

A Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta

Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw



An English Rendering by
U On Pe (Tet Toe)

First printed and published in the Socialist
Republic of the Union of Burma
December 1980

*Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organisation
Mahāsi Translation Committee, Rangoon*

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Edited by
Bhikkhu Pesala
September 2021

Contents

Editor's Foreword.....	vii
Preface.....	viii
A Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta.....	1
Date for This Discourse.....	1
Concentrated Attention is Essential.....	2
Proper Way of Listening to A Discourse.....	2
The Woman Who Overheard the Guardian Spirits.....	4
Invitation by Sātāgiri.....	4
Attributes of the Buddha.....	5
Is the Buddha Impartial?.....	7
A Searching Question.....	9
The Buddha is Perfectly Equanimous.....	9
The Buddha is Very Adorable.....	10
The Arising of Great Compassion.....	10
Wrong Beliefs Are Most Deplorable.....	13
King Korabya and Venerable Raṭṭhapāla's Dialogue.....	13
A Shrewd Question.....	16
The Buddha's Equanimity.....	17
Mahā-Kassapa and A Leper.....	17
Does the Buddha Steal?.....	19
The Buddha is Free From Stealing.....	19
The Buddha is Free From Remorse and Lassitude.....	20
Rude Words of the Heretic Kassapa.....	20
The Buddha Never Neglected Jhāna.....	21
The Buddha Does Not Steal.....	21
The Bogus Buddhas.....	21
Nobody Wants to Be Killed Or Robbed.....	22
Restraint From Stealing.....	22
Stealing is Without Sympathy.....	23
Restraint by Insight.....	23
Restraint Through the Noble Path.....	23
One Who Kills is Not a Stream-winner.....	25
Samatha Jhāna.....	27
Vipassanā Jhāna.....	27
The Buddha Entered Jhāna Very Rapidly.....	28
Correct Usage of Sādhu.....	29
Does the Buddha Tell Lies?.....	31
Vassakāra's Slander.....	31
The Buddha Refrains From Falsehood.....	32
Perfect Speech.....	34
The Attribute of Sugata.....	37
Is the Buddha Free From Desire?.....	38
Three Kinds of Wrong View.....	38
The Buddha's Mind is Always Pure.....	39
The Bodhisatta Was Free From Wrong View.....	40

The Origin of False Views.....	41
Free of All Delusion.....	42
The Buddha Has the Eye of Knowledge.....	42
Knowledge of Others' Predispositions.....	44
Is the Buddha Wise and Moral?.....	47
Three Kinds of Special Knowledge.....	48
Eight Kinds of Special Knowledge.....	51
Insight Knowledge.....	51
Psychic Powers.....	53
Mind-Reading.....	53
The Story of Mātikamātā.....	53
No Mischief Near a Mind reader.....	58
The Divine Ear.....	59
Fifteen Kinds of Moral Conduct.....	59
Knowledge and Conduct Are Noblest.....	61
Meditators Have These Attributes.....	63
The Story of Suppabuddha.....	63
Kāli Was Honoured for Her Faith.....	65
Hemavata's Praise of the Buddha.....	66
How Does A Living-Being Arise?.....	67
A Being Arises From Six Things.....	67
Where the Six Are, the World Is.....	67
The Six Are in Company.....	69
Striving is Not Self-mortification.....	71
The Buddha's Admonition.....	72
Sensual Indulgence and Self-mortification.....	72
Three Aspects of the Middle Way.....	73
No Encroachment.....	74
Venerable Ariṭṭha's False Views.....	74
Must Not Encroach on Samādhi.....	75
Six Sense-Bases Make Up Man.....	76
Suffering in the Six.....	76
What is the Way to Liberation?.....	77
Instructions to Venerable Mālukeyputta.....	79
Discarding the Craving That Occurs on Seeing.....	80
Who Can Gain Liberation?.....	81
The Moral, Mindful, and Wise Can Escape.....	81
The Current of Sensuality.....	81
The Current of Existence.....	82
The Current of Wrong Views.....	82
The Current of Ignorance.....	83
Qualifications of A Successful Swimmer.....	84
Do Not Talk Rashly About Ekodhammo.....	85
The Arahant Overcomes All Fetters.....	87
Past History of Hemavata.....	88
Index.....	93

Editor's Foreword

About thirty of the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw's lectures have been translated into English and printed in Burma. Several of these valuable books, including this discourse on the Hemavata Sutta, have been reprinted in Malaysia. It was comprehensively revised when I first published an edition for free distribution in 1993 with the sponsorship of Mrs Sarojini Fernando in memory of her parents, Mr Hector de Fonseka and Mrs Inez de Fonseka.

This edition was updated in December 2013 with some minor revisions, some more footnotes, and numerous hyperlinks for the convenience of finding cross-references while reading in a PDF Viewer. This was updated again in September 2021 to fix broken links and other errors. The index has been improved and more entries have been added.

The Venerable Sayādaw's discourses were addressed to meditators practising intensively at Mahāsi Sāsana Yeikthā, in Rangoon, so they contain many Pāli words which, though familiar to those who have heard regular discourses, may not be familiar to others. I have revised this edition for the benefit of those who may be unfamiliar with Pāli terms. However, it is not desirable to remove technical terms altogether because no translation can convey the full meaning. Although I have replaced most of the Pāli words with a translation, I have given the Pāli word in brackets the first time it is used. I have polished the English to make comprehension easier, but nothing has been omitted or changed substantially from the original translation.

To further help the reader I have added some footnote references. References are to the page numbers of the Pāli texts of the Pali Text Society which, in the translations, are given at the top of the page or sometimes in the body of the text. However, in the case of the Dhammapada or Sutta Nipāta, references are simply given to verse numbers.

The Hemavata Sutta is from the Sutta Nipāta verses 153-180.

An excellent translation of the Sutta Nipāta in contemporary language by the late Venerable Hammalawa Saddhātissa is available from several online retailers.

Bhikkhu Pesala
September 2021

Preface

Honour to the Fully Enlightened One. Homage to the Omniscient Sage who spread the radiance of the Dhamma. Long may the Dhamma illumine the world.

This book is the translation of the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw's discourse on the Hemavata Sutta, by U On Pe, a well-known Burmese writer. The Hemavata Sutta belongs between the Dhammacakka and Anattalakkhaṇa Suttas in chronological order. Although it is not as famous as the former two discourses, it is no less valuable to those who seek the truth and wish to gain knowledge about the Buddha and his teachings.

I would like to mention briefly the circumstances under which the preparation of the original book started. Once, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw delivered a series of discourses on the Dhammacakka Sutta at the request of his disciples. The discourses contained much information about the Dhammacakka Sutta and its practical application, leaving a deep impression on the audience. I was fortunate to hear the talks, and tape-recorded them. With the approval of the Sayādaw, the discourses were translated into English and published for the benefit of those who don't read Burmese.

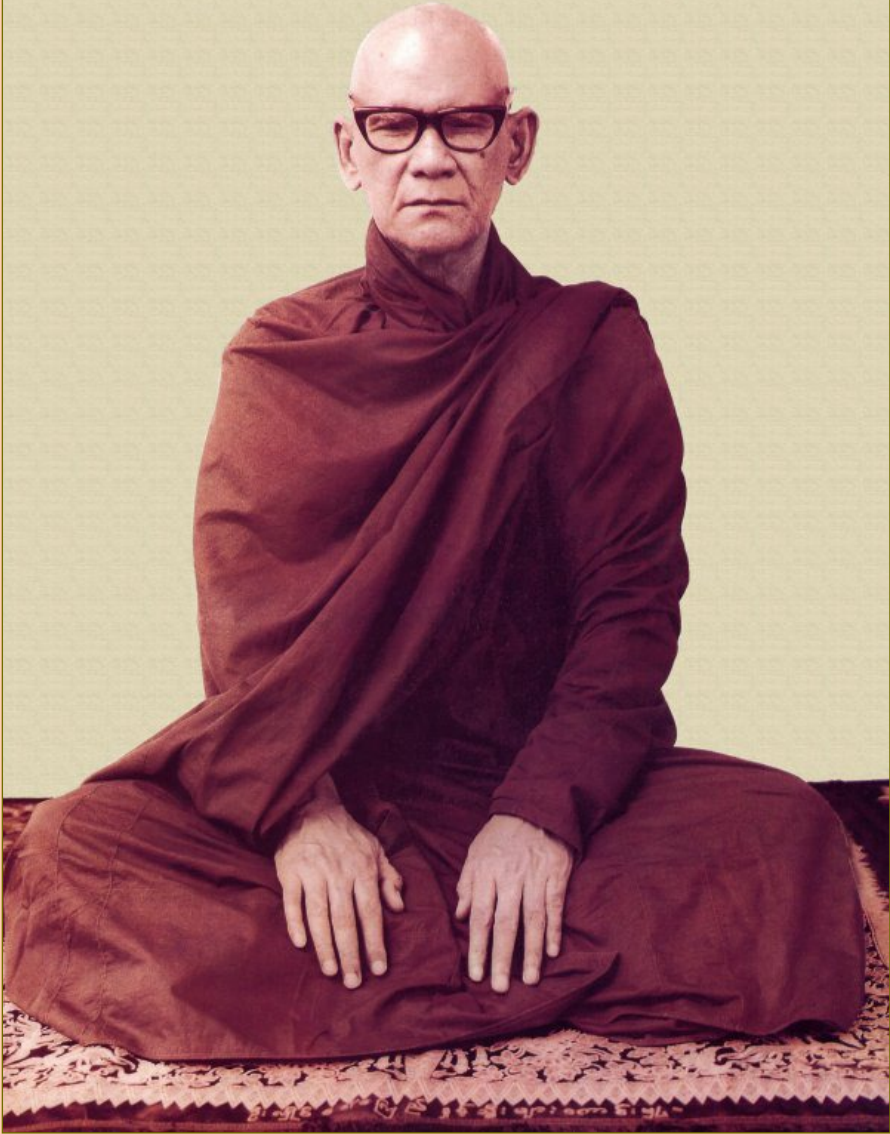
At the instigation of the Venerable Ashin Vaṇṇita, who helped me in preparing the book on the Dhammacakka Sutta, I requested the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw for a discourse on the Hemavata Sutta, and the Venerable Sayādaw kindly consented. He began a series of talks at the start of the Burmese New Year, in 1963, at the Mahāsi meditation centre. It was then crowded with meditators, including many high-school and college students. Six discourses were tape-recorded, transcribed, and submitted to the Venerable Sayādaw. They were first published in 1973.

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw's discourse on the Hemavata Sutta is a highly informative and illuminating Dhamma talk in simple language that can be understood by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. His discourse contains interesting stories and superb maxims in stanzas that can be easily memorized. The erudition and wisdom underlying the discourse will surely enable the reader to appreciate the taste of Dhamma, which excels all other tastes. As the Buddha said in the Vinaya, Aṅguttaranikāya, and Udāna:

“As the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, this Dhamma and discipline have but one taste, the taste of freedom.”

Finally, as the saying goes, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating of it,” and the readers can judge for themselves and enjoy the taste of the Dhamma if they practise accordingly. The discourse provides practical lessons that will be immensely beneficial to all spiritual aspirants regardless of sex, race, nationality, status, or occupation. We wish that this book — the first of its kind on the subject in English — will be a great benefit to the readers. May all beings attain the insight as pointed out in this book and achieve the liberation and peace of nibbāna, the abode of the Arahants and the Buddhas.

U Thein Han, BA., BL (Mahāsi Yogi)
Honorary Treasurer,
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Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw in 1982

A Discourse on the Hemavata Sutta

Date for This Discourse

This Hemavata Sutta is really a short piece, and so it is apt to be overlooked by many. In fact, it is the second of the discourses of the Buddha, for it was delivered just after the Dhammacakka Sutta, the Buddha's first discourse. The well-known Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta was delivered after the Hemavata Sutta, which was delivered on the night of the same day as the Dhammacakka Sutta.

This discourse is suitable for everyone. It is a conversation between two guardian spirits (*yakkha*), Hemavata and Sātāgiri,¹ describing the admirable attributes of the Buddha, and the ways of conduct for the Buddha's disciples. The woman who overheard the conversation was so inspired by the attributes of the Buddha that she became a Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*), although she had not yet learnt of his attainment of Buddhahood.

It would be really wonderful if my audience were to gain realisation of the Dhamma like that woman. She heard only a short conversation whereas my audience will be hearing a discourse that will last more than two hours daily for three or four days. My audience would be learning more from an elaborate discourse than the woman had learnt from a short talk. I hope that they will earn at least some perfections (*pārami*) conducive to attaining the path of a Stream-winner, if not the path itself.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma for forty-five years to human beings, *devas*, and *brahmās* before his final passing away (*parinibbāna*). From the time of his *parinibbāna* to this day is a period of 2,506 years,² and adding the forty-five years of his life as a teacher, the age of the Hemavata Sutta is 2,551 years. Being as old as the Dhammacakka Sutta, it is among the earliest discourses delivered by the Buddha.

At dawn following the full-moon of May 2,551 years ago Gotama attained Buddhahood. He stayed on at seven nearby places, for seven days each. After the forty-nine days, the Buddha went to the Migadavana forest near the city of Benares (Varanasi) to deliver his first discourse to the group of five ascetics. The date of the First Discourse was the full moon day of the month of July, 2,551 years ago. The time was the evening when the reddened ball of the sun was about to sink into the western horizon while the yellowish disc of the full moon was rising from the eastern horizon.

¹ The first edition of this book calls them '*devas*.' In the Pāli text *Sātāgiri* and Hemavata were earthbound guardian spirits (*yakkhas*). (Ed.)

² In 1963, when this discourse was given.

Myriads of *devas* and *brahmās* also assembled around the Buddha to listen to his First Discourse. Of the five ascetics, the oldest one, Venerable Koṇḍañña, attained to the stage of a Stream-winner while 180 million *brahmās* and innumerable *devas* attained the realisation of the Dhamma, according to the Milinda Pañha.

Among the celestial audience was Sātāgiri, who was named after the Sātā mountain, which was his residence. He was delighted to hear the Dhammacakka Sutta, but after looking around, he found that his friend was absent. He wished his friend to be present because myriads of world-periods had passed since the last discourse of the preceding Buddha ([Kassapa Buddha](#)) and this was the first time such a discourse had been heard since then. So he was wondering why his friend had not come to hear the First Discourse. Sātāgiri failed to attain realisation of the Dhamma owing to such distractions.

Concentrated Attention is Essential

To attain realisation of the Dhamma while listening to a discourse, one must have a serene mind. Only serene and careful attention will lead to concentration, and insight can only develop through deep concentration. If the mind wanders during the discourse to domestic, economic, or other secular affairs, concentration will not be gained. If anxiety sets in, it will be worse. When distraction and anxiety occur, the essence of the Dhamma will be missed, and as concentration is lacking, insight will not mature. If one cannot attain insight (*vipassanā*), how can one attain realisation of the Dhamma? So serene attention while listening to a discourse is crucial. The way to conduct oneself while listening to a discourse is described in the Kassapa Saṃyutta as follows.

Proper Way of Listening to A Discourse

A discourse must be attended to with a motive of benefit, just as in a commercial transaction a fair bargain must be struck with due consideration. In harvesting crops care must be taken so that not a grain of corn, nor a string of beans is left behind. The utmost care with which gold and gems must be kept is obvious. Similarly, in listening to a discourse one must try to realise the meaning of every word uttered. According to that treatise, the listener must listen carefully, with full mental involvement, and the Dhamma must be followed in practice.

That is the proper way of attending to a discourse. If one listens to a discourse in this way, one's mind will be calm and absorbed in the discourse, *i.e.* without distraction, so one will attain purity of mind. Many

beings attained realisation of the Dhamma while listening attentively to the discourse on the Four Noble Truths. The attainment of liberation from *saṃsāra* by Venerable Koṇḍañña, and the *devas* and *brahmās* when the discourse of the Dhammacakka was heard on that day, was due to paying concentrated attention to the Buddha's words. In this instance, Sātāgiri might have missed some words as he had been thinking about his friend Hemavata. If he had not missed the words, he might have pondered deeply upon their meaning. It appears that he did not quite understand the discourse as he was wondering why his friend had not turned up; he was thinking that his friend could be under the spell of pleasures and enjoyment. Thus, Sātāgiri did not come to the realisation of the Dhamma.

Hemavata was under the spell of pleasures, or in other words, "Beguiled by worldly pleasures." Worldly pleasures beguile people though they have no intrinsic value. Some individuals cannot come to attend this discourse because they are presently beguiled by worldly pleasures. The practice of the Dhamma is far away for such people. They usually think that the Dhamma can be practised later and that, for the present, making a living, making a headway in life, and enjoying pleasures, are more urgent. That is the beguilement of worldly pleasures. However, practising the Dhamma is really urgent and important. Such practice can be done only during the Buddha's dispensation, whereas worldly pleasures can be sought at any time. Therefore one should pay careful attention to the practice of the Dhamma after having found sufficient means of livelihood.

By the practice of the Dhamma, one could attain to a stage of spiritual achievement and thus escape from the dangers of the realms of misery (*apāya*) and from hell (*niraya*). Even if one cannot yet attain to the stages of the path (*magga*) and its fruition (*phala*), one can become involved in the Dhamma and regularly make wholesome kamma. Thus, one could be reborn as a human being, reach the spiritual realms of *devas*, or ascend to the higher realms of existence, and obtain some benefits. If, however, one wastes one's time in the affairs of secular life, one will be ill-equipped to attain a good life in the next existence. Therefore, believing that worldly pleasures are more important and urgent, although they are not, is due to the beguilement of worldly pleasures. It is, in fact, an illusion. Sātāgiri was giving a thought to his absent friend and letting his mind wander during the Buddha's discourse. That is why he missed the chance to realise the Dhamma.

After the Buddha's discourse on the Dhammacakka Sutta, Sātāgiri left the assembly to invite his friend. Sātāgiri was a leading *yakkha*, and so was

accompanied by his five hundred bodyguards with chariots drawn by elephants, horses, and garuḷa (huge and powerful birds). Simultaneously, Hemavata was on his way to invite Sātāgiri to a celestial festival of flowers — wonderful flowers that were then in full bloom in the Himalayan mountains. Sātāgiri too, came in full force with his bodyguards and chariots. As both were making an aerial journey, Hemavata heading for the south and Sātāgiri heading for the north, they met over the city of Rājagaha.

When the two friends met, Hemavata said: “Friend Sātāgiri, the Himalayas are now full of flowers as never before. So I have come to invite you to a feast to celebrate the occasion.”

Sātāgiri asked his friend why so many trees were blooming in the Himalayas. Hemavata said that he did not know the reason. Then Sātāgiri said: “Not only the Himalayas are so resplendent with flowers; flowers bloom as abundantly and as resplendently everywhere else. The reason is that the Fully Self-Enlightened One (*Sammāsambuddha*) attained enlightenment two months ago. Today he delivered his First Discourse, the Dhammacakka Sutta, and all the trees on earth have blossomed by way of making obeisance to the Enlightened One. I remembered you while I was attending the discourse, so I have come to invite you to it.”

The Woman Who Overheard the Guardian Spirits

While Hemavata and Sātāgiri were conversing, a rich man’s daughter named Kālī was enjoying the breeze, having opened a window of her boudoir. The month of July at Rājagaha city was hot, as it is at Mandalay or Shwebo. Kālī was then in the family way, and was feeling hot. So she opened the window, and was cooling herself in the breeze when she heard the two *yakkhas* overhead. She listened very attentively to their conversation. She realised that the conversation was not between two human beings, and guessed that it must be between two guardian spirits. She must have been about sixteen or seventeen, for in India in those days, women were married early and got into the family way at that age. The child she was carrying was none other than a future disciple of the Buddha, [Soṇakuṭikaṇṇa Thera](#). He was later extolled by the Buddha as [pre-eminent](#) for his excellent enunciation of Dhamma.¹

Invitation by Sātāgiri

Sātāgiri said, “Friend Hemavata, today is the fifteenth day of the month, an *Uposatha* day, and the night is bright with celestial lights. Today the

¹ See *Aṅguttaranikāya*, Vol. i. 24.

Buddha delivered his first discourse, so the trees are in full bloom, not only in the Himalayas, but also in the Sātā mountains. The flowers blossom not only in those regions, but all over the world, making obeisance to the Buddha for his first discourse. So many *devas* and *brahmās* are attending the discourse that the world is aglow with celestial lights. In the east the full moon shines clearly along with the Āsālhi planet. This night is therefore full of light from all these sources, and is sacred.”

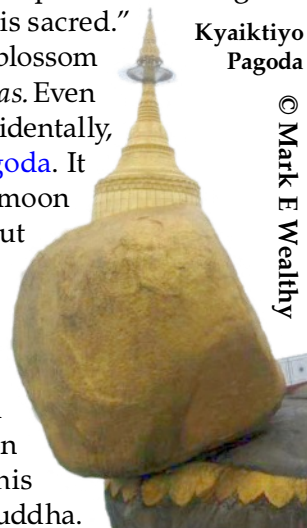
The world must have been so beautiful with blossom and celestial lights in the all-seeing eyes of the *devas*. Even to human eyes it must have been beautiful. Incidentally, once I went on a pilgrimage to the [Kyaiktiyo Pagoda](#). It was the night of the 14th of February in 1931. The moon was nearly full, and shining clearly. Looking out from the mountain range, I found the hills and valleys all around beautiful under the flooded moonlight. Some trees were full of flowers. The trees standing on the mountain slopes added to the scenic beauty of the panorama. The entire world must have been very beautiful to celestial beings on the day of the first discourse. So Sātāgiri invited his friend Hemavata to go to make obeisance to the Buddha.

“Let us go now to make obeisance to our great teacher, the Buddha of the noble and glorious lineage of Gotama,” said Sātāgiri to his friend, Hemavata.

Continuing, he said that the great teacher Siddhattha of the Gotama lineage of the Sakyan clan, had practised the Dhamma in Uruvela forest for six years. Now he had become the Fully Enlightened One possessing the nine incomparable attributes beginning with the attribute of *arahaṃ*. I will explain briefly the nine attributes of the Enlightened One.

Attributes of the Buddha

The word ‘*arahaṃ*’ means ‘deserving.’ What does the Buddha deserve? He deserves special adoration and worship. People worship various objects: trees, forests, mountains, oceans, the sky, the sun, the moon, the planets. Some people worship various kinds of celestial beings, some worship God in heaven, while others worship *brahmā*. Some people worship men such as the leaders of various sects and denominations. Why do people worship? They worship because they want to be free from danger and disasters. Everybody wants to be free from danger, and wants to be prosperous, healthy,



Kyaiktiyo
Pagoda

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long-lived, and wealthy. Not only human beings but celestial beings share similar desires. People want to achieve greater things than their own skill alone can do, so they depend on all sorts of deities, such as mountain and tree spirits. They worship and make offerings to them. Some imagine a super-powerful being who creates the world and its people and things, and worship that imagined being. Although no one has ever seen such a being, and no one can describe his appearance, people worship that being because someone in the past was reported to have said that he had seen that being. That person might have been dreaming.

Each generation of religionists worships according to their own beliefs without being critical. Even in this scientific age, traditional beliefs have remained. Believing that those who pray will be saved from adversity just by praying is groundless. If the gods or God could save these prayerful people, all of them would be rich, healthy, and prosperous, but they are not. Those who work, without praying, in any line of profitable trade or occupation become rich and prosperous. Every person is rewarded for his or her work according to its worth. Idlers obviously do not get rich. It is one's own effort that gives the reward, and prosperity is not due to worship of the gods.

The Buddha did not say, "Venerate me, and I will save you." He said that one would taste the fruits of one's own wholesome and unwholesome deeds. Nevertheless, one can gain special merit if one worships a person who truly possesses morality (*sīla*) and other noble qualities. If the merit thus gained finds an occasion to give its result, the worshipper will get the reward during his or her own lifetime, and the reward will be certainly be gained in future existences — the Buddha said so. However, if one adores a person who has no qualities that would make him noble and holy, such adoration is futile. It is like keeping bricks and gravel, thinking that they are precious stones. How can you expect to get the price of precious stones if you sell bricks and gravel? If, however, you keep genuine precious stones, then you can sell them at their true worth.

In the same way, if you worship noble and holy persons, you will gain the kind of merit you expect to get. As for the Buddha, he is the highest among those possessing morality and other noble qualities. So if the *devas*, *brahmās*, and human beings adore the Buddha, they will gain merit and receive rich rewards ranging from the benefits of human and celestial lives to the realisation of *nibbāna*. Such benefits are not given by the Buddha, but they are the natural result of merit accruing from adoration of the Buddha. The Buddha thus deserves the appellation "*Arahaṇ*" — one deserving the adoration of human and celestial beings. So Sātāgiri praised the Buddha with this noble appellation.

The other meaning of *arahaṃ* is, “to be far from something.” The meaning is that the Buddha is far from the mental defilements (*kilesa*). Beings in all realms of existence hanker after things that are desirable, or in other words, they have greed (*lobha*). They become angry when they come across things that excite their anger (*dosa*), and are under delusions or mistaken notions (*moha*). On the contrary, the Buddha is remote and free from greed, anger, and delusion. That is why the Buddha deserves the noble appellation of *arahaṃ*.

The next attribute is *Sammāsambuddha*. *Sammā* means ‘truthfully’; *sam* means ‘by oneself’; *buddha* means ‘knowing.’ So the term *Sammāsambuddha* means ‘knowing the truth fully by oneself.’ Though the Buddha had earlier received meditation instructions from Ālāra and Uddaka (ascetics who practised deep concentration), his attainment to Buddhahood was by methods evolved by his own insight. He gained the stages of absorption (*jhāna*) using mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), and perceived the Law of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) with his own insight. He analysed mental and physical phenomena and thus became enlightened. This is a brief summary of the Buddha’s realisation of the truth by himself. That is why the Buddha deserves the noble appellation of ‘*Sammāsambuddha*.’

When the Buddha attained Buddhahood, he gained full knowledge of the past, present, and future — he knew immediately whatever he thought about. His knowledge was without any defect. The Buddha deserves the noble appellation ‘Buddha’ because he knew the Dhamma fully and completely. This is what Sātāgiri said in praise of the Buddha.

Sātāgiri told Hemavata that the noble attributes of the Buddha were so many that one could not count them — one would have to explain them for myriads of years to do them full justice. Then he invited his friend to the Buddha’s discourse.

After hearing out his friend, Hemavata queried several points to find out whether the one referred to by Sātāgiri was really a Buddha. He put questions to his friend, and Sātāgiri answered them. At that time the leaders of several sects — Purāṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, and four others — were all claiming to be Buddhas, so it was necessary to make a proper investigation.

Is the Buddha Impartial?

“Friend Sātāgiri, can your teacher keep his mind well disposed? Is your teacher well disposed to all beings without any discrimination? Friend Sātāgiri, in this world many claim to be Buddhas. May I ask you if your Buddha is impartial to his disciples and those of others? Can he keep his

mind well disposed towards all living beings? Does he have loving-kindness (*mettā*) towards all, and wish them well-being and happiness? Does he have equal kindness and compassion (*karuṇā*) for all?"

This was a pertinent question because some who claimed to be Buddhas were partial — extending loving-kindness and compassion only to those who followed them and worshipped them. They said that they would save only those who adored and followed them, and those who did not would be relegated to hell. Such claimants to Buddhahood should not be regarded as real Buddhas for a true Buddha would be well disposed towards all living beings.

Hemavata continued: "Friend, can your Buddha control his mind and remain equanimous to what is pleasant and to what is unpleasant?"

In this world, people are pleased when they meet pleasant things, and enjoy them. When they meet unpleasant things they are displeased, angry, and disappointed, and show their anger. They follow their emotions and cannot control their minds. However, a true Buddha's mind is always under control, so Hemavata's question is important.

Ordinary people let their minds follow their sensations and emotions. They smile if anything evokes a smile, and curl their lips if a thing invites contempt. They laugh when amused and weep when they are sad. At first, they resist going to improper places, but when temptation becomes too strong, they go. Similarly, they say and do improper things after a short period of restraint. This is called "letting one's mind follow the sensations and emotions."

Let alone others, some meditators get disappointed because they cannot make progress, and give up. When they are making preparations to leave, their mentors have to urge them to stay. When they are thus coaxed to resume meditation, they make progress and are pleased. Yet some cannot be persuaded, and go home. That is another instance of allowing the mind to follow the sensations. Instances could be cited of meditators attaining the knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), who became disappointed because they found things wearisome, and went home. If such meditators had continued with their work, they would have attained full insight, but they could not control their minds and gave up. What a loss! However, most of the meditators listened to the admonitions of their meditation instructors and managed to control their minds.

In secular life too, there are many things over which one could control one's mind. The Buddha's message was for the control of one's mind. Those who have practised meditation can control their minds to a considerable

extent. However, those who have not are outside the Dhamma's influence. Since they are without a sense of shame (*hiri*) or fear (*ottappa*), they do or say whatever they like. Hemavata therefore asked his friend if the Buddha was one who could control his mind. That is quite a relevant question.

A Searching Question

Putting searching questions is important. A certain Sayādaw told me that he was once questioned by an American visitor at an alms-giving in a house. The questions were incisive and searching, and the Sayādaw said that it was quite an ordeal to be questioned like that. Yet he was well-known as a conversationalist. The visitor asked the Sayādaw how long he had practised the Dhamma and what perceptions (*ārammaṇa*) he had had. The Sayādaw said that such questions were embarrassing. Yet to me such questions were justified because an intelligent inquirer into the Dhamma would put such searching questions to the one who ought to know. To a seventy-year-old monk who had a reputation for deep learning, the enquirer should put such searching questions regarding personal experiences in the practice of meditation. It is important to be able to make bold and definitive replies to such questions and not to be embarrassed.

Hemavata was no ordinary individual. During the time of Kassapa Buddha, he was a venerable monk teaching five hundred disciples. That is why he asked questions about the attributes of the Buddha. Sātāgiri was also a venerable monk then, who had entered the Holy Order with Hemavata and, like him, had taught five hundred disciples.

The Buddha is Perfectly Equanimous

To the questions put by Hemavata, Sātāgiri gave a precise answer:

“Friend Hemavata, our teacher, the Buddha, looks upon all beings with equanimity. He has full control of his mental disposition towards pleasant and unpleasant sensations.”

This was Sātāgiri's answer. He implied that the Buddha's disposition towards beings was based on the principle of equality, whether they adored him or not. His close disciples were those who had gained enlightenment on hearing his first discourse, and ordinary disciples who were only within the fold of his dispensation. Of course, some were outside the Buddha's dispensation, and followers of Māra (the evil one) were actively opposed to the Buddha. “Our teacher, the Buddha, is equally disposed to all beings

with no discrimination, radiating his loving-kindness and compassion to all," said Sātāgiri.

That was at the beginning of the Buddha's dispensation. Later, the Buddha would be equally well disposed to his devout followers who provided the four essential requisites, and to the brahmins and heretics who were opposed to him. The Buddha adopted the same attitude towards his arch-enemy, Devadatta, as towards his own son, Rāhula, having regard for both of them as beings. The Buddha did not act partially towards anyone; he radiated his loving-kindness and compassion to all beings alike.

So Sātāgiri replied, "Our teacher, the Buddha, has the attribute of absolute impartiality towards all beings in all realms of existence."

The Buddha is Very Adorable

When one considers the partiality of people towards friends and family, and their prejudice against their enemies, one cannot fail to be full of adoration for the Buddha. Partiality is manifest in every sphere of human activity. To those they favour, people give all the help they can, making concessions and giving blessings. However, they have no desire to help those who oppose them. They render help grudgingly if asked to help complete strangers. Genuine impartiality is extremely rare. Let alone outsiders, people cannot even maintain perfect impartiality towards every member of their own family.

Let alone ordinary human beings, even those who are worshipped as gods in other religions are seldom impartial. These gods say, in effect, "I will save only my own followers and relegate the others to hell." Compared with such gods the Buddha is most adorable.

The Buddha wished all beings to be happy just as he wished for his son, Rāhula; he wanted all beings to attain nibbāna just as he wanted Rāhula to attain nibbāna; he had the same compassion and sympathy for all beings that he had for Rāhula. To be truly impartial is very difficult, but when the Buddha radiated great compassion, he did so to all beings in all realms of existence.

The Arising of Great Compassion

According to the 'Path of Discrimination' (Paṭisambhidāmagga), because the Buddha perceived the successive miseries of old age, disease, and death in all beings, great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) arose in his mind. Surveying entire realms of existence, he perceived the pitiable condition of beings, so great compassion arose in his mind. It is like a kind man taking pity on persons in great distress. The compassion of the ordinary person is not very

deep, but the compassion of the Buddha was extremely profound, and unlimited. The Buddha took pity on human beings for their present state of distress, and perceiving that in the next existence some would be reborn in the realms of misery: hell, the animal realm (*tiracchāna*), demons (*asura*), or hungry ghosts (*petas*), his compassion was even greater. Perceiving that all beings would suffer from old age, disease, and death in every future existence, the Buddha took pity on them all. Consider this human existence. From early childhood one has to study to learn as much as one can. On reaching maturity, one is obliged to take up a profession. One works until one is old and decrepit. Then one suffers from many kinds of diseases. Finally, unable to get the diseases cured, one has to die. People are usually oblivious to the inexorable deterioration of their bodies. With the onset of some terminal disease, when nothing can be done to cure it, death awaits. Only then do they perceive the tragedy of life. The relatives of a dying person do their best to allay the suffering, but nothing can be done. Surrounded by weeping relatives, he or she passes away. For a few months or years the relatives remember the deceased, and feel sad, but gradually they forget. That, in brief, is the life of a human being, which is just one drop in the vast ocean of *saṃsāra*.

The same pattern applies to the next existence — the gradual deterioration of the body, the onset of old age and disease, and eventually death. The Buddha perceived this clearly. He surveyed millions of ailing and dying beings, and, seeing the sorrow of those near and dear to them, great compassion arose in him. ‘Millions’ is the current term, but the true number is uncountable. If the history of one being’s existences could be illustrated, the pictures would fill the entire surface of the earth and yet more space would be needed. The birth, old age, disease, and death of beings, were perceived by the Buddha who felt great pity for them; that was how great compassion arose in him.

Thus, we learn, “Impermanence drives human beings to old age, disease, and death.” The Buddha foresaw that unless he could motivate living beings to follow his teachings and gain salvation, they would remain trapped in *saṃsāra*, and would suffer in the realms of misery. So the Buddha felt great pity for all beings in all realms of existence just as he felt for his own son, Rāhula. Thus Sātāgiri said, in reply to Hemavatā’s first query; “All sentient beings in all the realms of existence are helpless; they have no one to depend on for protection and support. So the Buddha has great compassion for all beings.”

One can depend on other people for protection and support. Parents protect their children, and children support their parents in old age. Teachers

look after their disciples, disciples serve their teachers, and relatives offer mutual help and support. However, such help and support are just temporary. Real help and support cannot be provided by others. For instance, children cannot prevent their parents from getting old. Parents cannot ensure that their children remain young. Children cannot accept and share with their siblings the advancing years of their parents. Nor can anyone remove and distribute the sickness of a patient to give them some relief. Of course, doctors and surgeons can usually alleviate suffering to some extent, but for many diseases they can do nothing effective. They cannot avert impending death, nor can the relatives or intimate friends of a dying person do anything to avert their death. All they can do is look on with compassion. People have all died in this way. No protection or support can help another to gain freedom from old age, disease, and death. No one can save another from going to the realms of misery after death if their kamma is bad.

Only the Buddha could save beings from these afflictions by guiding them onto the right path by his teachings and making them practise according to the Dhamma. This is how a doctor treats a patient — by prescribing appropriate medicine, and by proscribing detrimental food and harmful activities. There is no way of performing miracles by demanding, “May you be cured.” If the patient does not follow the physician’s directions, the disease will not be cured. Similarly, the Buddha only pointed out the correct path and gave directions. Those who follow his instructions can save themselves from old age, disease, and death, and gain liberation from *saṃsāra*.

A Buddha arises only after a lapse of many aeons (*kappa*), and each Buddha lives only for a limited period according to the normal life expectancy in that particular era. To hear the discourses of a Buddha is therefore an extremely rare opportunity. Though the Buddha is no longer alive, one can still hear discourses on his teachings delivered by learned and saintly teachers. Then one can follow the instructions contained in them to save oneself from further suffering in *saṃsāra*. However, such rare opportunities cannot be obtained in every era. Besides, many wrong beliefs are prevalent in the world, so one may adopt the wrong path. This is a grave danger, because one would then be striving for wrong aims. Then one would be dragged deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of existence. The Buddha felt great pity for all beings, whatever beliefs they held. His compassion was even greater, realising that so many beings in the various realms of existence were following wrong paths.

Wrong Beliefs Are Most Deplorable

One with wrong belief is really more pitiable than others because although he is seeking the path to happiness and well-being, he is following a path that leads to greater adversity the more he strives. Followers of the Buddha should not be complacent about having found the right path. They should work to attain at least the first stage of liberation, for only then will they be sure of being saved from adversity. In the next existence they will not have the same parents and teachers. They may be reborn with parents holding other beliefs. Then they will probably follow the wrong path. For that reason, the Buddha took great pity on beings who have no one to save them from the onset of old age, disease, and death, or from hell and misguided beliefs. His compassion was the same for all beings, with no discrimination.

King Korabya and Venerable Raṭṭhapāla's Dialogue

In this world, kings have large armies to protect themselves, and it may be said that they can place their reliance on them in worldly affairs. However, such kings too, have to become old in due course, and no army could protect them from old age, disease, and death when such tribulations assail them. [Venerable Raṭṭhapāla](#) was an Arahant in the time of the Buddha. He was the son of a rich man, and a friend of King Korabya. One day, the king asked the venerable Raṭṭhapāla why he had become a monk.

Venerable Raṭṭhapāla replied that he had become a monk after he had heard the Buddha's discourse relating to the helplessness of all beings from the tribulations of old age, disease, and death.

The king did not understand what helplessness meant. He said that as a king, he had large armies to protect him from all harm, and that he did not understand what was meant by helplessness.

Then Venerable Raṭṭhapāla said, "O king, did you ever suffer from any serious illness?"

The king replied, "Yes venerable sir, I did."

Then Venerable Raṭṭhapāla asked him if he could seek relief from that illness by asking his relatives to share the suffering with him.

"That is impossible. I had to suffer alone," the king replied.

Venerable Raṭṭhapāla then said, "That is precisely what the Buddha meant when he said that all beings are without anyone to help them, or anyone on whom they could depend for protection and support."¹

¹ Majjhimanikāya Vol. ii. 66ff, [Raṭṭhapāla Sutta](#).

So even if one has many people to help and protect oneself in worldly matters, one is helpless in the face of old age, disease, and death. The scriptures say that no property can be called one's own because one has to leave everything when one dies, and take rebirth in a new existence. The Buddha realised this fact and so his compassion for all beings was great. In other words, great compassion arose in the mind of the Buddha.

People have what they call their personal and private property such as gold, silver, food, cattle, vehicles, *etc.*, but when they die they have to leave all these things behind, and the body too. Death may come today or tomorrow to anybody, so we cannot say that the time for such separation is far off. Even while one is alive, these worldly things can be taken away by force, so they are not really one's own possessions.

One's real possessions comprise meritorious deeds, such as giving alms, observing precepts, and practising meditation. These cannot be taken away, whether by stealth or by force, and they are taken from one existence to another. Individuals who are rich in meritorious deeds will obtain well-being in future existences. It is therefore essential to accumulate merit by giving alms (*dāna*), observing morality, and practising mental culture (*bhāvanā*) to cultivate insight, the last two being the most important. You should strive to do these even if it is just for one or two days, for such deeds are very valuable and can be done without incurring any expense.

Those who have done meritorious deeds have something to rely on at the time of death. At the door of death one could die peacefully by practising meditation until the last breath, after which one would surely attain the celestial realms. So you should assiduously perform these three meritorious deeds — generosity, morality, and mental culture.

Your property is not really your own, you have to leave it to those who survive you after your death. If you are attached to it, you will probably become a hungry ghost, or another being in the lower realms, suffering extreme misery. The Buddha perceived the helplessness of all beings and felt great compassion for them.

The Buddha also saw that beings were assailed by insatiable desire for worldly things, and were slaves to lust and greed. For this reason too, his compassion for them was great. He saw that all beings were obsessed with craving (*taṇhā*); that they hankered after desirable and pleasant things to satisfy their six senses; that they were never satisfied with long life and fame that they might be fortunate enough to obtain; that they were never content with all the best endowments that life could offer them. Their

desires multiply inexorably, and dominate all aspects of their lives, so they are never satiated. In some countries many multi-millionaires have more money than they can ever spend. However, their desires have no limits, and they are never satisfied. Kings have never stopped their imperialistic plans; they always want more countries under their dominion.

It is said that *devas* are even more greedy. Powerful *devas* usually have five hundred or a thousand celestial maidens in their harems, but they never have enough. They enjoy all the delights and pleasures of celestial life, and yet they want more. So Sakka, the king of the gods, likened them to hungry ghosts who are always starving because they do not have enough to eat. The Buddha realised that all beings were slaves to craving and greed, and that moved him to great compassion.

It is true that beings are the slaves of craving and greed. Craving and greed urges them to search the things they want, and they risk their lives to get them. They have to work daily for the whole life to serve their desires. In the next existence, too, they remain slaves of the same master. There is no respite for them.

An ordinary slave may remain a slave only during one lifetime, but a slave of craving has an unending term of servitude until attaining Arahantship—thus escaping from *saṃsāra*. Ignorance (*avijjā*) colours all things, concealing their defects, and craving makes them seem delightful, urging beings to strive to get them. They strive all their lives, but are never satisfied with what they get. Since they are never satiated, they are always frustrated or disappointed. Realising this, the Buddha felt great compassion for all beings in every realm of existence.

“Unsatiated, all beings are slaves of craving.”

“Men are driven to old age, disease, and death.”

“Beings are so weak and helpless.”

“They have no genuine personal property, and whatever they have, has to be abandoned.”

These are the four points in the dialogue between Venerable Raṭṭhapāla and King Korabya. The venerable monk said that the Buddha saw this deplorable plight of all beings, and so was moved to great compassion. The Buddha saw that there was no one except him who could save them.

Thus Sātāgiri said that the Buddha's great compassion was without partiality or discrimination. “Besides, our teacher, the Buddha, can bear with equanimity all desirable and undesirable sensations,” continued Sātāgiri. It was a reply to Hemavata's question whether the Buddha could restrain his pleasure when in contact with pleasant things and his displeasure at unpleasant things, unlike

other beings who are moved and swayed by sensations of all kinds. This was a pertinent question, and the answer was apt.

Nowadays, if someone asks an irreligious friend to attend a discourse by one's revered teacher, such a person is likely to retort, "What can your teacher do? Is he adept in astrology, or can he do some chanting to enable me to prosper? Can he reconcile a separated couple, or recover lost property? Can he help me to gain promotion?"

Such questions are quite impertinent. This is not just a hypothetical example; I have heard of several instances like this. Questions like these are only asked by ignorant, irreverent persons.

A Shrewd Question

Hemavata's question in this context was most pertinent and shrewd. At the time of the Buddha, many claimed to be Buddhas. Prominent among those pretenders were [Purāṇa Kassapa](#), [Makkhali Gosāla](#), [Ajita Kesakambalī](#), [Pakudha Kaccāyana](#), [Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta](#), and [Sañcaya Belaṭṭhaputta](#). These six each had their own respective followers who believed in their divinations of the past, present, and future. Their followings were quite large.

Hemavata, however, knew that these so-called great teachers were not able to view pleasant and unpleasant things with equanimity. He wanted to know if his friend's teacher was truly equanimous, so he asked, "Friend Sātāgiri, can your Buddha control his mind and remain neutral to pleasant and unpleasant things?"

Sātāgiri gave him a categorical answer. The Buddha could view these things with mindful indifference, that is, rejecting both the pleasant and unpleasant with even-mindedness, over which he had full control. However beautiful and lovely a thing was, the Buddha could view it to realise that it was, after all, undesirable. He could look at the beautiful lady Māgaṇḍiyā and perceive that her body was composed of thirty-two repulsive components, and therefore remain unaffected. In the same way, in looking at the three beautiful daughters of Māra, he could regard them as merely a heap of loathsome physical elements.

Not only the Buddha, but all the Arahants could view things in the same manner, keeping their minds fully under control. Even those who are not Arahants can view physical elements in the same realistic way if they practised meditation on impurity (*asubha-kammaṭṭhāna*). Once, in Sri Lanka, the great elder Venerable Mahātissa of Cetiya mountain looked at a laughing woman on his almsround and saw the repulsiveness of the physical elements.

He thus gained absorption, and via that stage reached Arahantship. Meditators who have reached the stage of [knowledge of dissolution](#) (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*) can view things in their true nature of incessant decay and thus as unpleasant and undesirable.

The Buddha's Equanimity

The Buddha transformed repugnant beings into lovable ones by means of his loving-kindness. He viewed such beings with compassion so that they became as lovable and deserving of compassion as his own son, Rāhula. Thus he was unaffected by unpleasant and undesirable elements in their appearance. The Buddha viewed Devadatta, who tried to kill him by rolling a rock down onto him from Vulture's Peak, as kindly and as lovingly as he viewed Rāhula. He had the same goodwill for Devadatta as he had for his own son, thus he could turn the unpleasant into the pleasant.

Since he could view unpleasant things as pleasant, the Buddha picked up the sari from the dead body of Puṇṇā the slave woman, and wore it as a robe without any feeling of disgust. For the same reason he ate without disgust the cake from the folds of Queen Mallikā's skirt, and the leavings of a meal eaten by a brahmin named [Pañcaggadāyaka](#).

Mahā-Kassapa and A Leper

The Great Elder [Mahā-Kassapa](#) was also free from feelings of disgust. Once, the Venerable Mahā-Kassapa stood for almsfood at the place where a leper was eating his meal. He did so to enable the leper to gain merit, which would result in his prosperity and happiness in the next existence. The leper was so full of good volition for giving alms that he put the remainder of the food he had been eating into the almsbowl of the venerable monk. In doing so, the leper unwittingly dropped one of his disease-ridden fingers into the bowl. The great Arahant knew of this, but he did not remove the finger, and ate the meal¹ without any feeling of disgust.

This illustrates how to view an unpleasant thing as no different to a pleasant thing in respect of the elements that comprise it. All the Arahants could view things in this manner, not to speak of the Buddha.

The Buddha could also view the unpleasant without concern. It is important to be detached regarding the ailments occurring in one's body. The Buddha felt pain because he was struck in the foot by a splinter from the rock that Devadatta had rolled down from the mountain, but he viewed

¹ But not the finger (ed.)

the pain with unconcern. Also, during the last year of his life, the Buddha suffered from a serious illness, but he viewed the physical ailment with perfect equanimity. Not only the Buddha, but the Arahants too could view pleasantness and unpleasantness with equanimity.

Meditators who have reached the stage of **equanimity about formations** (*sañkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) can ignore pleasant and unpleasant feelings simply by noting the cognition, then dismissing it immediately. Such meditators may be said to have temporarily gained, at least in part, the attributes of an Arahant. Those who have attained this stage should be encouraged by this.

Wrong thoughts (*micchā sañkappa*) are of three kinds:

1. thoughts of sensuality (*kāma sañkappa*),
2. thoughts of ill-will (*byāpāda sañkappa*),
3. thoughts of cruelty (*vihiṃsa sañkappa*).

These three evil intentions must be dismissed from one's mind. Right thoughts (*sammā-sañkappa*) are also of three kinds:

1. thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhamma sañkappa*),
2. thoughts of loving-kindness (*abyāpāda sañkappa*),
3. thoughts of non-cruelty (*avihiṃsa sañkappa*).

These are the three good intentions that must be cultivated. Worldly people crave for pleasant things, and wish for unpleasant things to be removed or destroyed.

However, such unwholesome thoughts were absent from the Buddha's mind. His mind was pervaded with wholesome thoughts. He had no craving for pleasant things, and no aversion to unpleasant things. Only spontaneous thoughts of kindness and goodwill for all beings arose in his mind, no matter whether they were charming or abhorrent. His mind was always clear and fully under control.

The Buddha could control his mind by entering *jhāna* or the attainment of cessation (*phalasaṃpatti*) at will. He could maintain the same state of goodwill and loving-kindness for a moment, for the entire day, or for the entire week whenever he wished.

So Sātāgiri said: "Our teacher, the Buddha, has his mind under full control regarding the three evil intentions and the three good intentions."

The Buddha is adorable. He did not discriminate between those who had deep reverence for him and those who were antagonistic. His loving-kindness and compassion for all beings was universal. He had good-will for all, pleasant and unpleasant alike, and was fully in control of his mind. So the Buddha is most adorable.

Does the Buddha Steal?

The answer to the first query gave Hemavata sufficient cause to be convinced that the Buddha referred to by Sātāgiri was the genuine one. However, to be certain, Hemavata asked a second question: "Friend Sātāgiri, does your teacher take property the owner has not given by action or speech? Does he not rob or steal?"

The Buddha is Free From Stealing

Taking anything that is not given by the owner is stealing. Stealing consists in taking by stealth or by force. This question seems an insolent one to Buddhists. To ask whether such an individual as the Buddha had ever taken anything by stealth or by force is downright rude. If the same question were put to any monk, it would be regarded as very offensive. "Is your teacher, the monk, free of stealing?" It is indeed an insolent question. Nevertheless, at the time such a question was pertinent and not insolent. In those days people were eagerly looking for the genuine Buddha, and many bogus Buddhas had appeared on the scene.

The prominent bogus ones such as Purāṇa Kassapa, and five others were claiming that they were Buddhas. Their followers adored them and took refuge in them in the belief that they were genuine Buddhas. Yet these bogus Buddhas were giving discourses dismissing the concept of wholesome and unwholesome deeds.

Sātāgiri and Hemavata had been guardian spirits since the latter part of Kassapa Buddha's dispensation until the beginning of Gotama Buddha's dispensation. For such a long period these two guardian spirits would have known pretenders to Buddhahood at a time when people were eagerly awaiting the coming of the Buddha, just as many pretenders spring up to claim the throne when citizens of a country are awaiting the coming of their real king. Hemavata knew that the bogus Buddhas were not free of stealing, so he put this question. He wanted to examine Sātāgiri's teacher in respect of misdeeds.

We can make comparisons with those who worship God. According to their testament, their God does not seem to be free from unwholesome deeds. Their God is said to have punished some persons with death and destruction of property, and such acts are considered by Buddhism as unwholesome deeds. Therefore, Hemavata's question was not impertinent; it was quite pertinent given the prevailing situation.

The Buddha is Free From Remorse and Lassitude

Then Hemavata asked: "Is your teacher, the Buddha, free from remorse and lassitude?"

Lassitude is a kind of heedlessness. When overwhelmed by sexual desires, one is apt to forget that it is an unwholesome deed to commit fornication. Sexual intercourse is an ignoble act, and is an unwholesome deed if committed in the wrong circumstances. Heedlessness (*pamāda*) is used in the original Pāḷi text as a euphemism for immorality.

Rude Words of the Heretic Kassapa

A heretic named Kassapa came to see [Venerable Bākula](#) about fifty years after the passing away of the Buddha. This was not, of course, Purāṇa Kassapa, the Buddha-pretender. This Kassapa belonged to the sect of naked ascetics who were followers of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta. The present-day members of this sect are now called Jains.

When I visited the Migadavana Garden in India, I came upon a Jain temple. In that temple were photographs of their monks, called *muni*. *Muni* means a sage in Buddhism. Buddhist monks are fully clothed in yellow robes, but their monks are completely naked. We found such naked *munis* along the banks of the Ganges.

This Kassapa was a friend of Venerable Arahant Bākula when the latter was a layman. Kassapa asked Bākula, "Friend, how long have you been in the Buddha's dispensation?" to which Bākula replied, "Eighty years."

"How often did you indulge in sexual intercourse during that period?" asked Kassapa. That was obviously an insolent question.

Then Venerable Bākula said: "Friend Kassapa, you should ask, 'How often did you think of sex?' That is a civilized query."

Kassapa revised the wording of his question accordingly. Then Venerable Bākula replied, "I became an Arahant on the eighth day after my ordination, and becoming an Arahant means becoming free from all desire for sex. So I have not thought of sex since the time of my ordination, which is not once in eighty years."

This answer surprised Kassapa, who then took refuge in the Buddha's dispensation, and after practising meditation, became an Arahant. Hemavata was polite because he was not ignorant of the dispensation of the Buddha, and so he referred to 'heedlessness' or 'lassitude.' He meant to ask if Sātāgiri's teacher was free from lust.

The Buddha Never Neglected Jhāna

Hemavata asked whether Sātāgiri's teacher, the Buddha, never neglected *jhāna*, or in other words, whether he was fully aware so that he could reject all lustful desire, which is an impediment to Arahantship. Hankering after pleasant things and indulging in pleasures is a basic impediment. If one is free of that, one is said to have attained the first stage of *jhāna*. Now this question is just a corollary to the question of lassitude. Thus, Hemavata had put these questions relating to misdeeds of a physical nature, namely, killing, stealing, and the sexual act. He then asked about *jhāna*.

The Buddha Does Not Steal

"Friend Hemavata, our teacher is free of stealing. He does not steal or rob, like the bogus ones." Why was Sātāgiri so sure? Because the Buddha said in his Dhammacakka discourse that he had found the middle path. He also said that he had developed the path factors. These eight factors include right action, which refers to refraining from killing, stealing, and the sexual act. One must avoid these actions. Such avoidance is called restraint (*virati*).

Restraint is of three kinds: refraining from evil deeds by attainment of virtue (*sampatta-virati*), refraining from evil deeds after formally undertaking the precepts (*samādāna-virati*), and permanent avoidance by cutting off defilements (*samuccheda-virati*).

Sātāgiri knew that the Buddha was free of physical misdeeds because the Buddha had declared that he had completed the practice of the Noble Path which embraces all avoidance of all physical misdeeds. So he said, "Our teacher, the Buddha, is free of stealing."

The Bogus Buddhas

I will give a further explanation regarding stealing. The bogus Buddhas claimed to be Buddhas long before the enlightenment of the genuine Buddha. Of the six bogus ones, Purāṇa Kassapa said that killing, stealing, and robbing were not unwholesome deeds, and that alms-giving and other good deeds were not wholesome.

Another bogus Buddha, Makkhali Gosāla, said that there was no cause for either misery or happiness, for such states were predestined, and so, however much one did evil deeds one would not suffer. Similarly, one would not gain any merit by doing good deeds. He maintained that *saṃsāra* did not exist, and that all beings would be saved when their turn came.

Pakudha Kaccāyana, a leader of another sect, said that all beings were composed of the four elements together with misery, happiness, and life. So if one were to cut a being with a sword, the sword would cut into these seven components, without affecting the being.

Ajita Kesakambala, another bogus Buddha, maintained that there was no afterlife for any being, therefore wholesome and unwholesome deeds would not produce any effect.

From the teachings of these bogus Buddhas, we can surmise that they encouraged committing unwholesome deeds — they seemed to be urging people to kill and steal.

Nobody Wants to Be Killed Or Robbed

Naturally, every being would like to enjoy a long life, and would not want to be killed, or to be robbed of his or her hard-earned possessions. Therefore, no one should kill any living being. Sacrifices should not be made by killing living beings under a mistaken notion that such sacrifices are meritorious deeds. For the same reason, no one should steal anyone's property, either for himself or for others.

Yet in those days the bogus leaders of the sects maintained that killing and stealing were not unwholesome deeds. It may be inferred that since they said so, they themselves were not free of such unwholesome deeds. As for the genuine Buddha, he declared these deeds to be unwholesome. He did not commit them himself, and would not urge anyone to commit them. This was what made Hemavata put the question about stealing, to which Sātāgiri made a prompt answer saying that his teacher, the Buddha, was free of the unwholesome deed of stealing because he was perfect as regards right action.

Restraint From Stealing

If one were not fully endowed with right action, one would not be totally trustworthy, even though one might declare that one avoids taking things not given. One may steal when one has a chance to and cannot resist the temptation. To give an example, at the time of the British evacuation of Burma, just before the coming of the Japanese troops, most of the people in the towns fled, leaving their property. Then, the country-folk swarmed into the towns to loot. It is said that it was amusing to see cabinets too large for the hovels in which these looters lived. These looters were normally observers of the five precepts, but when they were given the opportunity to steal with

impunity, their precepts were broken. That is because of the absence of restraint by cutting off defilements, *i.e.* avoidance of unwholesome deeds by means of the Noble Path. The Buddha had perfected right action, and was therefore free of the unwholesome deeds of stealing and killing.

Stealing is Without Sympathy

One who steals from others is devoid of the sympathetic feeling that a moral person would have. Nobody likes to be robbed, so nobody should rob another. A truly moral person would have sympathy for others, and would not want to steal even without formally taking the precepts. This kind of avoidance is called restraint by attainment (*sampatta-virati*). Avoidance after taking the precepts is called restraint by undertaking (*samādāna-virati*).

On the subject of stealing, a Jain master once said, “A man’s property is his outer life, so stealing his property is taking his life.” This is quite a plausible argument, though a bit contrived. What he meant to say is that killing is taking another person’s life directly. Stealing is tantamount to killing since a man’s property constitutes his outer life because he depends upon it for his living. A person gets his property by hard work, careful budgeting, and thrift. So his property is really part of his life. Some people die of grief for the loss of their property. That is why the Jain master declared that property is one’s outer life.

Restraint by Insight

Even if one is not free from greed one should refrain from stealing through sympathy or scrupulous observance of the precepts. To meditators who note the arising and passing away of phenomena, avoidance of stealing is already accomplished. To them, everything is incessantly arising and passing away. The entire process is beyond one’s control (*anatta*), and so the desire to kill or steal will not occur. The practice of restraint is already accomplished by meditators.

Restraint Through the Noble Path

When the meditation practice reaches an advanced stage, one can comprehend the cessation of mentality (*nāma*) and materiality (*rūpa*), and gain the insight of the Noble Path. At that stage no desire to steal or commit any unwholesome deed ever occurs. At that moment the defilements are uprooted by means of the restraint of the Noble Ones. This complete abandonment is called restraint by cutting off defilements (*samuccheda-virati*).

This occurs not only when one reaches the higher stages of insight, but even at the first stage when one becomes a Stream-winner. At that point all the unwholesome deeds referred to in the five precepts have been uprooted.

According to the [Dhammādāsa Sutta](#), a Stream-winner possesses insight that enables him or her to know fully the attributes of the Buddha, so he or she has a deep reverence for him. Similarly, he or she comes to have a strong conviction of the attributes of the Dhamma and Saṅgha. Thus the Stream-winner has the ability to observe fully the five precepts that the Noble Ones hold in high esteem. So a Stream-winner has full confidence in the attributes of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and has joined the fold of the Noble Ones.

The Noble Ones adore the five precepts, and do not want to break them. They are always eager to preserve their morality. They observe the precepts, not because they are afraid that others would censure them, but because they want to keep their minds pure, for purity of mind can only be achieved by observance of the five precepts. Not only during this life but in all future existences, they do not transgress the precepts. They may not know that they have become a Stream-winner in a previous existence, but they do know that they must observe the five precepts fully and with no defect.

Sometimes one comes across a person who has never done any unwholesome deed such as killing or stealing since infancy. Though not given any particular instructions by his or her parents, he or she knows what is wrong, and refrains from it, keeping pure morality since childhood. Maybe he or she had achieved a special insight in a previous existence. There are also instances of persons who, though born of non-Buddhist parents, have come all the way to this country to practise meditation. Maybe such persons have had some practice of the Buddha's Dhamma in their previous existences. These are interesting cases, but must be evaluated in accordance with the extent and depth of their study and practice of the Dhamma.

A genuine Stream-winner has already entered the fold of the Noble Ones, so strictly observes the five precepts having completely uprooted all immoral deeds. Though not entirely free from greed and anger, a Stream-winner is not driven by them to transgress the five precepts. A Stream-winner would not dream of stealing — if he or she wanted something, he or she would buy it or ask the owner to give it in charity. That is the natural behaviour of a Noble One. The Buddha had already removed all the unwholesome deeds by means of all three restraints, so stealing was entirely

out of the question. When he was teaching the Dhammacakka Sutta, he declared that he had rejected all wrong-doing. That is why Sātāgiri said:

“Gotama Buddha is free from the unwholesome deed of taking anything that was not given by the owner by word or action. This I declare with the courage of conviction.”

Hemavata did not put this question relating to the unwholesome deed of stealing to know a mere temporary and occasional abstinence, but to be convinced that the Buddha had completely purified himself of the unwholesome deed of stealing. Sātāgiri’s answer was categorical.

Then the second answer was, “Gotama Buddha is also free of the unwholesome deed of torturing living beings. He is free of harming and killing beings.” This answer seems not to be needed, considering the attributes of the Buddha, but the question had to be asked because at the time several bogus Buddhas had appeared. The intention was to distinguish the genuine Buddha from the bogus ones. Some people at the time believed in God as the Creator of all beings and things. In their own books such a Creator is said to mete out punishment to those who went against his wishes. Punishment consisted of rousing great storms and floods to kill people, causing great earthquakes and destruction to crops for the same purpose. If so, then their God was not free from the unwholesome deed of killing. Hemavata’s question about the unwholesome deeds of killing and stealing, was pertinent in the prevailing situation.

One Who Kills is Not a Stream-winner

A writer once stated in a journal that a Stream-winner will not kill others, but if anyone comes to kill him, he will kill his attacker. The writer declared that he said that after researching into the nature of the human mind.

That is ridiculous. I wonder whose mind he researched, and how he did it. He must have made a research of his own mind. Perhaps he thought that he was a Stream-winner. Maybe he asked himself if he would allow an attacker to kill him if he had an effective weapon to defend himself. Thus, he got his own answer that he would kill the attacker first. From his own reasoning he obtained the conclusions that he expressed in his article. However, according to the tenets of Buddhism, this is a ridiculous statement.

The very fact that one thinks one can and should retaliate against an attacker proves that one is not a Stream-winner. According to the Buddha’s teaching, one who entertains such an idea is just an ordinary person (*puthujjana*), not a

Stream-winner. A genuine Stream-winner would not even kill a bug, let alone a human being. This fact must be fully understood and remembered.

As for the Buddha, the rejection of such unwholesome deeds is complete. So Sātāgiri gave a categorical answer: “I declare with the courage of conviction that our teacher, the Buddha, never kills or tortures any living being.”

Then comes the third answer: “Our teacher, the Buddha, is never forgetful. He is far removed from heedlessness.”

Forgetfulness in the secular sense is well known. You forget to do something, or you forget someone’s name, *etc.* However, forgetfulness in the present context is not like that. Here it means to be absorbed in the five kinds of enjoyments of the senses, allowing the mind to be lost in enjoyment, or heedlessness, which is called *pamāda* in Pāli.

Heedlessness means allowing the mind to freely enjoy all kinds of sense objects. It is like letting loose the ropes tied around the necks of cattle, and allowing them to wander and graze wherever they wish. Such forgetfulness is very enjoyable. Enjoying the beauty of a woman, or a man — the tender voice, the fragrant odour, the sweet taste, and the soft touch of an individual are pleasurable. To think about the good things of life, even if you cannot actually have them, is also enjoyment of the senses — such fantasising is extremely pleasurable.

All your waking hours are spent thinking about sensual pleasures and planning how to enjoy them. You do that not just for one day, one month, or one year, but you do it all your life. If you do not have time to think about such pleasures, you get bored. Without sensual pleasures to think about, or to plan to get, people wouldn’t really want to live in this world. Getting lost in thought and enjoyment of sensual pleasures is heedlessness. Of those sensual pleasures, sexual pleasures are most prominent. So Hemavata asked his friend whether his teacher, the Buddha, was free of the unwholesome deed of indulgence in sexual pleasure.

To this question Sātāgiri gave a definite answer, “Our teacher, the Buddha, is absolutely free of lust.”

Then, this apparently impertinent question, was pertinent. The answer was definitive. The Buddha was not only totally free from indulgence in sexual pleasures, but also did not indulge in pleasurable sights, sounds, odours, tastes, or tactile pleasures. He was always heedful in the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), and he never neglected *jhāna*.

There are two kinds of *jhāna*: *samatha jhāna* — concentration on one object, and *vipassanā jhāna* — constant mindfulness of mental and physical

phenomena. By contemplating incessantly on the arising and passing away of phenomena, one perceives the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and soullessness of all phenomena.

Samatha Jhāna

Concentration of one's mind on a certain object is called *samatha jhāna*. For instance, a circle of clay (*pathavi kasiṇa*) is used for concentrating on the earth element. Such concentration does not lead to insight into the arising and passing away of phenomena. As the mind is fixed on one object, sensual thoughts do not have a chance to enter the mind. Using this method, one can attain to the four stages of absorption on forms (*rūpa jhāna*). Then one can progress to the four formless absorptions (*arūpa jhāna*). These absorptions would not give the practitioner any insight into the impermanence of the aggregates of existence. They are good only for obtaining concentration and keeping the mind calm and collected.

Further progress in *jhāna* will lead to attainment of the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu*), the divine ear (*dibbasota*), knowledge of former existences (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), and knowledge of the minds of others (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*).

One can practise insight meditation based on *samatha jhāna*, and in due course attain the path and its fruition, so *samatha jhāna* should not be held in contempt. If one practises mindfulness of breathing, or contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body, one can keep one's mind calm and collected, and attain *jhāna*. However, if one does not observe the arising and passing away of phenomena, one would gain only concentration and mental tranquillity.

Vipassanā Jhāna

Observing the three characteristics means *vipassanā jhāna*. The three characteristics are impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and soullessness. However, to begin with the observation of these three characteristics is impossible. One must start by observing the consciousness arising at the six sense-doors as 'seeing,' 'hearing,' etc. To observe physical actions, one must note them as they occur, thus: the rising and falling of the abdomen; the lifting, moving forward, and dropping of the foot as one is walking. Similarly, one must note the standing, sitting, and lying postures, or the bending and stretching of the limbs as they occur.

While noting these mental and physical activities, one will come to perceive their arising and passing away, which are followed by a new series

of activities. Thus, one will come to know their impermanence or instability, which entails difficulty, distress, and misery, and the absence of any controlling entity or self.

The awareness of these characteristics in psychophysical phenomena takes a meditator to the beginning of **knowledge by comprehension** (*sammasana-ñāṇa*). The meditator repeatedly notes any movement or action, whether physical or mental, deriving a measure of tranquillity born of concentration. This kind of concentration is called one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), and is equivalent to the first *jhāna*.

As the meditator progresses, the actions and movements will spontaneously present themselves for noting. The meditator no longer has to try to note, and has reached the **knowledge of arising and passing away** (*udayab-baya-ñāṇa*). At this point, initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*) are absent, but joy (*pīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) abound as concentration strengthens further. So the early part of this stage of insight is equivalent to the second *jhāna*.

In the advanced phase of knowledge of arising and passing away, the light emanating from joy will be overcome by bliss (*sukha*), and concentration will become prominent. The advanced phase of this stage of insight is equivalent to the third *jhāna*.

Later, even bliss dims and fades when attention is focused on the constant passing away of phenomena, when knowledge of dissolution develops. Here, equanimity (*upekkhā*) is prominent. This stage is equivalent to the fourth *jhāna*. Equanimity and one-pointedness become even more prominent in the next stage of insight, knowledge of equanimity with regard to formations. Those meditators who have advanced to this stage will know what it is.

When Sātāgiri said that the Buddha was not out of *jhāna*, he meant that the Buddha never neglected *jhāna*.

The Buddha Entered Jhāna Very Rapidly

The Buddha was consistently in *jhāna*, and for that he is adorable. At the end of part of a discourse, while the audience exclaimed in one voice, “*Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!* (Well said!),” the Buddha went into *jhāna* even during that brief interval. Then he resumed the discourse. Such consistency is really marvellous.

Correct Usage of Sādhu

During my discourses there are only a few occasions for the audience to say “sādhu.” In Burma it is usual for the audience to say “sādhu” at the end of a Pāli verse of which the teaching monk gives a literal translation. When the monk ends in a long drawn-out voice with the [Burmese] phrase “*phyitkya le dawt tha dee*” the audience says without any hesitation, “sādhu.” They do not take care to distinguish whether the verse so recited and translated calls for exultation or not, they just note the ending words “*tha dee*,” and drone out “sādhu.”

For instance, in the [Vessantara Jātaka](#), King Vessantara gave away his two children, a son and a daughter of tender ages of four and five, to [Jūjaka](#) Brahmin. The Pāli verse about that describes the brahmin’s cruel treatment of the children who wept desolately; how the brahmin beat them cruelly and dragged them away. When the teaching monk recited that verse and translated it into Burmese, ending his translation with the usual “*tha dee*” the audience droned out the usual “sādhu.” However, that part of the story calls for sympathy and sadness from the listeners, not exultation, and so the “sādhu” went awry. In Burma the audience do not care to discriminate. In Sri Lanka, however, the audience intones “sādhu” three times only where a discourse refers to the attainment of Arahantship or nibbāna. That is an occasion for exultation when a congratulatory exclamation such as “sādhu,” is called for.

In the time of the Buddha the practice of saying “sādhu” must have been of the Sri Lankan pattern. When the audience exclaimed “sādhu” three times, the Buddha paused, and during that brief interval he went into *jhāna*. Soon after the exclamation of “sādhu” by the audience, he resumed his discourse — he never remained idle. How adorable!

The teaching monks of today may not be entering *jhāna*; that brief interval is probably the time to rest his voice or consider the words he will use when he resumes his discourse.

Moreover, the Buddha looked on all beings with great compassion, abiding in the attainment of great compassion (*mahākaruṇā samāpatti*) and the fruition of Arahantship (*arahatta samāpatti*) for 120 million times each, altogether 240 million times daily. That shows that the Buddha did not miss a single opportunity for entering into *jhāna*. So Sātāgiri said in reply to his friend’s query, “The Buddha who knows all the Dhamma fully never neglected *jhāna*.”

To sum up, the Buddha was free of the unwholesome deed of stealing, the unwholesome deed of torture and killing, and was always remote from heedlessness, nor did he ever neglect *jhāna*.

As the Buddha was Omniscient, he did not need to consider in advance what he would say in a discourse, he was always prepared. He also knew the appropriate teaching to suit the maturity of any individual. Not only did he enter into *jhāna* after the discourse, but he utilised even brief intervals during the discourse to enter into *jhāna*. He never remained idle for a moment.

If we consider this, we will realise just how adorable the Buddha is, thus we should take refuge in him with concentrated attention. While doing so, we should note the arising of the joy emanating from the adoration, and the immediate fading away of that joy. By using the *vipassanā* method we should strengthen our insight until we reach the final stage of the Noble Path.

To end today's session, I urge the meditators to continue their practice by first noting the actions of the body, such as the rising and falling of the abdomen, and then the thoughts and imaginations of the mind. Noting mental phenomena is *cittānupassanā*. Noting the stiffness and aching of the limbs, and all the other physical discomfort is *vedanānupassanā*. Noting 'seeing,' 'hearing,' etc., and anger, disappointment, and other mental states is *dhammānupassanā*. Noting the various movements and actions of the body is *kāyānupassanā*.

The meditators at this centre are doing this practice, and all of them are trying to win freedom from heedlessness. In due course, they will attain advanced stages of insight.

Of the four path knowledges, the path of a Stream-winner enables one to gain deep concentration. Then advancing from that stage to the next, the path of a Once-returner, the meditator will have his concentration power strengthened further. When one reaches the third stage, the path of a Non-returner, there will not be any wandering of the mind, and the concentration will be very deep. With diligence, one can advance to the ultimate stage of *arahatta magga* and thus attain the state of an Arahant. At that final stage heedlessness is impossible because mindfulness is ever present. So in praising the insight of an Arahant, it is said: "The Arahant is always mindful whether walking, standing, sleeping, or sitting."

An Arahant never misses a moment in his mindfulness of mental and physical phenomena. His awareness is all-encompassing. By 'sleeping' it means that there is mindfulness till the point of falling asleep, and mindfulness resumes at the point of waking up. Of course, there is no question of mindfulness while one is asleep. That is how mindfulness is

practised every moment of one's waking life, according to the Buddha's admonition "*appamādena sampādetha* — strive on with heedfulness."

Our meditators have been developing mindfulness, which is really heartening. They must work hard enough to attain at least the first stage of the path — the path of stream-winning. When one attains that stage, one will never again fall into the realms of misery.

Does the Buddha Tell Lies?

The two questions put by Hemavata relate to physical commission of unwholesome deeds, and to whether the Buddha neglected *jhāna*. Then Hemavata put questions relating to unwholesome speech:

"Friend Sātāgiri, does your teacher, the Buddha, refrain from telling lies? Does he refrain from using rude, abusive, and contemptuous words? Does he refrain from uttering words that destroy friendliness and unity? Does he utter frivolous speech?"

Hemavata wanted to know whether the Buddha committed unwholesome speech, such as using abusive words, telling lies, and telling tales that could set one person against another. Unity between friends and allies could be disrupted by someone dropping a few words, quite politely, hinting at something that could create misunderstanding.

Vassakāra's Slander

At the time of the Buddha, King Ajātasattu wanted to invade the Vajji kingdom where the Licchavī princes were reigning. These princes were ruling the country in harmony and unity, and their unity was their strength. Ajātasattu tried to disrupt the unity and undermine the strength of the Licchavī princes by employing a subterfuge. He sent Vassakāra, one of his ministers, into exile, and Vassakāra went to the Licchavī princes to seek refuge. Some princes said to others, "This brahmin, Vassakāra, is a cunning man, don't let him take refuge." Others replied, "This brahmin was exiled because he spoke for us against his own king. So we should take him on." Vassakāra was consequently received by the Licchavī princes, and was appointed as the teacher of the children of the princes.

Vassakāra taught the princes' children well, and thus earned the trust of the princes. Once he had obtained the trust and confidence of the princes, Vassakāra started his campaign of setting one prince against another. The ruse he employed was subtle: he called one prince aside and asked in a whisper, "Have you taken your meal? What curry did you eat?"

The other princes saw this, and asked the prince what the teacher had told him. The prince said truthfully that the old man asked him whether he had taken his meal and what curry he ate, but the other princes did not believe him. They thought to themselves, "One would not ask such questions in a whisper. There must be some important secret."

Next, the brahmin asked another prince, "Does your father plough the field? How many bullocks draw his plough?" When the other princes asked him what had passed between the brahmin and him, the prince told them truthfully, but none of them believed him.

Then the brahmin called another prince and asked in a whisper, "Are you a coward?" The prince asked him in surprise, "Why? Who told you that?" Then the brahmin said, "Oh your friend, that prince," and pointed to another prince. The prince was angry at being so accused, and began to mistrust the other prince.

Using such simple deceits, Vassakāra continued setting one prince against another. Within three years he had created disharmony among the Licchavi princes. The disruption of their unity was so great that no prince would look at the face of another. Then Vassakāra sent a secret message to King Ajātasattu who led an army against the Vajji kingdom of the Licchavi princes. Since each prince thought that the others had accused him of cowardice, none of them went out to fight the invading army. They said to themselves, "If they say I am a coward, let them go out and fight." So King Ajātasattu captured the country easily. This furnishes a good lesson about backbiting. Hemavata, therefore, asked, "Is your teacher, the Buddha, free of speech calculated to create misunderstanding?"

He further questioned, "Is your teacher, the Buddha, free from frivolous speech?" Such talk includes present-day novels and fables, which lack morals and valuable messages for the good of the secular or spiritual life of the people; they are written merely for pleasurable reading. Hemavata asked his friend, Sātāgiri, whether his teacher, the Buddha, was free of such frivolous speech.

The Buddha Refrains From Falsehood

Sātāgiri said in reply, "Friend Hemavata, Gotama Buddha does not tell lies; he always refrains from falsehood." Since the time when the Bodhisatta received the assurance from Buddha Dipaṅkara, he had refrained from telling lies. Since then, he had always been free of that unwholesome deed; he always spoke the truth. A person who tells lies does not hesitate to

commit any unwholesome deed because he or she will lie when asked about it. So a liar dares to do any kind of unwholesome deed. The Dhammapada says:

“For one who transgresses the truth and resorts to lies, who is unconcerned with the next existence, there is no unwholesome deed he cannot commit.” (Dhp v 176)

Transgressing the truth means abandoning truth, which means telling lies. One who does not hesitate to tell lies can commit any kind of unwholesome deed for he or she is ready with a false explanation. Such a person will do anything for personal gain. One who dares to do unwholesome deeds has no good prospects for the next existence, which means he or she is unconcerned about the next existence. He or she cares only for welfare in the present existence and not for what will happen in the next existence. Such a person will do any kind of unwholesome deed if it brings some benefit in the present life. So untruthfulness leads to all kinds of other unwholesome deeds.

The Bodhisatta had avoided this unwholesome deed of false speech in all his existences. His avoidance of this unwholesome deed was, of course, restraint by attainment and formally undertaking the precepts, but not by restraint by cutting off defilements. Only when he became the Buddha did he avoid this unwholesome deed through the third form of restraint; that is, avoidance through the path of Arahantship.

To explain further, the Bodhisatta avoided lying though he had not formally taken the precepts. He did not lie, and always told the truth. This is avoidance through attainment. If a person has taken the precepts formally, saying, “I undertake the precept of avoidance of telling lies,” then he avoids telling lies through undertaking.

Such instances of avoidance of falsehood are usually in consideration of some factors such as advanced age, reputation, fear of censure or fear of committing an unwholesome deed.

However, if one has attained the path of a Stream-winner through meditation practice, one abandons false speech completely. At that stage falsehood is foreign to his nature. The Buddha had abandoned this unwholesome deed since his attainment of this early stage of the path of a Stream-winner. When he reached the ultimate stage of *arahatta magga*, this matter was entirely out of the question. The Buddha had declared that he had already attained that ultimate stage. So Sātāgiri gave a definite reply

to the query, saying, “Our teacher, the Buddha, has completely abandoned the unwholesome deed of false speech.”

Then to the question concerning rude speech, Sātāgiri replied, “The Buddha is also free of using rude, abusive, and contemptuous speech calculated to destroy friendliness and unity.”

Some Arahants used rude speech out of habit, but they had no evil motives. For instance, [Venerable Pilindavaccha](#) had the habit of calling people “outcaste” since he was a brahmin. Even after he had become an Arahant, he did not abandon this habit. However, the Buddha had retained no trace of any habits, whether good or bad, after his enlightenment. He was completely free from the habits that are usually carried along through one’s lives.

To the question concerning frivolous speech Sātāgiri replied: “Our teacher, the Buddha, speaks only what is appropriate and beneficial either to worldly or spiritual affairs.”

By that, Sātāgiri meant that the Buddha saw the truth of any matter by his knowledge, and spoke what was conducive to well-being, and never indulged in any frivolous speech.

Right Speech has four aspects:

1. Not lying, but speaking the truth,
2. Avoiding rude and coarse words, but using gentle speech beneficial to the listener,
3. Not slandering, but promoting friendliness and unity,
4. Avoiding frivolous speech, but saying only what is appropriate and beneficial.

These four aspects apply to communication in worldly affairs as well as religious affairs. If one observes these four rules of speech, one can be said to be of pure speech.

Perfect Speech

Six kinds of speech are used in human communication:

1. False speech that is not beneficial, and displeasing to others.

For instance, if one makes an accusation of immorality against a person who is virtuous, then the accuser’s speech is false. His accusation might be believed by another person who would then distrust the accused person, and thus unwittingly earn demerit. The accused person will also feel unhappy because he has been unjustly accused. The false accusation will not be liked by the wise, so such speech is malicious and inappropriate.

2. False speech that is not beneficial, but pleasing to many.

Included in this category are fictional tales, backbiting, which causes misunderstanding and disunity, and erroneous religious discourses. Tales, novels, and stories are mere fabrications. They are not accounts of real events, and do not benefit the reader, who may become sexually aroused, sad, angry, or dejected. Yet these tales and stories are liked by many people. The backbiter makes false accusations and one-sided statements, designed to cause destruction of friendliness and unity. Propaganda of the present-day contains many such lies and unwarranted accusations. Though slander causes distress, the listener may feel that it is intended for his own good.

I shall now refer to some statements in the Tipiṭaka. In ancient times before the Buddha attained enlightenment, some teachings advocated the sacrificial offering of animals. This was said to neutralise the effects of unwholesome deeds and bring prosperity and happiness. Even King Pasenadi of Kosala once arranged for such a sacrifice to propitiate the gods. He arranged to have young cows, bulls, goats, and sheep (five hundred of each) sacrificed.

On the advice of [Queen Mallikā](#), the king approached the Buddha and asked his advice. The Buddha said that the sacrificing of animals for propitiation of the gods, was detrimental to the king's interests. The Buddha advised him that if the animals were released and allowed to live, it would be a meritorious act, which would bring him peace and happiness. Realising his error, the king ordered the sacrificial animals to be released.

Killing animals to obtain prosperity and happiness is illogical. To believe that inflicting misery on animals will lead to happiness is irrational, yet many people still have faith in such sacrifices.

During the Buddha's time, [Ajita Kesakambali](#), a leader of a sect, maintained, "There are neither wholesome (*kusala*) nor unwholesome deeds (*akusala*), and these deeds have no effect because there is no next existence." This is annihilationism (*uccheda ditṭhi*). A subscriber to such a belief will not shun unwholesome deeds, so will have no moral qualities worth praising. After death, the annihilationist will go to one of the realms of misery, which he or she has denied, and suffer greatly. This is the plight of those who deny life after death, according to the Buddha's teachings.

Such beliefs are of no benefit, yet many people subscribe to them. So the statement, "There is no kamma, or its result, because there is no afterlife" is not true and has no benefit, though many people like it. This is an example of the second category of speech. Many people like such beliefs, though

they are neither true nor beneficial. The Buddha censured such speech, so it must be avoided.

3. Speech that is true, not beneficial, and displeasing to others.

This category includes, for instance, calling a thief a thief, a cheat a cheat, a fool a fool, or a blind person blind. Though it is true, it has no benefit, nor is it liked by the person concerned. The Buddha never used this kind of speech.

4. Speech that is true, not beneficial, but pleasing to many.

This category includes, for instance, quoting somebody and setting him against another. Such speech causes disharmony and distress, but the listener might be pleased because the speaker is sharing a confidence. This kind of speech includes political rumour and gossip, which may be true and relished by many, but is of no benefit. Moreover, it disturbs those who are cultivating a spiritual path. Such speech was never used by the Buddha.

5. Speech that is true and beneficial, though not pleasing to some.

Such speech includes admonitions like, “You are suffering now because you have done many unwholesome deeds in your previous existences.¹ If you do not reform, but continue doing unwholesome deeds, saving yourself from hell will be difficult.” This admonition is motivated by good intentions for the welfare of others. Such forthrightness may be displeasing to others, nevertheless, it should sometimes be used. The Buddha used such speech when necessary.

¹ This kind of speech is disliked by materialists who do not believe in rebirth, and think that everything can be explained by scientific methods. For example, they say that all diseases have genetic or environmental causes, which will sooner or later be discovered by medical research. They support vivisection and other cruel tests on animals to find a cure for diseases in human beings. How ironic, therefore, that according to the Buddha’s teaching, cruelty to animals leads to rebirth in hell — the residual result of that kamma when eventually reborn again as a human being, is to suffer from many diseases (*Cūlakamma vibhaṅga Sutta*).

It is a wrong view (*Pubbekatahetu-dīṭṭhi*), according to Buddhism, to say that all effects are the result of previous kamma, because food, climate, and thought are also important causes, but previous kamma is one of the four possible causes. One should make a careful and thorough study of the law of kamma before jumping to facile conclusions. All that one can say with certainty is that disagreeable results are the product of unwholesome kamma, while wholesome kamma always gives agreeable results. As the Buddha said, “It is impossible that an evil deed could give an agreeable result.” (*Aṭṭhānapāli, Dutiyavaggo, A.i.¶.284*) (ed.)

The Buddha stated that Devadatta would fall into hell and suffer misery there for the entire aeon because he persuaded some monks to form a new group, thus causing a schism (*Saṅghabheda*). This prediction was not liked by Devadatta's group, but the Buddha made it for the benefit of others who might otherwise dare to commit a similar heinous deed. The Buddha used such speech because it was true and beneficial to many, though it was not liked by some.

6. Speech that is true, beneficial, and pleasing to many.

This category includes discourses on charity, morality, and mental culture. Religious discourses are beneficial and liked by wise and moral persons, so the Buddha used such speech whenever it was appropriate. The Buddha mostly used this kind of speech.

Of the six categories, false speech, which is never beneficial, should not be used, whether it is pleasing to others or not. The Buddha never used such speech. True, but unbeneficial speech, whether pleasing to others or not, was never used by the Buddha. So the Buddha never used these four kinds of speech. True speech that was beneficial, though it was sometimes displeasing to others, was used by the Buddha. Of course, the Buddha chose the appropriate occasion for such speech. He never said anything irrelevant to the situation.

Choosing the right words for the occasion is important. Saying something true and beneficial may be inappropriate when festivities are being held. For instance, at a wedding ceremony or a novice initiation, when people are light-hearted, talking about serious subjects like meditation on death or the stages of insight leading to nibbāna is inappropriate. Conversely, giving a discourse on blessings (*maṅgala*) is inappropriate at a memorial ceremony.

To summarise, the Buddha used only words that expounded the Dhamma and were of benefit to many. So Sātāgiri said, in reply to Hemavata's question, that the Buddha spoke after considering the benefit in mundane and spiritual affairs.

The Attribute of Sugata

Since the Buddha used the appropriate speech for every occasion, he possessed the *Sugata* attribute,¹ which means "saying appropriate words."

¹ This sublime virtue to break bad news gently whenever possible, and on rare occasions strictly when unavoidable, is exemplified by the Buddha's teachings to [Kisagotami](#) in the former case, and to [sixty evil-minded monks](#) in the latter case. (ed.)

The Buddha said what was true and beneficial to many, though it may be displeasing to some. So we can summarise, “The Buddha had the attribute of saying the right thing whether it was pleasing or not.”

After Sātāgiri had replied about the Buddha’s abstention from the four unwholesome deeds of speech, Hemavata put questions relating to unwholesome states of mind.

Is the Buddha Free From Desire?

Hemavata said, “Friend Sātāgiri, is your teacher, the Buddha, free from desire for sensual pleasures? Is he free from the desire to kill or destroy? Has he overcome delusion? Does your teacher, the Buddha, have the eye of knowledge to see all the Dhamma?”

Of the three unwholesome deeds of the mind, covetousness refers to the desire to get others’ possessions and scheming to achieve that purpose. Hemavata wanted to know whether the Buddha was free from covetousness (*abhijjhā*). People generally want to possess beautiful things. Even those who declared themselves to be Buddhas were not free from covetousness.

To be free from the desire to kill or destroy means to be free from ill-will (*byāpāda*) — the wish entertained by a person to see others dead or destroyed. People generally wish someone they hate to be dead, and some even express that wish. The bogus Buddhas of those days were not free from this ill-will. They said that one could kill with impunity. The God who punishes his creatures with death cannot be said to be free from ill-will. The wish for other’s death is, after all, an expression of anger, so it can never be accepted as mental purity. Hemavata wanted to know whether the Buddha was mentally pure so he asked, “Is the mind of your teacher the Buddha free from the stain of evil wishes?”

Wrong view (*micchā diṭṭhi*), is a combination of delusion and ignorance. When Hemavata asked whether the Buddha had overcome delusion he wanted to know whether the Buddha was free from wrong view, which is one of the mental defilements. Putting such a question about the Buddha seems very rude, but in those days many leaders of heretics were claiming to be Buddhas, so this question was pertinent.

Three Kinds of Wrong View

Among the bogus Buddhas, [Purāṇa Kassapa](#) taught that killing, stealing, and other unwholesome deeds were not demeritorious, and that alms-giving and other wholesome deeds were not meritorious. This belief, which rejects the principle of kamma, is called *akiriya diṭṭhi* or no-effect belief.

Ajita, another heretical leader, held that deeds had no effect because after death there was no rebirth, since life ends at death. This belief is called nihilism (*natthika diṭṭhi*).

Another heretical leader, **Makkhali Gosāla**, taught that no cause existed for the defilement and misery of beings, or for their purity and happiness. This no-cause belief is called *ahetuka diṭṭhi*. This belief also rejected the principle of kamma.

The last of the heretics, **Pakudha Kaccāyana**, said that all beings were composed of the four elements, and happiness (*sukha*), pain (*dukkha*), and life (*jīva*). These seven elements could not be annihilated by any force, so no deeds could affect this composite entity. Therefore, neither demerit nor merit had any meaning, he added.

These heretics, holding wrong conceptions, were sunk in delusion and ignorance. Hemavata's question whether the Buddha was free of delusion was therefore pertinent.

Questions relating to the unwholesome deeds of the body, speech, and mind had been presented, and categorical answers given. However, that did not convince Hemavata that the Buddha was the real Sammāsambuddha, for these attributes could also be possessed by Paccekabuddhas and Arahants. (A Paccekabuddha is a non-teaching, lesser Buddha). So Hemavata asked further; "Does your teacher, the Buddha, have the eye of knowledge to see all the Dhamma?"

The Buddha's Mind is Always Pure

This is the answer to the question, "Friend Sātāgiri, is your teacher, the Buddha, free from desires for sensual pleasures?"

Since the time of renunciation at the age of twenty-nine, the Buddha had been free from sensual desires. Even when he was suffering acutely from extreme asceticism, his mind did not revert to the former joys and pleasures of the palace, and he was free from covetousness. When he attained Buddhahood, he rejected all aspects of craving through the path of Arahantship. He declared this in giving his first discourse, saying that he had abandoned the cause of suffering, *i.e.* craving.

To the question, "Is your teacher, the Buddha, free from the desire to kill or destroy?" Sātāgiri replied, "The mind of our teacher is not sullied and is always pure."

The Buddha's mind was permeated with loving-kindness for all beings, without a trace of ill-will or aversion. When Aṅgulimāla was chasing him

with a sword, the Buddha had nothing but loving-kindness and compassion for him. When the drunken elephant, Nālāgiri, rushed to gore him, the Buddha was radiating pure love. So too, after Devadatta rolled down a huge rock upon him from a mountain. Even on such critical occasions his mind was free from negative emotions; nothing further needs to be said of other occasions. The Buddha, who had purified his mind of ill-will and anger through the path of Arahantship, was always of pure mind, hence Sātāgiri's answer.

In reply to the question "Has he overcome delusion?" — Sātāgiri said, "Our teacher, the Buddha, has overcome all delusion and ignorance through the four Noble Paths."

Hemavata meant to ask whether the Buddha had overcome wrong view based on delusion, but Sātāgiri's answer went beyond that and was all-embracing. He said that the Buddha had overcome all delusion, which was a comprehensive answer.

The Bodhisatta Was Free From Wrong View

Since the time of confirmation by Dipaṅkara Buddha that he would become a Buddha, the Bodhisatta was free from beliefs that deny the principles of kamma, such as eternalism (*sassata diṭṭhi*) and annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*). When he attained Buddhahood, he eradicated all defilements, which of course includes heresy (*duccarita micchā diṭṭhi*). This refers to the heresies propagated by the heretical leaders, Purāṇa Kassapa, and others. The Buddha exhorted his audience not to follow these wrong paths.

The Buddha said that heretical views like "Killing, stealing, and other unwholesome deeds do not produce bad effects" were due to attachment to the five aggregates: materiality, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. He asserted that no one who knew the five aggregates were impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial could adopt such heresies.

The Buddha likened the views of a leading heretic, Makkhali Gosāla, to a dragnet and urged his disciples to reject the heresy. Let us briefly outline Makkhali's view. According to him, no cause existed for either poverty or prosperity, and nothing could change or improve the situation, because all beings' lives were predestined. They would each have their share of poverty and prosperity, and would be reborn in higher or lower realms according to predestination. Bad or foolish beings did not suffer any longer. Good or wise beings did not suffer for a shorter period. Each being was allotted a share of misery and happiness, of poverty and prosperity. Just as a rolling ball of thread stops when all the thread has

unwound, the cycle of existences will end when each being has lived out a predestined period of existence.

This view of predestination asserts that one just has to live out one's time, and need not try for improvement. The idea that one will mature automatically, suits those who are too lazy to do wholesome deeds, and those who delight in unwholesome deeds. It is an ideal philosophy for skivers and rogues. It also accords well with the current belief that those who have already attained human status will not sink any lower after death, but will gradually mature automatically. This belief is assumed in the Burmese term, "*lu the lu phyt* — man dies, becomes man."

Once one gets caught in the dragnet of Makkhali's view, one cannot escape and has to die in it. The Buddha meant that those who favoured this view would not do any good volitional act that would enable them to attain celestial realms or nibbāna, so they would fall into hell.

I have heard that some teachers maintain that it is enough merely to listen to what they teach, and practising meditation is unnecessary. Such teachers should take note of the metaphor of the dragnet used by the Buddha for Makkhali, the most blameworthy of the heretics. The views of Purāṇa Kassapa and Ajita Kesakambala also fall into the category of 'dragnet views,' which preclude the possibility for beings to reach celestial realms, or to attain nibbāna.

The Origin of False Views

When did the false views denying kamma and its effect originate? According to the Cakkavatti Sutta, they arose during the era in which man's life-span was one thousand years. Until that era, people probably had less greed, anger, and delusion, and so were not enamoured of this argument about kamma. Since then, people became ever more depraved, and began to subscribe to these views. However, these views were not very popular, for even at the time of the Buddha, when the span of man's life was reduced to one hundred years, they were not liked by many.

As moral standards are deteriorating, people are becoming more depraved, and false views are beginning to flourish. According to the Cakkavatti Sutta, in the future, when man's expectation of life is reduced to just ten years, morality will disappear and even the expression 'an unwholesome deed' will become obsolete. The denial of the law of kamma is gradually gaining more acceptance because people's hankering after sensual pleasures is increasing. Even today, some think that if one avoids

unwholesome deeds, one will not achieve any useful purpose. This opinion leads people to wrong views.

Free of All Delusion

The denial of the law of kamma is now commonplace because of overwhelming greed arising from delusion. The Buddha realised this, so he exhorted people to strive hard to reduce greed and delusion. Those who follow the Buddha's exhortation, try to gain realisation through meditation, and thus free themselves from wrong views. They come to realise that the kamma of previous existences has moulded the present existence, and that the kamma of the present existence, if not yet free of craving, will determine the next existence. Thus, they confirm their belief in right view.

The Buddha was obviously free of wrong view, but at a time when there were many bogus Buddhas, it was quite pertinent for Hemavata to ask whether the Buddha had overcome delusion. Sātāgiri's reply stated that the Buddha had overcome all delusion and all wrong views.

The Buddha Has the Eye of Knowledge

In reply to the Hemavata's question about the Buddha's knowledge of all the Dhamma, Sātāgiri said, "Our teacher, the Buddha, has the eye of knowledge that sees all the Dhamma."

There are five kinds of eyes:

1. The physical eye (*maṃsa cakkhu*).
2. The Divine Eye (*dibbacakkhu*).
3. The Eye of the Dhamma (*dhamma cakkhu*).
4. The All-seeing eye — Omniscience (*samanta cakkhu*).
5. The Eye of the Buddha (*Buddha cakkhu*).

1. The physical eye is very clear and can see for a distance of one league (*yojana*) (about 7 miles).
2. The Divine Eye can see all material forms, large or small, far or near; it can see the abodes of *devas* and *brahmās*, the realms of misery such as hell, hungry ghosts, and demons (*asura*); it can also see the various universes. This eye can see anything anywhere, any shape or colour; it can also see where a being has gone to take up its next existence. The Buddha had attained this eye at midnight on the day when he was to attain Buddhahood. He then saw all the thirty-one realms of existence in which various beings were either enjoying pleasure or suffering from misery.

3. As for the Eye of the Dhamma, the term 'Dhamma' refers to the knowledge gained from the path of insight and knowledge of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*), especially to the knowledge of the Noble Path. The Eye of the Dhamma is synonymous with the path of the Stream-winner.
4. *Samanta cakkhu* is synonymous with Omniscience (*sabbaññuta-ñāṇa*). It is the eye that sees all the Dhamma. The Buddha declared while giving his first discourse, the Dhammacakka Sutta, that he had gained this eye in becoming the Buddha.
5. The Eye of the Buddha includes *indriyaparopariyatta-ñāṇa*, which is the insight into the grades of spiritual maturity of beings. Faculties (*indriya*) here refers to confidence (*saddhā*), energy (*virīya*), mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). The Buddha could see to what extent these faculties were mature. He examined the spiritual maturity of beings to find out their readiness to realise the Dhamma and attain nibbāna. If a certain individual was still lacking in maturity, the Buddha would not teach him the Dhamma at once. The period of postponement was sometimes months or years, but occasionally it was just a matter of minutes.

To illustrate such postponement there is the story of [Bāhiya-dārucīriya](#). He was an ascetic from Suppāraka (in the region of Aparanta on the western coast of India) who came to Jetavana Monastery (near the city of Sāvatti, about 1,400 miles away). When he arrived, the Buddha was out collecting alms-food in the city. Bāhiya did not wait at the monastery, but went into the city to find the Buddha. When he met the Buddha, he made obeisance and requested him to teach the Dhamma.

The Buddha saw that he was not yet mature enough to receive his teaching, and said that it was not fitting to give teachings while on alms-round. Bāhiya made the request a second time, and the Buddha refused. When he made the third request, the Buddha saw that his faculties had attained sufficient maturity, and gave the following brief discourse:

“Bāhiya, when you see an object, be conscious of just the seeing; when you hear a sound, be conscious of just the hearing; when you smell or taste or touch something, be conscious of just the smell, taste or the touch; and when you think of anything, be conscious of just the thinking.”¹

¹ Commentary to the [Dhammapada](#), v 101.

While listening to the discourse, Bāhiya became an Arahant after passing through the stages of insight, and the four paths and fruitions. This is an instance of postponement for a few minutes.¹

Knowledge of Others' Predispositions

Āsayānusaya-ñāṇa means the insight into the idiosyncrasies of an individual. Predispositions are called *āsaya*. There are two aspects to the psychology of an individual, namely wrong-view (*ditṭhi*) and knowledge (*ñāṇa*). Those who are worldly usually have wrong view deep in their minds. They hold either eternalistic or nihilistic views. Those who prefer eternalism do not like nihilism since they cherish the idea of the soul's immortality. Those who prefer nihilism do not like eternalism since they favour the idea of the disappearance of a being after death. Though either type may change their view for some reason or other, they usually revert to their preferred view later. They are like dogs that wander during the day and come back to their sleeping places at night. The Buddha knew whether an individual was inclined to eternalism or nihilism, and directed his teachings accordingly to enable that individual to gain right view and quickly attain the path.

Among those who want to escape from *saṃsāra* and attain nibbāna, some have gained insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). Although they have not reached the stage of the Noble Path, and still hold the views of permanence (*nicca*), happiness (*sukha*), and self (*atta*), they will regain insight into impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*) when they hear the Buddha's discourse. Similarly, those who have gained insight knowledge, but have stopped noting the three characteristics for some time, can regain their insight soon after they resume their practice. This is like returning to one's home.

As Stream-winners and Once-returners are not fully free from sensual desire (*kāma*), lust (*rāga*), and ill-will (*byāpāda*), these defilements may recur during lapses of mindfulness. Once they regain mindfulness, they will retrieve their insight into the truth. It is like leaving the comfort and security

¹ The Commentary to the [Dhammapada](#), v 70 tells the story of the naked ascetic [Jambuka](#). He had to endure the result of his previous unwholesome kamma before his perfections (*pārami*) ripened to a stage where he was ready to understand the Dhamma. This is an instance of postponement for fifty-five years.

This extraordinary knowledge that the Buddha possessed to fully appreciate the spiritual maturity of other beings made him the incomparable trainer of trainable persons. His ability to tame even ferocious animals like Nāḷāgiri has already been mentioned above. (ed.)

of one's home, to visit several places during the day for some reason and returning for the night. The Buddha saw this nature of the mind and gave a teaching best suited to the inclinations and idiosyncrasies of individuals so that they could attain the stages of the path and its fruition.

There are seven kinds of latent defilements (*anusaya kilesā*); namely, sexual desire (*kāma rāga*), lust for life (*bhava rāga*), aversion (*paṭigha*), conceit (*māna*), wrong view (*ditṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and ignorance (*avijjā*). The Buddha discerned which one was predominant in the mind of an individual and gave the most appropriate teaching. That is why those who had the opportunity to hear the Buddha's teaching personally, quickly attained nibbāna.

These two kinds of knowledge, namely insight into the spiritual maturity of beings, and insight into the predispositions of individuals, are together called the 'Eye of the Buddha' (*Buddha cakku*). This twin insight was possessed only by the Buddha and by no other Arahant. Even Venerable Sāriputta didn't have it. Venerable Sāriputta could not determine the spiritual maturity or the mental inclination of an individual to give him the appropriate teaching.¹

Venerable Sāriputta once taught a disciple to contemplate the repulsiveness of the body, asking him to practice it for the whole rainy season. The disciple could make no progress, so Venerable Sāriputta took him to the Buddha. After considering the predispositions of that monk, the Buddha created and gave him a lotus of ruddy gold, and asked him to focus attention on it, noting the redness of the flower. The monk did as directed, and by meditating on the golden lotus, gained the four stages of absorption. Then the Buddha caused the flower to wilt, and the monk, coming out of *jhāna*, perceived the decay. He then realised the instability of his own body through introspection. Appearing before him, the Buddha gave him a discourse, and the monk attained Arahantship.

The monk in this episode had been a goldsmith for five hundred existences, and naturally liked everything beautiful and delicate. He was not the least interested in contemplating decomposing corpses. Venerable Sāriputta did not know of his predisposition, and gave him an unsuitable object for contemplation. The Buddha, on the contrary, knew about the individual's predisposition from previous lives, and so asked him to

¹ Because this ability is unique to the Buddha, we should visit and listen to many different teachers to find the best guidance for our personal needs. There may be some teachers who jealously guard their disciples, and some cults who reject members if they don't show unquestioning loyalty to their group, but wise teachers who are aware of their own limitations actively encourage their disciples to learn from other teachers. (ed.)

contemplate redness (*lohita-kammaṭṭhāna*) after giving him a lotus of ruddy gold. Because of the Buddha's very specific teaching, the monk could attain Arahantship within a few hours.

As the Buddha alone possessed these two kinds of insight, Sātāgiri replied definitely: "Our teacher, the Buddha, has the eye to see the Dhamma in all its aspects."

Of the five kinds of eyes enumerated earlier, all except the physical eye, which needs no special mention, pertain to insights into the Dhamma. The Buddha possessed all four, hence Sātāgiri's reply.

To reiterate, Sātāgiri said to his friend, Hemavata, that the Buddha was free from all desire and lust, was of pure mind, and had eradicated anger and ill-will through the Path of non-returning (*anāgāmi*). This means that the Buddha's mind was never sullied by feelings of anger or anxiety.

Incidentally, Venerable Sāriputta was praised for his patience. He was never angry. A certain brahmin could not believe this. He maintained that Venerable Sāriputta was never angry because nobody ever provoked his anger. So one day, while Venerable Sāriputta was on alms-round, he gave the Arahant's back a hefty slap. Venerable Sāriputta did not even look back at him, and continued walking with composure. Only then did the unbelieving brahmin realise the truth, and he humbly begged the Venerable Sāriputta's pardon. Not only Venerable Sāriputta, but all Arahants are free from anger. Yet they still have some idiosyncrasies that are vestiges of anger. Only the Buddha had eliminated all character traits. His mind was exceedingly pure.

Sātāgiri said that the Buddha had overcome all aspects of delusion. Delusion means not understanding the Four Noble Truths, *i.e.* having wrong notions of them. For instance, regarding what is suffering (*dukkha*) as happiness (*sukha*). Since one is subject to the process of incessant arising and passing away, nothing is pleasant or stable. So there is no happiness at all, but only suffering. Yet delusion leads one to mistake suffering for happiness.

Whatever is seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or thought of is just mind and matter undergoing constant arising and passing away. However, delusion persuades one to regard these unstable phenomena as dependable and pleasant, which encourages one to be mentally attached to them. This attachment — the cause of suffering (*samudaya sacca*) leads to new existences. The cessation of existence is the truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha sacca*), but delusion makes one dislike it, because cessation is taken to mean the final death, and is therefore not relished.

Charity, morality, and mental culture are the basis for attaining nibbāna but delusion makes one dislike them. They are taken to be arduous. Likewise with the practice of insight meditation. This is the nature of delusion, which gives us wrong notions. Sātāgiri meant to say that the Buddha had overcome all aspects of delusion, and was free from delusion and ignorance.

Is the Buddha Wise and Moral?

The next series of Hemavata's questions runs as follows:

“Friend Sātāgiri, is your teacher, the Buddha, fully endowed with knowledge (*vijjā*) and moral conduct (*caraṇa*)? Has he completely eradicated the flood of defilements? Is he free from *samsāra*? Is there no future existence for him?”

In reply, Sātāgiri gave categorical answers to the effect that the Buddha was fully endowed with all the qualities referred to by Hemavata.

As mentioned before, Kālī, the rich man's daughter who overheard the exchange between the two guardian spirits, attained the stage of Stream-winner. She became a Stream-winner because she heard about the attributes of the Buddha. While joyously adoring him, she passed through all the stages of insight, perceiving the three characteristics of mind and matter. Her achievement was truly remarkable.

Sātāgiri said that the Buddha was fully endowed with knowledge.

Vijjā means ‘special knowledge’ or ‘wisdom.’ According to one classification there are three kinds and, according to another, eight kinds. The Buddha had fully developed all of these.

“Besides, our teacher, the Buddha, has pure moral conduct, that is, all the virtues that pave the way to nibbāna.”

“Also, our teacher, the Buddha, has rid himself of the flood of defilements (*kilesāsava*), the flood of sensuality (*kāmāsava*), the flood of wrong views (*diṭṭhāsava*), and the flood of ignorance (*avijjāsava*).”

“Our teacher, the Buddha, will have no more new existences; he is free from rebirth.”

Sātāgiri gave definitive answers because he had heard the Buddha declare in the [Dhammacakka Sutta](#) that he had already completely developed the knowledge of the Fourth Noble Truths (*magga sacca*) or, in other words, had fully developed the eight factors of the path. Of them, Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) and Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*) are the factors relating to wisdom, or what is also called *vijjā* — special knowledge

and mental powers. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*) and Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) make up the path of morality, and Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) and Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) make up the path of concentration (*samādhi magga*). These latter two paths of morality and concentration together make up moral conduct (*carāṇa*).

In the Dhammacakka Sutta is a declaration by the Buddha that he was the Fully Self-Enlightened One (*Sammāsambuddha*), the genuine Buddha, who was fully endowed with the special virtues called *vijjā* and *carāṇa*. That is why Sātāgiri gave his answers with the courage of conviction. He gave a definite answer about the floods of the defilements because, in the Dhammacakka Sutta, the Buddha said that he had completely rid himself of the cause of suffering (*samudaya sacca*) or craving. This statement, with the declaration of himself as *Sammāsambuddha*, convinced Sātāgiri that his teacher, the Buddha, was the genuine Buddha.

The answer to the question regarding the Buddha's future existences was based on the Buddha's declaration in the Dhammacakka Sutta, "My deliverance from defilements is permanent." By that, he meant his deliverance was complete and not just for a few moments or for a certain period; it was final and inviolable. The Buddha affirmed that his present existence was his last, and that no future new existence would result.

Three Kinds of Special Knowledge

Depending upon the method of classification we can enumerate three kinds of special knowledge, or eight kinds. The three kinds are the knowledge of former existences (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu-ñāṇa*) and the knowledge of destruction of the defilements (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*).

1. The knowledge of former existences was gained by the Buddha during the first watch of the full-moon night of May, the night on which he attained Buddhahood.

2. The divine eye is the ability to see as if with the eye of a *deva*. The metaphor of the eye of a *deva* is used to explain the nature of this knowledge, but the range of this ability far exceeds that of a *deva*. Those who possess this knowledge can see various beings at vast distances, and they can see what the human eye cannot. They can see through walls, mountains, and other barriers. They can see beings suffering in the realms of misery — in hell, the animal kingdom, and the world of hungry ghosts. They can see the entire human world, and the celestial realms.

The human eye cannot see even the guardian spirits of the forests, mountains, and trees. Some say that such beings do not exist, because they cannot see them. Nevertheless, they are afraid to remain under trees or in places reputed to be haunted by ghosts. They dare not behave in a way that offends the spirits. Guardian spirits and ghosts do sometimes reveal their forms and frighten people. Many people report seeing them. Among the spirits that frighten people, some are guardian spirits. The Metta Sutta refers to spirits revealing various forms to the monks, who had come to reside in their forest, to frighten them. Such spirits were the guardian deities of trees.

Hungry ghosts show themselves occasionally. Once, [King Bimbisāra](#) offered alms-food to the Buddha and the Saṅgha and returned to his palace. That night, hungry ghosts haunted the royal chamber and frightened the king. These beings were told by Kassapa Buddha, a previous Buddha, that they would obtain sustenance if they said “*sādhu*” (well done) when the king shared his merits gained from the wholesome deed of offering alms-food. So they gathered around the Buddha’s monastery and waited to say “*sādhu*.” Unfortunately, King Bimbisāra returned to his palace, forgetting to share his merit. So the hungry ghosts entered his chamber to frighten him.

When the king told the Buddha about this, the Buddha told the king that these hungry ghosts had been the king’s relatives ninety-two aeons ago, and that they frightened him to remind him to share his merit with them. So the king offered alms-food to the Buddha and the Saṅgha again on the following day, sharing his merit with all beings. The hungry ghosts said “*sādhu*” and thus obtained celestial food. These are just a few instances of haunting and frightening by spirits. The human eye cannot see these spirits but the divine eye can.

Once, [Venerable Moggallāna](#) and [Venerable Lakkhaṇa](#) were coming down from Vulture’s Peak for their alms-round, when Venerable Moggallāna saw various kinds of ghosts. Some were only skeletons, some were only flesh, and others had bodies that were on fire. The former two kinds were being pecked at by crows, vultures, and kites, and were shrieking from pain and running about in the sky. Venerable Moggallāna smiled at the thought that he was free of the possibility of such an existence of suffering. Venerable Lakkhaṇa asked him why he smiled. He said, “Ask me after the alms-round.”

Soon after having had their meal, Venerable Lakkhaṇa asked Venerable Moggallāna in the presence of the Buddha, why he had smiled. Venerable Moggallāna replied simply that he had smiled because he saw the strange sight of hungry ghosts. Then the Buddha said, “My disciples have gained

the eye of knowledge, and can therefore see what a human eye cannot, such as hungry ghosts. Now my disciples can bear witness to the fact that there are such beings. I myself, had seen them on the night when I was to attain Buddhahood while sitting on the seat under the Bodhi tree. I have withheld a discourse on these beings because I was sympathetic with those who would have earned demerit by their scepticism in this matter.

One strange ghost was a butcher in this city of Rājagaha. He had fallen into hell and suffered many hundreds of thousands of years before he became this ghost to work off the residue of his unwholesome deeds. Moggallāna was not mistaken when he said he had seen strange ghosts." The Buddha continued to describe more than twenty kinds of ghosts. Some beings had to suffer pain from swords, lances, arrows and spikes that fell upon their bodies and pierced them. Some had lumps of iron of various sizes piercing their bodies and were running about, screaming from the excruciating pain they were suffering in the process. No other human being in that area could hear or see them, nor could Venerable Lakkhaṇa, since he had not yet gained the divine eye. Such miserable beings were found not only on Vulture's Peak, but elsewhere too, in places where they had done unwholesome deeds in their previous existences. Only the divine eye can see such beings, the ordinary human eye cannot.

The divine eye can see not only ghosts, but all other beings too, including beings in hell, *devas*, and *brahmās*. Venerable Anuruddha could see one thousand universes at once with his divine eye, and the Buddha could see innumerable universes. He gained this knowledge on the night of the full-moon day of May, before attaining Buddhahood.

3. The knowledge of destruction of the defilements is the ability to eradicate all lust, desire, and other defilements. It is synonymous with the knowledge of the four stages of the Noble Path: the path of stream-winning, the path of once-returning, the path of non-returning, and the path of Arahantship.

Of these four knowledges, the path of stream-winning eradicates the defilements concerning wrong view (*ditṭhi*). The path of once-returning eradicates the coarse defilements of sexual desire (*kāma rāga*) and ill-will (*byāpāda*). The path of non-returning eradicates the subtlest manifestations of lust and anger, and the path of Arahantship eradicates all the remaining defilements. Collectively, these four paths are called the knowledge of destruction of the defilements. Since only Arahantship can destroy all the defilements, it alone is called *āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*. The Buddha attained this knowledge on the night of the full-moon of May just before dawn.

When he emerged from the absorption on mindfulness of breathing, the Buddha contemplated the **Law of Dependent Origination** (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) by observing the arising and passing away of the five aggregates of grasping. Observing the arising and passing away of the aggregates means the observation of seeing, hearing, knowing, *etc.*, which is practised by the meditators here. However, an important distinction regarding the Buddha's practice is that he entered all the absorptions, simultaneously observing the arising and passing away of phenomena inside and outside the body. Nothing was left unobserved — that is the important distinction. The process of observation was, of course, the same.

The Buddha continued towards the attainment of the Noble Path following the process of insight knowledge. When he attained Arahantship, he realised nibbāna and attained Buddhahood, gaining Omniscience, and all the other attributes of a Buddha. The Buddha declared this when he gave the first discourse, stating that he was the Fully Self-Enlightened One. That is why Sātāgiri said that the Buddha had the three knowledges: knowledge of former existences (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), the divine eye (*dibbacakkhu-ñāṇa*), and the knowledge of destruction of the defilements (*āsava-kkhaya-ñāṇa*).

Eight Kinds of Special Knowledge

The first three of the eight kinds of special knowledge have already been explained. The remaining five are: insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), psychic powers (*manomayiddhi-ñāṇa* and *iddhividha-ñāṇa*), mind-reading (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*), and the divine ear (*dibbasota-ñāṇa*).

Insight Knowledge

Insight knowledge is obtained by observing the three characteristics of mind and matter. It cannot be attained by casual observation, but only by close observation of the processes as they occur, without missing any. Observation should be sustained on seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, *etc.*, as they occur, without omitting anything. Initially one should observe one's gross physical actions. The Buddha said in the Mahāsati-paṭṭhāna Sutta, “*Gacchantova gacchāmi’ ti, pajānāti* — as one goes, one knows ‘I am going’.” That means that one should observe the propelling force, or the element of motion (*vāyodhātu*) as one walks.

The Buddha continued, “As one sits, one knows ‘I am sitting’.” This means that as you are concentrating on the posture of sitting, you observe the mental and physical feelings generated by sitting. In the same way, you observe

bending, stretching, moving, *etc.*, as these actions occur. I have instructed you in the simple practice of observing the rising and falling of the abdomen as you sit in meditation. The Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta gives full instructions for observing the changing state of the body, so my instruction to observe the rising and falling of the abdomen while sitting accords with the discourse.

If you think that there is a gap between the rising and the falling of the abdomen, you can insert a mental note of the sitting posture, *e.g.* “rising, falling, sitting,” “rising, falling, sitting,” to make the observation continuous. This is observation of physical phenomena — *kāyānupassanā*. While sitting, if you feel tension, heat, or pain in the body, you should observe these feelings (*vedanā*), which is *vedanānupassanā*. If a thought occurs, you should note it, which is *cittānupassanā*. Observing the seeing, hearing, *etc.*, as just a series of phenomena, is *dhammānupassanā*. Together, these four make up the practice of mindfulness meditation (*satipaṭṭhāna*).

As you practise these four foundations of mindfulness, your mind will cease to wander, and will become fully concentrated on the actions as they occur, without any omission. In this way the mind becomes purified, and you obtain purity of mind (*cittavisuddhi*).

While in that state of purity, the object observed and the observing mind will become distinct phenomena. When you observe the rising of the abdomen, the rising itself is distinct from the mind that knows the rising. The same principle applies to the falling of the abdomen, the bending and stretching of the limbs, and so forth. The action and the noting mind become separate, *i.e.* the physical action, which knows nothing, and the knowing mind are seen as separate phenomena. In other words, the meditator can distinguish mentality from materiality. That stage of insight is called [analytical knowledge of mind and matter](#) (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*), which is the foundation of insight knowledge. Without attaining this knowledge, the other stages of insight cannot be reached.

Going on with the practice, the meditator will come to discern the cause and effect of actions. For example, that the motion occurs because of the desire to move, that knowing occurs because of the object to be known, that seeing occurs because of the object to be seen, *etc.* The meditator will realise that the causes and effects are inherent in mind and matter, and that there is no other cause. This realisation is [knowledge by discerning conditionality](#) (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*).

Later, the meditator notes the appearance and disappearance of actions and feelings. For example, if pain arises, the meditator notes the pain as it

occurs, e.g. “pain, pain, pain” until the pain disappears, noting the entire process from the beginning to the end. This noting of successive occurrences leads to the realisation of the three characteristics. These successive realisations are insight knowledge.

The noting mind becomes sharper and quicker as the meditator continues the practice. This kind of insight knowledge can be attained by an ordinary meditator, but for the Buddha, the attainment of insight knowledge was an easy matter since he had already attained *jhāna* and purification of mind.

Psychic Powers

Manomayiddhi and *iddhividha-ñāṇa* are both powers for creating forms. *Manomayiddhi-ñāṇa* can create multiple copies of one’s own body, and *Iddhividha-ñāṇa* can create a variety of objects — whatever one wants to create. The latter special knowledge has a wider scope. The sky can be made solid like the earth, so that one can walk on it. It can make one’s body as light as cotton wool so that one could be blown away by the wind. The earth can be made to become water or a tunnel so that one can dive into it. One can make oneself invisible, or create any physical thing. Such creative powers are based on the fourth *jhāna*.

Mind-Reading

Mind-reading (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*) also arises from the fourth *jhāna*. One who possesses this higher knowledge can read the thoughts of others, and know what has happened to them in the past week, or the thoughts that will come up in the forthcoming week. Current thoughts are like an open book to someone with this knowledge. To live with such a person might be difficult, but it would be a check on any vices that one might have. This is the story of Mātikamātā, a woman who possessed this knowledge.

The Story of Mātikamātā

When the Buddha was residing at the Jetavana monastery in Sāvatti, sixty monks came to take meditation instructions from him and then looked for a suitable place to settle down for meditation practice. They came to a village by the name of Mātika. Mātikamātā, the mother of the village headman, invited them to reside for the rainy season. Dwellings were built for them, and the sixty monks settled down.

The monks assembled and agreed, “We should not be heedless and negligent, for the eight great hells are like an open pit. We have received

meditation instructions from the Buddha, so we must follow them. We should not reside two in one place, but in solitude." So they each began their solitary meditation retreats.

One day, Mātikamātā sent some butter, oil, and molasses to the monastery, but when she went with her retinue in the evening no monks were to be seen. Those who knew told her that the monks would come to the meeting place when a signal was given. They gave the signal and the monks assembled from their separate places of meditation, thinking that perhaps one of them had fallen sick, and needed help.

Mātikamātā misunderstood the situation, and asked, "Have you quarrelled?" The monks said they had not, and when asked why they did not come together as they did when they came to her house for alms-food, they said that they were living separately to practise the ascetic's duties. They said that practising the ascetic's duties helped the attainment of concentration and insight.

Mātikamātā had never heard of the ascetic's duties, and asked the monks what it was. The monks explained that the anatomical parts of the body had to be contemplated to observe their decay and deterioration. She asked whether this Dhamma was exclusively for the monks or whether it could be practised by lay people. They said that it could be practised by anyone. Then Mātikamātā asked the monks to give her instructions for meditation, and the instructions were given.

Of course, that did not take more than an hour or two. Nowadays, some people say that meditation practice can be undertaken only after one has completed a course of Abhidhamma. This amounts to discouraging people from taking up meditation practice.

Mātikamātā went home and began the practice. It is not known how many days she took to attain the path and fruition of non-returning, but she attained it before any of the monks. Simultaneously, she gained the four analytical knowledges (*paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*), and the special knowledge of mind-reading, referred to above. On reflection she discovered that the monks had not attained any *jhāna* or insight knowledge owing to lack of suitable food. So she had suitable food sent to the monks who, being properly nourished, practised meditation more vigorously and attained Arahantship during the rainy season. From this story we can see that suitable, nourishing food is an important factor for meditators.

When the rainy season was over, the sixty monks went to pay their respects to the Buddha at Jetavana monastery. They praised Mātikamātā

in front of the Buddha, saying that she knew their minds and fulfilled their wishes. They were inspired to apply themselves to the meditation practice, and soon achieved concentration and insight. Hearing this, a certain monk wanted to go to that village to practise meditation. So he requested meditation instructions from the Buddha and went there.

When he reached the monastery, he thought to himself, "This woman is said to know others' thoughts. I am tired from the journey, and cannot sweep the monastery. It would be good if she sent someone to sweep the monastery." Mātikamātā knew the monk's thoughts and so sent a man to sweep the monastery. Then the monk was thirsty and wanted to drink some sugar-cane juice. The drink was accordingly sent to him. On the following morning he wanted to eat meat salad and soft porridge, and his wishes were fulfilled.

He then wanted to meet Mātikamātā, and, knowing his wish, she went to see him at the monastery, bringing alms-food. After eating the food, the monk asked her whether she was Mātikamātā. "Yes, reverend son," she replied. When she asked him why he asked about her, the monk said that he did so because he had found that she knew his every wish. She replied modestly that many monks possessed similar powers. The monk then asked her directly whether she knew others' thoughts. Mātikamātā replied that those who possessed such powers behaved in such and such a way. Her reply was an indirect admission. This is the case with Noble Ones, they have no pride, and do not want to reveal their capabilities. When confronted with a direct question, they usually give an indirect reply.

When the monk confirmed that Mātikamātā had the power to read others' thoughts, he felt uneasy to reside in the monastery built by her charity. He thought that, being an ordinary person, he might entertain some unwholesome thoughts and desires. This woman would know his thoughts, so he would be found out, reprimanded, and put to shame. So he said that he was leaving the monastery.

She asked him where he would go, and the monk replied that he would go back to the Buddha. She asked him to stay on, but the monk could not be persuaded. He was really afraid of her.

When the Buddha asked him why he had returned, he said that he was afraid to reside in that monastery because Mātikamātā knew his every thought, and would know if he entertained some unwholesome thoughts. The Buddha realised that Mātikamātā's monastery was the ideal place for such a monk, who was in the habit of entertaining unwholesome thoughts

and desires. With the presence of Mātikamātā to curb his random thoughts, this monk would be constrained to achieve concentration.

Some meditators need a meditation instructor who knows their thoughts. When they are asked to note the actions of the mind and body systematically, they cannot help getting sidetracked by speculations and fantasies. Some meditators waste their time by chatting. When the meditation instructor questions them, their remissness usually becomes known. If a thorough investigation could be made, they would not dare to entertain stray thoughts and fantasies.

For this monk, the place where the woman was present to watch his thoughts was ideal. So the Buddha told him to go back to the monastery from which he had fled. He told the monk to control his mind, and said that if he could note mental activities, he had nothing to fear.

The Buddha said, "The mind is hard to control, it is flighty and lands wherever it pleases. To tame the mind thoroughly is good, for the well-tamed mind brings happiness." (Dhp v 35)

The mind is difficult to control, and rebellious. If asked not to think about certain things, it thinks about those very things. It is unruly, but cannot be beaten and punished. The mind is exceedingly quick. At the beginning of the meditation practice the noting of the wandering mind is a hard task. The flighty mind alights on multifarious thoughts and desires. Unlike the body, the mind cannot be chained up or imprisoned. Though the body stays in the meditation cell, the mind goes out, and roams about wherever it wants. To discipline the mind is good, because a disciplined mind brings happiness.

Everyone wants to be happy; no one wants to be miserable. The best way to gain happiness is to tame the wild mind and train it. The way to train the mind is by the application of systematic attention (*yoniso manasikāra*), observing the mind however it happens to be. Happiness will develop according to one's mental discipline.

If one can keep one's mind on devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and thus discipline it, one can find bliss in human and celestial existences. Otherwise, one could not possibly obtain such rewards, and would be afflicted by suffering in the human world or the realms of misery.

The mind will become more disciplined and civilised if one could successfully observe one or two of the five precepts besides having devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Of course, if all the five precepts could be observed properly, it would be much better. Besides that, if one

could practise the meritorious deeds of charity, morality, and mental culture, it would be better still. Of the two kinds of meditation, bliss could be obtained in the realms of form (*rūpaloka*) and the formless realms (*arūpaloka*) through the practice of *samatha bhāvanā*, while insight meditation could lead one to the attainment of nibbāna.

Noting the rapidly changing phenomena is not so easy for beginners. They should persist in the noting until the arising and disappearing process is clearly perceived. As you know, the mind is difficult to train, it flits about incessantly, and is hard to catch and restrain. I would describe the waywardness of the mind as follows:

“The mind is uncontrollable and flighty, flitting to wherever it wants. If this unruly mind could be caught by watching and noting its activities, and thus be disciplined, it would become tame and civilized, thus giving happiness.”

The unrestrained mind flits from one thought to another at random. Stray and idle thoughts occur to those who do not bother to note the activities of the mind. If one’s imagination is given a free rein, fickle thoughts and desires multiply. These thoughts and desires are liable to drive people to acts of immorality or violence, which causes unlimited misery. Unrestrained thoughts and desires could easily lead one to hell, or to other realms of misery.

The Pāli saying “*cittena nīyate loko*” means “the world is lead by the mind.”¹ In other words, the mind leads one to various realms of existence, it can take one to the celestial realms if it is wholesome, and it can take one to the realms of misery if it is unwholesome. So it is our responsibility to discipline the mind so that it takes us to the higher realms.

The meditation practice starting with the noting of the rising and falling of the abdomen is helpful for grasping the fleeting mind and preventing it from dwelling on unwholesome desires. If persistent efforts are made to control the mind by repeatedly noting its activities, it will become docile. When a meditator reaches the stage of equanimity about formations (*sañkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) the mind will become considerably tame and docile. Such a tame and docile mind could eventually lead one to the ultimate stage of insight — the path and fruition of Arahantship.

I will now return to the story of Mātikamātā. She saw the return of the monk by her special knowledge of mind-reading, and prepared suitable

¹ Samyuttanikāya, Citta Sutta, S. i. 39.

food, which she offered to him when he arrived. The monk resumed his meditation, and in just a few days became an Arahant. Not only the Buddha, but some lay persons like Mātikamātā possess the ability to read others' thoughts. One could soon attain the highest stage of insight if one could just get rid of fickle and unwholesome thoughts.

No Mischief Near a Mind reader

It is true that while near a mind reader, one dare not entertain any unwholesome thoughts. In 1931 when I was in my eighth year as a monk, I had not done any meditation practice. I was then in search of a suitable meditation teacher and arrived at the monastery of Sayādaw U On Gaing, at Shweyaungpya Hill, near Donwun rail depot, in Thaton. This Sayādaw always practised austerity and did his meditation practice at a cemetery. He passed his nights there. He went from one cemetery to another near the villages where he went for his alms-food.

When I arrived at the Sayādaw's monastery, I went along with his disciples who were following him to a cemetery. Before long, the Sayādaw was approached by some villagers with a request that he go and keep watch on the grave of a freshly buried corpse. The corpse was that of a fifteen-year-old suicide. The villagers asked the Sayādaw to watch over the grave and guard it against possible exhumation by black magicians who were usually out to cut the wrists off the corpses of suicides to use them in their black magic.

The Sayādaw and his disciples, including myself, accepted the offer and went to that cemetery. All eight of us got to the cemetery just before sunset. Mats were spread around the grave, and pots of drinking water were set out at convenient places. When we took our seats, I was nearest the grave, only about a yard away. Other monks were experienced, but I was not. It was my first time at a cemetery, so I felt uneasy. However, I could not change places with any other monk because I was the most senior of the Sayādaw's disciples. The other monks recited the Metta Sutta and lay down to sleep. I didn't lie down; I didn't dare. I remembered the words in the Visuddhimagga to the effect that ogres usually haunted a grave and sat near the corpse. I had to sit tight for four nights controlling my thoughts for fear that the guardian deities of the cemetery and the ogres, who were near the corpse, would probably know my thoughts and frighten me. So my thoughts were kept within limits. From this experience I surmise that the monk near Mātikamātā was obliged to control his mind and keep it pure, enabling him to attain Arahantship quickly.

The Divine Ear

This is the last of the remaining five knowledges. Just as the divine eye can see objects regardless of size or distance, the divine ear (*dibbasota*) can hear sounds regardless of volume or distance. It can hear not only the sounds from the human abode, but also the sounds from the abodes of *devas* or *brahmās*. The sounds from other universes can also be heard.

So Sātāgiri told his friend Hemavata, that the Buddha was in full possession of the three knowledges and the eight knowledges — the supreme mental abilities. “Besides,” said Sātāgiri, “our teacher, the Buddha, possesses pure and excellent moral conduct (*caraṇa*).”

Fifteen Kinds of Moral Conduct

Sātāgiri replied, when Hemavata asked, that the Buddha was in full possession of the fifteen categories of moral conduct. They are as follows:

1. Restraint by fundamental precepts (*pātimokkha saṃvara sīla*). The meaning of this term is that the one who keeps this morality will be duly protected by it. This morality protects the one who keeps it from the misfortunes arising in the present and future existences in the cycle of rebirth. For lay people, *Pātimokkha saṃvara sīla* means the five precepts, but for monks it is the 227 precepts (or ninety billion precepts in detail). If one keeps these precepts, one will be free from slander or contempt, and from punishment by the law. Moreover, one will be free from the realms of misery.

2. Restraint of the sense-faculties (*indriya saṃvara sīla*). This morality is guarding the senses as one sees, hears, smells, or tastes so that the defilements of jealousy, greed, lust, ill-will, dejection, and anger cannot arise. This morality can be observed properly only when one is practising one kind of meditation or another. Otherwise, it can be observed with only partial success.

3. Moderation in food (*bhojane mattaññūtā*). This is the reflection when eating, or receiving alms-food, or using medicinal requisites. For example, when taking food, one must reflect as the Buddha instructed, “When one has delicious food, one should not delight in it; when, however, one has poor food, one should not be disappointed. One should overcome all reactions, whether good or bad.”

Eating is not for pleasure, nor for intoxication, nor to become plump and good-looking. One eats merely to sustain oneself, to be relieved of hunger — for lack of nourishment causes suffering and ill-health. One has to be healthy to practise as strenuously as the Buddha exhorted. So in eating one must know the right amount. Similarly, one wears the robes

to ward off cold and heat, to protect oneself from attacks by mosquitoes, gadflies, snakes, and scorpions.

4. Moderation in sleep (*jāgariyānuyoga*). *Jāgariya* means 'to be alert' and *anuyoga* means 'to make an effort.' It refers to moderation in sleep, and to keeping one's mind and body alert. Of course, this means for practising meditation. If one is busy doing other things, the purpose will not be achieved. Once, a monk told me that when he was awake, his mind used to entertain so many unwholesome thoughts that he was obliged to sleep as long as possible. What he said makes some sense. If one harbours unwholesome thoughts while awake, one will be accumulating demerit. So saying that one who is asleep has less chance of harbouring unwholesome thoughts seems reasonable. What this rule of conduct means is that one must be active in meditation practice. The Buddha said that by exerting oneself in meditation by walking and sitting throughout the day, one could be free from the thoughts that preclude mindfulness and concentration, and thus one's mind would be kept pure.

The instruction is that one should make one's mind pure and free from greed, lust, and other detrimental traits by practising walking or sitting meditation. Of course, besides walking and sitting, standing should also be included. Only the one remaining of the four postures, *i.e.* lying down, is not recommended. One should keep alert by alternately walking, sitting, or sometimes standing throughout the day until 10:00 p.m. Then for four hours one may lie down to sleep to maintain one's health. However, until one falls asleep, one should continue with the meditation. Then one should wake up at two in the morning and resume meditation. Of the six parts of one day, one should sleep only one part and keep awake for the remaining five, engaging in meditation. That is what is called *jāgariyānuyoga*.

5-8. These are the four *rūpa jhānas*. It is possible to include *arūpa jhāna* as the fourth *jhāna*.

9-10. There is no need to elaborate on confidence and diligence. These two are included in the ten moral actions.

11-15. Then there are mindfulness (*sati*), wisdom (*paññā*), shame of unwholesome deeds (*hiri*), fear of unwholesome deeds (*ottappa*), and being well-informed (*bāhusacca*).

Being well-informed means, in this context, that one should have heard and remembered the Buddha's teaching. Thus, getting information about the Dhamma is 'hearing' or *āgama suta*. Discerning and realising the truth after the actual practice of meditation is 'seeing,' or *adhigama suta*.

These two together are *bāhusacca*. How much general knowledge should one have? For an ordinary devotee, understanding one verse (*gāthā*), is sufficient. For those who will teach others, many of the Buddha's teachings should have been mastered. Then the question arises: "How was the Buddha, who had no opportunity of learning the Dhamma from others, perfect in 'hearing' and 'seeing'?"

The answer is, the Buddha was fully equipped with 'seeing'; he knew everything there was to know, and had no need to learn from others. It is like a man who does not have to learn from others about the things that are in his house. As the Buddha knew all the Dhamma without exception, his knowledge was complete and sublime.

Sātāgiri declared emphatically that his teacher, the Buddha, was fully endowed with the three knowledges, eight knowledges and fifteen kinds of moral conduct.

As I have said earlier, the young lady named Kālī who was in the family way, heard the conversation between the two guardian spirits. As the voices floated down from the sky, she knew that they must be the voices of spirits, and listened attentively. Kālī was endowed with excellent perfections so she could hear the spirits, though an ordinary human being could not. She could also understand their conversation, so she became devoted to the Buddha.

Knowledge and Conduct Are Noblest

In India there was, and still is, a caste system, which divides people into different classes. The Brāhmaṇa and Khattiya classes were regarded as noble, and superior to the Vessa and Sudda classes, who were the commoners. There were also various clans. The Kosiya and Bhāradvāja clans were inferior to the Gotama and Moggallāna clans. You may have heard about the avoidance of contact with beggars, scavengers, *etc.*, who are called 'untouchables.' These 'untouchables' had to live in a village of their own outside the city. When they walked about in the city they had to tap the ground with a stick so that the higher castes could avoid physical contact with them. In the story of Mātāṅga the rich man's daughter, Diṭṭhamaṅgalikā, happened to see the beggar Mātāṅga and, saying that it was inauspicious, she turned back from a picnic. So the rich man's servants beat Mātāṅga. This distinction of caste was conspicuous in those days, and it remains in India today.

This is the hearsay evidence. The late Venerable Veluvun Sayādaw of Bahan Township in Rangoon saw it for himself. During the British rule,

when he was in India and Sri Lanka on a pilgrimage, he was received as a guest by a wealthy Indian man. The rich man told the Sayādaw, "You can reside at my house, but since we cannot occupy the place where you have stayed, we will make a special place for you. We will also make a special bathroom because we cannot use one that you have used."

Even that was a special concession given only to those from Burma. In their country, a person of lower caste cannot enter a temple used by people of higher castes. According to their belief, one born into a low caste family cannot improve his social position, and one born into a high caste family remains superior and 'noble' whatever mischief he may commit. Such beliefs are embodied in their scriptures and are mentioned in the Buddhist books as well. In Sri Lanka a caste division exists too, but it is not so strict. In Sri Lanka, a monk born of a high caste family does not pay respects to a monk born of a low caste family, and a monk from a low caste may be diffident towards high caste laymen. No such distinction exists in Burma.

Among laity, the Khattiya caste, or the ruler caste, is said to be of the highest status. The members of this caste would not marry outside their caste and they said that their caste was 'pure.' The members of this caste were brave and loyal to their caste and their country too. They were the holders of power. So according to the caste system the Khattiyas were the noblest, and as such, they were said to be in possession of the attributes of knowledge and conduct.

From a worldly point of view, the person of Khattiya caste is the noblest, but from the spiritual point of view, the person who has the attributes of knowledge and conduct is the noblest. Such a declaration was made concerning the Buddha by Sahampati Brahmā, and the Buddha replied in support of it. A person of high caste was the noblest only as long as he lived, but when he died he had nothing upon which to fall back. However, the person who has knowledge and conduct, remains noble for all times. The better these attributes are, the nobler he becomes.

People would have a high esteem for any person who could fly in the air and dive into the earth, read others' minds, or tell the next existence of the dead. They would have a high regard for one endowed with the 'hearing and seeing' power. Such powers can be developed by some meditators whose concentration is at its keenest.

A woman living on an island in the district of Pakokku, having practised meditation following our instructions, is said to have gained the 'hearing and seeing' powers. One day, her younger sister lost her jewellery, so she

asked her elder sister to find it. The woman entered meditation and saw in her mind's eye that the maidservant of the house stole the jewellery and stowed it away in the loft in the kitchen of her house. The younger sister took a policeman to the maidservant's house and searched, and the stolen property was found at the place suggested. It is said that the policeman was surprised.

Well, this is a present-day instance of such powers, and similar instances are none too few. If only the powers of higher knowledge (*abhiññā*) could be displayed, people would have the highest esteem.

Foremost among these knowledges are insight knowledge and knowledge of the destruction of the defilements. Having gained insight knowledge one becomes a Lesser Stream-winner (*cūlasotāpanna*), but if one has gained knowledge of destruction of the defilements, one becomes a fully-fledged Stream-winner and is free from the danger of falling into the realms of misery. For seven future existences one would be assured of freedom from the realms of misery, and within that period one would attain Arahantship and *parinibbāna*. If one has gained knowledge to a higher degree, one will attain a higher status than that of a Stream-winner.

Those who have attained high status in the human, celestial, and *brahmā* worlds have a good standard of conduct and morality. Those who attend religious discourses have the attributes of conduct like the Noble Ones who have achieved different stages of the path. However, if one possesses both knowledge and conduct, one becomes nobler.

Meditators Have These Attributes

The meditators who have been practising *vipassanā* here have, in the first instance, the attribute of insight knowledge. Of course, one who has attained the Noble Path has gained knowledge of destruction of the defilements. Among the fifteen kinds of conduct, the meditator who possesses morality has control over physical and mental actions, and is alert. So the meditators at this centre gain the attributes of knowledge and conduct, becoming noble according to the teachings of the Buddha. This is really gratifying.

As for the Buddha, he was fully endowed with all the attributes of knowledge and conduct. The Buddha's attribute of *vijjā carāṇa sampanno* is now fully explained.

The Story of Suppabuddha

In this connection is the story of Suppabuddha, a poor man who lived during the time of the Buddha. Abandoned by his parents when he was a

child, he became a beggar. Being homeless, he had to sleep by the roadside. He also suffered from leprosy, which gave him pain during the night, so he groaned and disturbed others' sleep. He therefore became known as "Suppabuddha — the waker of sleepers."

One day, on his begging-round, Suppabuddha saw a large gathering of people. Thinking that he would get much charity from the crowd, he approached and found that it was a congregation listening to the Buddha's discourse. He wanted to listen, so he meekly sat at the edge of the gathering. The Buddha saw with his divine eye that Suppabuddha would realise the Dhamma that very day. The Buddha continued with the discourse on charity and morality, exhorting the audience to refrain from killing, stealing, *etc.* Suppabuddha became determined to observe the precepts, so he gained the attribute of morality. When the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths, Suppabuddha contemplated them and became a Stream-winner.

After the meeting had ended, Suppabuddha went away as the crowd dispersed. Then a little later, he came back to the Buddha. The king of celestial beings, wanting to test Suppabuddha's integrity said, "Hey, Suppabuddha. You are very poor and stricken with leprosy. You have no one to rely on. If you obey me, I will give you great wealth and cure your disease."

Suppabuddha replied, "Who are you? What are your instructions?"

The king of celestial beings said, "I am the king of celestial beings. Gotama, who has been giving discourses, is not a true Buddha. His disciples are not true bhikkhus. You must say, 'I don't take refuge in the Buddha; I don't take refuge in the Dhamma; I don't take refuge in the Saṅgha.'"

Suppabuddha retorted, "You are too rude to be the king of celestial beings. You shouldn't be talking with me. Why do you say that I am very poor and have no refuge? I am now a true son of the Buddha. I am not poor. I am now wealthy and noble because I am fully endowed with the seven treasures of the good and noble, namely, confidence (*saddhā*), morality (*sīla*), shame of unwholesome deeds (*hiri*), fear of unwholesome deeds (*ottappa*), being well-informed (*bāhusacca*), liberality (*cāga*), and wisdom (*paññā*), as enumerated by the Buddha. You are not fit to hold conversation with me." Saying thus, he sent the king of celestial beings away.

Suppabuddha went to the Buddha and reported his realisation of the Dhamma to him. It is the same with present-day meditators who are eager to report their meditation experiences to the instructor. After Suppabuddha had made his report to the Buddha, he went away. As his past kamma dictated, Suppabuddha was gored to death by a cow on his return from the

Buddha's monastery. He became a *deva* in the celestial abode of Tāvatiṃsa, where he had powers superior to those of *devas* who had reached Tāvatiṃsa through merits done outside the Buddha's dispensation.

These *devas* were disgruntled. They said that although Suppabuddha was among the lowliest in his life as a human being, he held a position higher than theirs. The king of *devas* explained why Suppabuddha had attained a higher position. He said that in his human existence Suppabuddha had fulfilled the seven duties of the good and noble, and so in this existence as a *deva* he was endowed with the benefits of his previous meritorious deeds.

This story illustrates that a highly attained person is more noble than others, although he or she may occupy a lowly position in secular society. Suppabuddha had fulfilled the seven duties for only a few hours before his death, but he possessed the attributes of knowledge and conduct. He had been a leper because in a previous existence he had called a Pacceka Buddha a leper. He was gored by a cow because in a previous existence he had robbed and killed a prostitute. The Buddha, referring to Suppabuddha's fate, warned the audience to avoid unwholesome deeds just as one avoids obstacles and pot-holes while walking. Meditators should take the moral of this story to heart and shun unwholesome deeds.

Then Hemavata asked, "Is your teacher, the Buddha, free from lust and desires? Is he also free from future existence?"

Sātāgiri replied: "Our teacher, the Buddha, is free from lust and desires. For him there is no future existence."

If one is not free from lust and desires, one will have a new existence and suffer from birth, old age, disease, and other kinds of misery, although one may have the attributes of knowledge and conduct. Only when there is no more existence will one be rid of all miseries. These two points are very important.

Kāli Was Honoured for Her Faith

To return to the story of Kāli — we find that this young woman overheard the two guardian spirits and was overjoyed to hear about the attributes of the Buddha. As she was filled with joy, she practised meditation spontaneously and soon reached the stage of a Stream-winner. In due course, she gave birth to a child who later became [Venerable Soṇakuṭikaṇṇa](#).¹ Kāli was

¹ Declared by the Buddha to be the monk with the clearest utterance (A.i.24), he was from the South-western region of Avanti (near Bhopal). A disciple of [Mahā-Kaccāna](#), he obtained from the Buddha several concessions for monks residing in regions outside of [Middle India](#) (*Majjhimaḍesa*), including the allowance to grant bhikkhu ordination (*upasampadā*) with a quorum of only five monks. (ed.)

the first woman to become a Stream-winner. She achieved that distinction on overhearing the attributes of the Buddha and thus having firm confidence in him. Later she received the highest honour from the Buddha because of her firm confidence in the Buddha.

Hemavata, too, became confident of the attributes of the Buddha and was eager in the adoration of the Buddha. He said to his friend, Sātāgiri, "The mind of the Buddha is perfectly pure. His physical and mental behaviour is also free of faults; the Buddha has all the attributes of knowledge and conduct. I adore him."

Hemavata's Praise of the Buddha

Hemavata was completely satisfied with Sātāgiri's reply regarding the Buddha's possession of the attributes of knowledge and conduct. So he said, "Friend, Sātāgiri, the Buddha whom you have praised is truly of a pure mind. He is free from stealing; he is free from lying and malicious speech. The Buddha has all the attributes of knowledge and conduct. You, my friend, have praised the Buddha fittingly."

Thus in congratulating Sātāgiri on his praise of the Buddha, Hemavata said, "*Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!* (Well said! Well said! Well said!)"

In reply, Sātāgiri congratulated Hemavata on his acceptance of his praises of the Buddha in good faith. Then he asked Hemavata to come with him to worship the Buddha. Hemavata accepted this invitation. He said, "Friend Sātāgiri, let us go to worship the Buddha who has limbs like an antelope, who is lean, courageous, and indefatigable. He is free of desire and obsession, moderate in eating, and dwells meditating in the forest, the Buddha of the Gotama clan." Then he turned to the audience of guardian spirits and asked them to accompany him and his friend, Sātāgiri.

When he said that the Buddha had limbs like an antelope, Hemavata meant that the Buddha's limbs were smooth. When he said that the Buddha was lean, he referred to the Buddha's six years of austerity, which he had abandoned only about two months ago. While practising austerities, the Bodhisatta became completely emaciated, so he could not have recovered his former weight after just two months. According to the commentaries, none of the Buddhas were ever overweight.

According to the commentaries, the reference to the Buddha's moderation in eating refers to his habit of taking just one meal a day. He took more when he had to go on a journey.

Then turning to the guardian spirits who were following him, Hemavata said, "Let us approach the Buddha who, like a lion, is hard to approach. He lives alone, for he does not have the company of defilements. He is free from unwholesome deeds, since he is not enmeshed in lust and desire. Let us ask him how to escape from the snare of death."

When they reached the Buddha, Hemavata sought permission to ask questions. He said, "O Lord, the Enlightened One, who teaches the Four Noble Truths both synthetically and analytically, who knows the Dhamma fully like no one else, who has overcome all dangers, may we submit a few questions?"

This is the usual approach in polite society. In those days, one who wanted to ask a question in the refined society of kings, lords, and wise men, usually asked for permission first, only the poorly educated shot the questions straight out. Hemavata had been a learned monk before he became a guardian spirit, so he knew about good manners.

How Does A Living-Being Arise?

When the Buddha assented, Hemavata put the first question thus:

"O Lord, how does a living-being (*sattavā*) arise? What does the world (*loka*) of beings, have as company? To what is it attached? What is involved in the misery suffered by beings who make up the world?"

The four points in this question carry deep significance. An ordinary guardian spirit could not have put such questions. Hemavata could because he had been a learned monk at the time of Buddha Kassapa.

A Being Arises From Six Things

The Buddha replied, "Hemavata, a being or the world arises when six arise together. The world of beings has six in company. To six it is attached. Six are involved in the misery suffered by beings who make up the world."

Where the Six Are, the World Is

The six referred to by the Buddha are the six sense-bases (*āyatanā*). They are the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind. These are called the inner sense-bases. If there are these six, a being comes into existence. A being is also called the world (*loka*). All human beings must

have these six sense-bases. Statues and images have forms of these sense-bases, but they are not living ones, so they do not have any senses.

With only four or five sense-bases, a human being may still exist. One who is blind has the other five sense-bases. Similarly, with one who is deaf, or who has no sense of smell. (I once came across a monk who did not have any sense of smell). If the tongue, the body and the mind exist, there can be a being. Some marine animals appear to be rocks or weeds, but they are living beings. So a being can exist if there are just the tongue, the body, and the mind. In the realm of form there is no nose, tongue, or body, yet there are beings with the eye, the ear, and the mind only. In the formless realm, beings have only the mind, but no other senses. All six sense-bases are absent in the unconscious realm of existence. I assume that the Buddha meant to exclude this realm in his answer. We can conclude that when there is only the mind there can be a being. Of course, when there are all six there is nothing more to say. The existence of one, two, three, four, or five sense-bases is included in the maximum of six, to which the Buddha referred in his answer.

Now what about the six inner sense-bases? In the human world, an incipient mind appears in the mother's womb at the time of conception. So the mind and body appear together, and a being comes into existence. It is only after conception that the eye (the material sense-base), and the seeing (the mental sense-base) appear simultaneously. Likewise, the ear and the hearing, the nose and the smelling, the tongue and the taste, the body and the sense of touch appear in pairs. As for the mind, the thought comes with it. Then all these sense-bases together make up a being.

If there is no eye and so no seeing, no ear and so no hearing, no sense of smell, no sense of touch, nor a sense of feeling, then there is no being in the human world. Look at a corpse. A little after death, a corpse is just like a living human being. However, the difference is that it has no conscious sense-base of any kind. So a corpse is not a living being. If one cuts up a corpse, one does not commit an act of killing. However, if one treats the corpse of a person of noble character disrespectfully, then one commits an unwholesome deed. Some people still have attachment for a corpse, which, of course, has none of the sense-bases, and so cannot be called a being.

Some people think that death means the exit of some living thing from a body, but it is not so. If the sense-bases continue operating, then one is considered to be alive. At the last moment, these sense-bases cease to operate, then death occurs. Once they cease, and if the person concerned is not free from defilements, a new mental phenomenon pitches itself onto a suitable material base.

The mind at the last moment of the life of a being is called decease consciousness (*cuti citta*), and the new mental phenomenon on a new material base is called relinking-consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*). This mental phenomenon is the sense-base of the mind (*manāyatana*). Simultaneously, the material base has in it the sense-base of the body (*kāyāyatana*). So, from the inception of a being there appear two, three, four, five, or all six sense-bases. With the appearance of these sense-bases, a new being appears. So the Buddha said, "Where there are the six, there the world is." However, it is not that a new being springs up, nor is the old being transferred to a new realm of existence. In fact, new sense-bases appear because of the previous kamma. Without the six sense-bases there can be no being. Like a flowing river in which the water moves on with no gap since the old flow is followed immediately by the new flow, the sense-bases move on without a break or gap. This process is considered by one without insight as stable and permanent.

By a meditator who constantly notes the successive arising and disappearance of the six sense-bases, incessant change is seen and impermanence is realised. The meditator comes to know personally that human existence is just a series of incessant arisings and disappearances, and that nothing is permanent.

The Six Are in Company

The Buddha said that the world or a being is constantly in the company of the six. The six sense-bases: the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, are constantly in close association with the six sense-objects: sight, sound, odour, taste, touch, and thought. In other words, the six sense-bases are closely related to the six sense-objects. The sense-objects may be living or inanimate.

We distinguish between men and women by appearances. In effect, the eye and the seeing associate themselves with the sight. After the eye has seen, the mind-base takes an impression of the sight. Though the sight itself has disappeared, the impression on the mental sense-base remains. This makes the perception of a human being, which is a blend of the eye (*cakkhāyatana*), the sight (*rūpāyatana*), and the knowing of it (*manāyatana*). Ultimately, there is no such thing as a man, a woman, or a thing. If you think deeply and carefully, you will come to know that seeing is just an interplay of sense-bases. To one who meditates with well-developed concentration, such a realisation is normal, there is nothing remarkable about it. He or she will note the appearance and immediate disappearance

of the senses. So the Buddha said: “Where there are the six, there is the world, and the world is closely associated with the six.”

Men and women can also be distinguished by hearing the male or female voice. The ear, the hearing, and the sound are associated with one another and the mind retains the perception of the sound, whether it is a male or female voice, whether it is pleasing or repugnant to the ear. Ultimately, there is no owner of the voice. There is only an association of the ear, the hearing, the mind, and the sound. To a meditator with practical experience it is obvious.

The nose and the sense of smell associate themselves with all kinds of odours, a man’s odour, a woman’s odour, the fragrance of a flower, *etc.* The mind registers the odour. Here, it is not only the odour itself, but the possessor of the odour, whether it is a woman or a man, that makes an impression on the mind. For instance, if you kiss your son, there is no kisser or the kissed — the nose, the sense of smell, and the odour blend. In other words, the nose, the sense of smell, the mind, and the odour associate with one another.

Eating food and tasting it, makes an impression of the taste on the mind. The eater will say that this food is tasty, sweet, creamy, or whatever, as the mind registers the taste. Ultimately, however, the eater, the food, and the taste, and the cook do not exist. Once the food is gulped down, the taste disappears, and nothing lasts.

Touch or physical contact is the combination of three elements: solidity (*pathavi*), temperature (*tejo*), and motion (*vāyo*). Roughness or smoothness is the earth element; warmth or coolness is temperature; stiffness, pressure, or movement is motion. The contact with another body, or inanimate things such as clothes, the bed, *etc.*, is transitory. The meditator has to note these contacts.

That is why the Buddha exhorted his disciples to note ‘going,’ while going. This was, in effect, an instruction to discern the true nature of the element of motion. In the same way, they were asked to note every physical action such as standing, sitting, lying down. Why is this instruction given? Because if one does not note the bodily actions, one does not know the physical phenomena. That ignorance then spawns defilements, which would make for either wholesome or unwholesome deeds. In noting the bodily actions, one should be mindful of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. If one is fully mindful of them and has developed the knowledge of the Noble Path, one will have completely got rid of the miseries of the defilements and sensual desire.

Here, I would like to point out that the rising and falling movement of the abdomen is included in physical phenomena. I therefore instruct my disciples to note the rising and falling of the abdomen when they begin the practice. This instruction is easy to follow. Once the meditator has gained concentration, he or she will come to realise the elements in the stiffening and softening of the abdomen and thus comprehend the physical and mental sense-bases according to the Dhamma. The meditator will then know clearly that there is no 'I.'

The mind that differentiates men and women associates itself with thoughts or ideas. In other words, the mind-base associates with mental objects. People often say, "I am meeting somebody," or "I am thinking of someone," etc. Ultimately, however, nobody meets or thinks of anyone. Such thoughts, which occur incessantly if we are awake, are often unwholesome. Every time a thought occurs, the mind associates itself with it, and many people revel in such thoughts, and would resent the suggestion that they should restrain them.

Some teachers instruct their disciples to keep their minds free and relaxed instead of concentrating on meditation objects, because concentration, they say, restricts the mind. This is contrary to the Buddha's instructions, although it might not seem to be. If the mind is allowed to roam freely as advised by these teachers, it will surely indulge in fond thoughts and revel in sensual pleasures. It would be like the idle thoughts of an opium smoker. Indulgence in such idle thoughts is the same as indulgence in sensual pleasures. So this statement in the Hemavata Sutta, that the mind works concurrently with sense-objects or ideas, is appropriate. To separate the mind from the ideas, one must practice meditation to gain concentration. If concentration is weak, the mind will stray, associating itself with sense-objects outside the object of meditation, as the meditators must have found for themselves.

Some pretentious teachers blame meditation practice for causing bodily discomfort. This is really discrediting the Buddha's words. Those who follow their advice would be losing the chance of gaining true insight and would be unwittingly committing a serious unwholesome deed against noble persons.

Striving is Not Self-mortification

Tiring oneself mentally and physically can be a practice of self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*), but this does not apply to meditation practice. The idea that sensual feelings will not occur if the body is mortified, is

wrong. Physical exertion with such an idea in mind is self-mortification. However, if one strives ardently to attain insight, one does not commit the unwholesome deed of self-mortification. Even if such exertions cause death, it is not an unwholesome deed. Consider the case of an opium-addict who refrains from taking opium at the risk of great physical discomfort. Such a person is not committing the unwholesome deed of self-mortification. Would the Buddha blame a person who risks his life to keep his morality intact?

Likewise, refraining from adultery by restraining one's carnal desire in the face of temptations is a great physical discomfort. Would the Buddha blame such a person? So also, one who refrains from afternoon meals to preserve his eight precepts, is blameless. A servant of Anāthapiṇḍika who determinedly abstained from afternoon meals, though he was afflicted by a gastric disease, consequently died. This was not self-mortification. This manservant became an arboreal guardian angel after his death. The Buddha praised such determined acts of abstinence to keep morality intact thus, "My disciples do not break their precepts, even at the risk of their lives."

The Buddha's Admonition

The Buddha admonished his disciples: "Bhikkhus, attainment of the Dhamma may be achieved by diligence and fortitude even though one is reduced to a skeleton. You should strive for such attainment with determination and persistence." This is a fervent admonition of the Buddha, as contained in the [Mahāgosiṅga Sutta](#):

"Sāriputta! The bhikkhu who sits cross-legged, practising meditation after his meal, determined not to leave that sitting posture before attaining freedom from defilements, is one who adorns this Sāl forest of Gosiṅga."¹

Based on these statements, one should banish doubts about striving strenuously in the meditation practice, especially regarding efforts to gain insight. You must remember that striving your utmost in meditation cannot be equated with ill-treating your body and thus committing the unwholesome deed of self-mortification. You must avoid bogus teachers or you will be misled.

Sensual Indulgence and Self-mortification

Failing to control the mind, but allowing it to wander freely is sensual-indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*). Mindfulness is a prerequisite to the attainment of insight. Monks should strive to be free from sensual-indul-

¹ Majjhimanikāya i. 219.

gence, at least by being mindful at the time of taking meals. They should remember that food is not for enjoyment, but for gaining strength to practise meditation. On the other hand, tiring one's body and mind while striving to attain insight is not the unwholesome deed of self-mortification. However, going about naked, or heating one's body at a fire or in the sun, or soaking one's body all day in cold water, is self-mortification.

Tiring one's body and mind to keep the five, eight, or ten precepts, or the precepts for novices and monks, is not self-denial. It is following the middle way of morality. Striving with the utmost physical and mental effort to gain concentration is not self-mortification. It is following the middle way of concentration. Incessantly noting the activities of the body and mind, without any respite, to attain insight and the wisdom of the path and fruition, is not repression. It is following the middle way of wisdom.

Three Aspects of the Middle Way

Of the three aspects of the middle way — morality, concentration, and wisdom — morality is obvious and does not need any elaboration. The other two must be differentiated.

Concentration is just to keep the mind from its constant flights, to keep it stable. *Samatha* is concentration on a certain object, such as the inhaled breath and the exhaled breath. Making a note of the inhaled and exhaled breaths as they brush the tip of the nostrils, is called *ānāpāna samatha bhāvanā*. As one concentrates on the breaths, one gradually gains *samādhi*, stability of the mind. Similarly, by other forms of meditation such as contemplation of a corpse, concentration can be gained. This concentration, however, does not involve the differentiation of mind and matter, nor does it, by itself, give insight into the physical and mental phenomena and their three characteristics. *Samatha bhāvanā* is merely for gaining concentration. The Buddha advised his disciples to control the mind by means of *samatha*.

Insight meditation begins only when one concentrates on the six sense-bases and notes their activities. The nature and characteristics of mind and matter should be observed, and the appearance and disappearance of activities in rapid succession should be noted. Simultaneously, one has to contemplate deeply the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of this flux of activities. By clearly seeing the true nature of mind and matter, one is practising insight meditation. Those without proper knowledge think that insight means merely noting one thing. They do not know that making a note involves observation of the physical and mental

activities, which are in constant flux. Such observation must be made to see the three characteristics. So the Buddha said that whatever emanates from the six 'doors' of the body should be noted and contemplated. The Buddha taught thousands of discourses for the control of the mind through insight. Only through insight can one realise the association of the sense-bases with the senses and the sense-objects, and that such actions and interactions make up the world or realms of existence.

No Encroachment

There must be no encroachment from one area to another, for instance, from the area of wisdom to the area of morality. Some people do not really know the nature of sense-bases, but they have learnt from books and lectures, and think much of their second-hand knowledge. From their superficial knowledge they often draw wrong conclusions. They argue that a gourd is a chemical conglomerate just as is a chicken. So, they say that if no unwholesome deed is committed by cutting the gourd, cutting a chicken is also not an unwholesome deed. Syrup, they say, is of the liquid element, so is liquor. So it is not an unwholesome deed to drink liquor, as it is not an unwholesome deed to drink syrup. If the touch between man and man is not an unwholesome deed, as it is mere touching, then the touch between a man and a woman is also not an unwholesome deed. The touch is the same nature, they say, as the touch of a bed-sheet, or a pillow. This kind of foolish argument is the same as that postulated by a monk named Ariṭṭha during the time of the Buddha.

Venerable Ariṭṭha's False Views

Venerable Ariṭṭha wondered why lay people enjoying sexual pleasures could attain the state of a Stream-winner while monks were denied such pleasures. Although the monks were allowed to sleep on soft beds, why were they not allowed the similar soft touch of the female body, for the feeling of touch was identical.

He maintained that it was not an unwholesome deed to enjoy the touch of the female body. The other monks reasoned with him and urged him to give up this wrong view, but he held that it was in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. So he was taken to see the Buddha. When the Buddha questioned him, he said that that was what the Buddha had taught. The Buddha then said that he had never given such a teaching, and called Ariṭṭha a hopeless man who could not attain the stages of the path and fruition. Even then, Ariṭṭha did not discard his belief. Currently there are

people like Aritṭha — I would even say that they are the relatives and descendants of Aritṭha — who still argue that such a belief is in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha.

If they say that syrup is essentially the same as liquor because both are liquids, then liquor is essentially the same as urine. Would they drink urine? If a gourd is essentially the same as a chicken or, for that matter, the same as their children, would they have their children cut up like the gourd or the chicken? If the touch of a bed sheet or a pillow is the same as that between a man and a woman, can they live their whole lives married only to a bed-sheet and pillow? If we ask these questions, the correct answer will soon become clear. The Arahants who know in their wisdom the true nature of the sense of feeling, have never transgressed the bounds of morality. Only those with superficial knowledge condone actions that violate morality. They do not merely say so, but they go further and commit unwholesome deeds. If they do that, it would be like holding a live coal, thinking that it is not hot. An unwholesome deed will not let them off scot-free. It will give its evil effects according to its intrinsic nature. If one holds a live coal firmly in one's grip, one will get severely burnt.

Must Not Encroach on Samādhi

Some say that concentration is not necessary, if one just ponders upon the two factors of wisdom — Right View and Right Thought — there is no need to note arising and dissolution. This is an encroachment on the area of *samādhi*. Attaining *jhāna samādhi* is best, failing that, one should at least gain momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), which is equivalent to access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*). Otherwise, one cannot gain genuine insight. So the Buddha said, "Monks, develop concentration, a monk who has concentration knows things as they really are. What is knowing things as they really are? It is knowing that the eye is not permanent, that the visible object is not permanent, and that seeing is not permanent."

The Buddha said further that one bereft of Right View is bereft of insight knowledge, so without concentration one clearly cannot attain insight knowledge, or path and fruition knowledge. So one can conclude that knowledge without *samādhi* is not insight knowledge, and without insight knowledge one cannot attain nibbāna. Superficial knowledge is not the monopoly of Buddhists, for non-Buddhists could gain it if they study the Abhidhamma. It is therefore vital to try to gain genuine insight by constantly noting the sense-bases using the *vipassanā* method.

Six Sense-Bases Make Up Man

To the question of how the world came into existence, the Buddha's answer was that the world's existence was based upon the six sense-bases. It means that the world of living beings comes into existence dependent on the six sense-bases.

Suffering in the Six

To the question "Where do beings suffer from the ill effects of the six sense-bases?" the Buddha replied that they suffered from the ill effects in the six sense-bases themselves. He said that beings suffered because they attempted to satisfy these six sense-bases. According to the commentary on the discourse, the sensations emanating from the outer objects attack the six sense-bases. In my opinion, the sensations such as sight, sound, taste, odour, touch, and thought invite craving and cause beings to suffer. I think that is a better explanation.

People are constantly trying to get beautiful things, animate or inanimate. If they do not get them, they go on searching for them until they succeed. When they come to possess them, they try to keep them and prevent them from being lost or destroyed. Thus, people are constantly striving, and constantly suffering. In the same way, they long to get other pleasant experiences, such as sweet sounds, delicious tastes, delightful touches, and they entertain fond hopes and thoughts. They strive to keep themselves healthy and long-lived so that they may enjoy these pleasures longer. In making these efforts, people have to feel anxious about themselves and others. Though they try to obtain and maintain these pleasures, things do not happen as they wish. Pleasures go as quickly as they come. Decay soon sets in and destroys them. Then people suffer greatly, not only physically, but mentally too. This affects not only human beings, but celestial beings too, who also try with similar purposes. Do not imagine that if one becomes a celestial being due to one's good deeds that one gets to a place where every wish is fulfilled, and one becomes fully satisfied. No one is ever satisfied with what they have, and will always crave for more or better things. To get more, further efforts must be made, and suffering will result from those efforts.

Suffering will result from actions involving the sacrifice of lives of other beings under the mistaken notion that one would gain merit from such an act. If one kills, steals, or does unwholesome deeds wanting prosperity and happiness, even for that of one's relatives and friends, one

will receive all the sufferings resulting from the act. One may even be reborn in the realms of misery.

Enjoying sense pleasures does not bring any real happiness; it brings only suffering. Say, for instance, one continues eating good food after having reached the state of satiety. Eating good food seems enjoyable at first, but the enjoyment will decline gradually and suffering will follow. This also applies to the other senses. If one looks at beautiful things constantly, one will get bored, then suffering and disgust will set in. One cannot enjoy the same sensation constantly, suffering always sets in after one is satiated. Enjoyment is only transitory, and it can cover up the innate suffering for just a limited time. Striving for enjoyment is, in fact, suffering.

What is the Way to Liberation?

Hemavata said, “O Lord, a being, which is the world, is subject to misery. What is the attachment (*upādāna*) that makes one believe ‘This is my self, this is my own’? May I ask what is the way to liberation? Would you, O Lord, please say how one can free oneself from misery?”

Hemavata’s first question to the Buddha related to the truth of suffering (*dukkha sacca*) and his second question is about the way to free oneself from misery.

“Hemavata” said the Buddha, “the mind, which is the sixth of the six sense-bases, produces desire and causes attachment for the five other senses and sense-bases.”

The five strands of desire (*kāmaḡuṇa*) are the desire to enjoy the sight, the sound, the odour, the taste, and the touch. These senses carry their respective sense-bases with them — the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the body. The mind also carries thoughts and feelings with it.

To those who do not practise insight meditation, any object they see gives them the idea “my eye sees it.” The young, who can see well, will say that their eyes are clear, but the old, whose eyesight is defective, will lament their plight. The young and the old both feel that the organ of sight is their own property. This idea of self extends to all parts of the body, to the body as a whole, and then to one’s own property. This notion extends further to cognition of male and female “This body is mine. I am this body.” Looking at a beautiful person and liking him or her, and wanting to possess, and having got, thinking “This is mine, my own” ... all these are the products of the mind.

For instance, if you go to the market, look at clothes on display, choose what you like and buy it, then you think that they are your own. In the

same way, one looks at another, is enamoured by his or her beauty, desires that person and wants to possess them. The three sense-bases — the eye, the object of sight, and the sense of sight — cause the attachment, “This is mine, this is my own, I possess it.”

The same attachment or obsession applies to the case of hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching. Everything is a source of attachment. For instance, if you touch somebody and know the sense of touch, then you say, “I touch him or her.” If you feel hot or stiff in the limbs, you say “I feel hot,” or “I feel stiff in my limbs.”

So the Buddha said: “Hemavata, in the world, the five strands of desire (*kāmaguṇa*) and the mind (*manāyatana*), or the six sense-bases cause craving, and if that craving is discarded, deliverance from suffering is achieved.”

The reason for attachment and desire is ignorance of the fact that the visible object, the seeing, and the eye are all sense-bases. This ignorance is like insanity. The mentally ill have unstable minds and cannot tell the good from the bad, the valuable from the valueless; they do not know what is useful, and they keep useless things in their bags. You all must have seen such deranged people. So-called sane people act in the same way when they are under mistaken notions.

At the end of the Second World War, those who foresaw the imminent end of the Japanese occupation in Burma, exchanged the Japanese currency notes that would soon be worthless, with many things. Those who did not have such foresight, cheerfully received the notes in the hope that they would continue to be valid. Then in a day or two, the change came. The Japanese currency notes became worthless, and the hoarders suffered the consequences.

When I was young, I came across people who filled pots of sand and waited for them to turn into gold according to the prediction of a con-man who posed as a master magician whom these people believed. Such people are really fools, who cannot tell the truth from falsehood, the good from the bad. Once they are cured of their madness, they will find that the things they have cherished are worthless.

During the time of the Buddha, *Paṭācārā*¹ became raving mad. She went about naked, but as she was insane she thought that what she was doing was right and proper. When she came near to the Buddha, he restored her sanity by admonition. She realised her situation at once and eventually

¹ Her story is told in the Commentary to Dhammapada [verse 113](#).

“Though one should live a hundred years
not understanding how all things arise and pass away,
better is a single day’s life if one sees how all things arise and pass away.”

became an Arahant, being endowed with good perfections. Paṭācārā knew at once from the Buddha's word of caution that she was naked. Her sense of propriety returned, and she accepted a shawl from a person nearby and, wrapping herself, sat down to listen to the Buddha's discourse. While listening to the discourse she attained the stage of Stream-winning. This is an instance of gaining right view and discarding mistaken notions.

The people I spoke of just now, found out in due course that the things they had cherished were, after all, worthless, and yet they could not discard them. Those who are always mindful of the constant flux of arising and passing away will have no attachment for the things upon which others set so much value.

Instructions to Venerable Mālukyaputta

The Buddha asked Venerable Mālukyaputta:

“Mālukyaputta, do you have any desire for the forms that you have never seen, for those that you do not see now, or those that you never expect to see?”

“No sir, that is impossible,” Venerable Mālukyaputta replied.

Now, if I asked you the same question as the Buddha put to Venerable Mālukyaputta, you would all give the same answer as he did. You would not have any feeling of love or hatred for a person you never expect to see, would you? There are many such persons in villages, towns, cities and countries, and you would never have any feeling of love or hatred for them. You would not have any attachment, desire, or lust. Defilements do not arise from the unseen. This point should be noted.

In that case, one need not get rid of defilements by means of insight; since there is no seeing, no defilements arise. So one does not gain merit or demerit. As for the things seen, however, defilements arise both in the act of seeing and after having seen, because a mental picture is retained in the memory. On reflection or recollection, defilements will recur. These cherished memories are stored up in the archives of latent tendencies (*anusaya*). It is necessary to root these out by means of insight.

The Buddha taught Venerable Mālukyaputta the doctrine of *diṭṭhe diṭṭha mattaṃ bhavissati* — in the seeing, only what is being seen — or minding the present.¹

¹ The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw's Discourse on the *Mālukyaputta Sutta* expands on this teaching in detail. It is the same as that given to *Bāhiya Dārucīriya* who, among all of the Buddha's disciples, was the one to attain Arahantship in the shortest possible time. (ed.)

Discarding the Craving That Occurs on Seeing

According to the Buddha's instructions to Venerable Mālukyaputta, one must note what is seen as seen and no more. That is the general idea of the instruction. During meditation practice, however, one must note the beginning of any process as it is occurring. One must accordingly make a note, for example in walking, that there is the lifting, moving forward, and dropping of the foot, and realise that each process appears and disappears in rapid succession. Only those who have penetrative mindfulness can notice clearly this rapid chain of action. If one could concentrate on each phenomenon distinctly and separately, one would not feel any attachment or desire and thus craving would cease.

To some insight meditators, hearing was taken note of as mere hearing, and thus there was no like or dislike attached to it. Some reported having felt the sound enter the ear, and could tell whether it entered the right or left ear. Odours also appear and disappear in rapid succession and no attachment of any kind occurs. The same happens with tastes, when eating food.

Touching is quite distinct. The rising and falling of the abdomen is obvious, and aches and pains are too. Physical actions are also easy to note, and noting each process in an action precludes any kind of attachment or desire. As for the wandering mind, noting it is not difficult. An experienced meditator's mind seldom idles, and when it does, it is usually caught and brought back immediately to the point of concentration. Thus, craving is expelled from the mind.

Sometimes, mental pictures of people, bhikkhus, gardens, and many other things appear. They are mere figments of the imagination, and will soon disappear if one notes them, so no attachment occurs. Sometimes, one may hear, or seem to hear, a celestial being or a teacher saying something. However, if one notes it, the hearing will disappear and no attachment can occur. The meditator who experiences such hearing should not be falsely flattered. If he is pleased or flattered, that fact should be noted immediately and it will disappear. This is how craving should be expelled from a thought or feeling.

This is also the way that insight is gained, leading eventually to the Noble Path and nibbāna. As insight matures, wisdom matures too, and the occurrence of attachment is gradually eradicated. So the Buddha said that if craving is discarded, deliverance from suffering is surely achieved.

Upon hearing the two answers of the Buddha, Hemavata and Sātāgiri, and their followers attained the stage of Stream-winning.

The young lady, Kāḷi, who had heard only the conversation between Sātāgiri and Hemavata, became a Stream-winner before they did. They might have reached the ultimate stage of Arahantship, but they were destined to attain to only the first stage.

Who Can Gain Liberation?

This is the last part of the discourse on the Hemavata Sutta. The main points of interest are the three questions that Hemavata put to the Buddha. Hemavata became a Stream-winner after hearing the Buddha's reply to the second question, but in deference to the Dhamma, Hemavata put the third question as follows:

"Lord, in this world, who can swim out of the eddying currents of the defilements?"

In the endless cycle of existences, called *saṃsāra*, there is a swift current with eddies called defilements. Who can swim skilfully enough to swim out of this current? Hemavata repeated the question in another metaphor, saying, "Who can swim out of the vast stretch of deep water, called *saṃsāra*?"

Saṃsāra, which is an uninterrupted flow of existences, a successive arising and dissolution of aggregates, is likened to a swift, wide, and deep river, or to a vast stretch of water. However skilful one is at swimming, to swim out of it is difficult.

Hemavata continued, "Apparently bottomless, there is nothing above the surface of the water to hang on to, who can manage to escape from drowning in that vast stretch of water, O Lord?"

The Moral, Mindful, and Wise Can Escape

To this question the Buddha gave the following reply:

"Hemavata, one whose morality is pure and complete, whose concentration is firm, who notes the physical and mental phenomena without fail, and who is wise, can swim across the stream of *saṃsāra*, which is very difficult to cross." This is the Buddha's answer to the first part of Hemavata's question.

The Current of Sensuality

Delightful objects invite desire and attachment, called *kāma*, which is likened to a current with eddies — *kāmoḅha*. Those who are involved in desire, lust, and attachment are said to be drifting in the current of desire. Those who like and want the objects of desire, such as sights, sounds, odours, tastes, touches, men or women, or property of all sorts, have to strive to

obtain and possess them. Once they obtain them, they have to try to preserve and maintain their possessions. They may resort to unwholesome deeds such as theft, murder, robbery, cheating, or adultery. For committing such unwholesome deeds they will go down to hell and other realms of misery. That is what is called drifting in the sea of *saṃsāra*.

Other people do wholesome deeds and are accordingly able to gain existence in human or celestial worlds where they are endowed with wealth, which they enjoy immensely. That is also called being immersed in the sea of *saṃsāra*. Existence in human or celestial worlds presupposes old age and death, from which one will surely feel anguish and suffer from misery. That is, in fact, immersion in the sea of *saṃsāra*.

The Current of Existence

To be enamoured of existence or becoming (*bhava*) is called drifting in the eddying current of existence (*bhavogha*). Some want to attain higher realms of existence such as the realms of form or the formless realms, and accordingly work to gain *rūpa jhāna* and *arūpa jhāna*. When they reach these higher realms of existence their life-spans are very long, to be counted in aeons, but they are not everlasting. They have to die, and though some go to the celestial realms, others go to the human world where misery abounds. They get only a temporary relief, not release from the cycle of existences.

The Current of Wrong Views

To be entangled in the various currents of wrong views (*diṭṭhogha*) is very common. There are many kinds of belief, some belonging to particular racial groups and some to particular localities. The various beliefs can be broadly categorised into two: one embracing the view that a being is indestructible, called eternalism (*sassata diṭṭhi*), and the other that a being is destroyed completely after its death, called annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*). Those who embrace the latter belief do not care to avoid unwholesome deeds, nor do they feel the need to do wholesome deeds. They can do whatever they like if they avoid crimes punishable by law. They believe that they will not be obliged to pay for the deeds they have done during their lifetime or later because, in their view, there is no more new existence. Such people will probably go to hell and other realms of misery, because the deeds they have done during their lifetime will usually be far from wholesome. This is an example of getting into trouble by following a wrong path.

Some people today turn the Buddha's teachings upside down and advise their followers not to do wholesome deeds, nor to practise meditation, or they would only get trouble. Their followers would most probably do only unwholesome deeds and are very likely to go to hell.

Those who believe in the indestructibility of beings do some deeds, which they take to be wholesome, but such deeds may include sacrifice of animals in rites. Such unwholesome deeds done under mistaken notions will surely send the evil-doers to hell. It is like taking the wrong medicine, which aggravates a disease. Other people believe that they can do anything with impunity if they have faith in their God.

There are worshippers of the sun, the moon, the mountains, the spirits or gods. Others believe they can be delivered from misery if they starve themselves, go naked, remain in the heat of the sun, or stay immersed in water. Some believe that they will be free of misery if they keep their minds idle. How can anyone gain morality, concentration, and wisdom without making the mind work properly and effectively? All beliefs in religious practices that cannot lead to liberation from *saṃsāra* belong to what is clinging to rites and rituals (*śīlabbataparāmāsa*). The followers of such faiths will never get out of the great whirlpool of *saṃsāra*. They will go through a long series of existences as they drift along in the current of *saṃsāra*. This is really terrible.

The Current of Ignorance

Another current is the current of ignorance (*avijjogha*), which means ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. People mistake suffering for happiness, they do not know the truth of suffering (*dukkha sacca*). All actions arising from psychophysical phenomena are really elements of suffering. Yet most people believe that the sights, sounds, odours, tastes, touches, and thoughts that they like are good. Such a belief results from ignorance or delusion. Liking such things is craving, to be attached to them is attachment (*upādāna*), and to strive to gain the objects of desires is kamma, either wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*). Owing to kamma, whether wholesome or unwholesome, existence recurs repeatedly. The existences in the thirty-one realms of existence are due to this ignorance. This current of ignorance flows down to the lowest hell and up the topmost realm of existence, the highest region of Brahmā. In the [Bhuridatta](#) and [Campeyya](#) Jātakas,¹ it is explained that the Bodhisatta became a great snake (*nāga*)

¹ Jātakas Nos 543 and 506.

because he longed to become a snake, thinking that such an existence would be good. This current of ignorance is very fearful indeed.

Getting beyond these currents is not easy. One must have great ability to swim out of them. That is why Hemavata asked the Buddha who could swim out of them. In answering that question, the Buddha described the qualifications of the successful swimmer.

Qualifications of A Successful Swimmer

The Buddha said that the first qualification of the successful swimmer is that he or she must always be fully equipped with pure morality. This is a really essential qualification, so the Buddha put it first. One with firm confidence in the Dhamma must believe that only if one is always keeps pure morality, can one overcome the four great currents, and thus attain nibbāna. Some doubters may refer to the story of [Santati](#), a king's minister, who attained nibbāna just before his death "... while the smell of liquor had not yet left his mouth," and wonder whether perfect morality is essential. Well, such instances are very rare, I should say, one in a hundred thousand. Such individuals already had perfections of the highest order. They were rare even in the time of the Buddha. They were exceptions. The Buddha knew about them and their grade of perfections.

Among the first five disciples, only [Venerable Koṇḍañña](#) attained to the stream-winning on the day of the Dhammacakka Sutta. The other four had to strive for four more days in succession to attain it, one after another. Not all of them had perfections of the same calibre. Such differences in grades and calibre of perfections should be noted. Some individuals realise the Dhamma while listening to a discourse, but they are very rare. Others have to work for some time, some for a few hours, others for days, months or years, according to their respective perfections.

Now, in the Buddha's words about always keeping pure morality, the word 'always' means from the time of beginning meditation throughout the period of practice. Only then can one be happy because one has kept one's morality pure. That joyful feeling of non-remorse will lead to concentration. Otherwise, doubt about one's own morality will impede the attainment of steady concentration. Without concentration one cannot gain insight knowledge, and without insight knowledge, the path and fruition would be far beyond one's reach. For a layperson, one must be fully equipped with the five precepts, for a monk, one must be equipped with

the *Pātimokkha sila*. Morality is a prerequisite, the first qualification for one who strives to swim out of the four great currents.

The second qualification relates to concentration. It means that after becoming established in pure morality, one must work hard to attain the states of concentration and absorption. It means that one must work for the attainment of all the eight kinds of *jhāna* or at least one or two of them. This is for disciples with distinguished abilities. If one cannot strive to attain absorption, one must work for attainment of access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) or its equivalent — momentary concentration (*khaṇṇika samādhi*), that is *vipassanā samādhi*. This is the least requirement for one to become fully equipped with purity of mind (*cittavisuddhi*), and with this, one can attain nibbāna. Otherwise, the purpose would not be achieved.

The third qualification is wisdom. Wisdom can be attained only by being mindful of the occurrence of one's mental and physical phenomena. One can rightly understand the incessant flux of activities and phenomena only when one notes them within oneself. How could one gain right understanding by noting another person's mental and physical activities? You may think that a person is happy, but he may really be in a sad mood. In the same manner, you may think someone is doing a wholesome deed, but he might be doing something unwholesome. One can only truly know about oneself. If one notes what is going on within oneself, one can know what is really happening. To note the things in flux within oneself is not too difficult. One has only to note things as they occur or disappear in rapid succession.

Do Not Talk Rashly About Ekodhammo

Those who have attained *jhāna* must note the *jhāna* and all phenomena arising from seeing, hearing, *etc.* Those who have not attained *jhāna* must note what they see, hear, *etc.* That is they must note the activities arising from mind and matter. Some say that noting activities as they occur will lead to a deterioration in concentration. They say that it contradicts the idea of single purpose (*ekodhammo*). Such individuals do not understand the practical operation of *vipassanā*. *Vipassanā* is not concentration on a single object. One must note all mental and physical phenomena. If one does not note them, one will probably take them to be permanent, able to give happiness, and possessing self. Such thinking will lead to kamma, which in turn will lead to renewed existence. The purpose of *vipassanā* is to remove such consequences by noting phenomena, and realising the three characteristics. The Buddha said that all phenomena must be perceived with insight.

In the texts and commentaries, *ekodhammo* is never mentioned in the sense of single purpose. In the Aṅguttaranikāya and [Dasuttara Sutta](#)¹ it is mentioned, but the meaning there is not what some people rashly take it to be. It means that one should persevere with one method of meditation, though as many as ten different methods are mentioned in the texts. Talking rashly about *ekodhammo* without knowing its proper meaning and intent should be discouraged.

By noting whatever is happening in one's own body and mind, and thus gaining concentration, one gains insight by perceiving mind and matter separately, and by realising the deep significance of cause and effect. Insight is achieved by the profound realisation of the three characteristics. When insight knowledge has been gained and developed, one will advance to the Noble Path. One who has attained the Noble Path is the swimmer who can swim out of the swift and turbulent currents of *saṃsāra*. That is what the Buddha said in reply to Hemavata's question.

The method of swimming out of these currents will now be explained for the benefit of those who still need further clarification. If one can discern nibbāna through the insight of the path of stream-winning, one is said to have crossed the current of wrong views (*diṭṭhi*). That is why it is said that a Stream-winner is free of the obsession about self (*atta*), and the belief in annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*). He or she is also rid of the wrong view called *silabbataparāmāsa*, which holds that one can gain deliverance from *saṃsāra*, not by working to gain morality, concentration, and wisdom, but by performing rites and rituals. A Stream-winner has firmly established confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and knows that one must work to gain morality, concentration, and wisdom. Those who are not Stream-winners are indecisive in their beliefs and so go around looking for mentors. More often than not, they get caught in the nets of bogus teachers, and thus suffer incessantly in their long journey through *saṃsāra*.

As for Stream-winners, they never deviate from the right path. They will gain liberation from the suffering inherent in existence after seven more existences at most. So if one can swim across the current of wrong views, one would clearly make an immense gain.

By progressing to the next stage of once-returning, one can weaken the current of sensuality, but not yet completely eradicate it. One must continue with the meditation practice to progress further. It is only when one has attained the stage of non-returning that one has completely eradicated

¹ The thirty-fourth and last discourse of the Collection of Long Discourse. (ed.)

sensual desire. A Non-returner has no desire at all, and will not even think of wanting anything. They have no preferences, no craving, or longing. Thus, they are blissfully happy, free from the misery that results from desire. Yet they still have to swim across the current of existence.

The meditator who has achieved the stage of non-returning must continue meditation until attaining the most mature insight, *arahatta magga-ñāṇa*. Only then has the meditator successfully swum across all four currents, including the current of ignorance, and escaped from *saṃsāra*.

The Arahant Overcomes All Fetters

The Buddha continued, “Hemavata, the Arahant who has overcome all the fetters (*saṃyojana*), after freeing himself from desires, never drowns in the bottomless, refugeless sea of *saṃsāra*, but always remains afloat, in a state of bliss.”

According to the first part of the Buddha’s answer, one who has persisted in the practice of meditation attains the ultimate stage and becomes an Arahant. For the Arahant there is no new existence, as he or she has completely escaped from the current of *saṃsāra*. A Non-returner has crossed the currents and is on the way out of the stream. A Once-returner has no more than two existences to strive for deliverance, and a Stream-winner has at most seven more existences to go through. All of them have saved themselves from hell and the realms of misery. An ordinary person has no guarantee against falling into hell, though he or she may have done many wholesome deeds. To ordinary persons the cycle of existences is like a stormy sea in which there is nothing to grasp, or take refuge on to keep oneself afloat. Now is the time to work for deliverance from *saṃsāra* — the cycle of existences in the thirty-one realms.

The exposition of the dialogue in the Hemavata Sutta is now complete. Only Hemavata’s adulation of the Buddha remains.

Having heard the words of the Buddha, and having appreciated his great wisdom, Hemavata was full of adoration. He turned to the one thousand guardian spirits who were his followers and urged them to worship the Buddha, “The Blessed One who is one endowed with profound and perfect wisdom, free of all kinds of desires, the Buddha has accomplished the path of an Arahant.” He said that, because, since they had worshipped the Buddha and heard his discourse, they had come upon the dawn of enlightenment. Then, turning to the Buddha, Hemavata said, “We, the thousand guardian spirits, adore and take refuge in you, the noblest Lord and Master.”

The reason why these thousand guardian spirits achieved the purpose of the Dhamma can be found in the story of their past.

Past History of Hemavata

Kassapa Buddha attained *parinibbāna* and his relics were enshrined in a great golden pagoda. At that time two men entered the Saṅgha in the Buddha's dispensation out of their free will and noble volition. (Incidentally, there are two kinds of monks — those who enter the Saṅgha out of their free will and noble volition, called *saddhā pabbajita*, and those who enter it out of fear of punishment by the law for their crimes, called *bhaya pabbajita*. The former are the true servants of the Saṅgha, but the latter are detractors who weaken and disgrace it.) The duties of a monk are under two main categories. The first is to study and eventually teach the literature of the Dhamma, and the second is to practice meditation to achieve the purpose of the Dhamma.

During the time of Gotama Buddha many bhikkhus, beginning with the first five disciples, became Arahants. For instance, *Yasa* the son of a millionaire and his fifty-four friends, the thirty clansmen of *Bhaddavaggi*, the thousand ascetics led by *Uruvela Kassapa*, *Upatissa* and *Kolita* who were to become Venerables *Sāriputta* and *Moggallāna* and their two hundred and fifty followers. All of them practised the Dhamma and became Arahants. Of them, the son of *Soṇa*, a rich man, strove very hard in the practice of the Dhamma.

This person was very genteel and delicate. As a young boy he had never set foot on the earth, so the soles of his feet were covered with soft hairs. When this delicate man entered the Saṅgha, fully determined to work hard at the duties of a bhikkhu for deliverance from the misery of *saṃsāra*, a problem arose. He worked his hardest, practising meditation by walking up and down the walkway barefooted. Since his feet were so soft and tender, they soon blistered and started bleeding, until the walkway became stained with blood, yet he did not give up. However, he could not achieve the purpose of the Dhamma. Eventually, he despaired and thought of leaving the Saṅgha. He was under the impression that he did not have enough perfections to achieve the purpose of the Dhamma. Then the Buddha came to him and advised him not to strain too much nor to relax too much, that is, to follow the middle path. The bhikkhu followed the Buddha's advice and soon became an Arahant.

In the days of the Buddha there were countless beings who attained Arahantship, non-returning, once-returning, or stream-winning. All these Noble Ones fulfilled the exhortation of the Buddha by practising meditation and achieving the purpose of the Dhamma. The two new monks who

entered the Saṅgha thought that those who practised the Dhamma were many, and that as they were young they should first study the Dhamma, and practise the Dhamma only when they grew old. Thus applying themselves diligently to the study of the literature of the Dhamma, the two monks became masters of the Tipiṭaka. They then taught the Dhamma to five hundred monks, and became famous teachers.

Let us now consider the decision made by the monks who were later to become Hemavata and his friend Sātāgiri. They decided to study the Dhamma when young and practise it when old. Who can guarantee that a person will not die young? If he dies young, then he will miss the opportunity of practising the Dhamma. The Buddha's wish is for all to start the practice of the Dhamma when young.

The Buddha said in the Dhammapada:

“The bhikkhu in the Buddha's dispensation, who practises the Dhamma while young with a view to attaining the path and its fruition, enlightens the world [which is synonymous with his own five aggregates] just as the moon that is unobscured by clouds, illumines the world.” (Dhp v 382)

The person who practises *vipassanā* enlightens his or her own world in the same way that the moon illumines the world. Starting the practice with the regular noting of the rising and falling of the abdomen, thus coming to know the real nature of mind and matter. Then, as the meditator goes on noting, he or she comes to know the real nature of the mental aggregates, realising the profound truth of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. As practice progresses, insight matures and enlightens his or her world, or the five aggregates.

It may be asked whether the same kind of enlightenment will not occur in older meditators. Certainly it will, but realisation and enlightenment may be slow to come. Age slows down the mental and physical faculties. Someone of thirty may achieve his or her purpose within one month whereas someone of sixty or seventy may succeed only after two or three months. The difference lies in mental and physical health and vitality. An older person also usually has more responsibilities, and so more worries and anxieties. A young person's intelligence is keen while an older person's is deteriorating. The latter may have more distracting thoughts to contend with. So the Buddha especially praised those who practise meditation while still young.

For monks too, it is better if newly-ordained monks start the practice of meditation while they are young and enthusiastic. Their confidence is strong, and their morality is free from doubts and defects. Although it is admittedly important to pursue the study of the Dhamma, young monks should do meditation practice for at least the first three months. That is my opinion. Perhaps the monks who were to become Hemavata and Sātāgiri died before they became old. They seem to have had no opportunity to practise the Dhamma.

These two venerable monks received the high esteem of their disciples, both monks and laity, and the Buddha Kassapa's dispensation was then flourishing. At that time, two young monks lived in a monastery, one was a strict follower of the rules and regulations of the Saṅgha and the other was a recalcitrant monk. When the scrupulous monk pointed out the errors of the corrupt monk, he would not tolerate any criticism. The former told him to wait until the time for invitation (*pavāraṇā*) came. All monks are obliged to attend the invitation ceremony at the end of the rainy season, when they invite one another to point out offences against the rules and regulations of the Saṅgha. This ceremony is held annually on the full-moon day of October at the end of the rainy season. One who is criticised for his offences or misbehaviour thanks those who point out his faults and undertakes to be more careful in future. This ceremony of criticism is intended to purify the Buddha's dispensation. The Buddha Gotama also prescribed this ceremony, and attendance is compulsory.

One should be grateful to a critic who points out one's faults, for such criticism gives one an opportunity to make amends. An offence in a monk is far more serious than a fault in a layman. If a monk dies without knowing that he has committed an offence, and so has had no opportunity to make amends, he can go to hell. If he knew his offence and made amends accordingly, his morality would become pure. If, after regaining purity, he practises the Dhamma, he can gain wisdom of a high order, but if he died, he would go to the celestial realms. So the Buddha said in the Dhammapada:

“The wise man who points out others' faults with wholesome intentions is loved and respected by good people, but hated by the corrupt and evil-minded.” (Dhp v 77)

The recalcitrant monk was opposed to the scrupulous monk. So the latter told the former that he would report the matter to the synod of senior monks. The recalcitrant monk was afraid that he might be punished, so he

approached the members of the synod, and gave them robes and begging bowls, and paid them respects. He rendered small services to the senior monks and behaved meekly. The monks asked him what the matter was. He said that he had had a dispute with his companion over his behaviour, and asked them to reserve judgement when his case came up to the synod. The senior monks said that they could not overlook any case, but the recalcitrant monk insisted. The monks had already accepted his gifts and services and felt rather diffident to deal with his case. So they promised to overlook his case when it came up. This is, of course, partiality and corruption. Thus reassured, the recalcitrant monk went back to his monastery and treated his colleague arrogantly. The scrupulous monk had some suspicions and made discreet inquiries. He began to wonder at the delay in the disposal of the case he had put up to the synod. The disciples of the senior monks whom he approached were reticent.

The recalcitrant monk became more and more brazen-faced. He asked the scrupulous monk about the case and insolently challenged him. "Now you have lost your case. You should not come back to the monastery. Go elsewhere, do not live with me," he said. The scrupulous monk asked the senior monks about the case and received an unsatisfactory answer. These old monks were otherwise very honest, but since they had accepted favours from the corrupt monk they deviated from the path of honesty.

The scrupulous young monk shouted, "Since the passing of the Kassapa Buddha you two monks, senior and learned, have been looked up to as another Buddha, but you have rendered yourselves unfit to pass judgements on cases relating to the rules and regulations of the Saṅgha. The Buddha's dispensation has gone to decay, it is being destroyed." Of course, such corrupt practices are to be deplored.

The two senior monks became repentant when they heard the accusation made by the young monk and this prick of their conscience persisted throughout their lives. They could not get rid of their doubts about their honesty even after long years of service to the Saṅgha by teaching their disciples the Dhamma and observing the rules up to the time of their death. So they became guardian spirits (*yakkhas*) in the Himalayas though they should otherwise have reached higher regions of existence in the celestial realms because of their great services. One came to be known as Hemavata and the other as Sātāgiri. They belonged to the higher echelon of the guardian spirit hierarchy, holding the rank of commandants of the *yakkha* battalions. There were twenty-eight such high officials, including these two,

under the charge of the chief, Duvera. Guardian spirits are far superior to the ordinary spirits though they are not handsome like *devas*.

Hemavata and Sātāgiri repented their misdeeds in their past lives and deplored their weakness when they succumbed to corruption by a wicked monk. They said that their long and meritorious services to the dispensation of Kassapa Buddha should have sent them to one of the higher regions of the celestial realms. They were remorseful when they found that some of their lay disciples had gained the upper regions, whereas they were obliged to take lower positions. They promised each other that if one of them had some good news he would immediately inform the other. In pursuance of this promise, Sātāgiri hurried to his friend, Hemavata, and broke the good news of the first discourse of Buddha Gotama.

They had lived for aeons, but eventually the time came, 2,551 years ago,¹ when Gotama Buddha gave his first discourse to the five ascetics, with millions of celestial beings in attendance. As I mentioned at the beginning of this discourse, Sātāgiri failed to find his friend, Hemavata, in the assembly, and so hurried to tell him the good news.

Hemavata was overjoyed at hearing about the Buddha's discourse, and went round from village to village, from mountain to mountain, of the spirit kingdom to announce the appearance of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha.

This is the end of the Hemavata Sutta. May the audience be able to cross the four great currents of *saṃsāra* by their arduous practice of insight meditation and thus attain the blissful state of nibbāna.

¹ In 1963, when this discourse was given.

Index

A

- absorption (*jhāna*), 7, 17, 27, 45, 51, 85
access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), 75, 85
aeon (*kappa*), 12
All-seeing eye — (*samanta cakkhu*), 42
analytical knowledge (*paṭisambhidā-ñāṇa*), 54
analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*), 52
anger (*dosa*), 7
animal realm (*tiracchāna*), 11
annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*), 35, 40, 82, 86
attachment (*upādāna*), 40, 46, 77-81, 83
attainment of cessation (*phalasarāpatti*), 18
aversion (*paṭigha*), 18, 39, 45

B

- becoming (*bhava*), 20, 41, 43, 63, 82, 85
bhikkhu ordination (*upasampadā*), 65
blessings (*maṅgala*), 37
bliss (*sukha*), 28

C

- cause of suffering (*samudaya sacca*), 46, 48
cessation of suffering (*nirodha sacca*), 46
Citta Sutta, 57
clinging to rites and rituals (*silabbata-parāmāsa*), 83, 86
compassion (*karuṇā*), 8, 10-15, 17, 18, 29, 40
conceit, 45
concentration (*samādhi*), 43
conduct (*carāṇa*), 47, 59
confidence (*saddhā*), 24, 31, 36, 43, 60, 64, 66, 84, 86, 90

- contemplation of redness (*lohitakammaṭṭhāna*), 46
covetousness (*abhijjhā*), 38
craving (*taṇhā*), 14
Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta, 36
current of existence (*bhavogha*), 82
current of wrong views (*diṭṭhogha*), 82

D

- Dasuttara Sutta, 86
decease consciousness (*cuti citta*), 69
delusion (*moha*), 7
demons (*asura*), 11, 42
Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), 7, 51
Dhammacakka Sutta, viii, 1, 2, 47, 48, 84
Dhammādāsa Sutta, 24
Divine Ear (*dibbasota*), 27, 59
Divine Eye (*dibbacakkhu*), 27, 42, 51
doubt (*vicikicchā*), 45, 84

E

- earth device (*pathavi kaṣiṇa*), 27
element of motion (*vāyodhātu*), 51, 70
energy (*virīya*), 43
equanimity (*upekkhā*), 28
eternalism (*sassata diṭṭhi*), 40, 44, 82
Eye of the Buddha (*Buddha cakkhu*), 42, 45
Eye of the Dhamma (*dhamma cakkhu*), 42

F

- faculties (*indriya*), 43
fear of wrong-doing (*ottappa*), 9, 60, 64
feelings (*vedanā*), 52
fetters (*saṃyojana*), 87
final passing away (*parinibbāna*), 1
flood of defilements (*kilesāsava*), 47

flood of sensuality (*kāmāsava*), 47
 formless absorptions (*arūpa jhāna*), 27
 formless realms (*arūpaloka*), 57
 fruition (*phala*), 3
 fruition of Arahantship (*arahatta samāpatti*), 29
 Fully Self-Enlightened One (*Sammā-sambuddha*), 4, 48, 51

G

giving alms (*dāna*), 14
 great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*), 10, 29
 greed (*lobha*), 7

H

happiness (*sukha*), 39, 44
 heedlessness (*pamāda*), 20
 hell (*niraya*), 3
 heresy (*duccarita micchā diṭṭhi*), 40
 higher knowledge (*abhiññā*), 63
 hungry ghosts (*petā*), 11

I

ignorance (*avijjā*), 15, 38-40, 45, 47, 70, 78, 83-84, 87
 ill-will (*byāpāda*), 18, 38-39, 44, 46, 50, 59
 impermanence (*anicca*), 44
 initial application (*vitakka*), 28
 insight (*vipassanā*), 2, 7, 8, 14, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 37, 43-45, 47, 51-54, 57, 63, 69, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 80, 84-86, 89, 92
 insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), 44, 51, 52, 63, 75, 84, 86
 invitation (*pavāraṇā*), 90

J

joy (*pīti*), 28

K

knowledge (*ñāṇa*), 44
 by comprehension (*sammasana-ñāṇa*), 28

by discerning conditionality (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*), 52
 of arising and passing away (*udayab-baya-ñāṇa*), 28
 of destruction of the defilements (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*), 48, 51
 of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), 8
 of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*), 17
 of equanimity about formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), 18, 57
 of former existences (*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), 27, 48, 51
 of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*), 43
 of the divine ear (*dibbasota-ñāṇa*), 51
 of the minds of others (*ceto-pariya-ñāṇa*), 27
 knowledge (*vijjā*), 47

L

latent defilements, 45
 latent tendencies (*anusaya*), 79
 league (*yojana*), 42
 Lesser Stream-winner (*cūlasotāpanna*), 63
 liberality, 64
 life (*jīva*), 39
 living-being (*sattavā*), 8, 11, 22, 25, 26, 67, 68, 76
 loving-kindness (*mettā*), 8, 10, 17, 18, 39
 lust (*rāga*), 14, 20, 26, 44, 46, 50, 59, 60, 65, 67, 79, 81

M

Mahāgoṣiṅga Sutta, 72
 Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, 51, 52
 Mālukyaputta Sutta, 79
 materiality (*rūpa*), 23
 meditation on impurity (*asubha-kammaṭṭhāna*), 16
 mental culture (*bhāvanā*), 14
 mental defilements (*kilesa*), 7
 mentality (*nāma*), 23

Metta Sutta, 49, 58
 Middle India (*Majjhimadesa*), 65
 mind base (*manāyatana*), 69
 mindfulness (*sati*), 43, 60
 mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), 26, 52
 mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), 7
 mind-reading (*cetopariya-ñāṇa*), 51, 53
 moderation in food (*bhojane mattaññutā*), 59
 moderation in sleep (*jāgariyānuyoga*), 60
 momentary concentration (*khaṇika samādhi*), 75, 85
 moral conduct (*caraṇa*), 48
 morality (*sīla*), 6, 64
 motion (*vāyo*), 70

N

nihilism (*natthika diṭṭhi*), 39
 non-returning (*anāgāmicagga*), 46, 50, 54, 86-88
 not-self (*anatta*), 44, 70, 73

O

Omniscience (*sabbaññūta-ñāṇa*), 43
 one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), 28
 ordinary person (*puthujjana*), 25

P

pain (*dukkha*), 39
 path (*magga*), 3
 path knowledge (*magga sacca*), 47
 Path of Discrimination (*Paṭisambhidāmagga*), 10
 perceptions (*ārammaṇa*), 9
 perfections (*pāramī*), 1, 44, 61, 79, 84, 88
 permanence (*nicca*), 44
 physical eye (*maṃsa cakkhu*), 42
 psychic powers (*manomayiddhi-ñāṇa*), 51
 purity of mind (*cittavisuddhi*), 2, 24, 52, 85

R

Raṭṭhapāla Sutta, 13
 realms of form (*rūpaloka*), 57
 realms of misery (*apāya*), 3, 11, 12, 31, 35, 42, 48, 56, 57, 59, 63, 77, 82, 87
 relinking-consciousness (*patisandhi citta*), 69
 restraint
 by fundamental precepts (*pātimokkha saṃvara sīla*), 59
 of the sense-faculties (*indriya saṃvara sīla*), 59
 restraint (*virati*), 21
 by attainment of virtue (*sampatta-virati*), 21, 23
 by cutting off defilements (*samuccheda-virati*), 21, 23
 by undertaking the precepts (*samādāna-virati*), 21, 23
 Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*), 48
 Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*), 48
 Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), 48
 Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), 48
 Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), 48
 Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), 48
 Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*), 18, 47
 Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), 47

S

schism (*Saṅghabhedā*), 37
 self (*atta*), 44, 86
 self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*), 71
 sense-bases (*āyatanā*), 67
 sensual desire (*kāma*), 44
 sensual-indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*), 72
 sexual desire (*kāma rāga*), 50
 shame (*hiri*), 9, 55, 60, 64

single purpose (*ekodhammo*), 85
 snake (*nāga*), 83
 solidity (*pathavi*), 70
 spirit (*yakkha*), 1, 91
 strands of desire (*kāmaguṇa*), 77, 78
 Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*), 1, 2, 24-25,
 30, 33, 43, 44, 47, 63-65, 74, 81, 86, 87
 Suppabuddha, 63, 65
 sustained application (*vicāra*), 28
 systematic attention (*yoniso*
manasikāra), 56

T

temperature (*tejo*), 70
 thoughts of non-cruelty (*avihimsa*
saṅkappa), 18
 thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhamma*
saṅkappa), 18
 truth of suffering (*dukkha sacca*), 77

U

unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), 27, 44, 70,
 89
 unwholesome (*akusala*), 35, 83

V

verse (*gāthā*), 61

W

well done (*sādhu*), 49
 well-informed (*bāhusacca*), 60
 wholesome (*kusala*), 35, 83
 wisdom (*paññā*), 43, 60, 64
 world (*loka*), 67
 wrong thought (*micchā saṅkappa*), 18
 wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), 36, 38, 40, 42, 44-
 45, 47, 50, 74, 82, 86
 wrong view (*micchā diṭṭhi*), 38