffering; to understand the origin of suffering or the truth of the origin of suffering; to understand the cessation of suffering or the truth of the cessation of suffering to understand the path leading to the cessation of suffering or the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering; this is called right-view.”

This is then the definition of the right-view given by the Blessed One. Briefly, it is knowing the four truths according to reality and understanding them rightly as they should be understood. The Commentary version of its exposition is as follows:

Meditation on the Four Truths

“Meditation on the four truths was taught prefaced by the words ‘understanding of the four truths.’ Of these four truths, the first two, namely, the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering are concerned with the cycle of existence (*vaṭṭa*). The last two, namely, the truth of cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering are concerned with escape from the cycle of existence (*vivaṭṭa*). The meditator employs only the first two truths as objects of meditation and not the last two truths.

It means that the meditator contemplates the first two mundane truths, not the last two supramundane truths, which are unsuitable subjects for meditation. Indeed it is impossible to meditate on them. Why so? The Subcommentary states that these supramundane truths are beyond the understanding of ordinary common worldlings.

Indeed it is true that ordinary common worldlings cannot take the path and fruition as their objects of meditation, nor is nibbāna within the scope of their knowledge before they attain the stage of **maturity knowledge** (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*). Maturity knowledge consciousness arises only after **knowledge of adaptation** (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), when insight becomes fully developed. Immediately after maturity knowledge comes the realisation of the Path and its Fruition. Therefore, it is obvious that a common worldling is not in a position to take nibbāna or the path and its fruition as an object of meditation. Thus, it must be carefully noted that any instruction to begin with meditation on nibbāna is totally wrong.

The question might arise whether nibbāna may not be taken as an object for tranquillity meditation. Contemplation on the qualities of nibbāna such as being devoid of lust (*virāga*), may be adopted as to gain concentration. However, this exercise is taken solely for the purpose of achieving one-pointedness of mind; it is not to immediately realise the Noble Path and Fruition. In any case this meditation exercise is most appropriate only for the Noble Ones who have already realised nibbāna, and not for the ordinary common worldling. Thus it is definitely a mistaken practice to try to achieve the path and fruition by dwelling on nibbāna from the very start.

The meditator learns from his or her teacher, briefly, that the five aggregates are the truth of suffering and craving is the truth of the origin of suffering. Or, he or she may learn more comprehensively

that the five aggregates consist of materiality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, and further that the aggregate of materiality means the four primary elements and their derivatives, *etc.* Having learned about the first two truths briefly or comprehensively from the teacher, he or she recites them repeatedly and contemplates them. With regard to the last two truths, the meditator just hears that the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering are desirable and laudable. This means that it is sufficient just to hear about these two supramundane truths and incline the mind towards them.

That meditator, acting in the way described above, penetrates the four truths simultaneously and comprehends them, understanding the four truths simultaneously through insight. By penetrative insight (*paṭivedha*), the meditator comprehends that suffering is to be rightly and well understood; that craving is to be abandoned or eradicated; that cessation is to be realised, and that the path is to be developed. By higher knowledge (*abhisamaya*) he or she fully comprehends that suffering is to be rightly and well understood; that craving is to be abandoned or eradicated; that cessation is to be realised; and that the path is to be developed.

As described above, before attaining the path, the meditator's knowledge of the truth of suffering and the truth of origin of suffering, comes about by learning, and hearing from the teacher, by questioning, by repeated recitation, and by mastering it through penetrative reflection. The first four processes of acquiring this knowledge constitute merely studying the scriptures; grasping through penetrative reflection only amounts to insight meditation. The knowledge concerning the truth of the cessation of suffering and the truth of the path leading to cessation is acquired only by hearing about them. After practising insight meditation, at the moment of realisation of the Noble Path, the first three truths are fully grasped by having accomplished the task of knowing rightly and well the truth of suffering, the task of abandoning the origin of suffering and the task of developing the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The truth of the cessation of suffering is fully grasped by actual realisation.

Thus, in accordance with the Commentary, initially it is sufficient to know only from hearing that the truth of cessation and the truth of the path leading to cessation are desirable and laudable, and to

incline the mind towards them. It is clear, therefore, that no effort is needed to contemplate particularly on these two truths. Knowledge about the first two truths should, however, be acquired both by learning and by developing insight through meditation.

How Much Learning is Necessary?

As stated in the Commentary that I quoted, it is sufficient to know only that the five aggregates are the truth of suffering; that craving is truth of the origin of suffering. Here the five aggregates are the five aggregates of attachment mentioned in this sutta. I have fully explained above that they are the objects that present themselves at the time of seeing, hearing, *etc.* I have also dealt comprehensively with the truth of the origin of suffering in the section concerned. Knowing the law of dependent origination in brief. In the great Subcommentary on the Visuddhimagga, it is definitely stated that what the Venerable Assaji said, “Those things causally arisen, the Perfect One taught their cause (*ye dhammā hetuppabhavā, tesam hetum Tathāgato āha*) constitutes the law of dependent origination in brief. The Commentary on the Vinaya Mahāvagga affirms that by the words, “Those things causally arisen,” the Venerable Assaji was referring to the five aggregates, otherwise called the truth of suffering, and by the words, “The Perfect One taught their cause,” he was referring to the truth of the origin of suffering. Thus it is clear that having learnt briefly, by hearing, about the truth of suffering and the truth of its origin, one has also learnt the law of dependent origination in brief. Those who teach that insight meditation is not feasible unless one has mastered the law of dependent origination supported by tables and circular diagrams, are therefore going against these words of the Commentary and Subcommentary and causing great harm to the practice of the religion (*paṭipatti sāsaṇa*).

In the Cūḷataṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta,¹ we find the following regarding the brief knowledge to be acquired by learning: “Oh, king of the deities, in this teaching, a bhikkhu has heard that phenomena are not worth adhering to.” It means that if a bhikkhu has ever heard that the five aggregates that occur at the six sense-doors every time there is seeing, hearing, *etc.*, should not be regarded as permanent, pleasant, or as a self; that they are transitory, unsatis-

¹ M.i.251. The Commentary explains that they are not worth adhering to because they are not permanent, pleasant, or self (ed.)

factory, and not-self, then he has sufficient learning (*sutamayaññāna*), to engage in meditation.

The Buddha continued: “Then that bhikkhu, who has learnt that much by hearsay, knows all phenomena by contemplation and actual experience.” Then the Blessed One taught how to attain analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ññāna*), etc.

To summarise: 1) all phenomena are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self; 2) that is sufficient learning to engage in meditation; 3) through meditation one can differentiate mind and matter; 4) to realise the true nature of impermanence and unsatisfactoriness.

The first two indicate sufficient learning (*sutamayapaññā*) to proceed to the practice of meditation. The third shows how, by noting each act of seeing, hearing, etc., at the moment of its occurrence, one gains the **analytical knowledge of body and mind** (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ññāna*), and the **knowledge by discerning conditionality** (*paccayapariggaha-ññāna*), which knows the cause of phenomena such as seeing, hearing, etc. These two kinds of knowledge are called higher wisdom (*abhiññā paññā*), being the realisation (*nātapariññā*) of the three higher knowledges. By the fourth is meant full knowledge of all phenomena, and insight into their three characteristics in accordance with the teaching “To know all things experientially (*sabbam dhammam abhiññāya*), and to comprehend them (*sabbam dhammam parijānāti*).” This constitutes the profound knowledge of realisation (*tiraṇa pariññā*) and abandoning (*pahāna pariññā*).

The main point that I wish to emphasise here is that having just learnt through hearing that all phenomena are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, one has enough learning to strive for Arahantship. The assertion that meditation should not be practised without a comprehensive knowledge of the law of dependent origination contradicts the text of the Cūḷataṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta, causes demoralisation in those intent on the practice of meditation, and is detrimental to the prosperity of the practice of the religion.

If, according to their proposition, meditation could be practised only after thoroughly mastering the law of dependent origination together with its explanatory circular diagrams etc., some people who have no time or opportunity to study the law of dependent origination, or who are slow in learning it comprehensively, are liable to lose the opportunity of gaining the Path or its Fruition even if they

are endowed with sufficient perfections to attain them. To cite an example, during the time of the Blessed One, one bhikkhu by the name of Cūlapanthaka found it difficult to memorise a verse of only forty-five syllables although he tried to for four weeks. To learn the whole law of the dependent origination extensively would thus have been impossible for him. Yet the same bhikkhu attained Arahantship, accomplished in supernormal knowledge and vision by practising for one morning only a meditation exercise prescribed by the Buddha.

While giving this discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma I would like to take this opportunity of cautioning those good, learned persons to refrain from making assertions that may discourage and demoralise those engaged in or intent on the practice of meditation.

If one intends to strive all alone for the practice of meditation, no doubt one needs to have learnt extensively all about the aggregates, the bases, the elements, the truths, the faculties and the law of the dependent origination. However, if one is going to work under the guidance of a good, virtuous, learned, and wise teacher, all that one needs to know is that all phenomena are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. It is also sufficient if one has learnt through hearing that a worldling is governed by two mundane truths of causal relations (cause and effect): the five aggregates, which is the truth of suffering; and craving, which is the truth of origin of suffering.

The majority of Burmese Buddhists can be taken to be already equipped with this much knowledge; and even if not, they can pick this up just before starting meditation or during the course of meditation by listening to the discourses of the meditation teacher. There should be no wavering or uncertainty regarding a lack of learning. All that is required is to start practising meditation in accordance with the instructions given by a reliable, virtuous, learned, and wise teacher. How to embark on the practice of insight meditation has been described in my third discourse in this series. To recapitulate, the practice consists of developing the three stages of the path: the basic path, the preliminary path, and the Noble Path. Developing them leads to nibbāna.

The basic path (*mūla magga*), is comprises the right-view of ownership of one's kamma (*kammassakatā sammādiṭṭhi*), morality (*sīla*), and access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), or absorption

(*appanā samādhi*), which I have already dealt with fully before. As to the first factor, the majority of Burmese Buddhists have already established faith in this right-view since childhood. With regard to the path of morality, if the lay meditator is not established in it yet, he or she can accomplish it by observing the precepts just before taking up the practice of meditation. The bhikkhu meditator should purify his morality by confession if he entertains any doubts about the purity of his morality. As for accomplishment in concentration, the meditator should take up a tranquillity exercise such as mindfulness of respiration (*ānāpānasati*) and practise it until attaining absorption or access concentration. If time or opportunity does not permit, the meditator can begin contemplating on the four primary elements by means of which momentary concentration for insight (*vipassanā khaṇika samādhi*), which is akin to access concentration, may be attained. This concentration dispels the hindrances so that purification of mind may be achieved. This is a brief description of how the basic path is established.

Development of Preliminary path

After developing the basic path as described above, the meditator starts observing the reality of the truth of suffering, otherwise called the aggregates of attachment, by noting continuously the phenomena of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, at the moment each phenomenon occurs. A full account of the aggregates, and how failing to note them and see them as they really are leads to clinging to them as permanent, pleasant, and self; and how seeing their true nature through heedfulness, attachment to them is extinguished, has already been given in Parts Three and Four of this series of discourses.

When concentration becomes fully established, one becomes aware with every noting, of the arising and vanishing of mind and matter, and their three characteristics. How such awareness is developed may be explained thus: While noting each action of rising, falling, sitting, touching, bending, stretching, lifting, stepping forward, moving, resting, the meditator begins to recognise the knowing mind as distinct from the material body. This discernment is analytical knowledge of body and mind, the initial basis for the development of insight knowledge. The Blessed One described how

this knowledge may be developed by giving the example of a lapis lazuli in the Sāmaññaphala Sutta¹ and Mahāsakuludāyī Sutta.²

Simile of a Gem Strung on a Thread

If a pure lapis lazuli (*veḷuriya*) gem strung on a brown, yellow, red, white, or light yellow thread is taken in the palm of the hand for observation, a man with good eye-sight is able to distinguish the gem from the thread; he can see clearly the coloured thread in the body of the gem. Likewise, the meditator is able to differentiate the knowing mind from the object to be known; he knows also the knowing mind rushing out towards the object to be known. In this simile the material object is like the precious gem, the knowing mind is like the thread. Like the thread embedded in the gem, the knowing mind plunges towards the object. Thus the differentiation between mind and matter is illustrated by the simile. It should be carefully observed that in the simile there is no mention of knowing as to how many types of matter how many types of mind and mental concomitants are involved; it mentions only distinguishing the knowing mind from the material objects known.

Again in the Visuddhimagga we find the following description of how mind becomes evident to the observing meditator. "For the meditator having discerned by such and such a method the nature of materiality, then in proportion as materiality becomes quite distinct, disentangled and clear to him so the mind that has materiality as its object becomes plain and evident too." Further we find in the Visuddhimagga: "It is when supported by mind that matter arises; it is when supported by matter that mind arise. When mind has the desire to eat, drink, speak, and adopt a posture." These passages make it plain that mere reflection on different categories of mind and matter will not result in analytical knowledge of body and mind (*nāmarūpapariccheda-ñāṇa*), genuine insight is developed only when the knowing mind and the material object to be known can be separately recognised while observing the phenomenon of arising and vanishing of mind and matter as it occurs.

The ability to distinguish the knower (*nāma*) from the known (*rūpa*), constitutes right-view. Although it may have been learnt from books that the knowing mind is separate from the material body,

¹ Di.77.

² M.ii.1.

prior to taking up the meditation practice, and at the initial stage of the practice, the meditator cannot distinguish the knowing mind and the material body through actual experience. It is only at the stage when analytical knowledge is developed that the distinction between these two occurs spontaneously. When noting the phenomenon of thinking or painful feeling, as it occurs, the meditator discerns separately the thinking mind and the material object or painful feeling and the location of pain in the body. This discernment of mind as distinct from matter is knowing reality as it truly is, that is right-view. The meditator becomes convinced then that there is only the material body and the knowing mind; apart from them, there is no such thing as a living being or entity. This is also knowing reality as it truly is with right-view.

As the power of concentration becomes further developed, while noting rising, falling, sitting, touching, *etc.*, one comes to realise that one touches because there is the material body to touch; sees because of the eye and a sight, hears because of ear and sound, bends because of the desire to bend. One realises also that one does not know the reality because one fails to take note of the phenomenon as it occurs; one develops liking because one does not know the true nature; one develops attachment because one likes it. One then knows that when one has developed attachment, one becomes engaged in activities such as doing or talking. These activities of doing and talking produce effects, good when the action was wholesome, bad when the action was unwholesome. In this way one gains the knowledge of cause and effect as far as one's perfections allow. This again is knowing reality as it really is with the right-view.

As concentration becomes further strengthened, during the course of noting rising, falling, sitting, touching, seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling stiff, hot, or painful, one discerns clearly the origination of the object as well as its dissolution, the beginning and end of each phenomenon. One becomes convinced through personal experience that every phenomenon is impermanent, that it comes into being only to vanish instantly. One realises too that incessant arising and ceasing are dreadful suffering and what is not subject to one's control, is not self. This knowledge is also right-view that knows reality.

As the power of concentration gets still more developed, although the meditator is noting the acts of rising, falling, sitting, bending,

stretching, lifting, moving forward, dropping, he or she is no longer aware of the objects in their various shapes and forms such as the body, stomach, the limbs, *etc.* He or she notices only the rapid dissolution of successive phenomena. He or she perceives the swift passing away of the object of awareness as well as the noting mind, and comes to the vivid realisation of the real nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The object of awareness passes away the instant it makes its appearance and there is no self to fasten one's attachment on to. The knowing mind also dissolves so fast that there is no self, nothing to hold on to. Thus with every noting knowledge develops into the true nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. All of these constitute right-view.

From the time that analytical knowledge develops to the stage of right-view of insight (*vipassanā sammādiṭṭhi*), the mind has been inclining towards perceiving reality as it is. This constitutes Right Thought. Right Concentration is involved too to keep the mind fixed on the right object, and Right Mindfulness remains aware of it. All this while, the meditator is engaged in one of the four foundations of mindfulness: contemplating the body postures, feelings, mind, and mental objects. He or she contemplates with Right Effort.

Thus whenever a meditator is engaged in meditation, five path factors are involved, three from the concentration group, and two from the wisdom group. These five path factors co-operate in each act of heedful noting. The Commentary calls them the five working factors (*pañcasu kāraṅgesu*). In addition, there are also involved the three factors of the morality group: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood by preserving the precepts and fulfilling the abstentions. This is how such involvement occurs: the meditator starts observing the precepts even before beginning meditation and keeps it purified. During the course of meditation, morality remains unpolluted, and its purity is maintained. If anything, it may be said that morality gets more and more refined. Thus with three path factors of morality added to the five working factors, a meditator is developing all eight path factors at each instance of noting and knowing the phenomenon. The Mahāsālāyatanika Sutta¹ gives the following description of how the eight path factors are developed:

¹ M.iii.288.

“Bhikkhus, when the eye is seen as it truly is, when sights, eye-consciousness, eye-contact, and feeling that arises due to eye-contact, are seen as they truly are, then no liking is developed for the eye, sights, eye-consciousness, *etc.* Seeing the eye, sights, *etc.*, as they truly are, and no liking and attachment being developed for them, for the person who sees only revulsion in them, the aggregates of attachment (which may have arisen through failure to note) get no opportunity to appear. Craving for these objects also ceases, and gets annihilated.

“The view of such a person is right-view; thoughts are right thoughts; efforts are right efforts; mindfulness is right mindfulness; concentration is right concentration. Even before starting meditation, the meditator is well established in right speech, right action, and right livelihood. In this way the meditator becomes established in the Noble Eightfold Path.”

This is a brief account in the Buddha’s words of how the Noble Eightfold Path is developed when the meditator discerns what should be known at the moment of seeing — the true nature of the five phenomena involved: the eye, visual objects, *etc.* For a detailed description, please refer to the Mahāsālāyatanika Sutta.

The Commentary states that the Noble Eightfold Path becomes established at the moment of achieving the Noble Path. This may be taken as a superior interpretation. I prefer to take the view that what is meant here is the path of insight rather than the Noble Path, which is achieved by accomplishing the path of insight. My interpretation will be found to be in accord with the fact that knowledge as to the true nature of the eye, sights, eye-consciousness, eye-contact and feeling, comes only through insight meditation. The Noble Path, on the other hand, does not take the eye, sights, *etc.*, as its object; it accomplishes only the function of knowing.

Similarly, by noting the phenomena of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, the five phenomena that become prominent at the respective moments of occurrence, could be known and the Noble Eightfold Path developed accordingly.

What has been explained so far relates to involvement of the path factors of morality by way of maintaining them unpolluted, while practising insight meditation.

Abstention from Immorality during Meditation

There is no opportunity to commit wrong speech such as lying with regard to the objects being observed as they really are at the moment of noting them. Just consider for a moment. Where is the necessity to lie about an object that one neither likes nor dislikes, having seen its true nature of impermanence and cessation after dissolution? Similarly no occasion arises to slander, to abuse, or to talk frivolously, in brief, to commit wrong speech in connection with that object. Likewise there is no question of committing wrong acts such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, or engaging in wrong livelihood. Thus every time reality is seen while noting, Right Speech, which is abstinence from wrong-speech, Right Action, which is abstinence from wrong-action, and Right Livelihood, which is abstinence from wrong-livelihood, are accomplished with reference to the object under review. It is by abstinence that the path factors of morality are involved in the development of the path of right-view.

Thus on each occasion of noting rising, falling, sitting, touching, thinking, feeling stiff, hot, or painful, hearing, seeing, *etc.*, right-view is being developed together with the Noble Eightfold Path. Of the four truths, the truth of suffering is that which should be rightly and well understood, and the truth of suffering is the five aggregates of attachment that become prominent at the six sense-doors at each moment. Thus the truth of suffering would be rightly and well understood by noting each phenomenon at the six doors. Every time the truth of suffering is developed by noting thus, the Noble Eightfold Path, which should be developed, is being developed.

Thus contemplation on the truth of suffering by noting develops the Noble Eightfold Path. To develop the Path, the truth of suffering must be contemplated by noting. The truth of suffering, which becomes evident, by noting during the course of insight meditation, is the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), is the object (*ārammaṇa*) that must be rightly and well understood. The truth of the path which must be developed to understand the truth of suffering.

It must be carefully understood that only by contemplating the truth of suffering, is the Noble Eightfold Path developed, and only when the path of insight is accomplished is nibbāna realised. I should stress that the truth of suffering is the object and the knowing path is the knower (*ārammaṇika*). Such emphasis is

necessary because assertions are being made contrary to the teachings of the Buddha and detrimental to the prosperity of the religion that “Contemplation on objects of suffering such as mind, matter, and mental formations, will result in perceiving only suffering; nibbāna should be contemplated for the achievement of peace and happiness.”

Knowledge of the Four Truths through Insight

By noting all phenomena that occur at the six doors and knowing them to be merely of the nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality is understanding the truth of suffering. Thus with every instance of noting, the task of gaining penetrative insight as to understanding the truth of suffering, is accomplished.

Having seen the true nature of each phenomenon by noting them, no opportunity arises for liking or craving for these mental and physical objects. This is the momentary eradication of craving, the truth of the origin of suffering. Thus with every instance of noting, the task of gaining insight as to abandoning (*pahāna-paṭivedha*) the cause of suffering is accomplished. Here insight is gained not by observing the object; it is just knowing the fact of abandoning.

With the cessation of craving, attachment, kamma, mental formations, consciousness, and mind and matter, called the cycle of defilements (*kilesā vaṭṭa*), the cycle of kamma (*kamma vaṭṭa*), and the cycle of results (*vipāka vaṭṭa*), which will follow in its trail, get no opportunity to arise. Temporarily they are inhibited. This is momentary nibbāna otherwise called cessation (*nirodha*), achieved by means of insight. Thus insight knowledge is developed by momentary cessation similar to realisation by the Noble Path. However, the achievement comes about not by direct observation of the object; it is just an accomplishment of temporary cessation at each instance of noting. This is called gaining penetrative insight as to cessation by realising it (*sacchikiriyā paṭivedha*), knowing it through insight.

With every act of observation, the Noble Eightfold Path headed by the right-view of insight is developing within oneself. This is gaining insight as to development (*bhāvanā paṭivedha*). This knowledge, however, does not come about by direct observation; as it is experienced personally, reflective consideration will reveal that development has taken place within oneself.

Thus, as explained above, at each instant of noting and knowing, the truth of suffering is rightly and well understood; this is true realisation (*pariññā paṭivedha*). The truth of the cause is momentarily inhibited; this is accomplishment of insight through abandoning (*pahāna paṭivedha*). Momentary cessation is realised through realisation; this is realising it through insight (*sacchikiriya paṭivedha*), and the path of insight is developed, which is insight through development (*bhāvanā paṭivedha*). Thus the four truths are comprehended at every instance of noting: the truth of suffering by observing the object; the cause, cessation, and the path are accomplished by abandoning, realisation, and developing.

The path of insight, in this way, comprehends the four truths, as it should be comprehended and when it becomes fully accomplished and mature the Noble Path appears and nibbāna is realised. At that Path moment, the Noble Path headed by Right View is fully established. The Noble Path appears only once. By this single appearance it accomplishes the task of eradicating the defilements that should be eliminated, the cause of suffering, by understanding rightly and comprehensively the truth of suffering, and also developing the truth of the path. In this way it is said that the Right View of the Noble Path comprehends the four truths all at once.

Four Truths Comprehended Simultaneously

This is how it comes about: when the truth of cessation, otherwise called nibbāna is comprehended through actual realisation, the task of comprehending the truth of suffering is accomplished by recognising that the mundane mind, matter, and mental formations, which arise and perish incessantly are indeed suffering. Having recognised them as the embodiment of suffering, there can be no liking, craving, or attachment for them.

The abandonment of craving occurs in four stages: by virtue of attaining the first path, craving that would lead to the lower realms and craving that would cause rebirth for more than seven fortunate existences (*sugati*) of the sensual realm, cannot arise. By virtue of the second path, grosser forms of sensual craving and craving that will cause rebirth more than twice in fortunate existences of the sensual realm are removed. The third path eradicates the subtler forms of craving. By virtue of the fourth path, lust for the realms

of form (*rūpa rāga*), and formless realms (*arūpa rāga*), otherwise called craving for existence cannot arise. It must be noted that the craving for existence that still persists in Non-returners is not accompanied by the wrong-view of eternalism (*sassata ditṭhi*).

Such non-arising of craving amounts to accomplishment of comprehension by way of abandoning. With regard to the Noble Paths, as they are experienced in oneself, comprehension is accomplished by way of development. Therefore, the Commentary says: “Concerning the three truths of suffering, its cause, and the Path, comprehension is accomplished by way of full and right understanding (*pariññā*); by way of abandoning (*pahāna*), and by way of developing (*bhāvanā*).”

As explained above, the Noble Path Knowledge, through realising the truth of cessation, accomplishes the task of comprehending the three remaining truths. Likewise, insight knowledge, by contemplating and knowing the truth of suffering, accomplishes the task of comprehending the three remaining truths as well.

I have summarised these in the following mnemonic: “When the Path sees one truth, it comprehends all four.”

When the path of insight, which is developed to contemplate and know the truth of suffering, becomes fully strengthened, the Noble Eightfold Path becomes established and rushes into element of nibbāna where all sufferings connected with physical and mental conditioned objects, and all sufferings in connection with the mental formations of the knowing mind, cease. With the cessation of craving, comes the cessation of suffering, and the Path realises this cessation.

Cessation of craving is accompanied by cessation of all sufferings of the aggregates. Therefore, at the moment of establishment of the Noble Path, the objecting of contemplation is not just the cessation of craving, but the cessation of all sufferings of the aggregates. What is taught in the teaching about the cessation of craving must be understood to include the cessation of all sufferings of the mental formations, because only cessation of all sufferings of mental formations constitutes the real nibbāna, the truth of cessation of suffering. Therefore, nibbāna has been defined as the cessation of all mental formations. Thus establishment of the Noble Path is evident only in the sense of having arrived at the stage where all mind, matter, and mental formations cease to exist, and become void.

Insight Is Also a Constituent of the Path

Because it leads to the cessation of all conditioned suffering the Noble Path has been given the full title of the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipadā ariyasaccam*). However, without the path of insight, by itself it cannot attain nibbāna where all suffering ceases. In accordance with one's perfections, only after one has practised insight meditation, many times, many hours, many days, many months, with the momentum derived from insight, the Noble Path appears as if it has emerged out of the path of insight itself. It is for this reason that the path of insight is called the preliminary path, the precursor to the Noble Path, which should be regarded as the ultimate goal. Although the path is viewed then as consisting of two sections, the precursor and the ultimate goal, its development is brought about as one continuous process of endeavour. Hence, the Sammohavinodanī Commentary states that the path of insight should be regarded as a basic constituent part of the path leading to cessation: "The said eight path factors are the supramundane Noble Path with eight constituent parts. This Noble Path together with the mundane path of insight should be enumerated as the path leading to the end of suffering."

What is meant here is, although the truth of the path of the four noble truths is a supramundane path, it cannot arise by itself without the preliminary path of insight. Only after developing the path of insight, and when insight knowledge is fully accomplished, the Noble Path appears. Therefore the Noble Path together with its precursor, which has to be developed as an initial step, is called the path leading to the end of suffering. To summarise: developing the three paths, the basic, preliminary, and Noble Paths, leads straight to nibbāna.

I have now dealt adequately with the truth of the path, so I will terminate the discourse here.

May all you good people in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this Great Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, be able to develop the path of insight, otherwise called the preliminary path, together with the Noble Path, otherwise called the truth of the path. and soon attain soon the truth of cessation, otherwise called nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part Seven

Delivered on Sunday 10th March, 1963.¹

This series of discourses on the Dhammacakka Sutta was disrupted after the last lecture given on the full-moon day of November 1962, as I have been visiting other centres. On this full moon day of March, I will resume my discourses on the Dhammacakka Sutta. In Part Six, I dealt with the truth of the path. Today I will go on to consider the knowledge that it is the truth (*saccā ñāṇa*), the knowledge that a certain duty with regard to this truth has to be performed (*kicca ñāṇa*), and the knowledge that that duty has been achieved (*kata ñāṇa*).

Knowledge Regarding the Truth of Suffering

“Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasacca’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This is the Noble Truth of Suffering. Monks, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetrative insight, and light.”

This is how knowledge that it is the truth arises with regard to the truth of suffering. In earlier discourses I explained the truth of suffering as, “Birth is suffering,” *etc.* I will reiterate a little to make it clearer. The word “This” in “This is the Noble Truth of Suffering,” refers to various categories of suffering starting with birth, and ending with the aggregates of attachment. Here, the essential item is the aggregates of attachment, which is mostly just learnt from books. There are only a few who understand it as a personal experience, which of course is the main point. I will reiterate this to show how the aggregates of attachment should be understood by personal experience.

Whatever becomes prominent at every instant of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking constitutes the aggregates of attachment. The Noble Ones see in these objects only as dreadful pain and suffering; the ordinary common people view them otherwise. They do not consider them as the embodiment of trouble and suffering, but as pleasant and good. They think it pleasant to see beautiful sights, to hear what they want to hear and to listen to sweet, sonorous voices. Likewise it is pleasant for them to smell

¹ The Full moon day of Tabaung 1324 M.E. (The New Year is in April, ed.)

fragrant odours, to taste delicious food, and to enjoy delightful sensations of touch. Beings of the sensual plane regard the sensation of touch as the most delightful. It is a delight, too, to indulge in fantasies and daydreams. It would be terrible for them, a great loss, if everything, including their daydreams, were to vanish all at once. As a matter of fact, all that is seen, heard, *etc.*, are the aggregates of attachment, the truth of suffering. Insight meditation is practised to bring home this truth of suffering, by realising their true, dreadful nature of impermanence, *etc.*, due to incessant arising and perishing.

As for the Blessed One, having fully accomplished the path of insight, he had seen the best, the noblest bliss of all — nibbāna — by virtue of attaining the knowledge of Arahantship, and having seen the foremost and the noblest nibbāna, he saw in the the aggregates of attachment only dreadful pain and suffering. This perception came to him, not after hearing about it from others, nor from the practices he learnt from the recluses Āḷāra and Udaka. This came about by direct personal knowledge after developing the Noble Eightfold Path. That is why he declared, “Concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, *etc.*”

With these words he professed also that he had indeed become a Fully Enlightened One, a Sammāsambuddha, who had sought and found the truth by virtue of personal realisation and direct knowledge, unaided by instructions or guidance from any source. Such an open profession was indeed necessary. In those days, self-mortification such as abstaining from taking food, *etc.*, practised by Nigaṇṭha ascetics, was greatly esteemed as a holy and noble practice. The group of five ascetics themselves were earlier under the impression that it was so. Thus only when the Blessed One openly declared that he had discovered the practice and knowledge, “not through hearing from others, nor through speculation and logical reasoning, but by his own realisation, by personal experience, and direct knowledge,” his audience became convinced of his having gained Supreme Enlightenment, as having become a true Buddha.

To gain direct intuitive knowledge without outside assistance is the exclusive domain of Enlightened Buddhas and Pacceka Buddhas. The disciples of the Blessed One reached such stages of realisation and knowledge only by listening to the teachings of the Buddha and cultivating them through practice. Nowadays, too, such

knowledge, if desired, may be acquired by developing them through practice in accordance with the teachings enshrined in teachings such as the Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta. By practising as taught in these discourses, the aggregates of attachment will be seen as they truly are — mere suffering and pain. The Buddha’s proclamation was intended also to provoke the group of five ascetics to make the effort to see the true nature of the the aggregates of attachment.

In the Buddha’s declaration mentioned above, the development of extraordinary knowledge was described as “Vision arose, knowledge arose, wisdom arose, penetrative insight arose, light arose,” five descriptions given for a single form of knowledge. The Saṃyutta Commentary states: “Vision, knowledge, *etc.*, are synonyms meaning the same thing, knowledge. Because of the faculty of seeing, knowledge is termed vision; because of the faculty of knowing, it is termed knowledge; because of analysing in several ways, it is termed wisdom; because of penetrating, it is termed penetrative insight; because of shedding light it is termed illumination.”

The Paṭisambhidāmagga explains these terms similarly. The Pāḷi word “*cakkhu*” conveys the idea of seeing, hence vision, Various Pāḷi words are employed for the purpose of conveying the desired meaning or concept to different audiences, the Commentary explains. Thus to describe the knowledge that sees clearly as with the physical eye, it is termed vision. To give an illustration, a man who has been blind for several years regains his eye sight through application of right medicine or operation by an eye specialist. He did not see anything before treatment; now he sees everything very clearly. Likewise, before the meditator has developed insight knowledge or path knowledge he or she was living under the delusion that the five aggregates of attachment, which embody suffering, are good and pleasant. However, by constant noting at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, insight becomes strengthened, and the meditator realises clearly that the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, otherwise known as the aggregates of attachment, are really dreadful suffering because of their nature of incessant arising and perishing. It is like gaining eye-sight after being blind. With the development of path knowledge, his realisation of the true nature of suffering will be even sharper. Thus because it sees clearly as if by the eye, it is called vision.

With regard to “knowledge arose (*ñāṇaṃ udapādi*),” the Pāli term “*ñāṇa*” connotes knowing, hence knowledge. As to “wisdom arose (*paññā udapādi*),” the Paṭisambhidāmagga states that “*paññā*” connotes knowing analytically in various ways. In connection with insight meditation, while noting rising, falling, *etc.*, mind and matter are known separately as stiff movement and knowing mind. The uninitiated cannot know this distinction by personal experience.

The meditator can also differentiate the cause from the effect. He or she knows every fresh arising distinct from its vanishing. He or she knows that, because of incessant arising and perishing, the aggregates are impermanent, and dreadful suffering; and that they arise and perish of their own accord, not subject to anyone’s control. He or she knows clearly that they are not self, but insubstantial. This is not a vague, indistinct knowledge, just a glimmer of understanding, but a distinct, clear, definite comprehension as if observed in the palm of one’s hand. Such knowledge is described as knowing analytically in various ways; hence wisdom.

In “penetrative insight arose (*vijjā udapādi*),” the word “*vijjā*” means penetration. It should not be confused with the word for a person accomplished in mantras (*vijjadhāra*), who is described in books as having the power of flying through space. Here, *vijjā* denotes not a person, but the penetrative faculty; hence penetrative insight. Penetrative insight is a subtle and profound state. Here, I must relate an incident that happened in about 1938. During a discussion I had with the presiding Sayādaw of our village monastery, I happened to inform him that wisdom arose while taking note of the phenomenon of arising and perishing at the moment of its occurrence. The Sayādaw could not accept this kind of cognition as wisdom (*paññā*). He maintained that wisdom is that which is penetrative; only knowing penetratingly is wisdom. When asked how one should bring about “knowing penetratingly,” he hesitated for some time and then pronounced, “Well, knowing penetratingly is knowing penetratingly.” Knowing penetratingly is derived from the Pāli word “*paṭivedha*,” penetrating through. It is akin to “*sambodhāya*,” in order to know penetratingly as explained in Part Two of my discourse. Hidden by a screen or a wall, objects cannot be seen. However, when a hole is made in the screen or a window in the wall is opened, objects become visible through

these openings. Likewise, this knowledge penetrates through the veil of delusion. When concealed by delusion, what is seen, heard, *etc.*, is not known as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self; it is believed to be permanent, pleasant, and a self, being deceived by ignorance and delusion. When insight matures, clear knowledge arises as if the veil of delusion has been pierced. Such cognition is called “knowing penetratingly.” The Blessed One declared that such penetrative insight had arisen in him.

According to the Paṭisambhidāmagga, in light arose (*aloko udapādi*) light (*aloko*) is just a term used to denote illuminating. Here, light does not mean just ordinary light as seen by the human eye. It refers to the knowledge that discerns all phenomena clearly, and distinctly. Previously, the true nature of the three characteristics are not known as if they are shrouded in darkness. When insight knowledge and path knowledge have been developed, their true nature becomes apparent. Such cognition is therefore metaphorically described as “light arose.”

This single form of extraordinary knowledge was described in five ways: vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetrative insight, light to facilitate clearer understanding by various types of audience. This teaching is designed to meet the requirements of the listeners. It is just like our employing two or three synonyms in place of a single word so that our audience may catch the meaning of what we say through one word or another.

The Pāli words and their meanings explained above are all concerned with the knowledge of truth. I have dealt sufficiently with the knowledge of truth, and will go on to the duty that should be accomplished with regard to the truth of suffering.

Duty Regarding the Truth of Suffering

“Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyya’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This Noble Truth of Suffering should be well understood. Monks, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetrative insight, and light.”

This is how knowledge had arisen as to what should be done with regard to the noble truth of suffering. It should be carefully noted that the duty to be performed with regard to this truth is to comprehend it rightly and well, to understand it completely. For the meditator who aspires to attain the Path and its Fruition, nibbāna, it is incumbent upon him or her to strive to grasp the truth of suffering rightly and well, that is, he or she should understand fully each aspect of this truth from birth to the aggregates of attachment.

In the aspects of this truth of suffering such as birth, the essential factor is the five aggregates of attachment. By knowing these five aggregates of attachment as they really are, the task of comprehending the truth of suffering rightly, fully, and well is accomplished. In the Khandha Sutta¹ of the Saccā Saṃyutta it states: “What, monks, is the truth of suffering? It should be answered that the five aggregates are the truth of suffering.”

I have given a detailed exposition on the five aggregates in [Part Four](#) of this discourse. Whatever appears at the six sense-doors at the time of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, constitutes the five aggregates. These should be experienced personally by noting every phenomenon at the six doors as it occurs. Through such efforts the coarseness, roughness, smoothness, and softness of the earth element (*pathavi-dhātu*) should be experienced; so too the cohesiveness, the fluidity, and moistness of the water element (*āpo-dhātu*); the hotness, coldness, and warmth of the fire element (*tejo-dhātu*), and the stiffness, pressure, and motion of the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*) should be experienced. All of these should be separately and precisely understood through personal experience. How this is to be done has been fully explained before. Briefly it consists of giving concentrated attention to the sensation of touch that becomes apparent at any spot on one’s body. One of the four primary elements will then announce its existence through its intrinsic characteristics.

After knowing the four primary elements, when noting seeing, hearing, *etc.*, the physical base on which they depend, the material objects of sight and sound, and mental aggregates of consciousness together with their concomitants become apparent. At each noting of the phenomenon of “rising, falling, sitting, touching, knowing, feeling stiff, feeling hot, feeling painful; hearing, seeing,” the

¹ S.v.425.

meditator personally perceives the fresh arising followed by instant perishing of both the objects of awareness as well as the noting mind. Thus the meditator knows definitely that it is impermanent because it perishes after each arising (*hutvā abhābato aniccā*); he or she knows that it is dreadful suffering because it oppresses by incessant arising and passing away (*udayabhya paṭipilanatthena dukkhā*); he or she knows that it is not self, not amenable to one's control because it happens on its own accord, and is not subject to one's will (*avasa vattanatthena anattā*). Personal knowledge gained in this way by observing the phenomena of arising and vanishing and noting the three characteristics is knowing the truth of suffering comprehensively, rightly, and well (*pariññeyya*).

The Blessed One came to the realisation, without having heard from anybody else that the truth of suffering, otherwise called the aggregates of attachment, which is actually arising and vanishing, should be comprehensively, rightly, and well understood. Hence the statement, "Concerning things not heard before by me, vision arose, ... etc. Realisation came only after hearing the Dhamma from the Blessed One or from the other disciples of the Buddha. In spite of a definite statement in the Dhammacakka Sutta that the truth of suffering should be comprehensively, rightly, and well apprehended some consider it unnecessary to realise the truth of suffering or the five aggregates by noting the rising and vanishing of the phenomenon that is actually occurring. They take it that just learning from hearsay about mind and matter and about the three characteristics will serve the purpose. We can only express our sympathy for such people.

The knowledge that a certain duty with regard to the truth of suffering has to be performed (*kicca ñāṇa*) is then the realisation that the truth of suffering or the aggregates should be fully, rightly, and well understood through personal observation. It is knowing what duty should be performed concerning the truth of suffering. This realisation comes before the attainment of the Noble Path. Even before starting the practice of meditation, one must realise that one has to know comprehensively the three characteristics by noting when seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking. One must be aware of this task, too, while practising insight. Only then can one devote full attention to the arising and dissolution of the

aggregates of attachment and develop insight knowledge completely. Our disciples, the meditators here practising Satipaṭṭhāna, have accomplished this duty since the time of taking instructions from us on meditation methods, having learnt then that whatever appears at the instant of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, should be carefully noted. Also while noting, even if the meditator does not know at first what should be noted, he or she soon comes to know what should be observed. This discernment is knowing the duty to be performed.

I have given much time to this knowledge of the duty to be done because it is very important to know its significance. Now, enough having been said about it, I will proceed to the knowledge that that duty has been achieved.

Achievement Regarding the Truth of Suffering

“Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññāta’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This Noble Truth of Suffering has been fully, rightly, and well understood. Thus, monks, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetrative insight, and light.”

Being aware of the truth of suffering, otherwise known as the aggregates of attachment by noting seeing, hearing, *etc.*, and constantly knowing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, constitutes insight knowledge. By insight alone, however, the task of fully and rightly comprehending is not yet fully accomplished. Perception as permanent, pleasant, and self is still possible concerning those objects that one fails to note. It is only when insight knowledge is fully accomplished and the knowledge of the Noble Path becomes developed that the peace of nibbāna is experienced. Only when that happens can it be said that one’s knowledge of the three characteristics is complete and lasting. This is the achievement of the task of fully and rightly comprehending the truth of suffering.

Even then the knowledge of Stream-winning is not yet adequate to fully accomplish this task. Only by realising Arahantship can it be said that the truth of suffering has been rightly and fully understood. For the Blessed One, the task had been fully accom-

plished since the time of gaining Arahantship and Enlightenment. Hence he proclaimed that the task of fully understanding the truth of suffering had been completed. Vision *etc.*, arose that the task had been completed and nothing remained to be done.

The meditators presently engaged in the practice of meditation also have this purpose in view — to fully and rightly understand the truth of suffering, and ultimately to complete the task by attaining Arahantship. After attaining Arahantship, the realisation will come to them, through retrospection, that the task has been fully achieved.

I have now dealt with all the three knowledges — knowledge of the truth (*saccā ñāṇa*), knowledge of the duty (*kicca ñāṇa*), and knowledge of achievement (*kata ñāṇa*) with regard to the truth of suffering. To summarise:—

1. Discerning at the moment of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, that all the phenomena of origination and dissolution are dreadful suffering, the truth of suffering, constitutes knowledge of the truth (*saccā ñāṇa*).
2. Discerning that this truth of suffering should be rightly and fully understood by heedful noting constitutes knowledge of the duty (*kicca ñāṇa*).
3. Knowing through retrospection that the truth of suffering has been rightly and fully understood constitutes the knowledge of achievement (*kata ñāṇa*).

Of the three knowledges, the knowledge of the truth appears while engaged in insight meditation when the meditator realises that the phenomena of origination and dissolution are mere suffering. This occurs prior to the advent of the Noble Path. At the moment of the Noble Path too, seeing the peace of nibbāna, this knowledge arises by realising the truth of suffering in all the phenomena of arising and dissolution. After the advent of the Noble Path too, this knowledge is evolved by retrospection. Thus it is the knowledge of the four truths that arises before, after, and at the moment of the Noble path. Actually what is realised at the moment of the Path is only the truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha saccā*). The remaining three truths are said to have been realised by having achieved the task of knowing by penetrative insight (*paṭivedha*).

With regard to the truth of suffering, the moment realisation dawns on the truth of the cessation of suffering, the function of

knowing that unceasing mind and matter are suffering, is accomplished. Accordingly, the Noble Ones (especially the Arahants) who have attained the Path and its Fruition, know by reflection that the ceaseless mind and matter are all suffering. Therefore it is said that the task of penetrative insight, knowing the nature of suffering fully and rightly, is accomplished at the moment of the Path. While practising insight, this knowledge about suffering arises by actually noting the phenomena of origination and dissolution. This is knowing the truth of suffering rightly and well otherwise called true realisation (*pariññā paṭivedha*).

As for knowledge of the duty, that is the realisation that the truth of suffering should be comprehended rightly and well, it must be achieved in advance of the attainment of the Path. It is only by having prior knowledge of what duties should be performed that these duties could be performed for the attainment of the Noble Path.

In the case of the truth of suffering, it must be well understood at an early stage that it is necessary to perceive distinctly the nature of impermanence by noting the phenomenon of origination and dissolution, which is apparent in the aggregates at the time of each occurrence. Only with this prior understanding will the necessary task of observing the phenomenon be performed, and the Path developed after attaining fully mature insight. With regard to the other three Noble Truths, such prior knowledge as to the duties to be performed with regard to each truth is indispensable. Then only can the Noble Path be developed.

Thus, long before the attainment of the Path, there must be the realisation that the truth of suffering should be fully comprehended rightly and well; that the cause of suffering should be abandoned; that the cessation of suffering should be realised, and that the path leading to the cessation of suffering should be developed. Knowing the duties to be performed with regard to each truth must therefore precede far ahead of the advent of the Path.

The knowledge that these duties have been performed comes only after the attainment of Arahantship through reflection that the holy life has been lived (*vusitaṃ brahmacāriyaṃ*); what has to be done has been done (*kataṃ karaniyaṃ*). The knowledge of achievement (*kataññāna*) is the knowledge that knows one's duty has been done. Through realisation of cessation, Arahantship performs three other tasks:

fully and rightly understanding the truth of suffering, abandoning the cause of craving, and developing the path. It is knowledge of achievement that knows that all these four duties have been done.

The above concise statements about the three kinds of knowledge have been made in accordance with the Mūlaṭīkā Subcommentary on the Kathāvatthu. I have adequately dealt with the three knowledges with regard to the truth of suffering. I will go on to the three knowledges regarding the truth of the origin of suffering.

Knowledge Regarding the Origin of Suffering

“Idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasacca’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. Thus, monks, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetrative insight, and light.”

In the passage above “This” refers to sensual craving (*kāma taṇhā*), craving for existence (*bhava taṇhā*), and craving for non-existence (*vibhava taṇhā*), which have already been explained. How suffering originates from them is as follows: sensual craving finds delight in objects of sensual pleasure, which have to be searched and worked for. Some people undergo intense suffering, to the extent of losing their lives even, while in pursuit of the objects of their desires. Any attempt to curb the craving that has arisen also results in suffering and unhappiness. To look and work for things that are not easily attainable is also suffering. The task of looking after the acquired wealth and property is very onerous. Smokers and betel-leaf chewers suffer difficulty when they run short of supplies. People addicted to drink and opium will feel much more under similar circumstances.

Man is born alone. While young, he leads a single life, happily free from encumbrances. When he grows up, he feels the need for a companion. Instigated by sensual craving, he begins to look for one. When he aims for the unattainable he ends up in misery. If at last his wish is fulfilled by getting the companion he needs, the trouble soon starts if they find themselves incompatible. Even when there is concord and harmony in married life, trouble appears if

one of the partners is struck by a serious illness. Attending to a sick person is difficult. In time, death comes to one of the partners, leaving the other lamenting and grieving. It is plain that all these sufferings are rooted in sensual craving.

However, the majority of beings are under the delusion that this craving is the source of happiness. They consider it blissful to enjoy various sensual pleasures. When craving is not aroused, due to the absence of any pleasurable objects, life becomes dull and monotonous for them. To pay visits to monasteries or temples is irksome; to listen to discourses on insight meditation is utterly boring. On the other hand, entertainment such as films and plays provide joy, delight, and merriment. Thus this craving is carefully nurtured by hunting for all available objects of desire. This frantic pursuit of pleasures is made in the belief that they lead to joy and happiness. People only believe this due to ignorance, which is misleading them.

However, what seems to be pleasant and delightful is, in reality, dreadful and horrifying because of its nature of incessant arising and perishing. There is never any surfeit of sense pleasures since craving is insatiable. Even after days, months, and years of enjoying pleasure, craving remains unsatiated. Hence they constantly and earnestly pursue pleasure so that their enjoyment may not be disrupted. When at last, the stock of pleasurable objects and sensations becomes exhausted, great dissatisfaction ensues. This is a short account of how craving gives rise to trouble and suffering in the present life.

However, the real cause of suffering lies in the fact that this craving is responsible for repeated rounds of rebirths. Pleasurable sights and sounds excite delight and craving and this craving gives rise to attachment. Because of attachment, effort has to be put forth for its fulfilment. This constitutes mental formations or becoming (*kamma bhava*). Because of such activities in the fulfilment of desires, and because the impulsion consciousness (*javana*) of the death moment, otherwise called the kamma-forming consciousness (*abhisankhāra viññāṇa*) — which gets its impetus from craving — holds on to the object that appears, then rebirth-consciousness arises immediately after the decease-consciousness. From the moment of rebirth in the new existence, it may be said that all the troubles and tribulations with regard to a new life have begun. All these troubles from the moment of rebirth have their roots in craving. Arahants in

whom craving has been eradicated, do not encounter any more suffering of a new existence. Thus sensual craving is the real cause of suffering such as birth, *etc.*, the truth of the origin of suffering.

Those who aspire for fine material existence (*rūpabhava*) and immaterial existence (*arūpabhava*) strive to attain the appropriate *jhāna*. By virtue of such attainments, they are reborn in the realms of fine material and formless brahmās. As brahmās, they are free from the suffering of physical pain as well as mental afflictions. Their life-span is measured in terms of world-cycles. From the worldly point of view, their life may be deemed as one of happiness. However, when their life-span ends, they face death and suffers the agonies of death. They suffer mental distress, too, for not having their wish of immortality fulfilled. After death too, troubles and tribulations await them in sensual existence for which they are destined. Thus, craving for existence in the brahmā world is also the truth of suffering.

Craving for non-existence after death is also the cause of suffering because it encourages evil deeds in this life. Instead of shrinking from evil actions the annihilationist go to any length in pursuit of them wherever available and take delight in them. Because of such unwholesome kamma, they are reborn in the four lower realms for many existences and undergo the woes and miseries of these existences. It is plain, therefore, that craving for non-existence, arising out of the annihilationist view of life is definitely the truth of the origin of suffering.

All these three types of craving, being the root cause of suffering, the Buddha who had realised them as such declared how he had seen them: "The vision, which saw that this is the Noble truth of origin of suffering, had arisen in me." Knowing that this is the noble truth of origin of suffering is knowledge of the truth (*saccā ñāṇa*). The knowledge that knows this truth arises both before and after the advent of the Noble Path. At the moment of the Path, the function of knowing the truth is accomplished too, by way of relinquishing or abandoning. To summarise, that which knows the four truths before, after, and at the Path moment knowledge of the truth.

Duty Regarding the Origin of Suffering

"Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahātabba'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

“This Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering should be abandoned. Monks, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, penetrative insight, and light.”

If freedom from suffering is desired, the origin of suffering must be eliminated. For example, in order to cure a disease the root cause of the disease must be eradicated by administering suitable medicine. Burmese physicians diagnose the cause of a disease in terms of disorders in blood, wind, bile, and phlegm, climate, food, *etc.* Western physicians trace the cause to various bacteria or viruses. When such causes of disease have been duly diagnosed and then eradicated through proper medical treatment, a complete cure is effected. Likewise, the suffering of repeated rebirths in the cycle of existence may be avoided by removing its root cause, which is craving, the truth of origin of suffering. Therefore, this truth is regarded as something that should be given up (*pahātabba dhamma*).

How is abandonment to be effected? It is vital to know this. If one wishes, “Let craving not appear, let it not arise; I will keep my mind free from craving. I will only have thoughts free from craving,” will it be possible to maintain such a state of mind? People believing in the possibility of doing so should actually try to attain this state of mind and see how long they can maintain it. Will a married man not be harassed by thoughts of love and tenderness for his wife and erotic desires that demand to be fulfilled? Will craving not arise for a cigarette or to chew betel, or for other enjoyments or wealth? These questions cannot be easily dismissed by brushing them aside, arguing that they are concerned with mere trifles, just natural and routine affairs of no importance. We have to suffer the arising of such cravings only because we cannot subdue them. However, the fact remains, and this should be seriously borne in mind, that craving should be eradicated whenever possible.

Actually, there are three kinds of craving that need to be eliminated: the craving that motivates physical and vocal actions (*vīṭikkama kilesā*), that which excites the mind to revel in fantasies (*pariyuṭṭhāna kilesā*), that which is lying dormant awaiting opportune moment to manifest (*anusaya kilesā*). Of the three, the craving that motivates physical and vocal deeds can be eradicated by morality. A person who is preserving the precepts meticulously does not steal anything belonging to others, even though wanting it; does not commit sexual misconduct (or one who observes chastity does

not indulge in any sexual activity); does not lie, and abstains from intoxicants. Thus one keeps oneself free from active defilements. This is how craving is eliminated by means of morality.

The craving that manifests as imagination and fantasies can be eradicated by concentration. If one is constantly engaged in the practice of meditation such as mindfulness of breathing, one keeps oneself free from desire for, and imagination about, sensual objects. Unless thus absorbed in one of the meditation exercises, if the mind were left free to roam, it would engage in thinking about desirable sense-objects, yearning mostly for sensual pleasure. If anyone believes that they could keep the mind free from craving for sensual pleasures, they do not know their own mind.

In fact, even while occupied incessantly with meditation, before the power of concentration gets strengthened, thoughts of sensual pleasures keep on coming up. Only when absorption is attained through meditation are the grosser thoughts of sensual pleasure brought to cessation, but even then, only for the duration of the absorption. This is how concentration removes the craving for sensual pleasures by putting them away to a distance (*vikkhambhana pahāna*).

Craving for existence and craving for non-existence persist even in a person who has *jhānic* attainments. They remain with some brahmās too. Therefore craving for existence and non-existence cannot be eradicated by tranquillity meditation. It goes without saying then that ordinary persons uninitiated in concentration and meditation are not free from the craving for their own life and existence. However, such uninstructed people are not aware that their delight in life and existence is the defilement of craving. They even teach the extreme wrong-view that “the mind can be kept as it is free from defilements, and the mind free from defilements is nibbāna.” This is definitely contrary to the teaching of the Buddha.

The craving which has not actually arisen yet, but will appear when the right conditions prevail is called latent defilement (*anusaya kilesā*). This is of two kinds: the potential defilement that lies latent in sense-objects (*ārammaṇanusaya*), and the latent defilements lying dormant in oneself (*santānānusaya*).

There may be objects that manifest themselves at the moment of seeing or hearing, but one fails to note their three characteristics. On retrospection, however, defilements can arise in connection

with them. Such defilements are known as latent in sense-objects (*ārammaṇanusaya*). These defilements can be expelled by insight knowledge, but insight can remove only the defilements that may arise in the objects that are contemplated. In the objects that escape contemplation, the latent defilements remain unaffected.

The defilements that have not yet been eradicated by the Path and is awaiting opportune moment to arise in the continuum of aggregates of a person is known as latent defilements lying dormant in oneself (*santānānusaya*). These defilements can be removed only by means of Path knowledge. It is to facilitate the elimination of these defilements that insight meditation has to be developed.

Latent Defilements Actually Exist

In spite of definite statements in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma texts regarding the existence of latent defilements, some assert that there is no such thing as latent defilements — it is only through mental retentiveness that defilements arise. This is disrespectful to the teachings of the Buddha.

Just consider for a moment. In the pre-adolescent children, craving for sensual pleasure in the form of taking delight in the opposite sex, has not yet manifested. It is not because they are devoid of defilements, only because the moment is not yet opportune for this defilement to arise. It is lying dormant in them to arise when the right conditions prevail. It is common knowledge that, on reaching adolescence, the mere sight and sound of the opposite sex at once arouses sexual desire in them. It just happens spontaneously and not because they have previously seen or heard about its occurrence and kept it in mind. Actually it happens because there are latent defilements lying dormant in these youths, which now finds opportunity to arise.

Again take the case of some people who have had implicit faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. However, when influenced by teachers of other religions, they begin to entertain doubts about the Triple Gem. Some even change their faith to embrace wrong-views. Doubts and wrong-views arise in them, not because of mental retentiveness; they have been all the time lying in them, not yet having been removed by the Noble Path.

The Noble Ones of the Buddha's time had their doubts and wrong-views eliminated by the path of Stream-winning so that no

teacher, not even Sakka or Māra could influence them to embrace wrong-views, to entertain doubts about the Triple Gem. It was because the dormant defilements in them had been removed by the Noble Path.

The good people who are listening to this discourse on the Dhammacakka Sutta should bear in mind that latent defilements are lurking in them, waiting for an opportune moment to arise, and that craving, which is the real cause of suffering, should be eliminated by the Noble Path through practising insight meditation.

Knowing that craving is the Dhamma that should be eradicated is knowledge of the duty regarding the truth of the origin of suffering (*kicca ñāṇa*). This knowledge should be developed prior to the advent of the Noble Path. Thus it is prior knowledge of what should be known, what should be abandoned, what should be realised, and what should be developed. To the Blessed One, this knowledge appeared without having heard it from anyone. Therefore he admitted: "This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering, which should be abandoned. Thus, monks, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light." Then the Buddha continued to explain how he had accomplished the task of abandoning.

Achievement Regarding the Origin of Suffering

"Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahātabba'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

"This noble truth of the origin of suffering has been abandoned. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light."

This is an account of how retrospection on the completion of the task of abandonment took place after he had abandoned what should be abandoned, the craving otherwise called the truth of the origin of suffering. This knowledge of completion of the task that should be performed is known as knowledge of achievement (*kata ñāṇa*).

What is specially noteworthy in respect of the truth of the origin of suffering is that the four Paths cognise nibbāna by realising it.

At the first instance of such cognition, craving leading to the lower realms is eliminated; at the second instance grosser forms of craving for sensual pleasures get eradicated. On the third occasion, the subtler forms of sensual craving disappear. All the remaining craving is completely eradicated when nibbāna is cognised for the fourth time. Such eradication of craving is called knowing the truth of the origin of suffering by penetrative insight by abandoning (*pahāna paṭivedha*). The act of abandoning constitutes knowing what should be known by the Noble Path. Craving is what should be abandoned. This abandonment is penetrative insight.

The knowledge of achievement is also important. The goal of meditation is the removal of defilements including craving. Attainment of higher knowledge, accomplishment of what should be done, is complete and assured only when craving and other defilements are eradicated. It is essential to scrutinize oneself to see whether one is truly free from defilements. If even the lowest stage attainment, that of Stream-winner is claimed, craving that prompts unwholesome kamma leading to the lower realms should have been removed; one should also be free from the craving that may instigate transgression of the five precepts. The delight accompanied by attachment to the wrong-view that there is a living entity, a self, should have been discarded too. Only when one is fully liberated from all these cravings, the claim of having attained Stream-winning may be substantiated, otherwise no claim for any such attainment is admissible.

I have dealt fully with the three knowledges with regard to the truth of the origin of suffering, I will go on to consider the three knowledges regarding the truth of cessation (*nirodha saccā*).

Knowledge Regarding the Truth of Cessation

“Idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasacca’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light.”

“This” in the above passage refers to the complete cessation of craving, otherwise called the truth of the origin of suffering. As already explained, when craving is abolished, all suffering of mind, matter, and mental formations ceases. The Buddha said that the knowledge that knows that this cessation is the truth of the cessation of suffering, had arisen in him. This knowledge of the truth arises before and after the Path and is realised at the moment of the Path.

As to how this knowledge arises before the Path, disciples acquire this knowledge through learning from others, by hearsay. The Blessed One, however had gained this knowledge by his own intuition even prior to the attainment of Stream-winning. Thus he said: “Concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, *etc.*” At the moment of the Path, this knowledge of the truth is the same as knowledge of the Noble path, which cognises nibbāna by realisation.

Duty Regarding the Truth of Cessation

“Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabba’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This is the noble truth of cessation of suffering, which should be realised. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light.”

This knowledge knows that the truth of cessation, nibbāna, the cessation of craving, should be realised. It is known as the knowledge of duty (*kiṅca ñāṇa*), since it knows what duty should be performed regarding the truth of cessation. This is how realisation takes place:–

At the moment of the firm establishment of the **knowledge of equanimity about formations** (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), while observing one of the phenomena of origination and dissolution, the pace of cognition gets faster and faster until the objects being contemplated as well as the knowing consciousness plunge into a state of cessation where all mental formations cease. At the time of realising the cessation of all conditioned things, craving also ceases. Thus cessation of craving is called the truth of cessation (*nirodha saccā*), which is cognised by the Noble Path through

realisation. Such cognition is known as penetrative insight by realisation (*sacchikiriyā paṭivedha*).

The truth of cessation is the truth to be realised. Such realisation is known as penetrative insight by realisation. The purpose of noting every instance of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, and knowing is to accomplish the task of penetrative insight by realising cessation. The Buddha accomplished the function of penetrative insight by realising nibbāna through the attainment of Arahantship on the “Seat of Enlightenment” at the foot of the Bodhi tree. He continued to recount how he had developed the knowledge of achievement, which reflects on the completion of the task, as follows:–

Achievement Regarding the Truth of Cessation

“Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabbaṃnti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, which has been realised. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light.”

This is an account of how retrospection on the completion of the task took place after he had realised the truth of cessation by means of the knowledge of Arahantship. I will deal next with the three knowledges regarding Path knowledge.

Knowledge Regarding the Truth of the Path

“Idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃnti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light.”

This truth has a long name, but the Commentaries shorten it to just “The truth of the path (*magga saccā*).” I will use the short title in my discourse. Knowing that the Noble Eightfold Path is the truth

of the path leading to the cessation of suffering, to nibbāna, is called knowledge of the truth (*saccā ñāṇa*). This knowledge arises before, after, and at the moment of the Noble Path.

Disciples of the Buddha who have not yet attained the Path learn about this truth only from hearing about it. Ordinary individuals have not yet realised it by personal experience. The Commentaries say, “The truth of the path is something to be desired, to aspire to, and to be appreciated.” Learning thus through hearing, the mind should be inclined towards it. The preliminary task with respect to the truth of the path is accomplished just by inclining the mind towards it. Likewise regarding the truth of cessation, nibbāna, which ordinary individuals cannot perceive, the Commentaries say that it requires only to incline the mind towards it as something to be desired, to aspire to, to be appreciated. By doing this, the preliminary duty to be performed regarding the truth of cessation is accomplished.

It must therefore be remembered that truth of the path need not be thought about or contemplated. Likewise nibbāna needs no prior contemplation or thinking about. As for the Buddha, just as he had previously arrived at the knowledge of cessation through intuitive insight, he also gained knowledge of the truth of the path through intuition. That is why he said, “Concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, *etc.*” Only at the moment of attaining the Path, the truth of cessation is perceived by realisation. Dhamma realised in this way actually appears in one’s person and as such the task of developing it is accomplished. This is knowledge by development (*bhāvanā paṭivedha*). The truth of the path should be developed in oneself, which is knowledge by development.

What is meant here is that when the Noble Path appears it amounts to seeing the Path. It also means that the task of knowing it is achieved at the same time. As the Noble Path has been developed in oneself, retrospection will reveal it very clearly. However, it is not possible to develop the Noble Path immediately. One must begin by developing the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*) as a first step. For this reason insight meditation is to be regarded as the correct practice that leads to cessation. I already mentioned in [Part Six](#) how the Sammohavinodanī Commentary also recommends that insight should be regarded in this way.

Duty Regarding the Truth of the Path

“Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabba’nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhum udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.”

“This noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering should be developed. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light.”

Knowing that the truth of the path is something that should be developed within oneself is called knowledge of the duty. It is the knowledge that knows what should be done with respect to the truth of the path. It should be developed within oneself. This must be definitely remembered.

That the truth of the path is something that should be developed was taught for the first time by the Buddha in this Dhammacakka Sutta. Thus to develop the path is to practise for the attainment of nibbāna in accordance with the wishes of the Blessed One. However, the practice cannot be started with the development of the truth of the path straight away. One must start with preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*) otherwise called the path of insight (*vipassanā magga*). In order to develop the truth of the path then, one must begin with developing the path of insight.

To develop this path of insight, the truth of suffering must be contemplated. The truth of suffering means the aggregates of attachment, which have been extensively explained in Part Four. Contemplating the aggregates that appear at every instant of their arising, analytical knowledge of body and mind is first developed. This is followed by understanding the law of cause and effect, or the [knowledge by discerning conditionality](#). As one proceeds, one comes to know the nature of impermanence, the constant arising and passing away of mind and matter. Since it arises just to perish the next moment, it is unstable, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, since it arises and vanishes of its own accord. Personal realisation of these realities is right-view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*). It has been explained before that when right-view is developed, right-thought and the other path factors are also developed. How to develop these path factors

has also been described before. Briefly, it consists in noting any of the sensations of touch that one experiences. To simplify the practice, we recommend starting with contemplation of the rising and falling of the abdomen. While in the process of observing the abdominal movements, the meditator may happen to start thinking about something else. He or she should make a note of such thoughts too as they arise. He or she should also note the painful sensations such as stiffness, feeling hot, feeling painful, itching, *etc.*, as they arise. Changing of bodily movements should also be noted as they occur. Attention should be given to any extraordinary thing, seen or heard. Thus while observing every phenomenon, at every instant of noting, knowledge of reality as it is, right-view, and the path factors of insight will be developed. When insight becomes fully established, the Eightfold Noble Path is evolved thus contemplating the actual phenomena of the aggregates, the truth of suffering, amounts to the development of the Noble Eightfold Path.

To recapitulate: Only by developing the preliminary path, otherwise called the path of insight, can the Noble Path be attained. To develop the path of insight, the phenomena of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, which are the truth of suffering, should be carefully observed. At every instance of noting these phenomena the Noble Eightfold Path is being developed. Therefore, I have composed the mnemonic:

- Developing the basic, preliminary, and noble paths leads to nibbāna.

Some may have previously been under the wrong impression that the purpose is served by acquiring academic knowledge of the phenomena of the aggregates and the nature of impermanence, *etc.* Only when they have practised meditation in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna method and gained extraordinary experiences, do they begin to see their previous error. They then openly state their realisation that unless they engage in the actual practice of watching the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, at the instant of their occurrence, the duty of fully and rightly understanding (*pariññā kicca*) the truth of suffering remains unaccomplished. The task of developing the Noble Eightfold Path also remains unfinished. These are the admissions made by learned people well-versed in

the scriptures. They have, by personal experience, come to understand the right way leading to higher attainments.

The Buddha's teaching embodied in this Dhammacakka Sutta "This Eightfold Path has to be developed by contemplating mental and physical phenomena at the moment of their occurrence," should be noted with all seriousness. It should be carefully and steadfastly remembered too that, "Knowledge of the duty concerning the truth of the path should be acquired from learning prior to the advent of the Noble Path; only then could the path of insight be developed by observing the five aggregates as they occur; only by developing the path of insight, could the Noble Path, which is the truth of the path that should be developed, could be developed and nibbāna realised.

Achievement Regarding the Truth of the Path

"Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvita'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

"This is the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering, which has been developed. Thus, monk, concerning things not heard before, there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom; there arose in me penetrative insight and light."

This is the admission made by the Blessed One how the knowledge of achievement had arisen through retrospection, having achieved the development of truth of the path until the attainment of Arahantship. The three knowledges with respect to the four truths have now been completely explained in twelve ways, that is three kinds of knowledge for each of the four noble truths.

To recapitulate:

1. Knowing the Four Noble Truths before, after and at the moment of the path is knowledge of the truth (*saccā ñāṇa*). Knowing that this is the truth of suffering, this is the truth of the origin of suffering, this is the truth of the cessation of suffering, and this is the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering is knowledge of the truth. This knowledge also appears in advance of attaining the Path. For disciples, knowledge of the truth in respect of the truth of cessation and the truth of the path is acquired before the path, is only hearsay. The truth of cessation is perceived also

through realisation at the moment of the Path. The remaining three Paths are perceived at the moment of the Path by accomplishing the tasks of fully and rightly understanding, giving up and developing, that is, by accomplishing the three duties (*tisu kiccatō*), as the Commentaries say. How these are perceived after the attainment of the Path is very clear and needs no elaboration.

2. Prior knowledge of what should be known, what should be realised, and what should be developed is knowledge of the duty (*kicca ñāṇa*). Knowing that suffering should be fully and rightly comprehended, that craving should be abandoned, that cessation should be realised, and that the Path should be developed within oneself, constitutes knowledge of the duty regarding the four truths. This knowledge arises before insight meditation starts as well as during the period of practice prior to the advent of the Noble Path.

3. Knowing that the necessary duty has been accomplished is knowledge of achievement (*kata ñāṇa*). In mundane affairs there is knowledge of completion when any task has been done. Likewise when the four duties of rightly comprehending, giving up, realising, and developing have been fulfilled, this fact is known through retrospection. This is known as knowledge of achievement.

What I have described are the twelve kinds of knowledge made up of four kinds of knowledge of the truth, four kinds of knowledge of the duty, and four kinds of knowledge of achievement. Of these twelve, it is vital to know clearly how knowledge of the truth arises and how the four duties are to be performed, so I will go over them briefly again.

1. The truth of suffering should be rightly and fully comprehended. Such comprehension is true realisation (*pariññā paṭivedha*).
2. The truth of the origin of suffering should be abandoned. Such abandonment is known as penetrative insight by abandoning (*pahāna paṭivedha*).
3. The truth of cessation should be realised. Such realisation is known as penetrative insight by realisation (*sacchikiriyā paṭivedha*).
4. The truth of the Path should be developed in oneself. Such development is known as knowledge by development (*bhāvanā paṭivedha*).

Knowing the Four Truths Simultaneously

At the moment of the Path, only the truth of cessation is perceived through realisation. The remaining three truths are perceived through completion of required tasks by true realisation, penetrative insight by abandoning, and by developing, respectively. Therefore the Commentary says: “The three truths are known by completion of the tasks and cessation is known by realisation.”

When the Path sees one of the four truths all four penetrative insights are accomplished. Just as with the Noble Path, at the moment of practising insight meditation too, by observing the truth of suffering alone as an object, the task of knowing the remaining three truths is also accomplished. It happens in this way:–

The sense-object that is being perceived through meditation as the embodiment of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self cannot arise craving, which would take delight in it under the delusion of permanence, pleasure, and self. This is the temporary abandonment (*tadaṅga pahāna*). The ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*moha*), which would misapprehend the observed object, as well as the mental formations, consciousness, *etc.*, get no opportunity to arise, and consequently cease. This is realisation through temporary cessation (*tadaṅga nirodha*). The path of insight, which perceives everything as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self is being developed at every instant of awareness. This is penetrative insight by developing (*bhāvanā paṭivedha*). Thus, while practising insight meditation, and by knowing the truth of suffering through contemplation, the remaining three truths are perceived by completion of the tasks of abandoning, realisation, and development. Thus it may be said that all four truths are perceived simultaneously.

I have come to the conclusion of the consideration of twelve ways of perceiving the Four Noble Truths in four groups of three knowledges. I will stop here for today.

May all you good people present in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this Great Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma, be able to fully and rightly understand the truth of suffering, by contemplating the phenomena of hearing, seeing, *etc.*, and through whatever path and fruition you have chosen, achieve speedy realisation of nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Part Eight

Delivered on Tuesday 9th April, 1963.¹

My series of lectures on the Dhammacakka Sutta given at this Hall of Glass was disrupted during my visits to Myitkyina and Bhamo. In my last lecture on the full moon day of March, I dealt with twelve kinds of knowledge, three for each of the four truths. Today I will give an account of when the Buddha did not admit, as well as when he did admit, to the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment.

Before the Buddha Claimed Enlightenment

“Yāvakiṅvañca me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivoṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ na suvisuddhaṃ ahoṣi, neva tāvāhaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyyā pajāya sadevamanussāya ‘Anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddho’ti paccaññāsim.”

“As long, monks, as my knowledge of reality and insight regarding the four noble truths in three aspects and twelve ways was not fully clear to me, so long did I not admit to the world with its deities, māras, and brahmās, to the mass of beings with its recluses, brahmins, kings, and human beings, that I had understood, attained, and realised rightly by myself the incomparable, the most excellent, perfect enlightenment, Supreme Buddhahood.”

“*Sammāsambodhi*” is the special knowledge of Arahantship attained only by Buddhas. They gain this knowledge intuitively by their own efforts without any instruction from others. By this knowledge, they rightly and perfectly know everything because of Omniscience (*sabbaññuta ñāṇa*). This exclusive Arahantship of the Buddhas is known as Perfect Enlightenment: **sammā** means perfectly, **saṃ** is by oneself and **bodhi** means enlightenment, thus **sammāsambodhi** is perfectly enlightened by oneself. For Solitary Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, their knowledge of Arahantship is known only as **sambodhi**, enlightened by oneself without the qualifying “*sammā*” — perfectly. The Arahantship of disciples is simply known as **bodhi**, enlightenment without the qualifying “*sammā*” and “*saṃ*.”

The knowledge of Arahantship that arises to Buddhas is known by themselves and perfectly. Hence is called “*sammāsambodhi*.” With

¹ The full-moon Day of Tagu 1324 M.E.

this knowledge Omniscience (*sabbaññuta ñāṇa*) arises simultaneously, which knows all things. Having acquired this faculty of knowing everything, Buddhahood was attained. So perfect enlightenment is the knowledge responsible for the attainment of Buddhahood. Thus in the above passage, the Buddha said that he had not yet admitted the attainment of perfect enlightenment or Buddhahood.

For how long did he withhold this admission of Buddhahood? It was stated that he withheld it as long as his knowledge of the four truths in three aspects of truth, duty, and achievement for each truth, as explained earlier, was not fully clear to him. To fix a definite time limit, it meant that the admission was withheld until the early dawn of the day after the full-moon day of May, just before he attained the path of Arahantship. By this pronouncement of non-admission until then, he made it clear that it was out of the question for him to make the claim of Buddhahood during the earlier period when he was engaged in extreme austerities.

In the above passage, three aspects means truth, duty, and achievement for each of the four truths. By twelve ways is meant the total number of knowledges for all four truths. Arahantship, together with these twelve knowledges, which appeared before and after it, is the knowledge that sees reality as it is (*yathābhūta-ñāṇa*). As long as this knowledge of reality was not fully clear to him, the Blessed One withheld admission of attaining perfect enlightenment.

To the query, "Amidst whom was this admission withheld?" it may be answered, "In this world." In this world, there are powerful deities of sharp intellect; there are also māras who are antagonistic to the teaching as well as brahmās, more powerful and more intelligent than the deities and māras. If attainment of Buddhahood were claimed before his knowledge of the four truths was fully clear to him, it would have been difficult to give satisfactory answers to the questions, inquiries, and disputes that would be raised by these beings. Keeping aside these deities, māras and brahmās who were not in close association with the human beings, there were in the human world, on the surface of the earth, recluses (*samaṇa*), ascetics, and priests (*brāhmaṇa*). There were also kings popularly designated as deities, and the common people. It would have been difficult to reply to the enquiries that they might make. In those days, there were leaders of religious sects such as Purāṇa Kassapa who claimed

to know all about the past, present, and future. When learned people, recluses, and laymen scrutinized their claims, these religious leaders had been found to fall far short of their claims. Had the Buddha pronounced his Buddhahood before actual attainment of perfect enlightenment, he could have faced a similar predicament.

At one time, the Buddha was confronted by King Pasenadi of Kosala who, taking advantage of his regal position, subjected the Buddha to a searching examination, "Gotama, do you also claim to understand, achieve, and realise the incomparable, perfect enlightenment, otherwise known as Buddhahood?" In those days, leaders such as Purāṇa Kassapa, used to make bold claims of Buddhahood to the common people, but when examined by King Pasenadi they had faltered in their claims. "When even elderly leaders of religious sects hesitate to claim Buddhahood, you, Gotama, who are much younger and less experienced in religious life, do you really admit that you have become a Buddha?" The king persisted in his enquiries by repeating the question. Being true a Buddha, he was able to give satisfactory answers to the king. Fully convinced about the Buddha's supreme attainments, King Pasenadi took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha and became a disciple from that time. Having in mind such people who might examine him, he said, "I did not yet declare to the world with its deities, maras, and brahmās and to the mass of beings with recluses and brahmaṇas, kings and people that I had attained Buddhahood."

With these words the Buddha let it be known that as long as he had not become a true Buddha, he should not lay claim to it, and accordingly, did not. However, when the time came when he should pronounce his Buddhahood, he did pronounce it, and this is how he made his declaration.

After the Buddha Claimed Enlightenment

"Yato ca kho me, bhikkhave, imesu catūsu ariyasaccesu evaṃ tiparivaṭṭaṃ dvādasākāraṃ yathābhūtaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ suvisuddhaṃ ahoṣi, athāhaṃ, bhikkhave, sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyyā pajāya sadevamanussāya 'Anuttaraṃ sammāsambodhiṃ abhisambuddho'ti paccaññāsiṃ."

“However, when, monks, my knowledge of reality and insight regarding the four noble truths in three aspects and twelve ways became fully clear to me, I declared to the world with its deities, māras, and brahmās to the mass of beings with its recluses, priests, kings and people that I had understood, attained, and realised perfectly by myself the incomparable, the most excellent perfect enlightenment, in other words, the perfectly enlightened supreme Buddhahood.”

What he declared in the above passage was that only when his knowledge of reality as it truly is was fully clear in twelve ways derived from three kinds of knowledge with respect to each of the four truths, he admitted to attainment and realisation of the incomparable, the most excellent perfect enlightenment, supreme Buddhahood. This declaration was made not just to that region, that but to the whole universe with its powerful deities of sharp intellect, with its māras hostile to the true teaching and with its more powerful and more intelligent brahmās. It was meant also for the whole of humanity with its learned recluses and brahmaṇas, with its kings and people.

This declaration was an open invitation to any doubting deities, māras, or brahmās or to any doubting recluses, priests, kings or wise lay persons to investigate, and to scrutinise his claim, with a guarantee to give satisfactory answers to all their enquiries. This is indeed a very bold, solemn declaration not made impulsively without due verification, but only after he had scrutinized and reassured himself by retrospection that he had really attained Buddhahood.

Concluding Statement

“Nāṇaṇaṇica pana me dassanaṃ udapādi — ‘Akuppā me vimutti, ayamantimā jāti, natthidāni punabbhavo’”ti.”

“Indeed, knowledge and vision arose in me: ‘Unshakeable is my deliverance;¹ this is the final existence; there is no more rebirth for me.”

¹My liberation from defilements is achieved by Arahantship, not just suppressing defilements by fine material or formless absorption, but eradicated at the root without remainder, liberation which results in complete and final peace. He knew therefore by reflection that the deliverance was unshakable, and indestructible.

In this concluding statement, by the words, “Unshakable is my deliverance,” is meant that his deliverance is not like that obtained by absorption, which may be lost. The individual who has obtained the absorptions is free from defilements such as sensual desire, ill-will, *etc.*, and they remain suppressed. However, when the absorption deteriorates, defilements can reappear. Absorptions only remove defilements to a distance by suppression (*vikkhambhana*). The type of deliverance won by the Buddha was liberation by cutting-off (*samuccheda vimutti*), which completely eradicated the defilements without remainder, and liberation by tranquillising (*paṭippassaddhi vimutti*) the potency of these defilements. Liberation by cutting-off is deliverance by the path of Arahantship, which eradicated without remainder all defilements while liberation by tranquillising is deliverance by means of the fruit of Arahantship, which calms down the potency of all defilements. His deliverance remained steadfast and invulnerable, hence the Blessed One reflected, “Unshakable is my deliverance.”

Moreover, having eradicated craving, otherwise called the origin of suffering, by means of Arahantship, the Blessed One was free from any craving that could cause new becoming. For beings still saddled with craving, after passing away from one existence they are reborn in the next, holding on to one of three signs — kamma, sign of kamma, or sign of destiny — that appear as death approaches. There is always a new existence for beings who are not yet devoid of craving.

The Bodhisatta also had passed through many rounds of rebirths in successive existences. Thus, on the dawn of his Enlightenment, the Blessed One reflected: “Seeking in vain, the house-builder (craving), who repeatedly designed and built this house (of fresh existences, *i.e.* the five aggregates, because I had not yet gained the knowledge of Arahantship), I wandered through many existences (*aneka jāti saṃsāraṃ sandhāvissaṃ*). Now (with the attainment of Omniscience together with Arahantship) I have found you. Oh, house-builder, never again will you build this house.”

In this way, the Blessed One gave an account of his retrospection. Although fresh existence is no more possible for the Blessed One in the absence of craving, he still had to live the present life, which had been brought into existence by craving before its eradication.

With retrospective insight he said, "This is my last existence. Now there is no more rebirth."

These are the concluding words of the Dhammacakka Sutta.

A Matter for Consideration

Careful study of the Dhammacakka Sutta, beginning with the words, "These two extremes, monks, should not be followed by one gone forth (*dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā*)," and ending with the words "This is my last existence. Now there is no more rebirth (*ayamantimā jāti, natthidāni punabbhavo'ti*)," reveals that it deals with the path trodden by the Blessed One, the truths he had discovered and how he had discovered them. As to the practical details of the path, there was little mention of them in a direct way. Only the opening words, "These two extremes, monks, should not be followed," conveys some practical instructions. It is therefore a matter worthy of consideration how the first five disciples attained the higher knowledge of the path and its fruition, by what methods, and how they attained their goals. I will now explain this.

Higher Knowledge Gained by Listeners

In the discourses taught by the Buddha, although there were no precise instructions such as, "Practise in this way; bear this in mind," it must be regarded that they contain exhortations and guidance as to what should be followed and what should be avoided. According to the ancient masters, "Every word of the Buddha carries an injunction." To illustrate:-

"Asevanā ca bālānaṃ, paṇḍitānañca sevānā.

Pujā ca pujanīyānaṃ, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ."

This verse of the Maṅgala Sutta gives only the enunciation of the three blessings, namely, "Not to associate with the foolish, to associate with the wise, to honour those who are worthy of honour, this is the greatest blessing." In this verse, there is no direct exhortation with whom one should not associate, with whom to associate, or whom to honour. Nevertheless, it should be taken as an exhortation. Likewise we do not find any direct exhortation or injunction in the Dhammacakka Sutta. The Blessed One said simply, "Avoiding the two extremes, I have discovered the middle path."

This should be regarded as meaning, "Like me, you must avoid the two extremes and follow the practice of the middle path."

In stating, "The middle path leads to vision, *etc.*," it should be taken to imply, "If you develop the middle path, vision will arise in you too; higher knowledge will come to you, you will gain benefits until the realisation of nibbāna." In giving the enunciation of the Noble Eightfold Path, it should be taken as giving instructions for promoting the path factors of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Then, the definition of the truth of suffering must be regarded as instructions to make an effort to understand it comprehensively. Likewise it must be understood that, what was taught as the origin of suffering was an instruction to remove it; and the truth of cessation and the truth of the path were instructions to develop the path in oneself and realise cessation, nibbāna.

Afterwards, when he taught the four knowledges of the truth, it must be regarded as an exhortation to strive to attain knowledge with regard to the four truths; when he taught about the four duties it was instruction to understand the truth of suffering by contemplating impermanence, *etc.* This is obvious. When it was described as the Dhamma that should be rightly and fully comprehended, it clearly meant that an effort should be made to achieve complete and perfect understanding of the truth of suffering. The truth of suffering has already been explained previously to consist of birth, *etc.*, up to the aggregates of attachment, which manifest when seeing, hearing, *etc.* Thus it is understandable that it means contemplation of impermanence by noting every instance of seeing, hearing, *etc.*

"The truth of the path to be developed," means development by noting each phenomenon of seeing, hearing, *etc.* Similarly "The truth of the origin should be eliminated," means that craving should be eradicated by contemplating the truth of suffering. "The truth of cessation should be realised," means that after fully understanding the truth of suffering, through contemplation and developing the path of insight, ultimately the truth of cessation will be realised.

When the Buddha told them how he came to know what should be known by developing the middle path, his audience could understand that they too would come to know what should be

known by developing the middle path. It is just like a person recounting how the disease he was suffering from was cured by taking a certain effective medicine. Anyone having the same disease will realise that they could also be cured by the same medicine.

The Buddha's audience at that time was made up of people who were already accomplished with sufficient perfections (*pāramī*) to attain higher knowledge by hearing the first discourse of the Buddha. They were in a position to understand what he meant. Accordingly, it could be taken that they contemplated the truth of suffering at the moment of occurrence, developing insight knowledge in successive stages, ultimately realising nibbāna by means of the four Noble Paths.

There is no doubt that the good people forming this audience could also, by contemplating the truth of suffering, by noting the phenomenon of rising and vanishing, come to know the four truths as they should be known and realise the higher knowledge of the Noble Path and its Fruition.

Understanding the discourse in the way that I have just explained, one among the audience at the first discourse of the Blessed One, the Venerable Koṇḍañña, noting all the phenomena of hearing, knowing, feelings of devotion and pleasure, feeling glad, touching, seeing, *etc.*, that appeared to him at the time of their rising, developed the path of insight and realised the path of Stream-winning and its fruition. How he realised them will be the subject of my discourse later.

A hundred and eight million brahmās likewise achieved similar realisation. According to the Milindapañha, innumerable deities of the sensual realms also meditated in a similar way and attained the higher knowledge of the path and its fruition. Because all the beings who were developed sufficiently to receive the Dhamma had attained higher knowledge and because he had completely covered all the things that he should teach, the Blessed One brought his discourse to a conclusion with the closing words just quoted above. The reciters at the first Council had recorded this account of the termination of the discourse and how the group of five monks were gladdened by the discourse in these words:-

Records of the First Buddhist Council

“Idamavoca Bhagavā. Attamanā pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū Bhagavato bhāsitaṃ abhinanduntī.”

“Thus spoke the Blessed One, (starting with, “These two extremes, monks, should not be followed by one gone forth,” and ending with “Now there is no more rebirth,”) and the group of five monks greatly rejoiced, welcoming the words of the Blessed One with delight.”

It is worthy of special note that the elders of the First Council recorded how the Venerable Koṇḍañña attained higher knowledge:-

“Imasmiñca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ bhaññamāne āyasmato koṇḍaññassa virajaṃ vītamalaṃ dhammacakkhuṃ udapādi — “Yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhamma”ntī.”

“And while this discourse was being expounded (or having been expounded), the dustless and stainless eye of Dhamma arose to the Venerable Koṇḍañña, ‘Everything that has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing’.”

Briefly, this record states that the Venerable Koṇḍañña became a Stream-winner by attainment of the Path and its Fruition. When did it happen? He attained it while the Blessed One was “Expounding the discourse.” This is the precise translation of the grammatical tense as given in the text, *“bhaññamāne, bhaniyamāne.”* The Sāratt hadīpanī Subcommentary reproduced the same tense. However, the Paṭisambhidā Commentary preferred to take the perfect past tense proximate to the present tense, *“bhanite,”* meaning “after being expounded.” I have thus rendered it as “having been expounded.”

Venerable Koṇḍañña Attains Higher Knowledge

The Venerable Koṇḍañña could have developed the Noble Eightfold Path and attained the Noble Path while the Blessed One was enunciating on the middle path during the discourse. When he heard about the Four Noble Truths too, he could have contemplated to know what should be known and attained the higher knowledge of the Path. Especially, when he heard that the truth of suffering should be fully comprehended and the Path should be developed, it is very probable that he would contemplate on the

truth of suffering, otherwise known as the aggregates of attachment, and by developing the path of insight, attained the higher knowledge of the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning.

As for contemplating suffering, by noting the sound of the teaching at every instant of hearing it, he would come to know the reality as it is and the three characteristics and in this way developed the Noble Eightfold Path. When deep appreciation for the meaning of the discourse arose, it could be contemplated upon. Devotional appreciation of the Dhamma and for the voice that delivered it could be noted too as it occurred. Rejoicing that came after appreciation, the thrill of joy that accompanied it could all be contemplated. It is probable that joy (*pīti*) was taken as an object for contemplation. It was mentioned in the Pāli texts that at the moment when the mind was feeling fit and prepared, soft and tender, free from hindrances, elated and exultant, full of faith and devotion, hearing the discourse on the four truths, many attained to higher knowledge. The Noble Eightfold Path could also be developed by noting what is occurring in the body, the sensations of pain or pleasure in the body, and by contemplating the act of paying respectful homage to the Buddha.

Seeing, hearing, *etc.*, mentioned above with respect to the mental and physical phenomena presently arising are not mere concepts (*paññatti*), they are ultimate realities (*paramattha dhammā*) that actually occur. The aggregates of attachment are such realities. The truth of suffering, which should be fully comprehended is also an ultimate reality. When every phenomenon is noted, in accordance with the teaching that the truth of suffering should be fully comprehended, the truth of suffering is fully comprehended through understanding the three characteristics. On each occasion of understanding in this way, craving that may arise because of the notions of permanence, pleasure, and self gets eliminated, having no opportunity to arise. This is momentary abandonment of the origin of suffering.

Delusion or ignorance with respect to the object being contemplated together with defilements, kamma, and results that may arise in connection with it, vanish and come to cessation too with each noting. This is momentary cessation achieved with each noting by virtue of having accomplished it. It goes without saying that the path of insight is being developed at each moment of observation.

In this way by noting what was seen, heard, *etc.*, the Venerable Koṇḍañña developed insight, which knows the Four Truths as they should be known, and attained the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning while listening to the discourse. In other words, he became a Stream-winner right at the end of the discourse.

How Path Knowledge Is Stainless

The eye of Dhamma attained by the Venerable Koṇḍañña was praised in the sutta as being dust-free and stainless. It would be profitable to consider how this knowledge was dust-free and stainless. The Sāratthadīpanī Subcommentary states: “It is dust-free, being free from the dust and dirt of lust (*rāga*), which would lead to the lower realms; it is stainless, being free from the defilements of wrong-view (*ditṭhi*), and sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*).” This is a figurative description of the defilements that are eliminated by the Path of Stream-winning. However, the Paṭisambhidāmagga Commentary considers both as dust and defilements, *etc.* Lust tends to conceal and hence is likened to dust. Again, lust is likened to defilements because it spoils or brings destruction.

Another consideration arises here. Does being free from dust and defilements mean: a) the arising of the eye of Dhamma, otherwise known as Path knowledge, unaccompanied by dust and defilements, or b) not hindering Path knowledge so that nibbāna could not be seen? The Path, however, has no association with defilements. It is obvious, therefore, that it has no reference here to freedom from dust and defilements. Thus dust-free and stainless should be understood in the sense of not hindering Path knowledge so that nibbāna could not be seen.

This is how hindrances are overcome: whilst wrong-view and sceptical doubt, which should be eliminated by Stream-winning, and lust that leads to the lower realms, remain in force, in spite of insight meditation, if nibbāna is not seen yet by means of the knowledge of Stream-winning. It is just like the inability to see because of a cataract. However, when insight knowledge becomes fully accomplished and strengthened, the wrong-view, sceptical doubt, and lust that would lead to the lower realms would get weakened, so they can no longer hinder the sight of nibbāna, just as the cataract that gets thinner can no longer completely obscure

one's sight. Then the knowledge of Stream-winning can see through and realise the nibbāna. Such capacity to perceive through and realise nibbāna is described as dust-free (*virajaṃ*), and stainless (*vitamalaṃ*). Path knowledge eradicates only after insight has done its utmost to eliminate.

The above interpretation conforms with the figurative description of the eye of Dhamma and with the expositions in the Visuddhimagga and its Mahāṭīka, which state that supramundane Path knowledge eradicates without remainder only those defilements, which have been weakened to the utmost by mundane insight knowledge.

Path Knowledge Evolves from Insight

It should be especially noted here that supramundane Path knowledge does not arise out of nowhere. Just as the succeeding consciousness arises out of the preceding consciousness, Path knowledge can also be said, by way of unity, to have arisen out of insight knowledge. Thus defilements such as wrong-view and doubt, which have been debilitated by the power of insight can no longer keep nibbāna obscured from view. By dust-free and stainless is meant this inability of lust, *etc.*, to keep nibbāna concealed any longer.

The Brahmāyu Sutta¹ describes the three lower paths as the eye of Dhamma (*Dhammacakkhu*). In the Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta,² all the four paths and fruitions are described as the eye of Dhamma. When, therefore, these higher attainments are stated to be dust-free and stainless, it means that lust and ill-will are so weakened by virtue of insight knowledge that they could not keep the nibbāna concealed from view. I have taken the trouble of delving deeply into these points to make it easily comprehensible that Path knowledge does not arise out of nowhere, but evolves only from insight knowledge by virtue of natural sufficing conditions (*pakatupanissaya*).

The question then arises: "How does this eye of Dhamma, otherwise known as the Path knowledge of Stream-winning, arise?" This knowledge arises by perceiving that everything that has the nature of arising has the nature of passing away. There are two modes of perceiving this. At the moment of developing the [knowledge of arising and passing away](#) (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), seeing

¹ M.ii.145.

² M.iii.280.

origination and instant dissolution, the realisation comes that what arises passes into dissolution. This is perception by means of insight. When the **knowledge of equanimity about formations** (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) is fully established, while noting the continuous process of dissolution of mind and matter, a stage is reached when (volitional activities of) mind, matter, and mental formations dissolve into a state of complete cessation. This is perceiving the peaceful bliss of nibbāna by actually realising it, when all the phenomena of constant arising come to complete cessation. This is perception by Path knowledge.

The eye of Dhamma, otherwise called the Path knowledge of Stream-winning, is developed by the second kind of perceiving. For this reason, the attainment of Stream-winning is clearly indicated when all volitional activities dissolve into complete cessation. Once realised by the Path of Stream-winning, the knowledge that perceives “Everything that arises gets dissolved,” remains firm and unshakeable. Hence, the Cūḷarāhulovāda Sutta describes the realisation of all four path knowledges in the same words. “The dust-free, stainless eye of Dhamma arose: everything that has the nature of arising has the nature of passing away.” All mind and matter cease when nibbāna becomes the object of Path knowledge.

Quoting the Cūḷaniddesa Commentary, which states: “By means of the Path of Stream-winning four types of consciousness connected with wrong-view (*diṭṭhigatasampayuttam*), and one consciousness accompanied by doubt (*vicikicchāsahagattam*), these five types of unwholesome consciousness come to cessation,” a certain person is teaching and writing, attempting to refute the statement, “At the moment of the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning, all mental and physical formations are perceived to have ceased.” He seems to maintain that the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning have as their object only the cessation of the five types of unwholesome consciousness brought about by the Path.” This is a serious wrong-view for the simple reason that nibbāna is not the partial cessation of unwholesome consciousness; nor the partial cessation of mind and matter. In fact, nibbāna means the complete cessation of three cycles (*vaṭṭa*), namely, the cycle of defilements (*kilesā vaṭṭa*), the cycle of kamma (*kamma vaṭṭa*), and the cycle of results (*vipāka vaṭṭa*), the complete cessation of all compounded things. Thus to the question “What does

the Noble Path have as its object?" the reply would be that it has nibbāna as its object and nibbāna is, as just explained, the complete cessation of all conditioned phenomena. Thus the assertion, "At the moment of attaining the Path and Fruition of Stream-winning, one perceives only the cessation of the sense-objects known as well as the knowing mind," is a factual statement of what is actually observed.

A careful study of the Questions of Ajita¹ on which the exposition was given in the said Commentary to the Cūḷaniddesa, will reveal the statement therein: "At this peace of nibbāna all mind and matter cease." Furthermore, if questioned, "Is nibbāna which is the object of the Path of Stream-winning the same nibbāna that is the object of the higher Paths?" the answer would be "Yes, it is the same, there is no difference." Were the Path of Stream-winning to have the five types of unwholesome consciousness as its object and the other Paths were to have as their objects the cessation of respective unwholesome types of consciousness that they eradicate, the objects of the four Paths would be four different types of nibbāna. There is, however, no such difference and it is therefore obvious that all the four Paths have as their objects the one and only nibbāna.

For the reasons stated, "The Path of Stream-winning must have as its object only the cessation of the five types of unwholesome consciousness," is a totally wrong-view.

I have digressed from the main discourse to make some critical remarks about certain wrong assertions. I must now return to the original topic by recounting the meaning of the Pāḷi text:

"While this discourse was being expounded (or had been expounded), the dust-free stainless eye of Dhamma, otherwise known as the Path of Stream-winning) arose to the Venerable Koṇḍañña, that everything that has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing."

Was the Path Not Attained by Appreciating the Discourse?

Here is a point for discussion. Is it not a fact that in the passage just quoted, there is no mention of the Venerable Koṇḍañña engaging in the practice of insight meditation? It mentions only that the eye of Dhamma was developed while the Blessed One was expounding the discourse or had just finished expounding it.

¹ Sn.vv.1038-1045, Pārāyanavaggo, Ajitamānavapucchā.

Could it not be that the knowledge of the Path of Stream-winning was developed through appreciation of and delight in the discourse? In that case, all the elaborations about how Koṇḍañña engaged in the practice of insight meditation is really redundant. This is the point for discussion.

The elaborations are not redundant at all. In the Dhammacakka Sutta itself, it is definitely stated that the Eightfold Path should be developed. In addition, the Commentarial exposition of right-view states that the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering should be understood by contemplating them. There are also statements that Path knowledge is developed only when the preliminary path (*pubbabhāga magga*), otherwise called the path of insight (*vipassanā magga*), are fully accomplished. It is also definitely stated that without contemplating any of the four subjects of meditation, namely, the body, feelings, mind, and mental-objects, no insight or path knowledge could be attained. (Refer to Part Three of this discourse). The Pāli texts also clearly state that the path factor of Right Mindfulness could arise only by developing the fourfold mindfulness. For these reasons, there can be no arising of the Noble Path without developing the path of insight. These elaborations are given to facilitate understanding how insight could be developed while listening to a discourse. It must be taken therefore that by adopting one of the methods of meditating as explained above, the Venerable Koṇḍañña instantly attained the Path and its Fruition.

After describing how the Venerable Koṇḍañña attained Stream-winning, the Elders of the First Council went on to describe the way in which the Dhammacakka Sutta was acclaimed.

Acclamation by the Deities and Brahmās

“Pavattite ca pana Bhagavatā dhammacakke bhummā devā saddamanussāvesuṃ — “Etaṃ Bhagavatā bārāṇasiyaṃ isipatane migadāye anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appaṭivattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā mārena vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmi”nti.”

“When the Blessed One had set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma,¹ in other words, when the Blessed One had given

¹ According to the Commentary, this means penetrative insight (*paṭivedha ñāṇa*) and knowledge of what and how to impart the Dhamma (*desanā ñāṇa*).

the discourse on the Dhammacakka Sutta, the Earthbound deities proclaimed in one voice: ‘The incomparable Wheel of Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One at Isipatana, the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares, which no recluse, priest, deity, māra, brahmā, nor any other being in the world can reverse or prevent.’”

Having heard this proclamation by the earthbound deities, the Cātumahārājikā deities and the deities in the upper realms of Tāvātimsa, Yāma, Tusita, Nimmānaratī, Paranimmitavasavattī and the brahmās, all proclaimed in one voice:

“The incomparable Wheel of Dhamma has been set in motion by the Blessed One at Isipatana, the deer sanctuary in the township of Benares, which no recluse, priest, deity, māra, brahmā, nor any other being in the world can reverse or prevent.”

“Itiha tena khaṇena, tena muhuttena yāva brahmalokā saddo abbhuggacchi.”

“Thus in an instant, in a moment, the sound of proclamation went forth up to the world of the brahmās.”

The Earthquake and Appearance of Radiance

“Ayañca dasasahasilokadhātu saṅkampi sampakampi sampavedhi, appamaṇo ca ulāro obhāso loka pāturahosi atikkamma devānaṃ devānubhāvanti.”

“The entire cosmos of the thousand worlds shook in upward motion, quaked in upward and downward motion, and trembled in four directions. An immeasurable sublime radiance, caused by the mighty teaching, surpassing even the majestic, divine radiance of the deities appeared on earth.”

Utterance of Joy by the Blessed One

“Atha kho Bhagavā imaṃ udānaṃ udānesi — ‘Aññāsi vata, bho, koṇḍañño, aññāsi vata, bho, koṇḍañño’ti! Iti hidaṃ āyasmato koṇḍaññaassa ‘Aññāsikoṇḍañño’ tveva nāmaṃ ahoṣiti.”

“Then, just after delivering the discourse, just after the appearance of the eye of Dhamma to the Venerable Koṇḍañña, the Blessed One made this joyous utterance — ‘Friends, indeed Koṇḍañña

has understood! Indeed Koṇḍañña has understood!’ Thus it was because of this joyous utterance that the Venerable Koṇḍañña won the name of Koṇḍañña the Wise, the one who has understood.”

Here ends the Discourse on the Dhammacakka Sutta.

The concluding passage recited above marks the termination of the Dhammacakka Sutta as recorded in the Mahāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya. On reflection at the conclusion of the discourse, the Blessed One perceived that the Venerable Koṇḍañña had attained the higher knowledge of Stream-winning. So joyously he made the utterance, “Indeed, Koṇḍañña has understood, Koṇḍañña has understood.” It was in reference to this utterance that the Venerable Koṇḍañña became commonly known as Aññāsi Koṇḍañña.

According to the Saṃyutta Pāḷi text, the Dhammacakka Sutta ends here. However, the Vinaya Pāḷi text continues from there giving an account of how the Bhikkhu Saṅgha came into existence. I will relate this account now.

Venerable Koṇḍañña’s Request for Ordination

“Atha kho āyasmā Aññāsikoṇḍañño diṭṭhadhammo pattadhammo vidadhammo pariyogāḷhadhammo tiṇṇavicikiccho vigatakathaṃ-katho vesārajjappatto aparappaccayo satthusāsane Bhagavantaṃ etadavoca — “labheyyāhaṃ, bhante, Bhagavato santike pabbajjaṃ, labheyyaṃ upasampada”nti.”

“After the Blessed One has made this joyous utterance, the Venerable Koṇḍañña made the following request in these words: “Venerable sir, may I go forth (*pabbajjaṃ*) in the presence of the Blessed One, may I receive ordination (*upasampadaṃ*).”

Difficult to Give up Traditional Beliefs

The Venerable Koṇḍañña must have previously embraced some kind of traditional religious belief. To give up this old belief and desire admission into the Blessed One’s Order could not have come about with mere ordinary faith. In modern times, it is not an easy matter for people of other faiths to join the Saṅgha after accepting Buddhism. For some people, not to say of putting on the yellow robes, to take refuge in the Triple Gem and keep the precepts for the purpose of practising meditation is a difficult task.

Apart from the Venerable Koṇḍañña, the remaining four of the group appeared to be indecisive to get admitted into the Buddha's Order. Why then did Koṇḍañña seek permission to join the Buddha's Order? The answer is that Koṇḍañña had become possessed of virtue and qualities, which are described by such epithets as having seen the Dhamma (*diṭṭhadhammo*), etc.

Fully vested with such virtues Koṇḍañña made the request, having seen the Dhamma. He had seen the truth of cessation, that is he had realised nibbāna. Then having seen the peace of nibbāna, he saw the constant arising and vanishing of conditioned mind and matter as dreadful suffering. He perceived too that the craving that took delight in them was the true cause of suffering. He realised at the same time that the truth of the path consisting of Right View, etc., was the true path that would lead to the peace of nibbāna. Thus realising the four truths for himself, firm confidence arose that the Buddha had also realised the four truths. Such confidence is known as knowledge born of complete faith (*aveccappasāda ñāna*). It is like the confidence a patient places in a physician whose treatment has effectively cured him of his disease. Thus, having seen the four truths exactly as expounded by the Buddha, Koṇḍañña made the request for ordination.

Diṭṭhadhammo:- having seen; to make sure it means seeing with the eye of knowledge and not by physical eye, it is qualified by **pattadhammo**:- having arrived, attained, reached; to connote arriving through knowledge and not by any other means it is qualified again by **viditadhammo**: having clearly known. To assure that such knowledge is not just partial but complete, the qualifying word **pariyogāhadhammo**: is used, which means to dive into, to penetrate, conveying that he had penetrated fully into all aspects of the Dhamma. All these words show the richness of the Pāli vocabulary of those days.

It is very important to see, to know by one's own knowledge the Four Noble Truths. Without knowing the real truth yet, mere profession of the Buddhist faith will not have removed all doubts about the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Misgivings on them may appear under certain circumstances. Doubts may arise also with regard to the practice of the morality, concentration, and wisdom that one is pursuing. By knowing what should be known by oneself, one may become free from scepticism to a certain extent.

The meditator who practises by noting every instance of seeing, hearing, touching, knowing, *etc.*, knows, when the power of concentration gets strengthened, that the object observed (*rūpa*) is separate from the knowing mind (*nāma*). Then he or she knows through personal experience that seeing takes place because there are the object and the eye; there is the act of going because of the desire to go. Because one fails to note the object, one wrongly takes it to be pleasant, thinking it pleasant, one takes delight in it. Because of delight, one craves for it. To satisfy the demands of craving, one has to exert oneself to suitable actions. All these become personal knowledge through experience. One also knows that one faces difficulties and bad situations because of unwholesome kamma; one enjoys good things because of wholesome kamma. When one's knowledge grows to this extent, one can become free from doubts as to whether there is a soul, a living entity, or a Creator.

When one continues with the practice, one perceives mental and physical phenomena arising and vanishing even while observing them. One becomes convinced, while continuing with the noting, of their impermanence, dreadful suffering, and that they are not-self, not subject to one's control. This singular perception strengthens one's confidence that the Buddha who had given this discourse must have realised the truth himself; he must be a true Buddha, his teachings are true and the Saṅgha who are practising his teachings are the true Saṅgha engaged in the right practice.

Then comes the stage when all conditioned mental and physical phenomena dissolve into complete cessation. This is realising personally the peace of nibbāna, in other words, the truth of cessation. Simultaneously, the three remaining truths are realised by virtue of having accomplished the tasks of fully and rightly comprehending suffering, abandoning its origin, and developing the path in oneself. Knowing the four truths as they should be known, confidence and faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha becomes firmly rooted and unshakable. Confidence in the practice of morality, concentration, and wisdom also gets firmly established. With firmly rooted confidence and faith, sceptical doubts are overcome. The Venerable Koṇḍañña has seen the four truths for himself and thus had left all uncertainty behind --- **tiṇṇavicikiccho**. For this reason too he asked the Buddha for ordination. When he

was free from doubt and scepticism, he became free from wavering, irresolution, indecision — **vigatakatamkato**, which is synonymous with **tiṇṇavicikiccho**. He had made the request for this reason too.

Furthermore he made the request to the Buddha because he had acquired courage of conviction in the teaching, **vesārajapatto**, the courage born of knowledge of the truth, and also because he had become independent of others, **aparappaccayo**, in the matter of the doctrine having acquired personal knowledge of it.

Most followers of various religious faiths in the world are dependent on others in the matter of their beliefs, being ignorant about them themselves. Some worship deities of trees, forests, and mountains because the practice has been handed down from generation to generation by their ancestors. No one has seen nor met those beings. Some worship the king of deities, brahmās or Gods of the heaven. No one has the personal knowledge of these objects of worship. People take on trust what was told them by their parents, teachers, *etc.* Among the people of the Buddhist faith too, prior to attaining what should be known, they are dependent on elders, parents, and teachers in the matter of their beliefs. When some knowledge has been gained by one's own efforts in practising concentration or insight meditation, self-confidence may be gained to a certain extent. When the absorptions, the path and its fruition are attained, one has personal knowledge of these attainments, and so the belief in them is no longer dependent on others.

Citta the Millionaire and Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta

At the time of the Buddha, there lived a certain millionaire by the name of Citta, who had attained the stage of Non-returning. One day he happened to arrive at the hermitage of Nāṭaputta, the leader of the Nigaṇṭha sect. The sect leader Nāṭaputta was worshipped as a supreme God by the followers of Jainism, and was also known as Mahāvīra. He was quite well-known since before the enlightenment of the Buddha. Nāṭaputta addressed Citta, "Your teacher Gotama is said to teach that there is absorption and concentration free from initial and sustained application. Do you believe it?"

Citta replied, "I acknowledge there is absorption and concentration free from initial and sustained application not because of my faith in the Buddha." The great teacher Nāṭaputta made a wrong

interpretation of this reply. He thought that Citta had replied that he had no faith in the Buddha. So he told his followers. "Look, my disciples, Citta is very straightforward and honest. What he did not believe in, he said he did not believe. Well, this matter is really unbelievable. It's impossible, just like trying to catch the air with a net; or to arrest the swift flowing waters of the Ganges with the first or the palm of the hand. It's impossible to get free from initial and sustained application."

Upon which the millionaire Citta asked Nāṭaputta, "Which is nobler, knowing or believing?" He replied, "Knowing is of course nobler than believing." The rich man Citta then retorted, "I can attain any time I wish the first absorption with initial and sustained application ; the second absorption free from initial and sustained application; and the third absorption free from joy (*pīti*) and the fourth absorption free from bliss (*sukha*), accompanied only by equanimity and one-pointedness. In this matter of saying, "There is absorption and concentration free from initial and sustained application," when I personally experience them, is there any need for me to rely on other noble persons, or recluses, for my belief?"

In this story, Citta had no need to rely on others for believing this fact. Likewise, Koṇḍañña who had personal experience of the four truths was not dependent on others regarding the Buddha's teaching on the Eightfold Path of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Having known them personally, without depending on others, he asked the Buddha for admission to his Order. This passage is so inspiring and stimulates so much devotion that I will repeat it in full.

"After the Blessed One has made this joyous utterance, the Venerable Koṇḍañña made the following request in these words: "Venerable sir, may I go forth (*pabbajjam*) in the presence of the Blessed One, may I receive ordination (*upasampadam*)."

This record by the Elders of the First Council describing the Venerable Koṇḍañña's request giving details of his qualifications and attainments to establish his eligibility for admission to the Saṅgha, develops in the reader intense devotion. The more one knows of the Dhamma the more intensely one feels this devotion.

Ordination by the “Come Bhikkhu” Formula

When the Venerable Koṇḍañña made his request in the above way, the Blessed One permitted him to join the Saṅgha with these words:-

“Ehi bhikkhū”ti Bhagavā avoca — “svākkhāto dhammo, cara brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriyaṃ”ti. Sāva tassa āyasmato upasampadā ahoṣi.”

“Come, monk. “Well taught is the Dhamma. Come and practise the holy life of for the sake of the complete destruction of suffering.”

The Venerable Koṇḍañña at that time was already a recluse (*samaṇa*), but not of the Buddha’s Saṅgha. He therefore asked for admission to the Saṅgha from the Blessed One who permitted him to do so, by saying, “Come, monk.” This is acknowledgement by the Blessed One of his entry to the Saṅgha. Thus the Venerable Aññāsi Koṇḍañña became a disciple as a member of the Saṅgha.

Other Beings Who Attained Higher Knowledge

At the time of delivery of the Dhammacakka Sutta, there were only five members of the human world, the group of five monks, who heard the first discourse. Of them, only one person, the Venerable Koṇḍañña attained higher knowledge. However, it is stated in the Milindapañha that 180 million brahmās and innumerable deities of the sensual realm also attained higher knowledge.

At that time only the Venerable Koṇḍañña sought entry to the Saṅgha and become a disciple of the Buddha. The remaining four — the Venerable Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānama, and Assaji — had not yet done so. Their hesitation may be accounted for by the fact that they were not yet fully accomplished in personally knowing the Dhamma like the Venerable Koṇḍañña. They were still deficient in the courage of conviction with respect to the Buddha’s teaching. However, by virtue of hearing the discourse, they had developed faith in the teaching. Therefore from the time of hearing the discourse these four were engaged in the practice of meditation under the guidance of the Blessed One. The Vinaya Mahāvagga has given the following account of how they practised meditation and how they came to realise the Dhamma.

Higher Knowledge Attained Only by Practice

“After the Venerable Koṇḍañña had been admitted to the Order, the Blessed One gave guidance and instructions on the practice of the Dhamma to the remaining four members of the group. Being thus guided and instructed by the Blessed One, the dust-free, stainless eye of Dhamma rose to the Venerable Vappa and Bhaddiya that everything that has the nature of arising has the nature of passing away. When the eye of Dhamma opened, and they became Stream-winners, the Venerable Vappa and Bhaddiya requested the Blessed One for ordination and he accepted them by saying, “Come, monks.”

Systematic Guidance and Practice

The Vinaya Mahāvagga text continues:—

After the Venerable Vappa and Bhaddiya had been thus admitted to the Saṅgha by the “Come, monk (*ehi bhikkhu*),” ordination, the Blessed One gave instructions on the Dhamma and guidance to the remaining Venerable Mahānāma and Assaji, without going on almsround himself. Three bhikkhus went out for almsfood and all the six, including the Blessed One, sustained themselves on whatever food was brought back by the three. Being thus guided and instructed by the Blessed One on the practice of the Dhamma, the dust-free, stainless eye of Dhamma arose to the Venerable Mahānāma and Assaji that everything that has the nature of arising has the nature of passing away. The Venerable Mahānāma and Assaji, having seen the Dhamma, having attained it, having clearly understood and penetrated the Dhamma, leaving uncertainty behind, having overcome all doubts, being free from wavering irresolution, having acquired the courage of conviction with respect to the teaching of the Buddha, having personal knowledge of the Dhamma, not depending on others with regard to the teaching, asked the Blessed One: “After the Blessed One has made this joyous utterance, the Venerable Koṇḍañña made the following request in these words: “Venerable sir, may we go forth (*pabbajjam*) in the presence of the Blessed One, may we receive ordination (*upasampadam*).” The Blessed One replied, “Come bhikkhus. Well taught is the Dhamma. Come and practise the holy life for the sake of the complete ending of suffering.” This invitation by the Blessed One constitutes the act of ordination

and accordingly the Venerable Mahānāma and Assaji became bhikkhus in the Saṅgha of the Blessed One.”

In this Pāli Text of the Vinaya Mahāvagga, it is mentioned that the four bhikkhus attained higher knowledge in two groups of two each, whereas its Commentary states that they attained higher knowledge one by one as follows:—

“It should be understood that the eye of Dhamma arose to the Venerable Vappa on the first waning day of July, to the Venerable Bhaddiya on the second waning day, to the Venerable Mahānāma on the third waning day, and to the Venerable Assaji on the fourth waning day respectively. Furthermore, it should be specially noted that all this while the Blessed One remained in the monastery without going out for alms, ready to render assistance to the four bhikkhus in removing the obstacles and difficulties that may arise to them in the course of practising meditation. Every time obstacles arose in the bhikkhus, the Blessed One went to their aid travelling through space, and removed them. On the fifth waning day of July the Blessed One gathered all five bhikkhus together and instructed them by giving the discourse on the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta.”

In this account in the Commentary the statement about the Buddha’s travelling through space to remove the obstacles reveals the urgent nature of assistance needed by the meditating bhikkhus. At present too, it would be beneficial if the meditation teachers could constantly attend on the meditators and give guidance.

The Pāsārāsi Sutta¹ gives the following account on the subject: “Bhikkhus, when I gave instructions to the two bhikkhus, the three bhikkhus went for alms. The group of six of us lived on the food brought back by the other three bhikkhus. When I gave instructions to the three bhikkhus, the other two bhikkhus went for alms. The of six of us lived on the food brought back by the two bhikkhus. Then, being thus instructed and guided by me, the group of five bhikkhus, having in themselves the nature of arising in new existence, and seeing danger and wretchedness in fresh rebirths, searched and endeavoured for the noblest, supreme nibbāna, free from fresh rebirth, and accordingly attained the supreme nibbāna, free from wavering, irresolution, having acquired the courage of conviction with respect to the teaching, having personal knowledge of the Dhamma, not dependent on others

¹ M.i.173, also known as the Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, the Noble Search (ed.)

with regard to the teaching.” In this way, the Blessed One stated that the five bhikkhus had attained Arahantship.

The Commentary on this sutta has this to say: “The Blessed One remained in the monastery, ready to go and assist the Venerable Vappa and Bhaddiya removing any obstructions that arose during their meditation practice. Whenever impurities and difficulties arose in them the bhikkhus came to the Blessed One and asked him for guidance. The Blessed One himself also went to where the bhikkhus were and removed their obstructions. Then without going out for alms, but living on the food brought by the other three, these two bhikkhus went on meditating. Of these two bhikkhus, the Venerable Vappa became a Stream-winner on the first waning day of July, and the Venerable Bhaddiya on the second. Venerable Mahānāma became a Stream-winner on the third waning day, and Venerable Assaji attained the Path on the fourth. On the fifth waning day of July, the five bhikkhus assembled, and the Blessed One taught them the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, at the end of which all attained Arahantship.

Listening is not Sufficient, Practice is Needed

According to the Vinaya and Sutta texts, attainment of the Path was described as being achieved by two groups of two bhikkhus, whereas the Commentary gives a detailed description of how individual bhikkhus achieved Stream-winning on consecutive days. That is the only difference between the Pāli text and the Commentarial versions. It was not just by listening to discourses, but by actually practising meditation that they attained Stream-winning. They did not even go out for alms, but worked incessantly day and night. The Buddha himself stayed in the monastery, ready to give guidance and assistance whenever it was needed. On these points there is agreement in all versions.

It is very clear, therefore, that the Venerable Vappa began striving on the evening of the full-moon day of July and attained Stream-winning on the first waning day. Venerable Bhaddiya had to strive for about two days and attained Stream-winning on the second waning day. Venerable Mahānāma strived for about three days and achieved Stream-winning on the third waning day. Venerable Assaji strived for about four days and achieved Stream-winning on the fourth waning day of July. All of them had to make strenuous efforts

to attain Stream-winning, and did not do it by just listening to discourses, but did so by striving hard under the guidance of the Blessed One himself. This fact is very clear.

The groups of five bhikkhus were not ordinary persons. It is said that they were the royal astrologers who had foretold the future of the Bodhisatta at the time of his birth. Some Commentaries, however, say that they were the sons of these court astrologers. They were singular individuals who had given up household life and become recluses while the Bodhisatta was still in his teens. They were also endowed with remarkable intelligence, able to grasp easily the teaching of the Buddha. If Stream-winning were attainable merely by listening to the Dhamma, they were persons who could have realised it merely by listening to a discourse, without having to strive strenuously for one, two, three, or four days. The Blessed One would not have urged them to strive earnestly, he would have merely taught them once to attain Stream-winning, or repeated the teaching twice, or thrice. Instead, he required them not just to listen to discourses, but to practise meditation strenuously. On reflection, the reason for doing so is obvious. He knew them to be the type of individuals who needed to practice under guidance (*neyya*).

Assertions are made nowadays that there is no need to practise concentration of insight meditation is necessary to reach the mere stage of Stream-winner; appreciating and understanding what is taught by the teacher is enough to gain this stage." These assertions only serve to discourage and dissuade the practice of concentration and insight meditation. It must be noted that these views are groundless and are causing great disservice and harm to the spread of the practical aspect of Buddhism. It must be firmly noted too that believers and followers of such views will find the path to nibbāna closed to them.

How the Other Four Monks Practised

The Venerable Vappa and the other bhikkhus of the group of five strove hard for attainments by developing within themselves the Noble Eightfold Path as taught in the Dhammacakka Sutta. The Path was developed, as described in detail earlier, by noting the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, that are constantly occurring in oneself, to completely and rightly comprehend the truth of suffering.

A meditator who begins noting incessantly the arising of mind and matter as it occurs, may be troubled with wandering thoughts and fantasies. Especially for the learned scepticism and doubts are liable to arise. For some, unbearable pains will develop intensely in their bodies. Objects of strange vision and signs may distract them, giving them high opinions of themselves (with wrong conclusions as to their achievement). Some may hear whispering noises in their ears or get demoralised through sloth and torpor. Progress may also be retarded through imbalance between faith and wisdom, or between concentration and effort. In the absence of concentrated effort, one-pointedness of mind may not evolve. At the stage of arising and passing away when strange phenomena such as light, joy, bliss, and intense mindfulness appear, it is often noted that a meditator may over-estimate his or her achievements. When such distractions, defilements, and difficulties arise in the course of meditation, it is necessary for the meditation teacher to give guidance and help to remove them. In the absence of a teacher to guide and instruct, the meditator's efforts at meditation may prove futile. That was why the Blessed One waited in readiness without going out on almsround to give guidance while the five monks were engaged in strenuous meditation.

With such guidance and assistance, the Venerable Vappa gained Stream-winning after about a day's effort. When he gained realisation of the four truths, he became established in virtues and qualifications of having seen the Dhamma, *etc.* Knowing the truth personally, all doubts about the teaching vanished. There came the courage of conviction, ready to face any questioning concerning the teaching. Having established his eligibility thus, he requested the Blessed One to grant him admission to the Saṅgha, and the Buddha acceded to his request by the welcoming words of, "Come, monk."

The Venerable Bhaddiya, Mahānāma, and Assaji also attained Stream-winning, and having left uncertainty behind, gaining the courage of conviction in the Dhamma, requested ordination on the second, third, and fourth waning days of July respectively, and the Buddha ordained them by saying, "Come, monk."

On the fifth waning day of July, the Blessed One assembled the five bhikkhus together and taught them the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta. At that time, while listening to the discourse, all five bhikkhus

contemplated on the aggregates of attachment and developed the path of insight by virtue of which they all attained Arahantship.

Six Arahants Including the Blessed One

The compilers of the First Great Council recorded in the Vinaya Mahāvagga: “At the time (after the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta had been delivered) there were six Arahants (including the Buddha) in the world (*Tena kho pana samayena cha loke arahanto honti*).” This was a really wonderful, and unprecedented event.

Let us now bring to a close this series of discourses on the Dhammacakka Sutta by keeping our minds on these Venerable Accomplished Ones, the six Arahants, and giving them our reverential homage.

“We, the disciple of the Blessed One, bow with clasped hands to pay our homage and adoration with a deep sense of reverence to the Buddha together with the group of five bhikkhus, Arahants who having eradicated the defilements had become fully Accomplished Ones, two thousand five hundred and fifty one years ago on the fifth waning day of July, in the deer sanctuary, near Benares.”

A Concluding Prayer

May all you good people in this audience, by virtue of having given respectful attention to this great discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of Dhamma (the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta), which has been delivered in detail on eight occasions, from the new-moon day of September 1962 to the full-moon day of April 1963, be able to avoid the extremely relaxed path of indulgence in sensual pleasures as well as the extremely austere path of self-mortification, and by developing the Middle Path, otherwise known as the Noble Eightfold Path, become accomplished in penetrative insight (*pariññā paṭivedha*) and higher knowledge (*pariññā abhisamaya*), fully and rightly comprehending the truth of suffering.

May you abandon the truth of the origin of suffering, realise the truth of the cessation of suffering, and develop the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, and very soon attain nibbāna, the end of all suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

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