

# A Discourse on the Vammika Sutta

by  
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw  
of  
Burma



Translated by  
U Min Swe (Min Kyaw Thu)  
Buddha Sāsanānuggaha Organization  
Mahāsi Translation Committee, Rangoon



# A Discourse on the Vammika Sutta

by  
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw  
of  
Burma

Translated by  
U Min Swe (Min Kyaw Thu)



First printed and published in the Socialist  
Republic of the Union of Burma  
December 2000

New Edition  
Edited by  
Bhikkhu Pesala  
September 2021  
*All rights reserved*



# Contents

Editor's Foreword.....	v
Translator's Preface.....	vi

## Part I

Introduction.....	1
Fifteen Riddles.....	1
A Motto About the Fifteen Riddles.....	5
Kumāra Kassapa's Previous Life.....	6
Seven Monks Enter a Forest Retreat.....	7
Acquiring Beneficial Results.....	12
Becoming an Arahant at the Age of Seven.....	12
Venerable Dabba Thera.....	13
King Pukkusāti.....	13
The Wandering Ascetic Sabhiya.....	13
Bāhiya Dārucīriya.....	14
The Goat That Became a Dog.....	15
Bāhiya's False Pride.....	16
An Ant-hill Full of Holes.....	20
An Ant-hill That Emits Filth.....	21
A Heap of Dust.....	21
Home to Various Organisms and Germs.....	24
An Accumulation of the Four Elements.....	25
It Begins from Fine Particles of Fluid Matter.....	28
Developed From Nutriment.....	29
Emitting Smoke.....	30
Expelling Bright Flames.....	31
The Buddha.....	32
The Outstanding Pupil.....	33
The Abode of the Noble Ones.....	33
Eight Path Factors In One Act of Noting.....	38

**Part II**

The Buddha, the Brahmin Teacher.....	40
A Monk and a Millionaire's Son.....	42
The Hoe.....	45
The Bolt.....	47
The Significance of the Method.....	48
A Pioneer of Insight Meditation.....	54
The Admonition of the Buddha.....	55
Keeping the Door Unbolted.....	57
The Toad.....	58
The Trivial Dhamma Talk.....	59
The Story of Vedehikā.....	60
A Discussion on Patience.....	62
The Junction.....	63
Personal Experience of Sceptical Doubt.....	64
Doubt Resembles a Con Artist.....	65
The Essence of Meditation.....	67

**Part III**

Further Explanation about Doubt.....	68
Must Contemplate in the Present.....	71
The Water-Strainer.....	81
Like A Fish Out of Water.....	82
How the Five Hindrances Are Dispelled.....	83
Purity of Mind.....	83
Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind.....	83
The Tortoise.....	85
A Cleaver and Chopping-board.....	90
A Piece of Flesh.....	91
The Dragon.....	94
Worship the Dragon.....	95
How to Worship the Dragon.....	95
Conclusion.....	101
The Beneficial Results of Insight.....	102
Index.....	103
Index of Proper Names.....	106

## Editor's Foreword

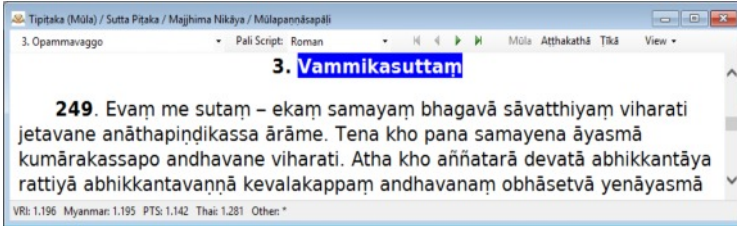
As with my other editions of the translated works of the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, I have removed many of the Pāli words for the benefit of those who are not yet familiar with the technical terms. The original translation was published in Rangoon in 1982. The Sayādaw gave the Dhamma talks, which spanned a period of many weeks, in 1965. To transcribe and translate these hours of tape-recordings was a huge task, but one productive of great merit as it enables a much wider audience to benefit from the late Sayādaw's profound talks.

References are to the Pāli text Roman Script editions of the Pali Text Society — in their translations, these page numbers are given in the headers or in square brackets in the body of the text. This practice is adhered to by Bhikkhu Bodhi's modern translations, like that below:

238 *Vammika Sutta: Sutta 23*

i.144

Thus, a reference to M.i.144 would be found on page 144 of volume one in the Roman script Pāli edition, but on page 238 of Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation. It would be on a different page in I.B. Horner's translation, but the Pāli text reference will still be i.144.



In the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition (CST4 Tipiṭaka), the references to the pages of the PTS Roman Script edition are shown at the bottom of the screen. The Vammika Sutta begins in Vol.1 at p.142.

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

This edition my still have some defects, but I hope it is already good enough to be useful. As my time permits, I will gradually improve it. If you find any errors, please let me know.

Bhikkhu Pesala  
September 2021

## Translator's Preface

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa*

Among many outstanding discourses expounded by the Venerable Aggamahāpaṇḍita Mahāsi Sayādaw, the Vammika Sutta is one of the most interesting discourses that reveals the Truth of the Buddha's Dhamma in a simple, effective way and in unequivocal terms. The brilliant light of the Mahāsi Sayādaw's teachings has expelled the darkness or the dim ambiguities of certain highly philosophical truths, which are not ordinarily and easily comprehensible to a man of average intelligence.

This lovely discourse, originally taught by the Buddha has been elucidated by the author, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, to become a newly developed idea of his own. It reveals in a very brief and striking way the genius of the Omniscient Buddha. In it you will find the fundamental religious concepts ornamented with a wide variety of aphorisms and lively short stories, which though concisely narrated leaving out what is irrelevant to the practical aspect of the Dhamma, will be found really interesting and invaluable.

The exposition takes the trend of a new style of expression relating to the prime importance of the practice of *vipassanā* meditation, which is essential for all mankind to escape from the fetters of human passions. The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw has precisely presented the practical method of insight meditation in this discourse, with brilliant touches that would surely bring an enthusiastic reader a step closer to nibbāna. This statement is not an exaggeration. Reading through this Sutta, one may perhaps be aroused with curiosity as to what are the fifteen riddles posed by Venerable Kumāra Kassapa on the advice given by a *brahmā* god and what are the answers as elucidated by the Blessed One.

Treatment of this Sutta with lucid explanation is beautifully blended with the genius of the author. The translation truthfully rendered will, it is hoped, give a delightful reading particularly to those who understand English language and who have a bent in Buddhist philosophy. It may perhaps even encourage them to take refuge in the Triple Gem of Buddhism and seek for real peace and happiness by experimenting with *vipassanā* meditation.

The light of the Buddhadhamma is still shining. Reality is indescribable. The Buddha, whose purpose in life was the attain-



ment of Enlightenment, taught us with all-embracing love and compassion, to be always “mindful and self-possessed,” refraining from mental and emotional attachment to all things that are ephemeral, particularly, the material body (*rūpa*), which is prone to decay, suffering and death. The method of eliminating human passions (*kilesa*) has been candidly explained in this discourse for you to follow in accordance with the well-known phrase:

“Even the Buddhas only point the way and the individual must work out his own salvation with diligence.”

May you all be able to follow the right path, free from all hindrances and strive after nibbāna to bring all your passions to an end.

Min Swe  
(Min Kyaw Thu)  
Secretary  
Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization



# Vammika Sutta

## A Discourse on the Ant-hill

### Part I

Tonight's discourse is on the Vammika Sutta, which is the simile of the ant-hill. This discourse was recorded during the Saṅgāyana in the Mūlapaṇṇāsa, Opammavaggo, Majjhimanikāya. First, the context of this discourse should be given, beginning from the introduction.

### Introduction

One night, while the Blessed One was residing at the Jetavana monastery in Sāvatti, an elder by the name of Venerable Kumāra Kassapa was staying in the Blind Men's Grove<sup>1</sup> to the north of Jetavana monastery. During the Buddha's lifetime, senior monks and nuns who wished to live in solitude to find peace, used to retire to that forest. In those days, this forest was very seldom frequented by ordinary people, being a secluded place where peace and tranquility reigned. However, at the present time, this forested area has been transformed into a cultivated land where crops are grown.

When I went to India, I visited the site of the Jetavana monastery where the Blessed One had resided for a period of nineteen rainy seasons (*vassa*) and gave my whole-hearted reverence to this sacred place. There was no monastery at all — only bare ground on which the remnants of the old Jetavana monastery were found, a few foundation bricks and old unused wells. The former forest is now almost barren with hardly any sign of trees, let alone a forest. Only patches of crops under cultivation were found. However, during the time of the Buddha, this place was a remote forested area, calm and peaceful, that ordinary people would not dare to visit.

### Fifteen Riddles

While Venerable Kumāra Kassapa was residing in this forest, a radiant *brahmā* appeared before him at night and posed fifteen riddles. I will describe how these fifteen problems were proposed by reciting the original in Pāli to let you listen to it attentively with reverence. However, it would take some time if the whole passage

---

<sup>1</sup> See explanation of [Andhavana](#) in the Dictionary of Pali Proper Names (ed.)

as spoken by that *brahmā* were recited. So I will recite only part of it as an illustration. Please listen carefully.

*“Bhikkhu bhikkhu, ayaṃ vammiko rattim dhūmāyati, divā pajjalati. Brāhmaṇo evamāha — ‘Abhikkhaṇa, Sumedha, satthaṃ ādāyā’ti. Abhikkhaṇanto Sumedho satthaṃ ādāya addasa laṅgiṃ ‘Laṅgī, bhadante’ti. Brāhmaṇo evamāha — ‘Ukkhipa laṅgiṃ; abhikkhaṇa, Sumedha, satthaṃ ādāyā’ti. Abhikkhaṇanto Sumedho satthaṃ ādāya addasa uddhumāyikaṃ. ‘Uddhumāyikā, bhadante’ti ...”*

As stated above, the *brahmā* spoke to Venerable Kumāra Kassapa in Pāli. During the lifetime of the Buddha, in the region of India called Majjhimadesa, the people used to speak among themselves in Pāli, the same dialect that is found in the present-day Tipiṭaka. In those days, Pāli was the common language used by all people, both male and female, young or old. That is why the *brahmā* spoke to Venerable Kumāra Kassapa in Pāli.

Pāli scholars who have a high regard for the Māgadha language as being sacred, have decided that the Pāli language known as Māgadha is the dialect always used by *brahmās*. In the world of human beings, people sometimes speak in Pāli and at times they speak in other languages. However, during the Buddha’s time, Pāli was the common language among people. For this reason, the language used in this Sutta was Pāli as is also found in other teachings of the Buddha. To enable you to understand and appreciate the Pāli language with its meanings, I will first give the meaning in colloquial Burmese and let you recite the mottos and then explain the meanings phrase by phrase.

**Bhikkhu, bhikkhu:** Monk, monk! This was the way in which Venerable Kumāra Kassapa was first addressed. The repetition of the word “Bhikkhu” was used as an interjection. It means an exclamation of surprise. It is something like a cry of sudden surprise and fear as “Snake! Snake! or, Fire! Fire!” when one is alarmed at the sight of a snake or a fire. **Ayaṃ vammiko:** this big ant-hill or termite mound, **rattam:** at night, **dhūmāyati:** is emitting smoke, **divā:** during the day, **pajjalati:** it is ejecting flames.”

Let’s consider the way the *brahmā* spoke. Without saying anything that seemed relevant, he uttered in surprise “Monk! Monk! This ant-hill is emitting smoke at night and ejecting

flames during the day,” as if the ant-hill is nearby. I will explain about the ant-hill later.

**Bhikkhu bhikkhu**, O Monk, monk! **ayaṃ vammiko**, this ant-hill or termite mound; **rattiṃ**, at night time; **dhūmāyati**, is emitting smoke; **divā**, during the day; **pajjalati**, it is ejecting flames. **Brāhmaṇo**: the brahmin teacher, **evamāha**: instructed his pupil in this way. **Sumedha**: “O Sumedha,<sup>1</sup> (my good young pupil of outstanding wisdom), **satthaṃ ādāya**: take hold of the hoe, **vammikaṃ abhikkhaṇa**: persistently dig up this ant-hill. **Eti**: (indicates an instruction).<sup>2</sup> **Sumedho**: O Sumedha, **sattaṃ ādāya**: having taken hold of a hoe,<sup>3</sup> **abhikhaṇato**: when digging the ant-hill persistently as instructed by his teacher: **laṅgiṃ addasa**: found a bolt (for fastening a door). **Laṅgi bhadante**: “Venerable sir, there is a bolt,” the pupil said. **Brāhmaṇo evamāha**: the brahmin teacher instructed thus: “**Ukkhipa laṅgiṃ**: “Remove the bolt,” **abhikkhaṇa**, **Sumedha**, **satthaṃ ādāya**: “carry on digging, Sumedha, having taken hold of the hoe,” **eti**: (indicates an instruction). **Sumedha**: Sumedha, **satthaṃ ādāya**: taking hold of the hoe; **abhikkhaṇato**: on continuing to dig; **uddhumāyikaṃ addasa**: saw a toad that when touched swells up. **Bhadante**: “Venerable sir; **uddhumāyikā**: there is a toad that swells up when touched,” **eti**, the pupil said.

The gist is that a Brahmin teacher was giving instructions to numerous pupils. Some instructions on worldly knowledge could be acquired in the town itself, but to teach what could only be taught in the forest, he took his pupils to the forest and taught them how to discover things by experimentation. In ancient times, the Brahmin teachers who instructed their pupils were similar to present day headmasters. They were also called *Disāpāmokkha*,<sup>4</sup> renowned teachers, just like the University Professors of the present day. It means to say that they were eminent teachers whose fame had spread in all directions. The Burmese term for Professor (*Pāmokkha*), is derived from the term “*Disāpāmokkha*” of former times.

---

<sup>1</sup> Su + medha = of good wisdom (ed.)

<sup>2</sup> Eti, or ‘ti, at the end of a sentence indicates direct speech (ed.)

<sup>3</sup> *Satthaṃ* = a weapon, sword, or knife (PTS) none of which would be suitable for digging an ant-hill. A spade (the translation from Burmese used by U Min Swe) would not have been known in those days and is rarely used in Asia, so here I have translated it as “hoe.” Bhikkhu Bodhi translates it as “knife.” (ed.)

<sup>4</sup> *Disā* = cardinal directions of north, south, east, and west (ed.)

This Brahmin teacher, while instructing his pupils in that forest camp, was said to have found a big ant-hill. The peculiar nature of this ant-hill was that at night time it emitted smoke, while during the day time, it ejected flames. Finding the peculiar characteristics of this ant-hill, the brahmin teacher asked one of his wise pupils to dig it up. The pupil must have been very reliable in as much as he had earned the confidence of his teacher and was well trusted. That is why the special qualities of this pupil were praised as “the wise and well-educated pupil of outstanding ability (Sumedha).” The way of asking him to do was: “Well, my distinguished pupil! Here is the ant-hill. This ant-hill is very strange. At night it emits smoke constantly, while during the day it ejects flames. There must be some kind of treasure underneath this ant-hill.” So the instruction was given thus: “My good and bright pupil! Take hold of the hoe and dig this ant-hill.” In compliance with this instruction, the intelligent pupil took the hoe and began to dig with all his strength. In the course of digging, the first thing he found was a big bolt, a kind of wooden bar used to fasten a door. Then, the wise pupil remarked, “Teacher! Here is a big bolt. It must be the inherent quality of this big bolt that has caused the bursting forth of smoke at night time and flames during the day.” On hearing this remark, the eminent teacher said, “My good pupil! This is not correct. How could this bolt emit flames? Take it out and throw it aside, and continue digging.” As the pupil continued digging after removing the bolt, he found a toad called “*Uddhumāyika*.”

“*Uddhumāyika*” is a kind of a toad that becomes bloated every time it is touched, as some of you might have come across. This is the kind of toad that stays in a group in a pool at the beginning of the rainy season and croaks noisily producing a sound like: “*Om, In.*” In the Commentary, however, it has been mentioned thus: “This kind of toad usually stays among rotten leaves and in bushes. The size of this animal is about the size of a toe-nail (*nakhapitṭhi*). If it is about the size of the toe-nail of the big toe, it is very small. The kind of toad we see in Burma is not so small. It is about the size of a “*Gon-hnyin*” — a kind of fruit, flat and somewhat circular in shape cased in a long outer cover. It has a fairly thick brown hard shell about double the size of a dollar coin. It seems that the Commentators had probably mentioned the size as compared to that of the toads

found in Sri Lanka. The body of the toad found in Burma appears to be much larger. What I remember is that this kind of toad is known in Burmese as “Phar-Onn” or “Phar-Gon-Hnyin.” “Phar” in Burmese means “toad.” I haven’t heard of it as being called “Phar-dalet.” Some said it is called “Phar-byoke” which, of course, has poisonous horny scales on its back. “Uddhumāyika” is a kind of toad having nearly a round shape. The term used depends on the usage adopted wherever the toad is found. We cannot possibly say which is correct. Each country adopts its own terminology. In the [Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta](#) the Blessed One taught that the terminology commonly used in a certain country or district (*janapadaniruttiṃ*), should not be regarded as the only correct term (*nābhiniveseya*). Therefore, without prejudice regarding the name that is used by different people, let us just call it a toad, which is a common name known to all, for the toad that is puffed up every time it is touched.

The great teacher again asked his pupil to clear this toad away and discard it, and then continue to dig. After digging further, he reached a point where a junction was found inside the ant-hill. In this way, new and strange things were discovered one after the other until at last they came upon a dragon (*nāga*). In the process of digging, all that had been found commencing from the ant-hill to the dragon, came to fifteen — all puzzles that were shrouded in mystery. These are riddles or conundrums (*paheli*). They will be composed in a motto in serial order that can be easily remembered.

### A Motto About the Fifteen Riddles

“Seeing a big ant-hill, smoking by night, and ejecting flames by day, the noble teacher instructed his intelligent pupil to investigate. On digging it with a hoe, he discovered a bolt, a toad, a junction, a water-strainer, a tortoise, a cleaver, a chopping-board, a piece of flesh, and a dragon, making a total of fifteen riddles.”

Let us explain this motto. “Smoking by night” means, at night time it was emitting smoke. “Ejecting flames” means at day time it was spurting out flames. These two were meant to indicate the big ant-hill. This ant-hill or termite mound was found by the brahmin teacher. When he saw it, he asked his pupil to dig it with the hoe to know distinctly what were inside the ant-hill.

When it was dug, the first thing discovered was a bolt normally used in fastening a door. As the pupil continued digging, a toad called “*Uddhumāyika*” popped up. Thereafter, a junction where two paths met came in sight. Later, a water-strainer, then a tortoise, followed by a cleaver, a chopping-board, and a piece of flesh were found one after the other. The pupil therefore, said to his teacher: “There is a piece of flesh.” The teacher asked his pupil to remove this piece of flesh and continue digging as before. As the pupil went on digging, he found a dragon and uttered with surprise, “There is a dragon, sir.” The teacher then instructed him: “Let the dragon remain where it is. Do not disturb or harm him. Worship the dragon — *Tiṭṭhatu nāgo, mā nāgaṃ ghaṭṭesi; namo karohi nāgassā*”<sup>ti</sup>.”

**Nāgo:** the dragon, **tiṭṭhatu:** let it remain where it is. **Nāgam:** this dragon, **mā:** do not, **gaṭṭesi:** disturb or harm. **Nāgassa:** the dragon, **namo:** revere and worship.

This account conveys the fifteen riddles given by the *brahmā*. There is food for thought as to what is meant by the big ant-hill, the toad, *etc.*, fifteen riddles in all. I listed all fifteen riddles in the motto to help you remember it easily. After giving him these fifteen riddles, the *brahmā* said to Venerable Kumāra Kassapa: “O, Monk! You may approach the Blessed One and respectfully pose these riddles. Take note of the meaning of these riddles as explained by him. The only ones who could answer them correctly are the Blessed One, his disciples, or someone who got the solution from me. No one else would be able to give an accurate and complete explanation.” After leaving instructions where to obtain clarification on these riddles, the Brahma returned to his celestial abode.

In this connection, I should explain what connections he had to Venerable Kumāra Kassapa, and with what intentions he had come down to earth to give him these riddles, so I will tell you about the events that had taken place in a previous Buddha’s era.

### Kumāra Kassapa’s Previous Life

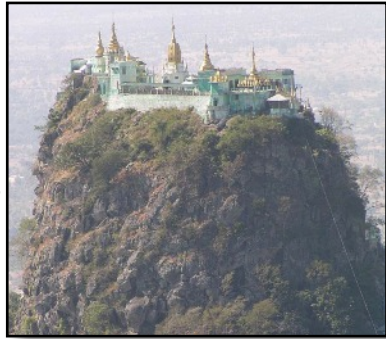
During the latter part of the dispensation of the Buddha Kassapa, finding that other monks were contravening the monastic discipline, some monks who were alarmed about this state of affairs, discussed among themselves reflecting how hard it was to come by the appearance of a Buddha. To become a Fully Enlightened Buddha is



not at all easy, as one whose objective is to attain Buddhahood has to strive relentlessly throughout his existences for at least four aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles to fulfil the perfections (*pāramī*). Only after attaining supreme enlightenment, will he be able to teach the true Dhamma to enable mankind to gain the path, its fruition, and nibbāna. They thought it regrettable that some members of the Saṅgha did not conform to the rules of discipline. They held the opinion that if such a state of affairs were allowed to prevail, this priceless and noble dispensation would soon disappear. They decided: “Before this great and noble teaching is obliterated we should devote ourselves to the practice of meditation to work out our own salvation by relying on this noble dispensation. Let us therefore go into a forest retreat where there is tranquility — a place free from worldly interference — and dedicate ourselves to the practice of meditation.”

### Seven Monks Enter a Forest Retreat

Having made this decision they went to a forested area, taking along with them only the eight requisites of a Buddhist monk: three robes, an almsbowl, *etc.* After reaching the forest, they climbed up to a mountain ledge that could not be reached without the help of a ladder. It might perhaps have resembled the famous Mount Popa of Burma.



When they found the mountain ledge, the seven monks made a ladder and climbed up. After reaching the ledge, the eldest announced, “Monks! If you have any clinging for life, you may now leave and return to the foot of the mountain. If you agree to stay here, I will throw down the ladder.” Not one of the seven monks descended having a very ardent desire to practice meditation even to the extent of sacrificing their lives. They all agreed to remain. Since everyone in the group of the seven had given their express consent to stay and meditate assiduously, the elder threw away the ladder.

After abandoning the ladder, the seven monks had nothing to depend on except the Dhamma. They were now unable to get down

*Taung Kalat, Mt Popa, Burma*

© Andre Lettau

from the mountain. If they jumped down, they would surely meet with death. The water they had taken along with them might have been a small amount as was contained in a water-bag. If that water was used up, they could die of thirst. They had nothing to eat for the next day so they could die of hunger. Under such circumstances their chance of survival depended on achieving the higher stages of insight meditation and supernormal powers (*abhiññā*). The danger of death was so imminent that they could not think about the future. In other words, they were trapped, and so plunged themselves into meditation with great earnestness and diligence. Because of this unremitting effort and zeal in practising meditation, the eldest became an Arahant during the first night.

If developed by dwelling on its imminent nature, recollection of death (*maraṇānussati*), can be very beneficial. The Blessed One taught as follows, exhorting us to dwell on the thought of death.

*“Ajjeva kiccamātappaṃ, ko jaññā maraṇaṃ suve;  
Na hi no saṅgamaṃ tena, mahāsenena maccunā.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Atappaṃ:** should act with right effort, energetically and zealously, **ajjeva:** this very day, without postponing it to the next day, or the day after, **kiccam:** duty that should be done. In other words, all that can be done now, should be done at once with zeal and ardour without procrastination.

Efforts to dispel unwholesome states that have arisen, to prevent those that have not yet arisen; to arouse wholesome states such as charity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), or the path of concentration and insight (*samatha vipassanā magga*), that have not yet been acquired, is right exertion (*sammappadhānaṃ*). All good deeds, particularly that of insight should be carried out diligently, and should not be deferred until tomorrow or the day after. Meditation must be practised right now. That this was the Buddha’s exhortation is very clear. Don’t you understand? If it is understood, you should join the meditation centre right now. Our male and female benefactors do not seem able to follow this teaching of the Buddha. Leaving aside laymen, even some of the Saṅgha do not seem to be able to adhere strictly to the Buddha’s instructions — they find it difficult to comply. However, the Blessed One earnestly urged us with boundless compassion to devote ourselves

<sup>1</sup> Bhaddekaratta Sutta, M.iii.187, Therāpadāna, Ap.i.506.

to meditation, because we do not know exactly when our death will occur. It may be today or tomorrow or at some future date. How can we know when we are going to face death? However, people generally think that their own death will not take place today or tomorrow, nor even in the near future. In general, that may be true. However, if we take a census of deaths, we would find a considerable number who succumbed to death in spite of thinking that they wouldn't die in the near future. Nobody is sure when death would happen, which is why it was said: "*Na hi no saṅgamaṃ tena, mahāsenena maccunā.*"

It means that we have no opportunity to be on good terms (*saṅgamaṃ*) with death, the king of the underworld, to get a fixed date, nor bribe him, nor raise an army to defend ourselves from death (*maccunā*). The king of death is equipped with a huge army (*mahāsenā*) and an arsenal of various lethal weapons such as disease, poison, etc. No one has been given a fixed date by Yāma, the king of death, as a favour to a person who might wish to befriend him. Nor is there anyone who can offer a bribe to live longer. In this world, a person who has committed a serious crime deserving the death penalty, might get acquitted if he could offer a suitable bribe, but no such bribe can be given to the king of death to escape from death or to live longer. No one on earth can fight death with the might of a gigantic army though they may be able to defeat any enemy. Every one of us will have to bow down before death. Death is, in fact, inevitable and metaphorically speaking, invincible.

I should mention here the significance of recollecting the imminent nature of death. At one time, the Blessed One addressed a congregation of monks to find out whether they had developed recollection of death (*maraṇānussati*). Thereupon, six of the monks respectfully replied that they were contemplating death. When the Blessed One inquired further as to how contemplation was made, the first monk replied that he imagined it would be good if he could live to practice the Buddha's teachings for a day and a night. His way of contemplation indicated his assumption that he wouldn't die today, but that he might meet with death the next day. The second monk said that it had occurred to him it would be good if he could contemplate just today while he was still alive. The third monk said he thought to himself how good it would be if he were able to contemplate for the time it took to take his meal. The fourth monk stated it would be really

good if he were able to contemplate for four or five handfuls of food. The Blessed One did not express his approval of the answers given by these four monks. That means he regarded them as unsatisfactory.

I have come across cases where some people have pursued alchemy so that they could live longer. When asked why, they replied that they wanted to live longer. Then, when asked what they would do if they lived longer, they said it would enable them to practise meditation seriously for longer. What they had said is not in conformity with the Buddha's teachings. Only if one could bear in mind that death is imminent, could one meditate with great diligence and earnestness, after severing the bonds of attachment to life. The belief entertained by the alchemists was that they would be able to meditate with peace of mind only if they have longevity.

These are different principles with divergent views. We do not believe that by prolonging one's life, one could meditate seriously for a longer period. Those who meditate in fear of death, which may occur at any moment, hope to gain insight before the hand of death seizes them. If they were expecting to live for thousands of years, I don't think they would care to devote themselves to meditation as earnestly as they are doing now.

Some meditators do not make serious efforts, and with their mind running riot, speculating what they will do after meditation, about what prosperity and wealth they would gain from their business enterprise and so on, valuable time has been wasted for nothing. Those monks who had climbed up to the mountain ledge, discarded the ladder to prevent laxity. With nothing to rely on after abandoning the ladder, they had no other way to survive except by making relentless efforts to achieve the Dhamma. The eldest monk thus gained Arahantship after a single night.

Arahantship is of two kinds. For some Arahants, the only distinguishing feature is that they have the full realisation of the Four Noble Truths and are entirely free from all defilements. They do not, however, possess psychic powers (*iddhi*) such as the super-normal power of flying through the air. Such an Arahant is called a dry-visioned Arahant (*sukkha-vipassaka*). This means an Arahant who has attained the Noble Path without *jhāna* and psychic powers. Some, of course, have achieved psychic powers from the outset, and after developing insight become Arahants. Some gain the psychic

powers simultaneously with achieving Arahantship, which is called “*Maggasiddha jhāna*.” This means the *jhāna* that has the full compliments of the path. Such Arahants are endowed with the psychic powers, such as the ability to fly through the air. The eldest monk was one of those Arahants fully equipped with psychic powers.

This Arahant brought food for his fellow-monks after fetching it by flying through the air, invited his fellow monks saying “Friends! Don’t relax, continue your utmost endeavour in meditation after taking food. I will supply you with your daily meals.” The six monks then asked his permission to speak, and said “Before we undertook meditation, did we make an agreement that the first person who achieved the special Dhamma should procure food for the others who have not yet reached the ultimate goal, while the rest should continue meditating while depending upon the meals so supplied?” Thereupon, the Arahant replied, “No, friends, we did not.” The six monks then said, “If we have adequate perfections, we will also achieve the special Dhamma like you. If we were to nourish ourselves with the meals brought by you, we would become lax, and thus would take longer to reach our ultimate goal.” They thus refused to accept the offer of meals. The Arahant therefore departed to some other suitable place.

On the next day, the second elder among the six, reached the stage of a Non-returner (*anāgāmi*). He too gained psychic powers the moment he attained Non-returning. This elder likewise brought meals for the remaining five monks, and offered them in the same way as done by the Arahant. The remaining five monks again declined the offer of food, and went on meditating relentlessly denying all food and water. Since two days had elapsed, they must have been severely afflicted by hunger. Yet, they persevered at the risk of their lives. How wonderful and worthy of reverence!

The Non-returner therefore left them and went to some other congenial spot. The five monks continued to make greater exertion to gain stages of awakening, but as they were lacking in perfections, they failed to gain the special Dhamma. They soon died of hunger and thirst. In this regard, those who have little faith in the Buddha’s teaching might think: “These monks suffered a great loss for striving so hard in meditation.” In fact, it is quite the contrary. It is not at all surprising that death is inevitable in one’s lifetime. No

matter to what extent one may nurture himself to his utmost, death cannot be avoided. It will take place one day. When it occurs, it is of paramount importance to have a purified mind on the eve of death, to reach a better new existence. It is dreadful to face death while leading a way of life without chastity. In that event one could land in the lower realms. In the case of these five monks, however, as they had succumbed to death while meditating strenuously, they were fully accomplished with morality, and also possessed concentration and wisdom, at least to some extent. Hence, according to the Buddha's teachings, their death was noble. They therefore gained a great benefit.

### Acquiring Beneficial Results

They reaped the benefits in the following way. After their demise they were immediately reborn in the celestial realms as if they had been aroused from their deep slumber without any sensation of pain and suffering by virtue of their morality, concentration, and wisdom. On their rebirth, everything was found furnished to their heart's content including the amenities of the celestial realms, with well furnished celestial palaces, along with a following of celestial nymphs. Such beneficial results were enjoyed from the time of Buddha Kassapa until the time of Buddha Gotama. They had thus been repeatedly reborn in the six celestial realms, and had the privilege of living in great luxury, comfort, and happiness throughout such existences. During the lifetime of Buddha Gotama they became human beings, the time being ripe for them to escape from all suffering through the attainment of nibbāna. They had, therefore, gained benefits throughout their rounds of existences.

### Becoming an Arahant at the Age of Seven

Let's return to the past history during the time of Buddha Kassapa. The first elder who became an Arahant, as mentioned earlier, attained final cessation (*parinibbāna*) at the end of his life-span in that era. The elder who became a Non-returner was reborn as a *brahmā* after his death reaching the Suddhavāsa realm. This *brahmā* was said to be watching his fellow-monks to help them whenever occasion demanded. Finding them elevated to the celestial realms after their demise from the human realm, no occasion had arisen to help them at that time.

### Venerable Dabba Thera

During the lifetime of Buddha Gotama one of the five monks attained Arahantship at the age of seven. A seven-year-old is very young if compared to children of the same age nowadays. However, he achieved Arahantship so young due to the perfections he had accumulated as the monk who meditated diligently on the mountain ledge. Those who are currently assiduously practising insight meditation should not be discouraged if, due to unfavourable circumstances, they have not been able to fully accomplish the knowledge of the Dhamma. They can still hope to become an Arahant easily as Venerable Dabba did in the era of this dispensation, or in the least, in the dispensation of the next Buddha.

### King Pukkusāti

The next monk had been reborn as King Pukkusāti in the country of Taxila. Taxila is situated in the southern part of Peshawar township which lies within Punjab, the province in the extreme north-western part of India. King Pukkusāti had donned the yellow robe after attaining *jhāna* through the practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*). He had taken up meditation, after realising the glorious attributes of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha on the strength of a letter received from King Bimbisāra of Rājagaha. After becoming a recluse, he left his native place to go and pay homage to the Blessed One. He arrived at Rājagaha where the Buddha was residing. There, while he was staying at the house of a potter, the Blessed One visited that potter's house. The Blessed One then delivered a Discourse on the [Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta](#). While listening to the Buddha's teachings, he became a Non-returner. However, soon after his attainment, he was gored to death by a cow that was an ogress who held a grudge against him in one of his previous existences. After his death, he reached the *Suddhavāsa brahmā* realm. As such, it was unnecessary for the *brahmā* god to help Venerable Dabba and Pukkusāti.

### The Wandering Ascetic Sabhiya

Another monk became a wandering ascetic by the name of [Sabhiya](#). Holding erroneous views, he became an adherent of a false doctrine. Finding him thus, the *brahmā* god came to him and gave him twenty riddles. The *brahmā* god then left him to find solutions to these riddles,

advising him to become a disciple of the recluse who could successfully solve these riddles. He went in search of a competent teacher and eventually, failing to find anyone who could solve them, he approached the Blessed One. Elated with the answers given by the Blessed One, he entered the Saṅgha and before long attained Arahantship.

### **Bāhiya Dāruciriya**

The next monk was reborn in the country of Bāhiya. Hence, he was given the name of **Bāhiya**. He was dealing in international trading business and was a reputable wholesale and merchant having business relations with foreign countries. After successfully conveying merchandise with sea-going vessels on seven occasions, he left his native place by ship on his eighth trip, fully laden with merchandise, intending to take it to **Suvaṇṇabhūmi**. In ancient times, the ships that plied between different countries were sailing vessels. In the past, Suvaṇṇabhūmi was thought to be a sea-port by the name of Thaton in Burma. Some researchers say that Sumatra was formerly known as Suvaṇṇabhūmi. This fits with the Commentary, which says that Suvaṇṇabhūmi is an island.

On the way to Suvaṇṇabhūmi, Bāhiya's ship was wrecked in a violent storm. The entire crew died except for Bāhiya. As for Bāhiya, this being his final existence, fortune favoured him. By a stroke of good fortune, he got hold of a plank torn from the wreckage and being buffeted by the waves, he was gradually carried to the shore. He rested on the shore and fell asleep. When he awoke, being hungry, he thought of begging for food.

Having lost his clothes in the struggle when the ship capsized, he was almost naked, so he gathered the slender stems from a plant and wove them into a garment, wrapping it around his waist. Seeing him wearing a garment made of wooden stems, he was given the name "Dāruciriya." After dressing himself with the outer garment made of thin sticks hanging down from his waist, and finding an old pot on an altar used to make offerings to a deity, he entered the port of Soppāraka to beg for almsfood.

The port of Soppāraka stands on the west coast of India near Mumbai. It is a place called Sopāra which lies at the mouth of Nammadā river to the north of Mumbai. Finding a person strangely wearing a woven slender sticks as his garment and carrying a worthless old pot,



the villagers thought very highly of him and remarked: "This person is a sage. Unlike common people, he wears no ordinary clothes and is using a worthless pot for his meals. This person looks like an Arahant." Regarding him as praiseworthy, the people offered him fine clothes, good food, crockery, and utensils for his use.

It is amazing that people in those ancient times regarded a person without any clothes as an Arahant. They revered Bāhiya who had preserved his modesty with woven sticks, regarding him as a noble Arahant. They had not considered things wisely, and had no ability to gauge a person from various aspects. These people were really gullible. It is because of such credulity that worthless beliefs without proper foundation have sprung up at the present day. Leaving aside these simple ancient villagers, even nowadays a few wrongly regard a strange person who seems to be seeking for a way out of this worldly life, as a noble Arahant, and worship him reverently! In this present age of modern science, despite the development of scientific knowledge and education, it is highly improper and inappropriate to find such people who blindly believe in bigotry.

When he was so revered as an Arahant and offered many requisites by the villagers, he thought to himself: "They revere and make offerings to me because of my lack of clothes. If I accept their gifts of clothes and put them on, they will lose faith and respect in me." He therefore accepted only the food offerings and refused the clothes, contenting himself with the garment made of slender sticks. The people then thought even more highly of him and made more offerings with increased reverence and generosity.

Indeed, it is so. Gullible people usually hold in high estimation such strange individuals whom they might meet. As people admired and respected him all the more as an Arahant, he began to believe that he was an Arahant. It occurred to him, "In this world, an Arahant may be like myself," and that odd assumption made him egoistic. It is natural for people to over-estimate their own qualities depending upon the consensus of many. Such a case has been cited as a fable in the [Hitopadesa](#).

### **The Goat That Became a Dog**

At one time, a Brahmin bought a small goat and carried it with him for the purpose of performing a ritual, an act to propitiate a deity. A group of scoundrels seeing him carried a goat, wanted to get it for

nothing. They made a plot, and agreed to make claims that the goat was a dog. They waited at the assigned places along the route they knew that the Brahmin would take. The person waiting at the first point said to the Brahmin on the latter's arrival, "Hello, Great Teacher! Why are you carrying a dog on your shoulders?" The Brahmin ejaculated with anger, "Who the devil are you? The animal on my shoulders is not a dog, but a goat. I have bought it for a ritual sacrifice. Can't you see that it is a goat? How could it be a dog?" So saying, he proceeded on his journey.

After walking for some distance, the Brahmin reached a place at the fringes of a jungle. There, a group appeared and one of them said "What a wonderful teacher! Since you belong to the high caste of Brahmins, it's really surprising that you are carrying a dog on your shoulders." The rest of the group joined in and agreed: "Yes. We are at a loss to know why he is carrying a dog on his shoulders." Then, the Brahmin's mind began to waver. He thought: "Just then a person had told me that the animal I carried is a dog. Could it be a dog? I had better take a close look at it." Thinking thus, he put down the goat and looked at it. He felt the goat's ears and said to himself, "Hmm! This is not a dog, but a goat after all." So saying he continued on his journey.

When he reached the other side of the forested area, another group appeared and made fun of the Brahmin, clapping their hands, saying: "Hey, Look! Look! This is amazing. In spite of being a high caste Brahmin, he is carrying a base creature — a mean dog. How extraordinary!" Then the Brahmin thought to himself; "It seems to be true. The first person said that the animal on my shoulders is a dog. The second group also stated that it is a dog. This group also remarked that it is a dog. The beast I am carrying does not seem to be a goat after all. It appears to be a dog." He then set the animal free, uttering: "Off you go, you big dog." After he had abandoned the goat and left, the animal was killed by the villains who cooked the flesh and made a feast of it.

This fable is told in the *Hitopadesa* as a lesson to those who, though they may be educated, could waver, if many others jointly express their adverse opinion on any matter.

### **Bāhiya's False Pride**

This is similar to the case of Bāhiya who held a false notion that he was an Arahant. As a good number of people had spoken in

admiration of his being an Arahant worthy of high esteem, he really thought himself to be an Arahant. Nowadays, it seems there are some who think highly of themselves as being Stream-winners or Arahants on the strength of their teacher's opinion of them as having reached those higher stages of insight. There could be a number of people who become egoistic for having been highly praised by many others. Such cases should serve us as a reminder to be heedful.

The *Suddhavāsa brahmā* found Bāhiya harbouring false pride. He reflected, "My friend has been following the wrong path due to his false view. During the time of the Buddha Kassapa when we were meditating on the mountain ledge, he had devotedly engaged in meditation even refusing to take meals offered to him by the elder who became an Arahant. He had also refused the offer of meals from the elder who became a Non-returner. Now that has debased himself by accepting offerings made by others under the delusion that he is an Arahant, although he is far from being an Arahant. He has falsely believes himself to be an Arahant. He has made a huge blunder. Before long he is going to die. I should help him." Reflecting thus, he went to Bāhiya Dārucīriya. At night time, he stood in the mid-air within sight of Bāhiya with all his radiance, and spoke bluntly, "Hey, Bāhiya, you think highly of yourself as an Arahant. In fact, you are not. You are an impostor without the necessary attributes to become an Arahant."

Having heard these words, Bāhiya thought to himself; "Hmm! This is true. I have not made any effort to become an Arahant. I was ship-wrecked, and being naked, and had to weave thin stems of a plant to wear as a garment. Wearing this garment, I went begging for meals. The innocent villagers were impressed by my strange attire and mistakenly extolled me as an Arahant. I have committed a grave mistake in pretentiously claiming to be an Arahant, though, in fact, I am not." Feeling ashamed, he asked, "Venerable *brahmā*, if that is the case, is there any real Arahant in this world? Where does he reside? The *brahmā* replied "There is a place called the kingdom of Kosala lying to the north-east. In that place is a monastery named Jetavana, near the city of Sāvatti. Residing at this monastery is Gotama the Buddha, who has descended from the royal family of the Sākya Clan. Gotama is a true Arahant, free from all the defilements of human passion. He is teaching the noble Dhamma and is showing the path that leads to the attainment of Arahantship."

Hearing this statement, Bāhiya felt repentant, and was greatly alarmed for his imprudent behaviour. He immediately left the place to seek out the Omniscient Buddha.

In the Commentary to the Bāhiya Sutta, the distance from the port of Soppāraka to Sāvatti is said to be 120 *yojanas*, but in the Commentary to the Puṇṇovāda Sutta it is said to be 130 *yojanas*. According to the Commentaries, one league (*yojana*) is approximately thirteen miles. Present day researchers have said that one *yojana* is about eight miles. If calculated at the lowest rate of eight miles and 120 *yojanas*, the distance would be at least 960 miles. To such a distant land, Bāhiya travelled on foot in haste resting *en route* only for one night at each place. "Sleeping one night at every place he had passed through on the way," is the exact meaning conveyed in Pāli by the expression "*Sabbattha ekarattivasena*." As it has been stated "*Sabbattha*: everywhere, *ekarattivasena*: coming after one night's stay," it is clear that at each place at the end of a day's journey, only one night was spent to rest. This is quite realistic. However, the commentator on the Bāhiya Sutta has given the meaning as: "The journey from Soppāraka seaport to Sāvatti was covered in a single night." If that is so, the long distance of 960 miles could not possibly be covered by ordinary human effort, it would require outside help. It is also not in agreement with the statement "*Sabbattha ekarattivāsena*." By this, as it is stated "everywhere" with the expression "Stay," there appears to be no justification in saying "walking or journeying," when it has been specifically stated as "staying" It will be absurd to stay only one night throughout the whole journey. It would be "one night's stay at every place." Hence, the statement "One night's stay at every place of stop instead of resting and wasting time for two or three nights," is more realistic. If the whole journey were performed in a night, the expression *Sabbattha*: everywhere, is considered superfluous. The word "*vāsa*: stay" will also be unnecessary. It would be adequate to use the expression "*ekarattaneva*," which means "only one night."

However, the most significant point is: "Bāhiya being greatly repentant had come in haste." At the time of his arrival at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha was away begging for almsfood in the city of Sāvatti. Bāhiya, therefore, made his way at once to Sāvatti. At the sight of the Blessed One, he was overwhelmed with great reverence, intense rapture, and faith, and paid homage. After

paying homage, he fervently requested the Buddha to teach him. The Buddha, fully realising that the time was inopportune to teach him while he was in a mood of extreme respect and ecstasy, and also fatigued after a long and strenuous journey, rejected his request saying, "This is not right the time to teach while seeking for alms."

However, Bāhiya earnestly entreated him three times. Then, the Buddha, seeing that his fervour had cooled down to a fit state of composure, and also finding it an opportune moment, gave the following exhortation in brief:

*"Tasmātiha te, Bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ — 'Diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati'ti."*<sup>1</sup>

The meaning of the above Pāli phrase in brief is: "When an object is seen, just contemplate and note fixedly as 'seeing.' When hearing a sound, just make a mental note fixedly as 'hearing' with concentration. When smelling an odour, just concentrate and note firmly on 'smelling.' When tasting, just note with constant awareness on 'tasting.' When feeling a touch, simply make a mental note fixedly on 'touching.' And when imagining, just mentally note with fixed concentration only on 'imagining'." Having heard this teaching — which is meant to deter any inclination towards external thoughts — while contemplating every moment of consciousness from the contact between the eye and visual objects, the ear and sounds, and so on, by concentrating fixedly on mere awareness of "seeing," "hearing," "touching," and "knowing," Bāhiya gained insight stage by stage and became an Arahant. He was honoured by the Buddha, as the pre-eminent individual in most speedily attaining the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition (*hippābhiññānaṃ*).

After thus attaining Arahantship, while going out to find the robes required to be ordained as a *bhikkhu*, Bāhiya Dāruciṛiya met his death and attained final cessation (*parinibbāna*), being fatally gored by a cow impersonated by an Ogress who had animosity against him in the past existence.

As stated above, of the five companions who, as monks, had practised Dhamma on the mountain retreat, Venerable Dabba had already become an Arahant; King Pukkusāti, after attaining Non-

<sup>1</sup> Bāhiya Sutta, Ud.7.

returning was already in the Suddhavāsa Brahma realm; Venerable Sabhiya had achieved Arahantship; and Venerable Bāhiya Dārucīriya had attained *parinibbāna*. Only one was left. The *brahmā*, reflecting where that person was living at the moment, saw Venerable Kumāra Kassapa residing in the Blind Men’s Grove (*Andhavana*). Therefore, wishing to help him out, he appeared at night time before Venerable Kumāra Kassapa beaming a radiant light and spreading out rays, and then offered him the fifteen riddles, as has been stated earlier, saying “*Bhikkhu, Bhikkhu! Ayaṃ vammiko rattaṃ dhumārati,*” etc. I have now explained the introduction to this discourse to show why it was taught.

On the following day, Venerable Kumāra Kassapa approached the Blessed One and respectfully paid homage. He then took his seat in an appropriate place and re-iterated the full account of the fifteen riddles given him by the *brahmā* and sought the Buddha’s elucidation with the words “*Ko nu kho, bhante, vammiko, kā rattiṃ dhūmāyanā, kā divā pajjalanā...* — What, venerable sir, is the ant-hill? What is the meaning of emitting smoke at night? What is the meaning of ejecting flames during the day? Who is the Brahmin teacher? Who is the intelligent pupil Sumedho, etc.” The Buddha replied as follows:

*“Vammiko’ti kho, bhikkhu, imassetam cātumahābhūtikassa kāyassa  
adhivacanaṃ, mātāpettikasambhavassa odanakummāsūpacayassa  
aniccucchādana-parimaddanabhedana-viddhamšana-dhammassa.”*

The meaning of the above passage is: “The ant-hill, Bhikkhu, is a simile for the physical body composed of four elements, derived from mother and father, nourished by rice and porridge, and worn away by impermanence and decay.” In other words, the ant-hill means the physical body or materiality (*rūpa*). The matter possessed by every human being is compared to a termite mound. Your own body is your ant-hill. Now everyone seems to know what is meant by the ant-hill. The comparison was made because the human body is like a real termite mound.

## An Ant-hill Full of Holes

An ant-hill is full of big and small holes. Likewise, the human body has many big and small holes. The big holes are the openings of the eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth. The small holes are pores on the skin, which are permeable to sweat. Body hairs grow close to

these pores. Western researchers state that about two thousand pores can be seen in a square inch of skin under a powerful microscope. Using just the naked eye, only about twenty pores would be seen. Mosquitoes appear to have very sharp eyes. They can suck blood from the minutest pores of the human body within a brief moment. Men cannot see the minute holes from where the blood is sucked by mosquitoes, but a mosquito can see the tiny space through which it pokes and sucks. If the skin is examined by a magnifying glass or microscope, numerous tiny holes could be found just like in a sieve. The human body, being full of big and tiny holes, resembles an ant-hill. Hence, the ant-hill was used as a simile for the human body.

If people were able to see the innumerable pores on their own bodies with their naked eyes, they would not consider themselves and others as attractive, since the body is, in fact, loathsome. Looking at the faces and hands with the naked eye, they seem to be smooth. They appear even more smooth, fresh, and refined if beautified with cosmetics. People, therefore, find bodies to be agreeable and desirable. If the pores on the body were seen with insight or with the mind's eye, they will be repulsive. The *brahmā* therefore compared this body with an ant-hill.

### **An Ant-hill That Emits Filth**

It vomits (*vamati*), thus it is called an ant-hill (*vammika*). What does an ant-hill vomit? Snakes, scorpions, rats, lizards, and all kinds of creepy-crawlies come out of an ant-hill. Such filthy, loathsome, and frightful creatures are vomited by an ant-hill. Similarly, this body ejects tears from the eyes, wax from the ears, mucus from the nose, saliva, and spittle from the mouth, sweat is expelled through the pores by glandular ducts. From the lower openings, faeces and urine flow out. Is there a single delightful or desirable thing among them? No. All are filthy and detestable. As the physical body ejects all kinds of loathsome excreta, it is likened to an ant-hill.

### **A Heap of Dust**

The next meaning is that an ant-hill is a heap of dust fetched and piled up by white ants. Just as these fine particles of earth discarded by the ants have formed into an ant-hill, this material body is composed of thirty-two body parts (*koṭṭhāsa*) such as head hairs (*kesa*),

body hairs (*loma*), etc., which have been rejected as worthless by the Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and Arahants. These rejected things are looked upon by ordinary worldlings (*puthujjana*) as pleasurable. How? Just as there are people who keep long hair, there are those who keep it short, according to their own preferences. They groom the hair in a fashionable way with scented oils or pomade to make it look better. Some have their hair curled or plaited at the hair-dresser's. This is done to enhance their physical beauty. It is obvious that they find pleasure in doing so, and are pleased with other's hair styles. Hair is regarded as pleasant as long as it remains on the head, but once cut off, hair become detestable. If a hair is found in a dish of rice or curry, people find it disgusting. See how inconsistent this is. When hairs are on the head, they give pleasure, but when dropped off the head, a strong feeling of aversion occurs.

People are fascinated by and delight in not only the hairs on the head, but also the hairs on the body. There are those who caress and trim their moustaches, eye-brows, and eye-lashes in a fashionable way. The beauty of eye-lashes has been described and extolled in romantic literature. Some women pluck or trim the eye-brows, making them into a thin strip, or curving them into a crescent shape. Some men keep long moustaches pointed at both ends, while others keep long beards (like Santa Claus). This indicates one's own pleasure in having done so and also the desire to afford pleasure to others.

Finger or toe nails are cut and polished to make them look nice. This is done simply because people generally consider them as pleasurable. In big cities like Rangoon, the women's finger and toe nails are polished and coloured with varnish. Such nails are regarded as delightful when on the body. Once they are cut with nail-clippers, the nail clippings are abhorrent, and if kept in the house, some think it would bring ill-luck. This superstitious belief perhaps arose because if nail clippings were allowed to remain inside a house, the sharp points could hurt young children whose skin is delicate.

Next comes the teeth. If seriously considered, they are useful and bring many benefits. If the teeth are healthy it improves digestion and general health. With strong teeth we can bite and chew. People, however, seldom think like this. They are happy in having them on the grounds that they enhance their beauty. It may be true in a way. However, the important thing is that by keeping the teeth



clean and healthy, they can be used to eat and maintain good health. When photographed, people smile to expose their teeth. Some even extract a good tooth and substitute it with a false tooth made of gold. Some have their teeth gilded. Writers may describe a fine row of white teeth as like a row of pearls, but when they are extracted, they become so detestable that people are disinclined to touch them.

People wrongly regard the skin as smooth, beautiful, and pleasing to look at. Having attachment to the complexion of the opposite sex, they delight in seeing the outer layer of skin and physical appearance. However, the skin becomes repulsive and is viewed with aversion if it is affected by dermatitis or other skin diseases.

The flesh, for example, red lips, pretty arms, well-rounded torso, with full breasts, cheeks, *etc.*, if it is stout and muscular in males, or elegant and slender in females, it is appreciated with great pleasure. Women put on rouge to make their lips and cheeks rosy.

Furthermore, the muscles and sinews, because they make it possible to control the limbs allowing one to sit, stand, walk, and work, are regarded as pleasurable. The bones, ligaments, marrow, *etc.*, are not obvious, but the body as a whole is considered delightful.

Saliva and viscid nasal secretions by the mucus membranes are detestable. However, while the saliva remains in the mouth it is not detested, and is swallowed with gusto. To prevent the throat from getting dry, saliva has to be swallowed, and while so doing it appears essentially agreeable. After the saliva has been spat out, it becomes detestable, and nobody would like to touch it. One has to wipe it away if it is ejected from the mouth. Nasal secretions are even more repulsive. Sometimes, nasal secretions have to be channelled through the mouth and spat out. Phlegm is the same. Sometimes, phlegm has to be swallowed and nobody seems to regard it as detestable, but once they are spat or coughed out, they are treated as filth, and unfit to touch. All of these are disgusting to ordinary people just as they are despised and discarded by the Arahants.

The most detestable things are faeces and urine. While they remain in the bowels and bladder, people do not detest them, but once they are excreted, people make a wry face at the sight of them.

These thirty-two bodily parts have been rejected as undesirable by the Arahants. The whole body being an agglomeration of filth that has been rejected, it resembles an ant-hill, which is a heap of

dust discarded by white-ants. Thus the material body, which is an aggregate of filthy substances, should be regarded as unpleasant and undesirable. So we should strive to abandon this detestable material body, as has been done by the Arahants.

The next point I would like to stress is that the ant-hill means a heap of particles of earth that white-ants have deposited together with their viscid saliva. In the same way, this material body, which is compounded with the passionate desire for existence, is very much like the big ant-hill. This conception being profound, it is difficult to make a large audience understand its full meaning within a short discourse, so I do not propose to amplify its meaning any further.

### Home to Various Organisms and Germs

Another meaning is that in the ant-hill, there are hideous and formidable creatures like snakes, scorpions, rats, lizards, and various other creepy-crawlies. An ant-hill is, therefore, abominable. Who would dare to sleep near an ant-hill? Our material body is like an ant-hill. This body of ours is infested with innumerable germs. The Pāli texts say that there are eighty kinds of germs. We do not know how many germs there are altogether. In the Commentary to this *sutta* it says, “*Asitimattāni kimikulasahassāni*,” the literal translation of which is: ‘There are eighty-thousand kinds of germs.’ If that is so, there would be eighty-thousand species of germs. Other texts mention only eighty kinds. It will agree with other texts if a thousand (*sahassāni*) in the Commentary is considered superfluous.

The ant-hill is a breeding ground for reptiles such as snakes and scorpions, insects, and other creatures. These creatures excrete and urinate in the same place. They sleep inside it coiling in that ant-hill if they are sick, and they die there too. This ant-hill is a place where these creatures are born, and is their lavatory too. It also serves as a hospital and a graveyard for these creatures. Bacteria and viruses live in the flesh and blood — in the veins, bones, stomach and intestines. Isn’t it the case that the body is a store-house for germs? Among them, according to the doctors, there are disease carrying germs. They breed and multiply inside the body. Therefore, no matter how highly people may regard and care for their own body as being kings, millionaires, officials, *etc.*, it is a breeding ground for germs. Some who hold superstitious views about having mysterious powers

of immunity from injuries that can be caused by all sorts of lethal weapons, or the power to win the affection of another human being, are disinclined to enter a labour-ward for fear of losing their powers. This is nonsense. These germs excrete filth in our head and mouth, though we may regard such parts of the body as attractive and lovable. Since the body is a toilet and cemetery for such vile germs, it is, in fact, abominable. That is why it has been likened to an ant-hill. So we should cherish no attachment to our body.

### An Accumulation of the Four Elements

The material body is composed of four primary elements, earth (*paṭhavīdhātu*), water (*āpodhātu*), fire (*tejodhātu*), and air (*vāyodhātu*), just like the heap of dust called an ant-hill.

Let us then dissect and analyse it.<sup>1</sup> The earth element has the characteristic of hardness and solidity. If we touch any part of the body, we will find something hard or soft. When we feel the hair, we find it to be rough and the same will be found in the case of eye-lashes and eye-brows. Some may think they are smooth and soft. However, this softness will be regarded as hard if compared to something softer and finer in texture. This is why both softness and hardness are the characteristics of the earth element. Finger nails and toe nails have hardness, which is the nature of solidity, and teeth have the same characteristic, and so does the skin. They are solid — all possess the intrinsic characteristic of the earth element.

The flesh, veins, bones, bone-marrow, ligaments, the heart, the liver, membranes, tissues, chest, large and small intestines, digested and undigested food, and the brain, number fifteen. Added to the previous five, the total is twenty. These all have the characteristic of hardness or softness, and solidity. They are called the earth element because of the predominance of hardness in these solids. In fact, these solids also contain the elements of water, fire, and air. For example, in the hair, there is the element of water or liquidity, which has the characteristic of being moist, humid, and sticky. It also has the fire element, which gives out heat. The hair also has the air element, which provides movement and stiffness.

<sup>1</sup> The thirty-two parts of the body as used in body contemplation are: head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin; nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews; bones, marrow; kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen; lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, serum, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine, and brain. (ed.)

This is the manifestation of the air element. However, as hardness is predominant, the hairs are grouped under the earth element.

A meditator who is contemplating and noting, when touching the hairs, feels hardness and knows the earth element that is inherent in it. When feeling it, if warmth or coldness is noticed, this is the fire element. When stiffness or movement of the body is known, it is the air element. If it feels damp, that is the water element. A meditator need not reflect on the conceptual nature of the elements. What is required is merely to know their characteristics. Awareness should not reach the stage of knowing that it is the hair of a male or a female. To know its characteristic of hardness is fundamental. The earth element is neither a woman nor a man. Nor is it hairs on the head or body. It is only an element. To realise this fact is essential.

The element of water or fluidity is taught as including twelve parts of the body: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, serum, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, and urine. These are all fluids that ooze out. For this reason, they are grouped as fluids. Fluidity is a manifestation of the water element, which is predominant. However, these bodily fluids also have hardness, temperature, and stiffness.

Next comes the fire element. The heat inside the body is known as the fire of decay (*jīraṇatejo*). Because of this fire element the human body is gradually decaying and growing older with the passage of time. The internal bodily temperature that is higher than normal is called fever (*santappatejo*). It is more than the normal temperature of 98.4°F measured with a clinical thermometer as used by doctors. When the body temperature becomes very intense and unbearable, it is called “*dahatejo*,” i.e. burning heat, which causes severe suffering. The heat in the abdomen, which includes stomach, etc., gives the power of digestion and is known as “*pācakatejo*.” These four kinds of heat are only known by their inherent quality. It is neither female nor male. If you examine and feel any place inside the body, you will at least find heat, warmth, or cold. Is it your self? Is it male or female? It is none of these. There is only the nature of heat, warmth, or cold. These are all just the fire element.

Finally, we come to the air element (*vāyodhātu*). This element is of six kinds. They are: 1) Belching, i.e. the expulsion of air either from the oesophagus or from the stomach through the oesophagus, 2) flatulence, 3) gastric wind that is generating in the intestines or

alimentary canal, 4) gaseous distention, 5) respiration, 6) the air element that pervades the limbs and other parts of the human body, causing movement of the limbs such as bending, stretching, sitting, standing, walking, *etc.* This is called *aṅgamaṅgānusārivāyo*. These six kinds of air element have the characteristic of stiffness and motivation, and is, therefore, obviously not male or female.

As previously mentioned, there are twenty bodily parts in the group of the earth element, twelve in the group of the water element, four in the group of the fire element, and six in the group of the air element — forty-two kinds in all. There are four primary elements. The whole aggregate is called the body or materiality (*rūpa*). From the point of view of those who have no insight knowledge, there is a wrong impression of their own body and that of others as a self, and of being the figure of a female or a male.

For example, take a brick building. Although it is constructed with building materials, such as bricks, sand, lime, cement, and timber, it is called a brick building. The building is not just a solid piece of matter. It contains a large number of bricks in one course after another, and an innumerable grains of sand, cement particles, and many small and large pieces of timber. In the same way, this body is an aggregate of numerous substances all belonging to the four primary elements.

Let's now dissect the forefinger. Take off the outer skin and nail that cover the top portion of the forefinger, and have a look at it. Is that outer skin and nail male or female? Is it an individual, a living entity, or a being? It is nothing of that kind. In fact, it is only the earth element, which has the characteristic of hardness or softness. Below the skin the bile, which unknowledgeable persons will not know about. This is not the earth element, but the water element. Therefore, just leave it aside. Flesh, nerves, bones and marrow will be found underneath the skin. All these are not a so-called human being. Neither is it male or female. It is not a living entity or a sentient being. It is only the earth element, which has the characteristics of hardness, roughness, and softness. There is also blood in the forefinger. There are lymph and bile in small quantities, which manifest the fluidity of the water element. There is also warmth or the fire element in the forefinger, and the air element having the characteristics of stiffness and motivation, is present too. None of these are male or female. Only

the elements exist. Other parts of the human body have the same nature and are composed of only four primary elements. This aggregate of the four primary elements is called the body.

In the latter part of this Vammika Sutta, insight knowledge is likened to the hoe. When the big ant-hill is dug with the hoe of insight knowledge, the four primary elements will be detected. If any part of the body is contemplated, wherever touch is felt, the characteristic of hardness or roughness will be noticed, which is the earth element, and heat, warmth or cold will be noted, which is the fire element. Then, stiffness, stillness, or motion will be found, which is the air element. If wetness, stickiness, or oozing are noticed, these are the water element. This body should be known as these four elements manifesting in four different ways.

### **It Begins from Fine Particles of Fluid Matter**

Generally, people think that the material body is a solid mass. It is not so. It has gradually grown large from the smallest particles in which elements combined among themselves or with each other. It, therefore, bears the name of the body and has been formed from the parents' spermatozoa and ovum. With the combination of the father's spermatozoa and mother's ovum, amniotic fluid is first formed. In this fluid (according to scriptures), three kinds of cells called *kāyadasaka*, *bhavadasaka* and *vutthudasaka* arise due to kamma. These three cells and amniotic fluid are so minute that they are invisible to the naked eye. If the minutest particle of dust seen in the sun's rays coming through the window, is split into thirty-six pieces, the dimension of the amniotic fluid is about the size of this tiny particle.

This tiny particle of clear fluid slowly grows without being noticeable. After seven days, this clear fluid becomes a bit turbid, like a greasy bubble. Then, this bubble again gradually develops into a semi-liquid substance (protoplasm) something like a chilli-juice in the shape of a tiny piece of flesh after seven days. Then again, this tiny piece of flesh, which is not rigid and yields to the slightest pressure, becomes a tiny piece of firm flesh after the next seven days. After another seven days, five minute projections protrude from this tiny piece of flesh. One will become the head, two will become the arms; and the others will become the legs. These five projections are called the five limbs.

Later, it gradually develops into a fluid substance in the shape of a head, hands, and feet and ultimately become a body. On the seventy-seventh day, it is said that the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue appear. Thereafter, it is stated that the nutrition obtained from nourishing food slowly infiltrates into the body of the embryo in the womb, contributing to the needs for the development of the body in the form of iron, calcium, and other elements essential to growth. The records of the medical scientists relating to pregnancy and the development of foetus into a human form, are more accurate. The Dhamma that was taught by the Buddha, the Commentaries and Subcommentaries are only approximations, since it was not intended to give medical treatment and aid medical knowledge. I have mentioned it simply because the records of medical scientists have been compiled complete with illustrations by photographs after practical observation, research, and analysis for the purpose of medical treatment. However, for the purpose of contemplation and noting in the practice of meditation, it is unnecessary to be so specific. Hence, in the texts the subject matter has been made given only superficial treatment. After the development of the foetus for about seven to nine months, or in some cases ten months, a child is born into this world. That is why the body, which comes into being from the parents' sperm and ovum, has been described as derived from mother and father (*mātāpettikasambhavassa*).

### Developed From Nutriment

Next, this material body grows because of food or nutriment. It has been taught that physical body (*imassa kāyassa*) bears its name (*adhivacanaṃ*) because it develops dependent on rice and curry (*odanakummāsūpacayassa*). It develops depending on the mother's breast-feeding after birth. From the time that food and other nutriment can be taken, it grows because of the nourishment it obtains. Some of the food eaten is consumed by bacteria in the gut. Some is excreted as faeces, some becomes urine, and some is used for bodily heat. The remaining nutriments spread all over the body to become flesh, blood, etc. This is mentioned in the texts. In this regard, the records of physicians are more precise. As nourishment is gained in this way, the material body has grown up. The degree of body development is measured in terms of the age of a person who, then, is said to have

attained the age of two, five, ten, fifteen, twenty or thirty, or forty, fifty or sixty years, etc, which, of course, indicates the length of one's life.

However, it is not the same young child's body that has turned into a figure of a grown-up. It is by bodily process that new and fresh material formations are continually arising. For example, it resembles a seed that germinates, sprouts and then grows up into a plant or a tree, mainly relying on the nature elements of water and earth. Just imagine a seed of the banyan tree that has developed into a big tree with the passage of time. The sprout that has sprung up from the seed is not the seed. When it is grown up into a small plant, it is not a sprout. Again, when it becomes a big tree, it is not the young plant at all. In the same way, physical substances in this material body are constantly undergoing change — arising and passing away every moment. New formations of matter are occurring in place of old which are dissolving. It is just like running waters that are incessantly changing. As it could crumble and is prone to destruction, it is clearly subjected to the Law of Impermanence. Besides, in order to keep this material body clean and tidy, it has got to be always bathed, its face washed and cleansed and beautified with perfumery, *etc.* Sometimes, massaging has to be done, to repair this body. This material body being an aggregate of various elements, is liable to decay and destruction according to the Law of Impermanence. It is, therefore, called an ant-hill, which is identified with the material body in the way stated above.

According to the *brahmā* god, the big ant-hill is nothing but a material body made up of an aggregate of the four elements whose characteristics are as described above.

## Emitting Smoke

In reply to the question “**Kā rattim dhūmayānā** — Lord, what is the meaning of the expression ‘It is emitting smoke?’” the Blessed One replied, “**Yaṃ kho, bhikkhu, divā kammante ārabha rattim anuvitakketi anuvicāreti — ayaṃ rattim dhūmayānā.**”

The meaning of the above Pāḷi is: “With reference to the work to be performed during the day, it is reflected at night.” The expression ‘emitting smoke when night falls’ indicates “reflecting or imagining at night.” In ancient times when the Buddha was living, people were not extremely avaricious. In those ancient times, people indulged themselves in business affairs only at day time. Only a few people



worked at night. At present, since people have more greed, the field of business has expanded. That is why they have to toil both day and night. Work connected with industry has to be performed around the clock. The above answer was given in accordance with the times when there was no work or activity to be carried out at night. It was absurd to work at night time. For the said reason, what was to be done on the following day, had to be thought of or planned at night time. This is what is meant by “Emitting smoke at night.”

In this regard, we can differentiate between good and bad smoke. What is meant by “good smoke” is something like reflecting that on the following day, one has got to go to school, to the pagoda to worship, observe the Uposatha, give offerings of alms, listen to religious discourses, *etc.* However, the fundamental idea behind this discourse is the reflection made with greed, hatred, and delusion relating to worldly affairs. So, if one has become immersed in imagination regarding worldly affairs, impelled by greed and anger, consider: “I am emitting smoke.” Nevertheless, one cannot possibly force people in this world “to shut out the bad smoke or deter them from emitting smoke.” One may have to think seriously in connection with some kind of business that needs to be performed. Otherwise, there is a danger of any undertaking failing or being spoiled. The main objective of this discourse concerns monks beginning with Venerable Kumāra Kassapa and including all others. In fact, there is nothing much to be done by monks during the day time for their own personal welfare. It is simple because of the support of lay benefactors who support the monks in their noble way of living by generous offering of the monks’ requisites. Early in the morning, monks can easily obtain food by making a round for alms carrying their alms-bowls after putting on their robes. They have robes to wear and a monastery in which to reside, so there is no need for them to worry and plan about making a living. If thoughts do arise at night time regarding the following day or the day after, such thoughts should be rejected, bearing in mind that these thoughts are merely “smoke.” Likewise, meditators should try to prevent emitting “smoke.”

## Expelling Bright Flames

The question raised was “*kā divā pajjalānā*” — “Venerable sir, what is the meaning of “bright flames are expelled in the day time?” To this question, the Blessed One answered:

*“Yaṃ kho, bhikkhu, rattiṃ anuvitakketvā anuvicāretvā divā kammante payojeti kāyena vācāya manasā — ayaṃ divā pajjalanā.”*

The gist of the above Pāli passage is: “Reflecting at night time is followed by actions performed by body or speech during the day time.

Actions done during the day are “bright flames.” What has been thought of at night time in regard to any kind of business to be performed is carried out gradually at day time as deeds or words. All that have been planned with a feeling of greed and anger at night are not only done by oneself, but also urged by means of verbal instructions during the day. These are said to be “expelling bright flames during the day time.” Moreover, in this regard, there is a strange ant-hill. The nature of the “ant-hill” is such that after investigating and hatching secret plans in day time, unfair opportunity is taken surreptitiously only at night when others have gone to bed. This kind of ant-hill may be regarded as unnatural. Now that we have dealt with three riddles.

## The Buddha

In response to the question as to what is meant by the brahmin teacher, the answer given by the Blessed One was “**Brahmaṇoti kho bhikkhu, Tatthāgatassetam̐ adhivacanam̐ arahato sammā-sambuddhasa.**”

The meaning of the Pāli is: “The brahmin teacher refers to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Enlightened One, who is worthy of high veneration by humans, *devas*, and *brahmās* alike — and who is the Omniscient, rightly knowing the truth of all Dhamma analytically with his own wisdom and supreme intelligence like all of his Enlightened predecessors. The brahmin teacher personified the Buddha in as much as there is some sort of similarity in the way instructions were imparted. The similarity is that usually a brahmin teacher had about five hundred pupils, and at the most he might have five, six, or seven thousand. However, in the case of the Buddha, the number of disciples were countless. These innumerable number of disciples or adherents were composed of all sentient beings including *devas* and *brahmās* apart from human beings. There are numerous beings in the world of sentient beings

and right now in this Buddha's dispensation (*sāsana*), there are beings who will be liberated from the world of beings (*sattaloka*) during the lifetime of the Buddhas to come. The Buddha has been extolled as "*devamanussānam*," having been endowed with attributes of a great noble teacher of all human beings, *devas*, and *brahmās*.

## The Outstanding Pupil

Then, relating to the question as to who is the wise and well-educated pupil of outstanding ability — Sumedho — the Blessed One gave the reply: "**Sumedho'ti kho bhikkhu sekkhassetam bhikkhuno adhivacanam.**"

The meaning of this Pāli phrase is: "Sumedho is the name of the fully educated, wise, and outstanding pupil." It implicitly refers to the meditator who is undergoing training (*sikkhā*) by practising morality (*sīla*), and concentration to gain tranquillity (*samādhi*). A person under training has ability in the field of moral discipline and is practising meditation to develop morality, concentration, and insight. In this regard, a trainee is one who is practising to gain insight. It refers to the outstanding pupil named Sumedho. This is because the material body (the big ant-hill) composed of the four primary elements cannot be dissected merely by achieving morality and concentration. It can be dissected only after the attainment of insight knowledge through a course of practical insight meditation. Later, you will know how it was dug with the hoe of insight knowledge. Only if one practices insight meditation, could one become a trainee according to this Sutta. Only then, would one be regarded as a person of outstanding ability. If insight meditation is to be practised, morality needs to be accomplished. Concentration and insight will then follow automatically in due course. A trainee who is developing morality, concentration, and insight, is the outstanding pupil.

## The Abode of the Noble Ones

If you wish to become an outstanding pupil of ability like Sumedha, let us contemplate and note in a practical way. It is particularly meant for those who have not had experience in the practice of meditation. This phrase from the [Ariyāvāsa Sutta](#) has some bearing on the way that meditation should be practised:

*"Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu satārakkhena cetasā samannāgato." (A.v.30)*

This means: “Here, monks, a monk is endowed with mindfulness as a protection.” If fully accomplished in mindfulness, it would be tantamount to reaching the abode of the Noble Ones. Whenever a thought arises, protect the mind by contemplating it with mindfulness. If one possesses constant mindfulness, one is said to be residing in the abode of the Noble Ones, and thus properly guarded and secure. Having reached the abode of the Noble Ones, affords oneself protection from the danger of descending to the lower realms. If progress is made by steadily noting the thoughts, the Noble Path will be gained, which will provide security from all adversities and dangers of the cycle of existence. If mindfulness is established on every formation of a thought, even if the Noble Path is not yet attained, one will be well-guarded against the four lower realms. In the event that death occurs while practising mindfulness, one will definitely escape the lower realms. This constant mindfulness of the arising of thoughts is known as the abode of Noble Ones.

“Note vigilantly whenever phenomena occur.”

This means to note every time a mental phenomenon arises. That is, every time consciousness arises on seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or imagining, be sure to note every occurrence. When consciousness arises on seeing an object, note what has been seen. So also, when awareness takes place at the time of hearing, the mind that knows the hearing should be noted. Every mental activity must always be accompanied by mindfulness. Apply mindfulness to every act of seeing, hearing, etc. It is similar to the case of an invalid who will have to take medicine whenever taking food to aid digestion. It means to apply mindfulness in noting whenever seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, or knowing occurs at any of the six sense-doors. This is said to be abiding in the abode of the Noble Ones, and it will give full protection from all dangers.

If you apply mindfulness vigilantly, not only will right mindfulness (*sammāsati*) occur, but energetic perseverance will be included automatically. This is right effort (*sammāvāyama*), and right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*) is embraced therein too.

Right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) and right thought (*sammāsankappa*), go hand in hand. As for right speech (*sammāvācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*) and right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), which are the path factors of morality, these are fulfilled from the time of undertaking the precepts. All eight factors of the path are therefore embraced.

“Note vigilantly whenever phenomena occur,” refers in brief to the ten Ariyāvāsa dhamma. If stated in terms of establishing mindfulness it is *Satipaṭṭhāna*. In the light of the Buddha’s final admonition to strive with heedfulness (*appamādena sampādetthā*), it is vigilance or heedfulness.

Every time consciousness arises, it should be accompanied by mindfulness. Do not fail to note as “seeing, seeing,” “hearing, hearing,” “smelling, smelling,” “tasting, tasting,” “touching, touching,” and “knowing, knowing.” Noting as “touching” includes all postures and movements. Mindfulness of the body such as: “When walking, he know, ‘I am walking’,” *etc.*, are also included in “touching.” While walking, stiffness and bodily movements occur in all parts of the body involved in manoeuvring the limbs. These movements occur only after the elements in the body have been pushed and stimulated by the intention to move.

Body consciousness touches and knows. From there, consciousness arises as “touching.” This feeling of touch brings awareness of stiffening. When stiffness occurs, awareness becomes vivid. When bending too, note as “bending, bending.” It is the consciousness of touch in respect of stiffness and bodily movements. The movements of the abdomen due to the pressure of the wind element should be noted as “rising,” and “falling.” Next, when imagining and planning, note as “imagining,” and “planning.” This is the routine in meditation exercises. However, for a beginner, it is not possible to follow all phenomena while contemplating.

It is important for a beginner to contemplate and note what is obvious. It was mentioned as “*Yathā pākaṭaṃ vipassanābhiniveso.*” It means that one can contemplate serially beginning from what is obvious. Generally, the bodily behaviour is more clearly manifested, so the Commentaries say that contemplating and noting should start with the materiality (*rūpa*). One should begin contemplating from the four primary elements. One should contemplate starting from any one of the four primary elements.

However, as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* has shown how to contemplate the element of motion as, “When walking, he knows ‘I am walking’,” *etc.*, it should be contemplated beginning from the element of motion. When sitting, contemplate and note as “sitting, sitting.” Then, stiffness which is the air element will be known. In any case, if noting

is done at ease as “sitting, sitting,” the power of concentration will get the better of effort which may, therefore, become weak. Hence, while meditating in a sitting posture, instead of noting only one object, we instruct to contemplate and note the rising and falling movements of the abdomen, which involves a variation caused by the wind element in pushing the belly up and down. All meditators have been instructed to note thus so that uniformity of method can be maintained among the meditators when contemplating.

Therefore, when the abdomen rises, note as “rising,” and when it falls, note as “falling.” “Rising” and “falling” should be noted mentally, and not uttered verbally. The key point is to be aware of the phenomenon. This is the same as “contemplating,” “noting,” “knowing,” and “memorizing.” Some have laid down certain rules such as, “It is not to be uttered that way,” or “It should be uttered in this way.” These rules are unnecessary — the essential thing is to know or be aware. If it is noted as “knowing, knowing,” it amounts to knowing it. If it is noted as “contemplating, contemplating” it will also be known. If noting is done, it is known. If it is memorized and is noted, it is also known. If noted as “imagining,” knowing is the result. All are the same and have the same effect. We just say “note,” to be able to pronounce it with ease.

When the abdomen rises, note as “rising” from the beginning to the end with awareness. In the same way, note “falling” and be aware of it. The breathing should not be controlled. It should be allowed to proceed at its natural pace. It is unnecessary to hold your breath to slow down the rate of breathing. Nor should special attention be paid to quicken the breathing, nor to breathe harder. Breathe as usual, and in the process of noting, just follow through and note. Practising insight meditation does not mean to contemplate anything which is not yet in existence by invention or by introducing a novelty. It is meant only to be contemplated and noted serially the phenomena of things arising and disappearing in respect of the existing dhamma.

Therefore, it is merely necessary to contemplate and note in sequence as “rising” when the abdomen rises, and as “falling” when it falls. If the mind wanders while contemplating, the wandering mind should be noted. If it wanders, note as “wandering.” If the wandering mind reaches a certain place, note as “reaching, reaching.” If it plans or imagines, note as “planning” or “imagining.” It is not

at all difficult. This mode of noting is contemplation of consciousness (*citānupassanā*), then revert to the usual exercise of noting as “rising” and “falling.” Meanwhile, if stiffness, hotness, pain, or aching manifest, they should be noted. If there is stiffness, note as “stiff, stiff” with the mind fixed on the place where stiffness is felt. If a hot sensation occurs, note as “hot, hot” concentrating on the place where heat. If pain is felt, note it as “pain, pain.” These are called contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*). After noting the feelings, revert to the usual exercise of noting “rising” and “falling.”

If a sound is heard, note it as “hearing, hearing,” and then, revert as usual to noting “rising” and “falling.” For one sitting, this is quite enough. However, when meditation is practised the whole day or for a long time, “bending,” “stretching,” and other bodily movements should also be noted. Furthermore, other the postures must be noted too. All phenomena that arise or occur are to be noted. Noting done during the present meditation exercise at one sitting is merely an experiment in tasting the Dhamma, just like tasting a bit of salt. It is only about two minutes which is a short while.

Let us meditate for a brief period to become a clever pupil. There is one thing to be born in mind before indulging in meditation, and that is: *“Addhā imāya paṭipadāya jarāmarañamhā parimuccissāmi,”* as instructed in the Visuddhimagga. This means essentially, “I will bear in mind that by performing this practice, I will certainly be liberated from all the woes, worries, and miseries of this cycle of existence, such as old age and death.”

In this world of human existence, if everything goes smooth in the matter of one’s own livelihood for subsistence, it would bring joy and happiness. Some even hum a tune while working.

What could be expected as his earnings from his sweat and labour is just sufficient enough for a day’s expense. If circumstances permit, he might receive remuneration to cover his living expenses for two or three days. Rare indeed is a person who will earn enough for ten days’ expenditure for his living with one day’s work. Surely, with one day’s income, it would not be sufficient to meet the entire expenses for a year, far less for a life-time. If one could find enjoyment and sing a song while performing a task to earn money to cover his expenses for a day or two, will it not be happier for him to practise meditation so as to get himself liberated forever from the woes and

worries of this cycle of existence? It's worth not only singing a song, but also taking part in an opera. This is said just to encourage people to practise meditation with diligence and enthusiasm which will surely bring about happiness. This is what has been stated by the Commentators and not me. We may, therefore, meditate just for two minutes in accordance with the instructions given.

### **Eight Path Factors In One Act of Noting**

The time is up — just two minutes. It is possible to note thirty times in a minute, perhaps forty or fifty. If you could note 30 times in a minute, you can note sixty times in two minutes. At every act of noting the eight factors of the path (*maggaṅga*) are included.

Firstly, does it not include exertion with care at every moment of noting? This exertion is right effort (*sammāvāyama*). It is indeed the right kind of exertion. It is not the kind of exertion that is applied improperly.

Then, at every moment of making a note, there is mindfulness. This is right mindfulness (*sammāsati*), which means attentiveness or mindfulness. Every time noting is done, the mind gets fixed on the object of meditation. This is right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*). Therefore, we now have three path factors: right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Next, at every moment of noting, the mind that is noting proceeds gradually in advance as if taking a step forward. For example, if rising movement of the abdomen is noted as "rising," the mind that is noting rests on the act of 'rising.' Similarly, when the falling movement of the abdomen is noted, the mind that is noting will rest on the act of 'falling.' This occurrence is known as right thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*). Although it is given the meaning of right thought, while making a note, it is not necessary to think for a long time. The mind that notes naturally advances towards the sensation. Hence it has been stated that it possesses the characteristic of application of the mind (*abhiniropanalakkhaṇa*). This is, of course, right thought. Then, the right perception of the sense-object which has been noted right view. How it is rightly known may be explained thus: while noting "rising," it is perceived as having the characteristics of stiffness and mobility. To become aware of the stiffness and movement is to know rightly the air element. In fact, at the first moment of the arising of awareness, no



attachment or imagination takes place that it is a man or woman, an individual or a living being, me or him, *etc.* It does not include any erroneous perception. If a stiff sensation is felt, it is perceived or known as “stiffness.” If it becomes tense, the “tension” that arises is known.

Knowing truly as such is called right view. When the power of concentration becomes stronger, the arising and dissolution of the phenomenon in its process is clearly known from beginning to end. This brings realisation of the nature of impermanence. If impermanence is known, unsatisfactoriness and not-self are also appreciated and realised. Knowing them at every moment of noting is the path factor of right view. Right view and right thought are the two path factors belonging to the wisdom group. These two, together with the three path factors of concentration are called the ‘five workers’ (*karaka maggaṅga*). To complete the process involved in a single noting, these five work together in harmony. Every time when contemplation is made, these five are working in unison.

When these five are working together, the path factors of morality automatically come into play. For amplification, it may be said that morality was purified from the time of observing the precepts. It remains purified at the time of contemplating the rising and falling of the abdomen. It may even have the chance to get more purified.

In terms of factors, it embraces right speech, right action, and right livelihood. When these three are combined with the five workers already mentioned, it totals eight path factors. When these eight are included, it is the Path (*magga*). There are many different kinds of path, such as paths leading to a village, town, monastery, pagoda, jungle, river port, *etc.* Like these mundane paths, there are also many different kinds of spiritual path. There are paths that lead to hell, the world of hungry ghosts, or to the animal realm.

The paths leading to the lower realms are paths of vice, of unwholesome action (*akusala kamma*), and demerit. If you wish to, you can follow any of these evil paths. On the other hand, there are paths leading to the human and celestial realms. These paths are the wholesome actions (*kusala kamma*) such as meritorious deeds of charity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), *etc.* There is the path of tranquillity meditation (*samatha jhāna*) leading to the *brahmā* realms. Should you wish to follow these virtuous paths, you may do so. Among these different kinds of path, the Noble Eightfold Path is the one leading to nibbāna. The

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta says that it is the one and only path (*ekāyano maggo*) leading to the attainment of nibbāna (*nibbānassa sacchikiriyāya*).

Now you have gained these eight wholesome path factors at least sixty times within two minutes. Within such a brief period you have cultivated the path factors sixty times. If, for example, the Noble Path could be achieved by cultivating the path factors a hundred times there would remain only about forty more to reach the goal. During the lifetime of the Buddha, there were people who reached the Noble Path within a brief moment while listening to a sermon by the Blessed One. Any of you can aspire to gain such an achievement. Say, if by noting a thousand times you can reach that stage, only 940 times remain to reach your desired destination. Today, you are sixty steps nearer to nibbāna by meditating as an experiment. When going outside or staying at home, if you could contemplate and note your own physical and mental behaviour every time an opportunity arises, it would amount to developing the eight path factors. It is a really precious Dhamma to be practised daily. If you could do so, you will gather the seeds of perfections, without any expense.

**Summary:** The ant-hill is the body; emitting smoke is planning at night; bright flames means day time activities; the Brahmin teacher is the Buddha; and the pupil is a meditator. The hoe is knowledge with which to dig the ant-hill. The bolt is ignorance; the toad is anger; the road junction is wrong view. The water-strainer is the five hindrances. The tortoise is the five aggregates; sensual desire is a chopping-board; delight is a piece of flesh; the celestial dragon is an Arahant.

## Part II

### The Buddha, the Brahmin Teacher

As has been stated earlier, the “Brahmin Teacher” refers to the Buddha, the Enlightened One. The Buddha as the founder of the Buddhist religion has innumerable adherents. The community of monks are his disciples, and his devoted followers include human beings, *devas* and *brahmās*. The Buddha, the Enlightened One, possesses infinite and infallible knowledge. After his attainment of Enlightenment, he imparted to human and celestial beings the realisation that he had gained. By teaching the Dhamma throughout his lifetime, he became the saviour of mankind. What he taught is the Truth which he himself had acquired and understood, without anyone’s aid. By

adhering to the practices he prescribed, his disciples are redeemed from the miseries of the cycle of existence, and attain nibbāna. Thus, the attribute “Teacher of gods and men (*sattadevāmanussānaṃ*)” is included in the nine glorious attributes with which he was endowed.

For having benevolently shown to all human and celestial beings the way to the bliss of nibbāna, they regard him as their beloved master and teacher. The qualities which such a teacher should possess are fundamentally to have the ability to prevent all beings from committing acts which will accrue no benefit and also from indulging in demeritorious deeds. He must also be able to dispense his knowledge of Dhamma with unbounded love and compassion for all mankind. An ordinary teacher may have the same kind of attributes. Nevertheless, the Buddha, who is a teacher of the most outstanding ability, is capable of giving protection to countless generations of people throughout the cycle of existences. He taught and admonished mankind to avoid all vices, to refrain from doing evil deeds either in person, or by proxy, and to keep their thoughts free from evil. In thus prohibiting mankind, *devas*, and *brahmās* — who are not yet free from the bondage of defilements — from doing evil, the Buddha has loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) in his heart. With boundless compassion, the Buddha prohibited all human and celestial beings from committing evil or immoral acts. Yet, all these beings in their own personal interest are bent upon killing and ill-treating others.

I remember an incident that occurred in my youth. A son advised his mother to avoid killing and stealing. The mother replied, “Oh, my dear son! In this human world, one unavoidably has to do such acts for one’s own subsistence. It’s impossible to abstain from doing so.” What a pity? People usually think such sinful acts are permissible for the sake of one’s livelihood.

Nevertheless, the Buddha forbade people to kill, ill-treat, to steal, or to rob others, being aware that such demeritorious acts, if committed, would bring dire consequences in the form of suffering throughout the cycle of existences, for the sake of one’s short-term welfare derived during a short period of one lifetime. The Buddha instructed us to do things that ought to be done, such as morality, concentration, and wisdom. Enforcement of the rules of morality or good conduct would perhaps appear restrictive to some people who might consider it as being rather too drastic.

### A Monk and a Millionaire's Son

During the Buddha's lifetime, a millionaire's son asked a monk whom he revered and whose benefactor he was: "Venerable sir, I wish to escape from the pain and misery of this cycle of existence. I wish to achieve nibbāna, where all human passions and suffering cease. How should I conduct myself?" He was, therefore, advised to donate food, robes, *etc.*, and to perform other meritorious deeds. Having duly complied with this instruction, he again asked the monk, "I have made several kinds of donation and performed meritorious deeds, but I have not yet found the Dhamma that brings freedom from suffering." The monk then gave him further instructions to take the three refuges and to observe the five precepts. After observance of the five precepts, he still failed to find real happiness and get free from suffering. He, therefore, approached the monk again and said, "Venerable sir, I have respectfully observed the five precepts, but have not yet become free from woes and worries." Then, the monk instructed him to observe the ten precepts. Despite these wholesome practices, he had not gained complete emancipation from misery.

Finally, the monk advised him to enter the Saṅgha. When ordained as a *bhikkhu*, ordinary layman's clothes are discarded, and after shaving the head, the yellow robes have to be donned according to the Vinaya rules. Thereafter, his own preceptor taught him the Vinaya rules. The senior monk who gave him dependence<sup>1</sup> imparted lessons to him relating to the Sutta and Abhidhamma.

Later, the monk was instructed to practise insight meditation. When he met his teacher, he was burdened with so many restrictions and conditions regarding the disciplinary rules that it made him reflect, "A monk's life is so difficult. I entered the Saṅgha to get rid of the miseries of existence, but the rules are so restrictive and binding that there is hardly room to move. It is impossible for me to remain in the Saṅgha any longer, I would rather discard the robes and revert to the life of a layman. I will lead the household life, striving as much as possible to practise alms-giving and morality, to get free from the suffering and misery of existence."

Fortunately, this incident happened during the lifetime of the Buddha. His teacher, having heard about his change of heart, sent

---

<sup>1</sup> A newly ordained *bhikkhu* must live in dependence on a senior *bhikkhu* of at least ten years' seniority for five years while he is training in the monastic discipline (ed.)

this monk to the Blessed One. After recounting what had taken place, the Blessed One asked him why he wanted to disrobe. He respectfully replied: "I have so many instructions to keep in mind. Having been taught the rules of discipline, I have become very perturbed both mentally and physically, and I dare not even move. As the rules of discipline are so restrictive, I've decided to disrobe." It seems that this monk had become worried and found it burdensome as he was under constant fear of breaking the rules of discipline and inflicting damage to the progress of his concentration and insight.

On hearing his answer, the Blessed One encouraged him, saying, "Do not worry. I will give you only one rule to follow. If you can keep it, there is nothing more to be done. The monk then inquired, "Venerable sir, what rule is to be followed?" The Buddha said: "Take care of your mind only. Could you do that?" To this question, the monk replied that he could. This monk probably imagined that since only the mind had to be controlled and kept under watch, it would not be too onerous for him as was the case in observing the Vinaya rules and code of conduct for *bhikkhus*. Numerically, as it is only one thing, he might have considered it easy to manage. That is why he undertook to comply.

Then, the Blessed One taught him mindfulness of consciousness in this way:

*"Sududdasaṃ sunipunaṃ, yatthakāmanipātinaṃ.  
Cittaṃ rakkhetha medhāvi, cittaṃ guttaṃ sukhāvahaṃ."*

"The mind is very hard to perceive, extremely subtle, it flies wherever it likes. Let the wise person guard it; a guarded mind is conducive to happiness." (Dhp v 36)

The above verse says that a wise person should vigilantly guard the very subtle mind, which is inclined to dwell on any sensation that may arise. The mind, which is capable of effectively guarding against defilements arising, can bring one to the bliss of nibbāna. That is why mindfulness of consciousness was prescribed. It would be good if I could elaborate on this Pāḷi verse. However, as there are a number of important points to be explained, I should proceed.

The aforementioned monk, after practising contemplation of consciousness based on the essence of this verse, soon became an Arahant. In this regard, the main point that I want to stress is that

it is usually thought that the monastic rules of conduct and discipline are extremely rigid. Moreover, as the mind should be prevented from wandering while practising meditation, one might think that it is exceedingly restrictive.

I heard that a monk once delivered a sermon on insight meditation to his benefactor. The instruction he gave was that the mind should be noted with awareness at every moment. One should note mentally at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, walking, moving, thinking, and imagining. It was taught that by contemplating and noting thus, insight would arise. His benefactor's reply was that he would be unable to contemplate since there were too many things to be noted. When practising insight meditation, there should be no lapse. There is hardly any break. It is, therefore, often presumed that the practice of insight meditation is too rigid.

However, the Buddha taught these methods to benefit mankind. If no effort is made to practise in the way instructed, there is no hope of attaining a stage whereby one could be sure of escaping from the four lower realms. No matter how well generosity and morality might have been fulfilled, under certain unfavourable circumstances before reaching the path and its fruition, from any one of many existences, one might descend to the four lower realms. This is a cause for anxiety. To get fully liberated from the four lower realms, and to escape forever from the miseries and suffering of existence, the Buddha taught us to develop morality, concentration, and wisdom. He taught thus for the benefit of all mankind including *devas* and *brahmās* who have adequate perfections to have faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha throughout the period of the current dispensation, beginning from the lifetime of the Buddha.

As expressed in the maxim: "*Buddho loke samuppanno, hitāya sabbapāṇinaṃ*: The Buddha (who fully realised the four noble truths) appeared in the world to reveal the universal principles of the Dhamma for the welfare of all beings."<sup>1</sup> The Buddha gained Enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, both terrestrial and celestial, but many are unable to gain faith in the Buddha. Those who do not have reverence for the Buddha are, of course, deficient in perfections. They may, therefore, be regarded as unfortunate. To cite

---

<sup>1</sup> Sutta-Nīpāta Aṭṭhakathā, ii.578.

an example, only those who are endowed with the gift of power and glory will come to possess precious articles, property, and wealth because of their perfections. In the same way, only those who have perfections will have the chance of paying homage to the Buddha.

To put it in another way, even if nourishing food is available for anyone to consume with relish, a person who has stomach trouble cannot eat and find enjoyment. He or she is, therefore, considered unfortunate. The Buddha had boundless love and compassion equally for all beings. He offered the Dhamma to all for their welfare. He is, therefore, the teacher of gods and men. As such, there is some similarity between the Brahmin Teacher and the Buddha. That is why the motto states that the Brahmin Teacher means the Buddha.

The pupil means the diligent meditator, that is one who is practising meditation for the achievement of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Now I have explained the meaning of five riddles.

## The Hoe

In reply to the question raised by Venerable Kumāra Kassapa relating to the problem which runs: "What is meant by the hoe?" the Buddha answered, "*Sattha'nti kho, bhikkhu, ariyāyetaṃ paññāya adhivacanam.*" The meaning is that the hoe is the noble spiritual knowledge, which is nothing but insight knowledge and path knowledge. The hoe represents "knowledge" or "wisdom." If the ant-hill is to be dug, it cannot be done with one's bare hands. It must be dug by using a hoe or a pointed iron bar. A hoe is the most effective. In the Commentary, it has been described as a hoe (*kuddāla*).

Just as it requires a hoe to dig an ant-hill, the tool of knowledge is essential to distinguish what is in this material body called the ant-hill. In the Commentary, this kind of knowledge is described as worldly (*lokiya*) and transcendent (*lokuttara*). However, if the means employed falls within the realm of worldly knowledge, the tool of insight will have to be used for distinguishing it. Therefore, it should be noted that the ant-hill should be dug with the hoe of insight knowledge or wisdom.

Ordinary people usually think that this body is one solid mass. The body resembles the ant-hill that existed before it was excavated. Whenever a meditator contemplates and notes the bodily movements every time they occur or respond to the sense of touch, they are

noted continuously as walking, standing, sitting, touching, lying down, stretching, bending, *etc.* Four different elements will be found: rigidity or roughness, hot or cold, stiffness or movement, and cohesion or liquidity. This is similar to separating earth into piles every time it is dug and removed from the ant-hill with the hoe.

This body will be known as distinct elements each time it is noted. It is known by insight. Concentrate and note as “walking, walking,” whenever you walk, or as “lifting,” “moving,” and “putting down.” If you note persistently, as concentration gets deeper, the physical phenomena will be known distinctly. The nature of the air element, manifested as stiffness and movement while walking, will be clearly noticed as separate phenomena. There is no longer a solid mass. When stiffness is felt, only the nature of stiffness is known, and what is found is only the nature of the air element. Moreover, every time noting is done, the phenomenal nature of bodily behaviour will be noticed as distinct parts. That is why the knowledge gained through contemplation and noting is said to be like the sharp edge of a hoe. Every time the ant-hill is struck with the hoe, just as the solid earth is broken into pieces, so too, every time contemplation and noting is done, the material body will be noticed as broken into pieces.

Let us reflect with our imagination. Think about hair. Hairs are the earth element, which manifests as roughness and solidity. These are obviously not an individual nor a living being. Therefore, hairs on the head will have been noticed through contemplation as splitting into distinct minute particles. Next, think about the hairs on the body, they are the earth element and are also not an individual or a living being. These too will be found to be decomposed. Again, if the toe and finger nails are reflected on with insight, they too are the element of earth and not a living being.

Let us now reflect on the teeth. They manifest the nature of hardness — an attribute of the earth element. They do not constitute a being, either male or female. Consider the skin, flesh, veins, bones, marrow, blood, intestine, liver, lungs, *etc.*, and reflect on them. All are elements by nature, and are not a living being. This is like an ant-hill that was gradually broken into pieces. The material body can likewise be decomposed into minute pieces with all its components. That is why insight knowledge, which brings awareness by the process of contemplating and noting, is likened to the sharp edge of a hoe. The motto being:



“What is meant by a hoe?

It is the knowledge that contemplates with awareness.”

In response to the question put as “Venerable sir, what is meant by ‘digging repeatedly’?” the Blessed One gave the answer:

*“Abhikkhaṇa’nti kho, bhikkhu,  
vīriyārambhassetaṃ adhivacanaṃ”*

This means: “Bhikkhu! The expression ‘digging repeatedly’ denotes the relentless effort to be applied without a break. ‘Digging repeatedly’ conveys the same meaning as “continuous and unremitting application of effort to contemplate and note ceaselessly.”

When digging with the hoe, the hoe must be held firmly. Likewise, when contemplation is made, it should be carried out with the constant application of utmost endeavour. Therefore, exertion is to be made continuously without relaxing one’s effort every time contemplation and noting is made as “rising and falling,” “sitting,” “touching,” “seeing,” “hearing,” “bending,” “stretching,” *etc.* If the effort become slack, indolence will creep in, causing the power of concentration and noting to weaken. This exertion called right effort is vital. If stated in terms of the four right efforts (*sammāppadhānaṃ*), there are the effort to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states, the effort to expel existing unwholesome states, the effort to arouse wholesome states not yet in existence, and the effort to maintain wholesome states that already exist.

Hence, with right exertion unwholesome states that have occurred previously can be rejected and no new unwholesome states will have the opportunity to occur. Then the wholesome kamma of insight, which have not yet existed will be gained at every moment of contemplating and noting. It means that exertion is being made to achieve the wholesome states of insight and the path. Every time one notes, not only will merits that already existed remain, but the wholesome state of insight will occur repeatedly. This exertion called right effort is, therefore, very similar to “digging with the hoe repeatedly.” The motto is: “What is meant by ‘digging’? It is the unfailing effort that is constantly applied.”

## The Bolt

Next, we have come to the bolt. When distinguished with the help of the sharp edge of the hoe, a bolt appears, *i.e.*, a wooden bar

for fastening a door. The question then asked was: “What is the bolt?” The Buddha’s answer was:

“*Laṅgī’ti kho, bhikkhu, avijjāyetam adhvacaṇaṃ.*”

The above answer may be explained as: “Bhikkhu! The door bolt is ignorance (*avijjā*) which does not understand the method of meditation. Ignorance is of different kinds according to circumstances, e.g. the ignorance that should be rejected by insight and by applying the knowledge of the Noble Path. This is ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. The ignorance that is relevant to the present case does not come up to that level. It is the ignorance that should be rejected by learning (*sutamayapaññā*) and reasoning (*cintāmayapaññā*). It is merely ignorance of the correct method of meditation. If the method is not rightly understood, meditation cannot be practised effectively. Just like a person who does not know how to cook rice, or, how to plough a plot of land without the necessary guidance of an instructor. I would like to amplify it since the method is rather important.

### The Significance of the Method

The Bodhisatta, Prince Siddhattha, abandoned worldly pleasures and retreated into the forest to search for the truth, which is the way to extinguish craving, the cause of suffering in this life and rebirth in the cycle of existences. He was then only twenty-nine years of age. He was married at sixteen to Yasodharā Devī and, for a period of thirteen years, had lived in luxury amidst gaiety, pomp, and splendour as a Royal Prince. While thus indulging in sensual pleasures, he saw four signs in the course of his chariot rides: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a recluse with a shaven head and a tattered yellow robe. On his return to the palace, pondering deeply, he felt repelled by sensual pleasures, wishing to escape from the woes and worries of this world. With this noble thought, which crystallized into a resolve to save not only himself, but all mankind, he left the grand palace in the silence of the night and went forth into a homeless life in search of the Dhamma. When he left, he had no experience or knowledge of the way to free himself from the bondage of human passions leading to rebirth, old age, sickness, and death.

After reaching the forest, he adopted the life style of an ascetic, and in the course of his search for the Dhamma, heard about a noted

sage by the name of **Āḷāra Kālāma**. The great ascetic Āḷāra was then teaching his three-hundred disciples the method of meditation at a hermitage in the neighbourhood of Vesālī, a town in the state of Vajjī. This sage fully possessed seven out of eight stages of attainments in concentration (*samāpatti*), except for the attainment of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*). Wishing to study under the sage Āḷāra with whom he met, he said, "Friend Āḷāra, I wish I could stay with you and learn the method of meditation." Āḷāra replied, "My friend Gotama, our method of meditation is superb. If a person of great intelligence like you practises meditation, you will surely gain all the knowledge known to the teacher. This method of meditation is indeed impressive."

It is essential that a pupil should learn the method known and mastered by the teacher, otherwise the pupil might go off at a tangent and it cannot be relied upon as authentic. If the pupil is not aware of the real quality of his teacher's knowledge, the pupil might wrongly think that the teacher is endowed with powers that are mistakenly believed to be miraculous. Believing that the teacher is equipped with supernatural powers, the pupil would revere and rely upon the teacher for the derivation of benefits from those powers, which the teacher does not actually possess. Some of them even tried to procure a philosopher's stone, *etc.* This is ridiculous. There are a number of such instances at the present day.

Similar instances can be found in the field of religious affairs. Outside of the Buddha's dispensation there are quite a number of such beliefs. Of course, blind faith entertained by superstitious followers was handed down to them from their predecessors. This is very unfortunate.

The Buddha's teaching is perfectly logical. It can be achieved if it is personally pursued and practised earnestly. It is not something that can only be known and achieved by the Buddha. Nor is the knowledge exclusively within the reach of noble Arahants like Venerable Sāriputta and Moggallāna. It is within the reach of all if they practise correctly. It is something like tasting salt. Anyone who tries it will undoubtedly come to know its taste. Likewise, the statement made by the sage Āḷāra to let the Bodhisatta know what he had realised is commendable. That is why the Bodhisatta accepted the method with pleasure and practised assiduously.

Not long afterwards, he attained all seven attainments that had been realised by the sage Ālāra. After his attainment, the Bodhisatta told Ālāra what he had achieved and how he had reached the state of nothingness (*ākāraññāyatana*). Revealing his achievement, he asked Ālāra whether the nature of his attainment was the same kind of Dhamma that the former had realised. Ālāra answered that it was so and expressed his surprise that he had achieved it in such a short time and that his talent was indeed marvellous. He then invited Gotama saying that he would put him on equal status with himself and delegate to him the task of guiding half of his followers as a teacher, while he himself would take responsibility for the other half of one hundred and fifty disciples. Gotama stayed for some time at Ālāra's hermitage, maybe for a few days, but found no answer to his heart's imperious demand. He reflected that the Dhamma that he had acquired was not the doctrine that would liberate him from the miseries of old age, disease, and death. After death, it would only cause one to reach the realm of nothingness. That is the *Arūpabrahmaloka*, the world of formless *brahmās*.

It is something that cannot be investigated and known by modern scientific methods. Therefore, if it is considered that this concept is not in agreement with science, the best thing would be to disregard it as unbelievable. Knowledge of modern science can only be applied to the material realm, and not to the state of immateriality.

An abode where only mind exists or where only consciousness dwells without the material form is strange. The life span in the realm of nothingness runs up to sixty-thousand world cycles (*kappas*).

Just one world cycle is an immense period. Even in this world cycle, four Buddhas have appeared, and the fifth Buddha, Metteyya has yet to appear. When his life period has ended, a *brahmā* will revert to either the human world or to a *deva* realm. The cycle of existence will, therefore, go on ceaselessly. If he is fortunate to befriend men of virtue, he may continue to be reborn in the world of humans or *devas* by virtue of the performance of good deeds. On the other hand, if he happens to fall into bad company, he will have no chance of gaining merits and guidance to the right path. The effect will be that he will sink to one of the four lower realms after death for having believed in heretical views and committed demeritorious acts.

Reflecting on the consequences that he could derive from Ālāra's Dhamma, the Bodhisatta left and went in search of a new Dhamma. He later heard about a sage by the name of Rāma who was famous for his accomplishment of all eight attainments. He lived in a forest attended by a group of seven-hundred pupils in the district of Rājagaha within the province of Māgadha. The Bodhisatta therefore made his way to Uddaka, the son and pupil of Rāma and said "Friend Uddaka, I would like to study and practise your method of meditation." Thereupon, after explaining to him the noble qualities of the Dhamma, Uddaka taught him the method.

On resorting to the method given, he soon attained the state of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññā-nāsaññāyatana*). Having appreciated the Bodhisatta's attainments, Uddaka, being merely a pupil of Rāma, set Bodhisatta up as his own teacher, while he himself assumed the second place as a pupil. At that time, it appears that the famous teacher Rāma was probably no longer alive. The Bodhisatta, the future Buddha, then reflected, as in the case of his first experience with Ālāra, that the acquisition of the knowledge of neither perception nor non-perception would only bring him the same consequences as before causing him to land in the *brahmā* heaven, *i.e.* the state of immateriality, a formless state where the life span extends to eighty-four thousand world cycles. On expiry of the life span in that abode, rebirths would result, without being able to escape from the cycle of existence, and from the suffering of old age, disease, and death. He, therefore, forsook this Dhamma and again continued his journey in search of the liberating truth.

A Fully Enlightened Sammāsambuddha, discovers and fully understands the Four Noble Truths by his own effort and wisdom without anyone's guidance. The Bodhisatta passed through the country of Māgadha to the town of Uruvela, and there settled down in a grove of trees taking his seat under a banyan (Bo) tree, and by putting his utmost endeavour into the practice of meditation, attained the knowledge of previous existences (*pubbenivāsa-nāna*). Later, at midnight he practised with his own insight wisdom and achieved the power of supernormal vision (*dibbacakkhu*). In the last watch of the night, after reflecting on the Law of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), which sums up the principle causes of existence, he continued to contemplate on the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates of grasping (*upādānakkhandhā*), which

led him progressively to the knowledge pertaining to the four Noble Paths (*ariyamagga ñāṇa*), eventually reaching the stage of full Enlightenment, and becoming the Omniscient Buddha.

Having become a fully Enlightened One, he spent seven days each at seven different places enjoying the bliss of liberation (*vimuttisukha*), with his mind completely emancipated, spending the days in various degrees of ecstatic meditation. On the fiftieth day, he considered to whom he should first teach the Dhamma and chose the persons who would understand it quickly.

It is appropriate to make the audience quickly understand in delivering the first sermon. Also in the case of teaching lessons, it is important to get the attendance of good students who have aptitude. If the first batch of students are well taught and able to quickly grasp the knowledge imparted, the teacher gets a good name. In monastic schools too, if they have outstanding students who have found success in the examination, the monastery concerned gains popularity and earns a good reputation. In the same way, the meditation centres need to obtain meditators who have good faith, zeal, industry, and intelligence. Then only, with the right method of teaching, the meditation centre will have a good name. If such meditators make progressive strides in the practice of meditation, it will give stimulus to others to take up the practice of meditation.

So the Buddha reflected to whom he should teach his first discourse. On reflection his first teacher, Āḷāra, came to his mind. "This sage cleansed the impurities of his mind with his accomplishment in concentration. He was also honest. If he were to listen to my teaching, he would quickly grasp the special Dhamma." While thus thinking about his first teacher, a deity appeared and addressed him, "Venerable sir, Āḷāra passed away seven days ago." Through the exercise of his supernormal powers, the Buddha came to know that Āḷāra had indeed expired seven days ago, and had reached the realm of nothingness — a formless realm. In this abode, there is no material body, only the mind exists. Since it is devoid of any materiality, there are no eyes and ears and therefore, no ability to hear the Dhamma that the Buddha would teach. If he had been lucky enough to remain alive in the human world, he would have attained the special Dhamma. He had missed a great opportunity, and thereby suffered a tremendous loss so much so that he would have to remain in that

abode for a life-span of sixty-thousand world cycles. After his demise from there, he would descend to the human world. There will then be no Buddha, and he would have no chance of hearing the Dhamma. He would, therefore, be deprived of the opportunity to achieve the path and its fruition. If, due to unavoidable circumstances, he committed evil deeds, he can still go down to the lower worlds. Ālāra thus missed a golden opportunity to hear the Buddha's first discourse by only seven days. It is indeed an irremediable loss. The Buddha realising this fact, reflected that Ālāra the Kālāma had suffered a tremendous loss. Judging by this incident, one should learn from it and take up meditation practice before death comes, as it may come at any moment. The key point, however, is, if one doesn't know the correct method, meditation cannot be practised effectively.

This great hermit Ālāra was not aware of the fact that he could achieve insight by means of contemplation and noting the phenomenal nature mind and matter. This method could only be known when a Buddha appears. The Buddha then thought of teaching Uddaka. Realising that this hermit too had passed away in the first watch of the previous night, the Blessed One reflected that Uddaka the son of Rāma had also suffered a great loss. In fact, Uddaka was more unfortunate than Ālāra having very narrowly missed an extremely rare chance of hearing the Buddha's teaching, which would, if he were alive, surely have liberated him from the bondage of defilements, and the consequential cycles of existence.

It was, therefore, stated that ignorance, which blinded a person from realising the right method of meditation, was similar to a bolt, which firmly fastened a door. If a person is locked inside, he cannot see the light of the day outside. In the same way, if the correct method of practising insight is not understood, much as one may wish to meditate, he cannot, and will miss the opportunity to attain the path, its fruition, and nibbāna. This explains the meaning of the bolt which symbolizes ignorance of the method of practising meditation.

The Buddha removed the bolt and opened the door for the sake of humanity by means of the method of insight meditation. Yet, as there are still many people who have no faith in the Dhamma, or have not yet understood it, I have to elucidate it. I have taught the Dhamma to make them meditate and contemplate all mental and physical phenomena each time they occur at the six sense doors.

If mind and matter are contemplated and noted, mindfulness, concentration, and insight will be developed. A considerable number of people have already practised, but there are still many more who have not yet taken up meditation. Before the bolt is put back again to lock the door, it is essential that one should keep the door open. I have kept the door open by removing the bolt and have instructed the people as much as I could, urging them to contemplate and note the arising phenomena of matter and mind, and in particular to note as “walking,” “walking,” as they walk.<sup>1</sup>

### A Pioneer of Insight Meditation

As far as Burma is concerned, Venerable Ledi Sayādaw of Monywa was a pioneer in teaching insight meditation. Then came Monhyin Sayādaw. I follow in the footsteps of these eminent Sayādaws like someone picking up the remnants of paddy that has been dropped while harvesting and reaping, and as such, it is a very easy task. The exposition of that Dhamma by the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw can be found in the Anatta Dīpanī.

To make it more precise as contained in the original text, I will read out an extract:

“In a walking posture, every time a step is taken, the mind should be focused firmly on the foot and walk, noting as “I walk,” “I walk.” Not a single step should be made without being mindful. This is how Venerable Ledi Sayādaw expounded.

The work known as the Anatta Dīpanī was written in the year 1900 (Burmese Era 1262). It was written before I was even born.

We follow that Sayādaw’s method of exposition. It was possible, not because of my own ability, but because I learnt this method from Mūla Mingun Jetavun Sayādaw. I have taught it as “*Gacchantovā gacchamīti pajanati,*” according to the Pāḷi text, and this is the instruction given at the outset to contemplate and note every time a step is made in the act of walking.

According to the rules of Pāḷi Grammar, there are three cases: if “*gacchāmi*” is used, though the particle “*ahaṃ*” is omitted, the word “I” should be inferred. If “*gacchāsi,*” is used, though the word “*tvam*” “you” is omitted, it should be translated as “you walk.” If

<sup>1</sup> Something is lost in translation, since in English the verb does not decline as it does in Pāḷi and Burmese. In Burmese, the Sayādaw would not have used a pronoun — the Burmese verb “*thwame*” means “I walk” (ed.)



however, it is written as “*gacchati*” using the third person (*namayoga*), another subject will have to be inferred and it should be translated as, “he walks,” “the mind goes,” “the body moves,” *etc.*, as may be required, without the word “I” or “you.”

Hence, if the word “*gacchāmi*” is used conjunctively in the first person (*amhayoga*), it is to be translated as “I walk” (*ahaṃ gicchāmi*), and in conformity with this Pāli grammatical rule, Venerable Ledi Sayādaw stated as “I walk,” “I walk,” with a rejoinder that “the mind should be fixed firmly on the foot while walking.

Emphasis was laid on “should be fixed firmly on the foot,” because the movement of the foot is the most obvious manifestation. Movements of other parts of the body can be contemplated, if it is desirable. Next, the instruction “not a single step should be made without being mindful,” is really precise and strictly worded. The Sayādaw has removed the door bolt and kept the door open. Despite the fact that the door has been unbolted and this clear exposition given, a Dhamma article, published about four years ago in Syriam (a town on the other side of the Rangoon river), which is notorious for its vilification, closed and bolted the door that was opened by the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw. It was critical of the instructions given as “I walk,” “I walk,” saying that it was wrong and should not be contemplated as such because “the concept of “I” had been included.

However, I support the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw and keep the door open. I have explained about it in my [Discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta](#), simply because if I had remained complacent, I would be guilty from the point of view of the Buddha’s doctrine, or I would be reprimanded by the Buddha if he were still alive.

### The Admonition of the Buddha

During the lifetime of the Buddha with reference to the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling (*nirodhasamāpatti*). Venerable Sāriputta taught that a monk who is accomplished with the attributes of morality, concentration, and wisdom, might become a *brahmā* called “*manomayakāya*” which is caused by the mind, if during his lifetime he did not attain Arahantship. Venerable Lāḷudāyī, an ordinary monk, raised objection to this teaching. He was a fault-finding critic who was neither learned in the scriptures (*pariyatti*), nor had any experience

in meditation (*paṭipatti*). Venerable Sāriputta repeated his point saying that it was possible. The monk, however, repeated his argument and objected. Venerable Sāriputta again elucidated it for a third time only to meet with another rebuff. During this controversy, no one spoke up in support of Venerable Sāriputta.

Under such circumstances, Venerable Sāriputta reported the incidence to the Buddha. Even in the presence of the Buddha, the Venerable Lāḷudāyī remained adamant, raising an objection to the statement made by Venerable Sāriputta three times in succession. Venerable Sāriputta then remained silent. Thereupon, the Blessed One expressed his disapproval saying: “*Atthi nāma, Ānanda, therañ bhikkhuṃ vihesiyamānaṃ ajjupekkhissatha* — Ānanda, how can you remain silent when elders are being harassed?”<sup>1</sup> The Buddha reprimanded Venerable Ānanda for not intervening when an eminent elder was being brazenly mistreated. This reproof was, in fact, aimed at all the monks though it was primarily addressed to Venerable Ānanda. In other words, the Buddha reprimanded them for not lending support to a true statement uttered by an eminent elder like Venerable Sāriputta, who was in the right, when a fool like Lāḷudāyī was objecting. This was indeed a severe admonition.

Venerable Ānanda was so shaken that he related these events to the [Venerable Upavāṇa](#) — an Arahant with sixfold psychic powers — and requested him to intervene in future if there was anything to be said in the presence of the Buddha. It is the responsibility of all wise men to endorse what is true. Realising this burden of responsibility, I had to explain, in my discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta, regarding the criticism made of Venerable Ledi Sayādaw.

In the discourse delivered by Venerable Sāriputta, the meaning of the expression mind-made (*manomaya*) is “*rūpabrahmaloka*,” that is, the world of corporeal *brahmās* caused by *jhāna*. Lāḷudāyī thought that the world of formless *brahmās* (*arūpaloka*) was mind-made. He had vexed Venerable Sāriputta without having any knowledge of the Dhamma, but was unable to substantiate his statement.

In this context, the term “mind-made” refers to the abode of *Suddhavāsarūpabrahmā*, springing from the *jhānic* mind. Non-returners and Arahants can abide in the cessation of perception and feeling (*nirodhasamāpatti*). Lāḷudāyī, however, wrongly imagined

---

<sup>1</sup> Nirodha Sutta, A.iii.193, Book of Fives.

that since it was mind-made it was a formless state, *i.e. arūpabrahmā* abode, where the inhabitants have no bodily form, but are mere effulgences endowed with intelligence. *Nirodhasamāpatti* does not usually happen in the abode of *arūpabrahmā*. For that reason he had objected to it and expressed his opinion that it was absurd.

If Venerable Ledi Sayādaw were still alive, he would subdue the arising heretical view and open the door by removing the bolt. I spoke about it in support of the Sayādaw in my discourse on the Ariyāvāsa Sutta because it concerns us despite the fact that the Sayādaw is now dead and gone. I also elucidated in that discourse what the Sayādaw had stated giving a direct translation in Burmese as “I walk” for the Pāḷi word “*gacchāmi*” from the Pāḷi text: “*gacchantovā gacchāmi’ti pajānāti.*” If this is criticised as being wrong, it would amount to rejecting the teachings in the Pāḷi text.

### Keeping the Door Unbolted

I have, therefore, been teaching everyone to contemplate and note as “walking” while walking, *etc.* According to the fundamentals of mindfulness of the body, all bodily movements should be similarly contemplated. The same method of contemplation should be adhered to in respect of feelings, consciousness, and mental states. This was explained according to the Pāḷi text of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. This is how the door is unbolted to escape from the cycle of existence. You may or may not wish to escape from the fetters of existence, but if you wish to find a way out of this mesh, you may not be able to find an exit if some miscreants bolted the door. You need to take special care in this regard.

During the lifetime of the Buddha, such an incident had happened in spite of the fact that the Buddha had kept the door-bolt open. The act of closing the door was committed by the great Māra, the evil one. At the time while female Arahants were temporarily residing at the Blind Men’s Grove, Māra appeared and said, “Hey! What are you all doing? There is no such thing as nibbāna whereby you can escape from the deep ocean or whirlpool of continued existences (*saṃsāra*). It is no use meditating, *etc.*” This is a wicked attempt to put back the bolt for locking the door.

Māra appeared before a *bhikkhuṇī* by the name of Somā and goaded her, saying:

*“Yaṃ taṃ isihi pattaḅbaṃ, thānaṃ durabhisambhavaṃ.  
Na taṃ dvaṅgulapaññāya, sakkā pappotumitthiyā.”*

“That which is so hard to reach can be attained by sages,  
Women, with their two-fingered wisdom, cannot.”<sup>1</sup>

It means that nibbāna is something that can be achieved only by eminent elders and not by women with their meagre knowledge and weak wisdom. In short, it is to say, “How could you women, with meagre knowledge and weak wisdom, gain nibbāna? You could not.” This amounts to closing and locking the door with the bolt. Fortunately, Māra could not fasten the bolt because Bhikkhuṇī Somā was an Arahant. So keep alert, or you may get into trouble.

Let’s recite the motto. “What is the bolt? It means ignorance of the method of contemplation and noting.”

The Commentary says: “By learning the method of meditation and asking questions on ambiguous points, Ignorance is dispelled.” This amounts to the rejection of the nescience that makes a person ignorant of the method of meditation. We are teaching the method of removing ignorance or the door-bolt.

## The Toad

The next question is: “What is meant by the toad that swells when it is touched?” The Buddha’s answer to this question is as follows:

*“Uddhumāyikā’ti kho, bhikkhu, kodhūpāyāsassetāṃ adhivacanaṃ”*

The above Pāli phrase conveys the meaning: “Bhikkhu! The toad that swells up when touched indicates anger or ill-will. With continued digging of the ant-hill after removing the bolt, the toad was found.” Anger is like that toad. Every time hatred or aversion arises, anger increases. Ugly sights or harsh sounds may cause anger to arise. Resentment may occur from any unpleasant touch or disagreeable thought that occurs. Such feelings occur frequently with the sensations of touch and of hearing. Reflect how one can suddenly become angry the moment that irritating or insulting words are heard. At

<sup>1</sup> Si.129, Thig v 60. According to the Commentary on the Somātherīgāthā, “Two-fingered wisdom” refers to a woman’s knowledge about cooking rice. Māra’s comment is clearly intended to be dismissive and derogatory. The appearance of Māra should be regarded as a *yakkha*, not the arising of doubts or other defilements. Since the Bhikkhuṇī was already an Arahant, how could any doubts occur? (ed.)

first, only an ugly facial expression may be apparent, but later arising anger may pervade the entire body when insults are repeated, causing one to lose control of one's tongue, and this is eventually followed by physical action. This may lead to committing assault or causing bodily injury to others. For this reason, an appropriate comparison has been made between the toad that swells up on being touched and anger, which tends to become more passionate. It is an apt comparison.

### **The Trivial Dhamma Talk**

At one time, U Pan Maung, a popular figure in charge of the Thudhammawadi Printing press, narrated a short story. When it was announced that a "Trivial Dhamma Talk" would be broadcast on the radio, I listened to it out of curiosity. The gist of his talk was that big trouble might brew even from a trifling cause and it was therefore advisable not to disregard anything on the grounds that it was a trivial matter. The title of the story is quite fascinating and modern. The story runs as follows:

At one time, there were two monks who lived together as close companions. While one of them was bathing, the other hid his slippers for a prank. After bathing, the monk found his slippers were missing. Not finding them, he knew that the other was playing a prank and had hidden them. He jested, "I wonder which dog carried away my slippers." This jocular remark, though trivial, deeply wounded the feelings of the other monk. The remark was not made with any intention to hurt the other monk's feelings. It is quite a common joke among lay people. However, the monk was so angry that he hit his friend on the head with a brick killing him instantly. Although the remark was trivial, the monk who had made the joke had to pay for it with his life. The monk who had struck his friend's head with the brick was accused of murder. This is a striking example of how one could get into trouble for trifling talk. U Pan Maung advised his audience to be heedful when talking to one another. This story should serve as a salutary lesson.

What do you think? Isn't it like the toad that swells up? The simple remark, "I wonder which dog carried away my slippers," is nothing that could cause physical harm to the other. It is not a bit harmful, not even as bad as throwing a tiny piece of gravel. However, it seriously affected the feelings of the other, arousing in him a

violent temper to the extent of making him retaliate with a fatal blow. This is like a toad getting puffed up with just one touch, whereas the toad normally gets swollen gradually each time it is touched.

### The Story of Vedehikā

There was a case where the Buddha gave an exhortation citing a story with reference to a monk named [Moliya Phagguna Thera](#). This story is also noteworthy.

A long time ago, there lived a rich house-wife in the state of Sāvatti by the name of Vedehikā. Her demeanour, poise, and sweet way of speaking were faultless, so she was praised by the people living in her district. Though some of you might have heard this story before, others might not have. The story is of great benefit, so I will relate it anyway.

Vedehikā was extolled for her refinement by her friends and neighbours in this way. “Vedehikā is good-tempered and tolerant. She is amiable and kind-hearted. She never gets angry and has compassion for all. She is really noble.” A maid-servant named Kālī lived with her. “Kālī” means black in Pāli, so she may be called “Miss Black.” This maid servant reflected: “Our mistress is praised so much by almost everyone in the neighbourhood — I wonder if our mistress really has no anger or resentment. Perhaps she has had no reason to get angry since she has been preoccupied with her domestic chores.” After reflecting thus, she started testing her mistress. Up till then, Kālī had fulfilled her duties such as sweeping, cooking, and fetching water from the well every day since the early hours of the morning. On that particular day, she did not get up from her bed at the break of dawn and went on sleeping.

Vedehikā got up from her sleep as usual and observed the condition of her home. She noticed that there was no sign of her maid having done the daily chores. Finding that nothing had been done as it should have been, she wondered if Kālī was sick. No feeling of anger had arisen in her yet. The toad had not yet been touched. She even sympathised with her, and then, thinking her maid had fallen sick, she decided to go and see if the maid needed some kind of help. If the maid was really sick, she might have to give her medicine, or summon a doctor. With the best of intentions, she went to her bedroom and called out softly “Hey, Kālī.”

Kālī replied, “What it is madam?” She then asked her “Haven’t you got up from sleep as yet? Are you all right?” Kālī replied, “I’m quite well, madam, but I’m still in bed.” This reply made Vedehikā pretty irritated, her face showing her displeasure. She thought, “This girl failed to get up from bed as usual and perform her duties though she said that nothing is wrong with her. She has become lazy.” Kālī, was a shrewd judge of character. She was observing how her mistress reacted, and noticed her displeasure. She, considered, “Our mistress is liable to get angry, but to be sure, I will investigate further.” She then purposely remained in bed on the next day too.

Vedehikā got up promptly at the usual time. The toad, having been touched the previous day, was a bit puffed up. When, on that day, finding her maid still lolling in bed when it was time to get up, the toad became swollen. She, asked Kālī in a commanding tone, “Hey, Kālī! Haven’t you got up from bed as yet?” Their dialogue then ensued as below:

“Madam, I haven’t yet got out of bed.”

“What is wrong?”

Nothing is wrong, madam.”

“Kālī! You will know who I am.”

She was not only stern in her looks then, but angry words were spurting out of her mouth. Kālī reflected, “Our mistress is capable of being really angry, but to be sure, I will test her further.” With this thought in her mind for the third time, she remained in bed even longer on the following morning. The toad having been touched twice, became badly swollen when touched for the third time.

Vedehikā rose from her bed early and then asked indignantly, “Hey, Kālī, are you still asleep? Haven’t you got up yet?”

“Not yet, madam.”

“What’s the matter with you, then?”

“Nothing is wrong with me, madam.”

“If nothing is wrong with you, then, you will know my true colour.” So saying, she took the door bolt and hit Kālī on the head causing blood to flow. The toad had become fully bloated now.

Having sustained an injury on the head, with blood flowing out from the wound, she went round the neighbouring houses and complained: “Just look at my injury and see how I was ill-treated by Vedehikā, the so-called compassionate, pious, and tolerant lady!

I'm the only person in the house doing the daily chores. See how I have been cruelly punished by my mistress Vedehikā merely for failing to get up early in the morning? I was struck with a door bolt causing a serious injury to my head." The neighbours rallied round her and remarked, "Oh, indeed! How cruel Vedehikā is. She is very rough, reckless, and heartless. She has no compassion for the poor girl." Blame was heaped on Vedehikā much more than praise was showered on her before.

It is human nature to notice the faults of others more than their virtues. People are liable to exaggerate when speaking of another's faults, but are generally sparing in praising their virtues. It is rare to receive a high commendation and honour for outstanding achievements or virtues. Once honour is conferred on a person, it needs to be preserved throughout one's lifetime. It is really difficult, yet once one's reputation is damaged by some misdeed, whether committed wilfully or carelessly, one's good name is lost.

The story cited above clearly reveals the similarity between anger and the toad which swells at every touch. I will relate another story that is relevant to men rather than women to cover every aspect.

### A Discussion on Patience

About three or four years ago, an incident that took place in Thanbyuzayat, a town within Moulmein District, was published in one of the Daily Newspapers. Four or five elders from that town were chatting on a religious topic. It is customary in Burma among knowledgeable elderly people to meet whenever there is any social or religious function such as a memorial service for the deceased. They usually discuss religious topics while the reception is going on with light refreshments such as green tea and some delicacies like pickled tea-leaf (*laphet*). Sometimes, heated discussions take place, and the participants disagree on controversial points. On this occasion, the elders became indignant and assaulted one another ending up with them being interviewed by police officers. The news editor who reported the story, remarked that the elders concerned had been placed in police custody, but "a redeeming feature" was that the topic of discussion happened to be on patience (*khanti*).

The editor hit the nail right on the head. Intolerance is the worst thing when discussing the topic of patience, which needs to be



exercised as advised by the Buddha. Indignation resembles the toad that swells up. It gives a great deal of trouble and therefore really needs to be discarded.

Quarrels usually occur between intimate friends, which agrees with the saying “familiarity breeds contempt.” It is like the tongue and the teeth, which are in close contact with one another, and so often clash. If patience and tolerance are not exercised in dealing with friends, relatives, members of the same household, or neighbours, it can bring about great trouble and unhappiness. Brothers and sisters often fall out, but when need arises, they have to depend on one another, as it is said in the proverb “Blood is thicker than water.” Quarrels happen because of this “toad” called anger. This same toad harms nations. Do not accept this toad. It should be rejected by wise reflection, or by contemplating and noting.

## The Junction

On continuing to dig the ant-hill, a junction where two paths met was found. The answer given to the question: “*Dvidhāpatho’ti kho, bhikkhu, vicikicchāyetaṃ adhivacanaṃ* — What is meant by the junction?” was, “Bhikkhu! The meaning of the junction is sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*).”

To illustrate, let’s imagine that a trader was travelling to make a deal somewhere. He would, no doubt, be carrying some money. A gang of bandits intent on robbing him had prior information about the route the trader was using and the time of his journey. The robbers lay in wait, and chased him as he came along. Seeing the robbers in pursuit, fear seized him and he began to run.

While running away from the robbers, he came to a junction in the road. As he had never travelled this route before he hesitated which branch of the road to take. As he was hesitating, the robbers caught up with him, then captured and killed him, looting all of his property. He could have escaped if he had not come across the junction, which caused him to hesitate.

Similarly, in the course of meditation practice, if the wavering mind or sceptical doubt arises, mental defilements would overtake you. The method of continuous meditation has been prescribed. Be vigilant and note every time that physical phenomena takes place. When walking note as “walking.” When bending, note as “bending.”

When stretching, note as “stretching.” When the abdomen rises, note as “rising,” and when it falls, note as “falling.”

The mind should also be noted every time it imagines or reflects, as “imagining,” or “reflecting,” as the case may be. This is how to contemplate and note while meditating. This method of meditation is contemplation of consciousness (*cittānupassanā*), according to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which say: “*Sarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ ‘Sarāgaṃ citta’nti pajānāti* — when a lustful mind is present he knows ‘there is a lustful mind’.” Every time a feeling occurs, it must be noted too. The Sutta says: “*Sukhaṃ vā vedanaṃ vedayamāno ‘Sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedayāmi’ti pajānāti* — on feeling a pleasant feeling he knows, ‘I feel a pleasant feeling’,” and it says, “*Dukkaṃ vā vedanaṃ vedayamāno ‘Dukkaṃ vedanaṃ vedayāmi’ti pajānāti* — on feeling a painful feeling he knows, ‘I feel a painful feeling’.” We have given instructions to meditate every time feelings occur, and at every moment of seeing, hearing, and so forth. However, doubt may arise in the mind of the meditator while meditating. This is, unavoidable, but when doubt arises, it is essential to reject and dispel it.

### Personal Experience of Sceptical Doubt

Prior to taking up the meditation practice, when I first heard about the method of Satipaṭṭhāna to contemplate and note as “walking” when I walk, as “standing” when I stand, “sitting” when I sit, and so forth, I had some doubts about its propriety or correctness since there was no mention of the distinguishing mind and matter as ultimate realities (*paramattha*) in the process of noting, and as stated also in the Commentary.

I reflected that my teacher — Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw — was expert in the Pāli texts; and that he had also personally practised meditation. When I checked this method of contemplation with the Pāli text, I found it to be correct. Therefore, since it agrees with the text, I considered it to be the right method. Reflecting thus, I took up meditation practice under the guidance of that Sayādaw. In fact, I did harbour certain doubts while meditating. Only later, I came to know that because of my academic knowledge, I was wavering and reflecting in the way stated. I mistook doubt for knowledge. It can be very misleading. This sceptical doubt had crept in, as stated in the Commentary as “*ubhayapakkha samtorana mukhena vicikicchā vañceti*,” i.e. “it is capable of deception by

assuming a false character as if it were knowledge, which seemingly considers impartially from both points of view."

### **Doubt Resembles a Con Artist**

In this world, there are people who disguise themselves in manifold ways to deceive others. A con artist will devise all kinds of strategies to win the confidence of his victims.

At one time, a king summoned a person who was alleged to be a con artist, and asked him, "Do you possess the ability to deceive others? He replied, "Yes, Your Majesty." Then, the king said, "If so, try to deceive me." The man replied, "Your Majesty, it is difficult for me to deceive a great sovereign of dignity and glory like yourself. I cannot deceive you while I am dressed with ordinary clothes. I will only be able to do so if I could put on the Royal Regalia." The king ordered, "Provide him with a complete outfit of royal robes and emblems of royalty." He was, therefore, given the full dress of a monarch. When he had obtained the Royal Regalia, he said, "Your Majesty, I cannot deceive you at once. I will come and play tricks on you on such and such a day." Accordingly, they agreed a date. On the appointed day, the king waited for him and reflected "This fellow will come today. I wonder how he would deceive me!"

Hours passed and the day drew to a close, yet there was no sign of the con artist. The king, sent out messengers who brought the man before the king who then asked him, "You promised to come and practise deception on me, but you didn't turn up. Why did you fail to do so?"

The man replied nonchalantly, "Your Majesty, I've already deceived you!"

"When and how was it done?" the king exclaimed.

"Your Majesty, on the very first day I received the full Royal Regalia from you," said the con artist.

The king reflected, "It is true."

In the same way, although doubt is said to have practised deception, it is not discernible.

It is usually misconceived as a knowledge. Therefore, it is to be feared that doubt might deceive us under the guise of knowledge. As stated earlier, the bolt (ignorance) is also connected with doubt.

We have taught so that the door may be unbolted and doubt may be dispelled. Otherwise it could destroy your confidence. It is vital that whenever doubt arises, it should be discarded by noting it with proper contemplation. If you continue contemplating, you will realise the Dhamma. As you proceed with noting all bodily behaviour, you will fully understand the process. Nothing will be omitted if awareness is maintained when noting the phenomena that occur at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, bending, stretching, moving, thinking, and planning. You will know all occurrences of each phenomenon from the beginning to the end completely, if you maintain constant vigilance.

Another example is a line of white ants. Have you ever seen one? If you look at it superficially, it seems like a continuous white line, but on closer observation, you will see one following the other in a procession. They are not joined together. One ant is apart from the others while moving along. It is not a continuous row of ants linked together. The truth of the matter can be known only by close observation.

Likewise, when mental and physical phenomena are contemplated and noted at every moment of their arising, they will be found to arise and disappear singly in distinct parts and not as a long chain of matter or thoughts. The process of arising and vanishing phenomena is extremely fast and is clearly indicative of impermanence. The nature of impermanence can be realised through one's own insight.

Another example: Hang a bag of sand on a hook and make a hole in the bottom. The sand will flow out through the hole as if it were a long line. If you push the bag forward, the sand flowing out will appear as if it has moved forward. Pull it back, and it would seem as if the line of sand has moved back. The same thing would happen whenever you move the sand bag. In fact, it is not a moving line, but the grains of sand are dropping out one after another in very close succession. Similarly, if phenomena are contemplated and noted at every moment of their occurrence, you will perceive the continuous arising and dissolution of things. Let us recite the motto:

“What is the junction? It is doubt that arises. The hoe is knowledge. Digging is exertion or the four right efforts. The bolt is ignorance of the correct method of meditation. The

toad represents anger, which should be contemplated and dispelled. It should be rejected after contemplating and noting.”

### The Essence of Meditation

I should amplify the method of meditation a bit more. According to the Satipaṭṭhāna method, bodily actions or movements should be contemplated every time they occur. They will then be distinguished in separate parts. It is like watching a flash of lightning when it is known during its initial, intermediate, and final phases. If every moment of the body is contemplated, it can definitely be known through personal experience and not by mere academic knowledge.

Merely by uttering the words “Matter is impermanent (*rūpaṃ aniccaṃ*),” though the terminology is correct, you will not realise what impermanence really is, without concentrated attention. What you will know is only conceptual knowledge. You would, in fact, be imagining impermanence. This can mislead you to a wrong notion that the concept or name is the ultimate reality. However, if you contemplate and note as: “rising,” falling,” “sitting,” etc., you will be fully aware of its true characteristics. True realisation only comes by contemplating and noting at every moment of the phenomenal occurrences of mind and matter arising at the six sense-doors. This is most natural. The Buddha therefore taught it as “*gacchanto vā ‘gacchāmi’ti pajānāti* — when walking he knows ‘I am walking’.”

So, contemplate and note what is seen every time you see an object. Similarly, every time you hear, touch, bend, stretch, or move your limbs, note what is heard or touched, or what you do. “Rising” and “falling” are included in the sense of touch. Therefore, note the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. Thoughts that arise should also be contemplated and noted at every moment. Note, too, every sensation that occurs. In the beginning of the practice, it will not be possible to follow up and contemplate every phenomenon that occurs. Hence, you should note beginning from the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. However, on gaining sufficient strength in concentration, you will find it easy to follow and will even be able to carry on with contemplation of each act of opening and closing of the eyelids while blinking. The motto given is:

“Contemplate and note at every moment of the arising phenomena and be mindful with constant vigilance.”

You should, therefore, contemplate and note whenever any sensation or feeling occurs. The whole body from head to toe comprises material phenomena that must be contemplated. Any place in the body, if conspicuous, can be noted. The Mahāṭikā<sup>1</sup> has said, “*yathāpakadhamṃ vipassanābhiniveso,*” which goes in support of this method of instruction. Those who have adequate perfections (*pāramī*) may become a Stream-winner just by listening to a sermon. Others, however, become a Stream-winner only after practising meditation with due diligence.

At the time when the Buddha delivered his first sermon of “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma,” only one of the five ascetics, namely, Venerable Koṇḍañña became a Stream-winner. The remaining four, only after practising meditation, reached the stage of Stream-winning, and perceived the Truth of the Dhamma. It took Venerable Vappa, Venerable Bhaddiya, Venerable Mahānāma, and Venerable Assaji one to four days, respectively, to become Stream-winners. It is therefore evident that it is essential to practise meditation to achieve the stage of a Stream-winner. These ascetics were eminent intellectuals and yet as they were asked by the Buddha to meditate, it is obvious that the practice must *invariably* be exercised. If they could reach the stage of Stream-winning by listening to his sermon only, he would have delivered his sermons repeatedly instead of asking them to practice meditation.

## Part III

### Further Explanation about Doubt

Some people say, “Only seeing is believing,” *i.e.* they will believe only if they have acquired personal experience. They cannot believe in anything unless they have experimented as scientists do. In other words, they do not believe things blindly. That’s not bad. Because the people in ancient times accepted doctrines blindly, a variety of religious beliefs have sprung up. There is no doubt that personal knowledge acquired by practical experience is natural and realistic.

The Buddha’s Dhamma can be practically experienced. Practical experience is reliable. However, it will not be feasible to accept only

<sup>1</sup> Although I could not find the exact reference, I assume that this refers to the Visuddhimagga Mahāṭikā, since the Sayādaw studied this in depth (ed.)

something that has been acquired by one's own personal experience. There are teachings that have been given after others have realised the truth through practical experience of the Dhamma. What has been taught by someone who has personally practised meditation should be accepted, though one may not have any personal experience of one's own.

The Buddha's teaching has the quality of being something that is realisable by oneself (*sandiṭṭhiko*), and with immediate result (*akāliko*), if practised with diligence. The Buddha offered his guarantee that the Dhamma will be personally realised if one truly practises it with right exertion. There are only two things: mind and matter. There is no self and no such thing as an ego or a soul (*atta*).

Refusing to accept a teaching simply on the grounds that one has yet been personally realised it, is not a good justification. Let me give a simile. If one were to proceed by train from Monywā, he will definitely reach Mandalay. This is obvious to those who have taken this journey before. Suppose a person who has never had any experience of a journey by train, and has never been to Mandalay, were told by an experienced traveller, "You will reach Mandalay if you ride on this train," and if he replied, "I cannot believe you since I have never travelled by train before, so I am unable to accept your advice." Will he be able to reach Mandalay without taking the train journey? Certainly not! This is so because he does not believe in what the other person has said. As an alternative, if he is advised to go by bus, and if he still has doubts and says, "I don't believe it either because I have never before travelled by a bus." If he refuses to accept the advice, will he get to Mandalay? Definitely not. Then again, suppose he is told that he could go by steamer to Mandalay, and yet, if he continues to adopt the same negative attitude, he will not reach Mandalay. With this attitude, it is even more likely that he will not travel by air from Monywā to Mandalay. If he had accepted the advice, he could have reached Mandalay.

Analogous to the case just illustrated, with reference to insight meditation, the Buddha taught; "Practise with diligence" as instructed in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta where it states: "*Ekayāno ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo*," i.e. this is the only way, the Noble Path by which nibbāna can be attained. The instruction thus given ought to be believed and accepted. The method of practising has also been

prescribed by the Buddha as *“gacchantovā gacchamīti pajānāti. etc.”* It means while walking, note as “walking” with awareness. If sitting posture is taken, note as “sitting.” While standing, note as “standing.” While lying, note as “lying.” When bending or stretching the limbs, note as “bending,” or “stretching,” as the case may be. In the act of walking, the characteristics of stiffness and propulsion are obvious. However, no instructions have, were given to note as: “stiff,” “propelling,” “moving,” or “pushing forward.” It has been taught to note as “walking” only.

While contemplating as, “walking,” stiffness of joints, motivation and propulsion will be noticeable. If there are people who say that unless they have had personal experience in meditation, they cannot believe the teaching, they are like those who refuse to travel by train, bus, steamer, or aeroplane, as described earlier. They will never reach their destination or achieve their objective. It is unreasonable to reject the advice without experimenting with it. Nor will it be proper to totally deny acceptance of the advice.

To put it in another way, a sick man should not refuse to take the medicine prescribed by a doctor who has experience in treating the sick. If the sick man refuses to take the medicine, there is no chance of recovery. The Buddha’s teaching is like medicine that can cure a disease. That is why the Buddha exhorted “come and see for yourself” by practising mindfulness meditation. If the practice is tested, one will definitely see the truth personally. You will find the incessant arising and dissolution of mental and physical phenomena if you meditate, contemplate, and note diligently.

In the first part of the section on deportment in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta — *“Yathā yathā vā paṇassa kāyo paṇihito hoti tathā tathā naṃ pajānāti”* — the meaning of this simple phrase as stated by the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw is exactly the same as interpreted and accepted by us. It is as contained in his book, the Anatta Dipani. When bodily actions such as movements of the limbs in any way, or the gait in the act of walking and lifting the feet that occur in the four main elements of the body, it shall not be done, as it usually is, without being mindful. It means that contemplation with attentiveness should be made on the limbs or parts of the body concerned. In this Pāli phrase, the movements embraced in the four main postures are emphasised. No emphasis is laid to contemplate on the



whole body as an aggregate of the four principal elements. In other words, the body should be known by the characteristics of its bodily behaviour. After teaching the way in which the four main postures should be known as “walking,” while walking, “standing,” while standing, “sitting,” while sitting, or “lying,” while lying down, the Buddha taught in another way that the body exists by such characteristics and that by these characteristics, the said ‘body’ is known. This statement agrees with the second exposition in the Subcommentary, which was reiterated to supplement the first exposition.

In the second method of contemplation as contained in the Subcommentary, it has been taught laying emphasis on the body. No primary importance is attached to the postures. The commentator says that the four main elements will be automatically included as mere accompaniments. These concepts are highly philosophical. Ordinary people will be unable to understand them. The salient point here is that the body exists. That body is known. The postures are not indicated as essential to be known. Therefore, it should be construed as having imbibed all the bodily behaviours. The behaviour of the main elements, is not to be taken into consideration. This amounts to emphasis being laid on the body.

It may be further elucidated thus: While sitting, any part of the limb, whether it is moving, feeling stiff, or remaining still, if that part of the limb concerned is contemplated, it would amount to dwelling on the characteristics of its presence in the body. The sitting posture is also automatically embraced therein. Hence, if the ‘rising and falling’ of the abdomen is contemplated while sitting, the posture of ‘sitting’ is automatically included, and is regarded as being fulfilled in sequence. Therefore, the statement made by the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw as “*Yathā yathā vā panassa kāyo paṇihito hoti, tathā tathā naṃ pajānāti*” shall be interpreted as having imbibed all bodily movements in detail, which is in agreement with the exposition of the second method of the Subcommentary. We are teaching in the same way. Presumably, it is sufficient for you to understand.

### Must Contemplate in the Present

Next, I would like to explain as to how contemplation should be made at the initial stage of insight meditation. The Visuddhimagga has stated as “*lakkaṇarasādivasena pariggahetabbā.*” The instruction

given is to contemplate the essence of characteristics.<sup>1</sup> In order to know the truth relating to mind and matter, it is necessary to discern the four factors: characteristic (*lakkaṇa*), function (*rasa*), manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*) and proximate cause (*padaṭṭhāna*). As it has been stated to contemplate the “characteristic, function, and so on” from among these four, it is obvious that the remaining two must be included because “and so on” was appended to that phrase.

Hence, it must be borne in mind that all mind and matter should be contemplated along with their characteristics, the existing manifestation as well as their proximate cause. This is how we instruct and how it was done by the Venerable Theelon Sayādaw,<sup>2</sup> the Venerable Ledi Sayādaw, and other famous Sayādaws in Burma. The justification for contemplating along with the manifestation has been shown in the Visuddhimagga as well as in in the Dīghanikāya, Mahāvagga, its Commentary and Subcommentary, and in the Saṃyuttanikāya, *etc.* How the five aggregates of grasping are contemplated has been described therein. There are some who have said that insight meditation should not be done as stated in the foregoing. They are, therefore, on the wrong path as their dissonant views are contrary to the Commentaries.

They repeated their error in saying that the existing materiality is a concept. The Visuddhimagga Commentary and Subcommentary have cleared this erroneous understanding of concept (*paññatti*). It is made even clearer in the Dīghanikāya Mahāvagga Commentary. Manifestation refers to materiality (*rūpa*), and not to mentality (*nāma*). This is meant to refer to the aggregate of matter. No reference has yet been made to mind. The body is conspicuous. It is, in fact, the sense object on which knowledge dwells. In other words, the character of the sensation is its manifestation. Materiality is an ultimate reality (*paramattha*). It really exists and is reflected in knowledge. It is not a concept (*paññatti*).

Therefore, whether contemplation is made on matter or on mind, according to the method of insight meditation, it must be contemplated with its characteristic, function, manifestation, and also with its proximate cause if possible. Then, the question may arise as to

<sup>1</sup> Vism. 587. Chapter XVIII Purification of View.

<sup>2</sup> A renowned meditation master during the reign of King Mindon (i.e. about 1850 A.D). The Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw was his disciple, and the teacher of Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw (Source: [Five Qualities of a Meditator](#), Sayādaw U Jatila) (ed.)

which is contemplated when contemplating “*gacchantovā gacchāmi’ti pajānāti,*” etc. The answer is that the air element (*vāyodhātu*) is contemplated. How is it then known? If contemplating on the nature of mind and matter at every moment of their occurrence, they appear with their own characteristics, in their own function, and in the way that they manifest. For example, looking at a flash of lightning as it occurs in the sky, the sign of electrical discharge is obvious. This characteristic is its substance. The substance is the brilliant light. The light that is emitted is the lightning. There is no other thing.

Then, a person who has seen it at the time of its occurrence will know the brilliant flash. This is knowing its characteristics.

At the time the lightning flashes, darkness disappears. The thing that causes the darkness to dispel, is called the function of the lightning flash. The person who is watching when lightning occurs knows the disappearance of the darkness. Then also, he who is watching at the moment lightning takes place will know the nature of the electricity that is discharged. The shape; its appearance whether the light that flashes is dim or profuse, or is of great magnitude, or round, or long or short, will be revealed. This is the nature of its dimension that is reflected in the conscious mind or the knowledge of the person watching the lightning as it occurs. This is the example. It cannot be said to be an ultimate reality.

In the same way, if the air element is contemplated at the time of its occurrence, it is known with its characteristics. Its function and manifestation will also be known. The nature of the air element is pressure or motion. It could, therefore, propel, or in ordinary parlance, it would cause stiffness. If you stretch your arm, you will find stiffness. If you stretch your leg, you will say you find stiffness instead of saying propulsion. Though no stiffness is knowingly or obviously felt, considering the degree of stiffness, you will have to say it is less stiff or vice versa, as the case may be. If the degree of stiffness is diminished, you will say that it has eased.

Take another example by pulling three ropes. One may be pulled tight, the middle rope may be moderately tight, while the third may be slack. The first rope is obviously the tightest. The rope in the middle, if compared to the first, may be said to be slack, but if it is compared to the third, it is considered to be tight. If the rope in the middle were the only one, it would be considered tight.

Propulsion, stiffness, tightness, or slackness, are the characteristics of the air element. The word “propulsion” is the usage in the literary sense. “Stiffness” is the term commonly used. The air element has the capacity of movement. The air element pushes or propels.

It may also be likened to a cart and the bullock. The cart itself has no mobility. It is the bullock that moves. When the bullock moves, the cart is propelled. The bullock causes the cart to move. The air element has the intrinsic nature of motivation. The wind by itself is in motion. If the wind strikes anything, it may be said that the wind propels it. It makes the leaves or dust move or change their position, and it sways plants and the branches of a tree. Then, if you bend or stretch and note as “bending,” or “stretching,” you will notice the nature of motivation. If you coil or bend your forefinger or stretch it, you will clearly find its movement. This is the moving (*samudiraṇa*) function of the air element. In the same way, while you contemplate as “walking,” “lifting,” “stepping,” or “dropping,” you will notice the bodily behaviour of your feet which move slowly. This is called “the function of movement” (*samudiraṇa-rasa*). The manifestation is the characteristic that becomes manifested after a thing has become an object of consciousness. When it is manifested, it is then correctly conceived. This knowledge is not the same as conceptual knowledge. It is an ultimate reality (*paramattha*). The motto is:

“The air element pushes and carries forth to where it proceeds on its own inclination. A meditator’s duty is to note and contemplate it.”

The foregoing explanation describes how the air element is known in its characteristics, function, manifestation, and proximate cause. Proximate cause, being less important, is not included in the verse. The air element in the body can be contemplated anywhere that it manifests, but it is essential to know it along with the three factors: characteristic, function, and manifestation. If one of those three is known, it may be said to have been correctly realised.

The phenomenon of the air element can be contemplated, wherever it occurs in the body. Any matter that is an ultimate reality, whether it is earth, water, fire, or air element, or any sensation relating to matter could be contemplated.

It is perfectly acceptable to contemplate mind and matter at every conspicuous occurrence. I stress these points so that you can dispel your doubts at the junction before you reach the stage of insight. You

have just learnt about the method. I am repeatedly explaining it to help you reject doubt before you go on with your meditation.

I have covered the subject of the air element well enough for you to understand. Now, I will explain with an example of mentality.

Consciousness has the characteristic of knowing the sense-object or sensation (*ārammaṇa vijānanalakkhaṇaṃ viññāṇaṃ*). The mind or thought only proceeds from contact with sense objects. Therefore, if mind-consciousness is contemplated every time it arises, it will be known that it becomes aware of the sensation that occurs.

When seeing occurs, the visual object becomes known through consciousness. The same thing happens if a sound is heard. The mind flows through the ear, the sense-organ from where it is heard. If there is an odour, the smell is sensed and the mind proceeds to where the smell is, *etc.* The mind immediately dwells on the sense object.

It is more obvious in the case of “imagination.” Wherever you are now, for example in Morywā, if you imagine the **Mahā Myat Muṇi Buddha** at Mandalay, the whole picture of the shrine comes into your mind. If you think of the Sagaing Hills and the Ava Bridge, it would also appear in your mind’s eye. That is why it is said that the mind reaches to where the sensation lies.



The motto is: “The mind has the natural tendency to know the sensation. It takes the lead or gives guidance as a leader.”

A person who has the qualities of leadership has the natural ability and tendency to take the lead. Any kind of work to be performed by a group needs a leader. In any organization, there is always a leader who directs the followers regarding the action to be taken. Even in transplanting paddy seedlings, it requires a group leader. The rest will follow his or her actions and guidance. In the same way, the mind reaches the object of sensation and gains awareness. This mind consciousness is followed by a series of mental formations (*cetasikā*). To cite a vivid example, take the case of seeing a visual object. After seeing it, sensation arises. If it is a pleasurable sight, greed follows. If anything that is seen is unpleasant or detestable, anger or aversion occurs. If a revered object is noticed, feelings of faith or generosity

occur. If it is anything that one is proud of, conceit arises. Likewise, meanness will arise if attachment to anything occurs or if jealousy is felt against some one. This is why the mind resembles a leader. Mental formations follow closely behind the mind, which takes the lead. Every time the mind is contemplated, you know what follows in its wake. If the mind is not properly contemplated and noted, greed and anger can arise. The leading role that is assumed, which is the function (*rasa*), will be known as it is by mere contemplation.

If a meditator carries on contemplating every time the mind occurs, any thought formations that follow will be clearly found to have a link with the mind that has already arisen. While noting “rising,” “falling,” “sitting,” or “touching,” the mind that imagines may occur, and while noting “imagining,” one will come to know whatever follows. It will be vividly realised that a series of mental formations are taking place in quick succession, like a string of beads following one another when the beads are moved. At the beginning of meditation, the mind sometimes wanders here and there, hopping from one place to another. Such events can be clearly known even by children if they contemplate and note the arising of the mind. Adults can easily realise them. Young children are really wonderful — there were children aged only seven who became Arahants during the lifetime of the Buddha. Children could relate the events that have occurred in their mind in sequence. Repeated occurrences of mind will also be conceived to have been taking place. It may appear to have so occurred endlessly, but it will come to an end when the contemplating mind with awareness comes to a cessation. Doubt may arise whether such mental occurrences will ever cease. The way in which the mind occurs singly and endlessly is taught in the [Dhammapada, verse 37](#), as follows:

*“Dūraṅgamaṃ ekacaraṃ, asariraṃ guhāsayaṃ.  
Ye cittaṃ saṃyamessanti, mokkhaṇ ti mārabandhanā.”*

This means that the mind is used to wander about ceaselessly and reach to a remote place. Whatever the distance might be, if you just think of a far distant place, it can be reached at once merely using your imagination. If you think of the Shwedagon Pagoda, your mind reaches it in a split second. The imagination can go to places in foreign countries that you have never visited. The mind

reaches its destination, without any delay, journey, or expense. If you imagine a place that you have never seen, it may be misled. The mind may go astray while frolicking in a far-off place, and if it so happens, it should be considered improper.

Mind arises singly on each occasion. Different thoughts cannot possibly occur simultaneously. It is just like beads on a string falling one after another in rapid succession. It may be difficult to believe, but the mind that occurred when young is not the same mind that has just arisen or that is now arising. One might regard it as a chain of thoughts occurring continuously. The statement, "Thoughts occur singly," may be accepted only because it has been taught by the Buddha and stated in the Commentaries and Subcommentaries. If you really want to know that thought occurs singly, you should meditate and verify it for yourself. Mindfulness of consciousness was taught by the Buddha as, "When a passionate mind is present, the meditator knows, 'A passionate mind is present'." If you contemplate and note the mind every time it occurs, you will definitely find it appearing only one after the other in extremely quick succession. The first mind that appears will soon disappear followed immediately by another mind. It flits and vanishes with the greatest rapidity. The moment that imagination or thought is noted, it vanishes suddenly. You will know it personally if you contemplate and note the mind. Though the first occurrence of the mind disappears, another mind subsequently appears and takes the place of the former mind that preceded and dissolved. The mind is occurring and disappearing as a never-ending process.

The mind that occurs singly has no substance. Matter is a physical substance. That is why the material body can be pointed out as being at a location. It can be felt, captured, tied up, or confined in a room. The mind has no such substance. It is, therefore, difficult to show where it stays or lurks. We can only say that awareness of the sensation is mind. It is hard to explain when asked where it occurs. It cannot be pointed out as being here or there.

Of course, what is definite is when seeing takes place, it happens or is reflected in the eyes. When a sound is heard, hearing occurs in the ears. When smelling, the odour comes in through the nose. When tasting, the flavour is felt on the tongue. When something is touched, it is felt or known at the point of contact, for instance, when the head

is touched, the sensation of touch comes from the head. Hence, all these five senses are definitely known. The location of the mind that imagines or plans is not clearly known. The Commentators, however, say that it occurs from the heart-base (*hadayavatthu*), the material base of the heart, depending on some matter, which is the heart.

Western doctors assume that it occurs in the brain, the nervous organ which is the seat of sensation and thought. If this viewpoint is considered, it is reasonable to say that the mind occurs in the brain. However, it cannot be said with any certainty. In any case, when there is fear the heart beats faster. When there is something to be worried about or to regret, it is often said that heart-ache is felt. In view of this, the authors of the Subcommentaries supported the view expressed in the Commentaries. If that is the case, it would have some sort of justification to accept the view that the formation of thoughts arises first in the heart.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to pinpoint where the mind first arises or occurs. Though it may be manifested, it is difficult to see it vividly as it has no tangible substance. The mind cannot be captured. It cannot be tied up with a rope, confined, or controlled.

If contemplation is made on this mind at every moment of its occurrence, and if it is constantly put under surveillance, it is stated that one can escape from the fetters of the defilements called "Māra." Māra means the executioner. Because of the presence of defilements, new existences have taken place. In every existence, death will take place once. This means that sentient beings are put to death by defilements. It is therefore said that one can escape from the bondage of Māra. If you wish to escape from the clutches of Māra, the mind should be guarded. It is impossible to tie the mind with a rope. The mind shall be contemplated and noted with attentiveness.

This concept appears to fall in line with what has been stated as "The way of knowing with the characteristics, function, and manifestation." A continual chain of mind-consciousness linking with the first mental occurrence can take place repeatedly and endlessly. What is to be known in this regard is that the mind occurs linking with the thoughts that have arisen or have preceded it. This is clearly known by a meditator by personal insight. No lessons need be learned. It is only necessary to contemplate the mind every time it occurs. It happens singly and separately. This fact will be personally realised. The



meditator then understands that death will take place in every existence. Conception in the womb of a mother and rebirth take place in a new existence. The actual process will then be understood clearly.

It may be explained like this. If the mind is known every moment it occurs, the consciousness that arises will be found to be vanishing. If such a state of vanishing is known with insight, the realisation occurs: "Death means the cessation of that kind of consciousness at the last moment before death."

Consciousness occurs one after another in a continuous chain, and when this is known, it will be realised that the passing away of the present consciousness only conditions a fresh one in another birth, and it is nothing but a new existence. This knowledge is the personal realisation of death and rebirth — entering a womb in a new existence. If a person truly realises this death and rebirth of consciousness as stated, he will get rid of eternalism (*sassatadiṭṭhi*) — the heretical belief that some living substance or self (*atta*) is eternal.

"In reality, mind or mental consciousness arises and then vanishes immediately. The consciousness that occurs in the new existence is similar to the consciousness of the mind that occurs afresh repeatedly while contemplation is made or in process. The mind from the past existence is not transmitted to the present existence; and the mind arising at the present existence does not move out to the next existence." A meditator who realises this fact as stated, will get rid of eternalism — the idea that a living thing or being is transferred in its entirety to the new existence, and will continue to reside in the new body. This is how eternalism is eliminated. As regards annihilationism (*ucchedadiṭṭhi*), this is the belief that nothing remains after death. "If the body is cremated, it is turned into ashes, and becomes fertilizer. There is no such thing as a new existence." This erroneous conception is known as annihilationism. In fact, when death occurs in one existence, consciousness still continues without a break just as when one is alive, as long as defilements have yet been destroyed. To a person who is not yet free from defilements, the mind impinges on a sensation. On his or her death-bed the sensation that occurs will always be remembered and will never be forgotten. It will be repeatedly reflected on by the mind. Therefore, on the verge of death, an act that has been done during life will appear as a vision and while in the course of reflecting on this act, the strength of conscious-

ness will gradually become feeble and fade away until it reaches the point of cessation. The moment that this last consciousness ceases, a fresh consciousness arises with the new existence. This process is what is called the appearance of a new existence after the death of a person in the present existence. In other words, it may be stated that a human being, a deity, or an animal is reborn or comes into existence. If this is clearly perceived and understood, a person may be said to be free from annihilationism — the view that existence is entirely annihilated after death. This knowledge is very valuable indeed.

If the mind is contemplated while it occurs, it can be known with the characteristics that distinguish the sensation. It can also be distinguished by the function that has the ability to take the lead, and by its manifestation, which occurs repeatedly and continuously linking with the mind that has preceded. If the mind can be known with characteristics, function, and manifestation it is obvious that the rest of the mental aggregates will also be known when they are contemplated at the moment of their occurrence.

I have explained it very briefly by citing only the air element out of the four material elements, with its characteristics, function, and manifestation to give you the flavour of the Dhamma. The example is as expounded in the *Dīghanikāya*, the *Samyuttanikāya*, Commentaries and Subcommentaries, and is, therefore, authoritative.

By now, it should be clear what should be known. If all bodily behaviours are contemplated, it would amount to establishing mindfulness of the body. It confirms the knowledge of the feasibility of the method of contemplation, as “walking,” or “lifting,” “moving,” “dropping” in the act of walking. I am sure there is hardly any room for doubt. Since the door is now unbolted and doubt has been dispelled, the road to nibbāna is clear. All that now remains is for you to meditate. Let us recite the following motto.

“The anti-hill is the body. Imagining is emitting smoke by night. Performing actions is ejecting flames during the day. The teacher is the Buddha, and the pupil is the meditator. The junction is doubt that arises. The hoe is knowledge. Digging is exertion or the four right efforts. The bolt is ignorance of the correct method of meditation. The toad represents anger, which should be contemplated and dispelled. It should be rejected after contemplating and noting.”

## The Water-Strainer

The last motto is said to be an obstruction that may be likened to a water-strainer. Venerable Kumāra Kassapa put the question as “*kiṃ ciṅgavarīṃ*,” i.e. What is meant by “water-strainer?” The Buddha’s answer to this question runs as follows:

“*Caṅgavāra’nti kho, bhikkhu, pañcannetaṃ nīvaraṇānaṃ adhiṅvacanaṃ.*”

The meaning is: “Bhikkhu! The water-strainer indicates the five hindrances (*pañca-nīvaraṇa*).” Water-strainers were generally used in those days though it is not used at present. A water-strainer is a piece of gauze through which liquid is poured filter solid matter. In ancient times, if people wanted soap, they had to dissolve the sandy soap in water and strain the soapy liquid to collect the residue — refined particles of pure soap for washing fine clothes. The gauze is finely perforated to allow water to pass through it easily.

In the same way, a person who is enmeshed in the five hindrances, which are obstacles to a successful religious life — lust, anger, sloth, restlessness, and doubt — cannot maintain wholesome states. It is similar to the water that flows through the fine gauze that serves as a water-strainer. Similarly, all wholesome deeds will just flow through. Here, “wholesome deeds” refers particularly to concentration and wisdom. The merits of generosity and morality will endure. Generosity will not be affected in any way by the presence of the hindrances and morality will not lose its noble qualities. If no misdeeds are committed by action or speech, morality will not be destroyed. Imagination may run riot with lustful thoughts or feelings of ill-will or malevolence, but morality will still remain intact. The hindrances cannot totally prohibit the merits of charity and morality. However, they can deter the merits derived from concentration and wisdom.

If sensual pleasures are reflected on, concentration cannot be gained. If passionate desires for wealth, existence, or for business affairs, *etc.*, are occurring in one’s mind, no progress will be made in developing insight. Such attachments to worldly passions are hindrances that deter the benefits of meditation.

These obstacles to the progress of insight are compared to the water-strainer. If wishes for sensual enjoyment, and passionate desires are entertained, no success can be achieved in meditation

practice. In the course of contemplation, while noting as “rising,” “falling,” “sitting,” and “touching,” the mind usually flits away frequently. The Buddha gave a very good example of this, comparing the mind to a fish out of water.

### Like A Fish Out of Water

Just as fish live and find happiness in water, the human mind dwells in and finds enjoyment in sensual pleasures. Men and women are always thinking and planning how they could earn their living and perform their duties in the field of social activities. Such mental and physical activities are prompted by passionate desires. That is the why sensual pleasures are said to be the dwelling place of the human mind. If the mind is taken out of its habitual residence it would resemble a fish taken out of the water and thrown on the ground. The Buddha taught this metaphorical statement in the form of verse. It is an excellent piece, but it will be more obvious if one has gained experience in the practical exercise of meditation.

*“Vārijoṇa thale khitto, okamokataubbhato.  
Pariphandatidaṃ cittaṃ, māradheyyaṃ pahātaṃ.”*

“Like a fish that is drawn from its watery abode and thrown upon land, even so does this mind flutter. Hence should the realm of passion be shunned. (Dhp.v.34)

In plain language, the above Pāli verse says that a fish, whose home is the water, if taken out of its dwelling place and thrown onto the ground, would quiver and struggle as if wounded to the point of death, longing for its watery home.”

In every human being the Truth of Suffering is found. It exists in the five aggregates: the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. These all fall within the realm of Māra or the defilements. Because of these defilements, existences have come into being. In any existence, death is inevitable. In other words, death occurs because of the presence of these mental and physical aggregates. Without the aggregates, no death will take place. Therefore, these mental and physical aggregates fall within the domain or jurisdiction of Māra, the great killer, or the defilements.

All of these aggregates are under the control of this great killer, and so living beings are bound to face old age, suffering, and death

wherever they may be in the human world, and even the celestial planes. With your material body you cannot possibly escape from the clutch of the defilements. To escape this fate you will have to put the mind on the landing ground of concentration and insight. It behoves us to join meditation centres and practise mindfulness. Contemplate “rising,” “falling,” “sitting,” “touching,” *etc.*, repeatedly with utmost concentration. You will find that your mind often reflects on sensual pleasures as usual. This resembles the fish thrashing, twisting, and quivering, as it wishes to return to its watery home. This restless mind should be rejected by noting to prevent it from reflecting on sensual thoughts.

### How the Five Hindrances Are Dispelled

It was stated as “*Ukkhipa caṅgavāraṃ, pajaha pañca nīvaraṇe*” i.e. discard the water-strainer and reject the five hindrances. Such hindrances should be noted repeatedly in the course of contemplation, and rejected. The way of rejection is to note as “reaching” when the mind reaches your home while contemplating “rising,” “falling,” “sitting,” and “touching.” If the mind wanders to your daily chores, note as “wandering.” If imagination occurs, note as “imagining” and then reject it. It is a very good method of rejecting the hindrances.

If feelings of disappointment, ill-will, or anger (*vyāpāda*) arise, these too should be contemplated, noted, and rejected. In the same way, sloth or laziness, restlessness or worry, and sceptical doubts should also be noted through contemplation and thus eliminated.

### Purity of Mind

If these five hindrances are contemplated and rejected after noting them, you will reach a stage where the mind becomes purified (*citta-visuddhi*). If you are really intent on meditating to achieve the path and its fruition it is imperative to be endowed with moral purity (*śīla-visuddhi*). Thereafter, it requires the full accomplishment of purity of mind.

### Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind

When you reach this stage of insight, at every moment of contemplation and noting, the mind that is conscious of the object and the object of contemplation are distinguished. This knowledge

that distinguishes between mind and matter is called: “Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind (*nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*).” The way in which mind and matter are distinguished has been lucidly explained by the Buddha with the following example.

What is known as a “cat’s eye” — a precious ruby — ought to be possessed. This “cat’s eye” is a gem with a pale greenish colour, and is crystal clear. Some people wear a ring as an ornament on their fingers made of gold and inset with such a gem. Great significance has been attached to such gems in the teachings of the Buddha. I will, therefore, make reference to the gem, which is generally well-known. Take for instance, a ruby, which is a crimson or rose-coloured gem, a product of Mogok ruby mines in Burma, renowned in the world of gems and known by almost everyone. A very tiny hole may be pierced through this ruby for threading with other gems of various hues — yellow, blue, green, or white. Then, let this gem be scrutinised by a person with good eye-sight after placing it on the palm of the hand. If it is closely observed, one will come to know distinctly that the gem and the thread are quite separate. The gem and the thread will then be distinguished. The thread will be seen to have been threaded through the tiny hole in the stone. In the same way, the meditator who is contemplating and noting will distinguish between the object of contemplation and the knowing mind at every moment of contemplation and noting.

To cite an example: When you note as “rising,” will you not find the stiffness and the movement in your abdomen? Then also, will not the mind that contemplates, notes, and knows the “rising” of the abdomen, become obvious? The rising movement of the abdomen with a feeling of stiffness is the intrinsic nature of matter (*rūpa*), and the knowing is mind (*nāma*). The stiffness and movement of the abdomen is matter, which resembles the gem. The mind that notes and knows resembles the thread. At every moment of noting, the mind that notes swiftly goes towards the sensation just like the thread that passes through the tiny hole in the stone.

That is why the noting mind that reaches the object of sensation is likened to the thread that passes through the gem. This simile given by the Buddha shows how the distinguishing features of mind and matter are realised by [Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind](#) (*nāmarūpa pariccheda ñāṇa*). It is the most reliable statement

as taught by the Buddha and is found to be in perfect agreement with what has been realised by our meditators. Likewise, there is similarity in the knowledge that distinguishes the two distinct parts every time bodily behaviours are contemplated and noted.

## The Tortoise

When mind and matter are distinguished you will find the five aggregates. This is stated as, “the hindrances are like a water-strainer, and the tortoise is like the aggregates.” It was said before that if the five hindrances, which resemble the water-strainer, are contemplated and noted, the mind becomes purified. As the mind is purified mind and matter will be distinguished at every moment of contemplation. These two — mind and matter — comprise the five aggregates. A meditator who is noting the rising movement of the abdomen will feel stiffness. Movement of the abdomen will also be noticeable. This rising movement is the nature of the wind element and is a characteristic of the material aggregate. Awareness by noting is the mental aggregate. The awareness that realises the nature of sensation is the aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇakkhandhā*). Joy and happiness that is felt while noting and being aware is pleasant feeling (*sukha-vedanā*). If a neutral sensation occurs with neither joy nor happiness, it is equanimous feeling (*upekkhā-vedanā*). These feelings are the aggregate of feeling (*vedanakkhandhā*). Perceiving the nature of the rising movement is the aggregate of perception (*saññākkhandhā*). Paying attention to know the nature of rising and stiffness, and thus distinguishing them is the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhārakkhandhā*). If they are analysed with careful attention, the distinguishing features of the four mental aggregates become distinctly noticeable. Every time contemplation is made on the rising of the abdomen, the stiffness or movement is material aggregate, while the mind that notes, constitutes the four mental aggregates. Together these are the five aggregates. Every time you contemplate and note, these five aggregates will be found. This is stated as “finding the tortoise.” A tortoise has five limbs — two arms, two legs, and a head.

The five aggregates will also be noticed every time you contemplate and note as “falling,” “sitting,” “touching,” “bending,” “stretching” and so forth. In the act of bending, if you note as “bending,” stiffness and the movement that occur is matter, while awareness

gained through noting is mind. Mind is the four mental aggregates, and matter is the one material aggregate — together five aggregates.

Similar characteristics can be known with due alteration of details in respect to other physical and mental phenomena that are noted. Do not seek for pleasure in these five aggregates, which are to be contemplated, noted, and rejected. This is the essential point.

The question posed, “What is meant by tortoise? (*Ko kammo.*)” The answer given was: “*Kummo’ti kho, bhikkhu, pañcannetaṃ upādānakkhandhānaṃ adhvācanaṃ.*”

The meaning of this answer is: “Bhikkhu! The meaning of the “tortoise” is the five aggregates.” The five aggregates implies the attachment that clings to the sensations. These sensations should be dispelled and eliminated by contemplation to get rid of desires.

The Buddha explained that “the tortoise should be removed (*pajaha kummaṃ*)” means, “Reject the five aggregates.” The Commentary says that the gist of it is to reject the attachment to the five aggregates. The motto I have given is:

“What should be contemplated to gain insight knowledge?

“Insight is gained by contemplating the five aggregates, which are prone to attachment.”

In this Vammika Sutta, the tortoise means the five aggregates. These are to be contemplated, noted, and then rejected.

Although the five aggregates are to be contemplated and rejected, at the initial stage of meditation, only the nature of five aggregates will be known. At this stage, the arising and dissolution of these aggregates, and their nature of impermanence cannot yet be realised. Only the nature of stiffness and movement will be known when contemplating the rising and falling of the abdomen. Hence, there is only awareness of the distinctive features of mind and matter.

When concentration and knowledge mature, all of these phenomena will be distinctly known both at the beginning and the end. When it is clearly realised that from the moment of their arising they begin to decay towards total dissolution, insight knowledge occurs with a direct realisation that they are impermanent. It should, therefore, be contemplated to know the true nature of the phenomena, as stated. It would be necessary to note and realise impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self as



concentration becomes strengthened. Only when such realisation is achieved, will you be free from the pleasurable feelings and desires connected with the five aggregates. So the Commentator has said “impermanence should be understood (*aniccam veditabbam*), the characteristic of impermanence should be understood (*aniccata veditabba*), and insight into impermanence should be understood (*aniccānupassanā veditabbā*).”<sup>1</sup>

What is meant by impermanence is the five aggregates, says the Commentary. If the material aggregate is contemplated, the nature of its arising and dissolution is known, depending mainly upon the body. In the same way, mentality can be known and realised in its true perspective. Let us recite the motto.

“The material and mental aggregates, as they arise and dissolve, have the nature of impermanence.”

The characteristic of impermanence is obvious because of its transient nature, vanishing without lasting. It is just like a flash of lightning. It flashes and disappears all at once. This is the nature of impermanence. You note what is occurring and you will find the occurrences immediately followed by their disappearance. This is evident of the nature of impermanence, without remaining constant even for a moment. The true characteristic of impermanence will be personally realised only when you have experienced it personally. Then only, the true knowledge relating to the nature of impermanence will be gained. This can only be achieved by right contemplation.

When such genuine insight is achieved, it can lead you to the knowledge of the Noble Path. Ordinary worldlings may wrongly think that from infancy until now as an adult, there is continuity of the same mind without any break. This is called ‘*Santati*,’ which is similar to the erroneous notion of a continuous line of white ants. To remove the veil of illusion that hides the truth, the mind should be contemplated and noted every time it occurs.

When awareness becomes accelerated, the thoughts that are arising gradually become distinct. Then, the realisation occurs that these mental events incessantly appear and suddenly vanish. They are found to be impermanent, and the truth of impermanence will be clearly appreciated.

---

<sup>1</sup> Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā, p.503 (ed).

Take sensations, for example. Pain or stiffness may be thought of as occurring for quite a long time. If carefully contemplated and noted, every time it is noted as “painful,” “painful,” it will be found that the painful sensation is occurring singly and then vanishing. It is just like the white ants in a row, which are separated from one another. Pain occurs and then disappears, and this state of flux indicates the nature of impermanence. All bodily behaviour occurs in the same way.

When impermanence (*anicca*) is known through insight, unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*) will automatically be understood. Being subjected to impermanence is suffering. This “suffering” in itself is not-self. They are basically the same though they are different in name. Therefore, if impermanence is understood, unsatisfactoriness is understood; and if unsatisfactoriness is understood, then not-self is also understood.

Now there is not enough time to explain fully how knowledge concerning *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta* occurs, so only a brief account of it will, therefore, be given.

If impermanence is clearly seen, unsatisfactoriness will be realised. If unsatisfactoriness is known, not-self will be perceived. When not-self is perceived, nibbāna will be found. If you want to reach nibbāna, follow this path. However, it should be borne in mind that one needs mature insight to realise nibbāna. It cannot be attained by merely perceiving not-self occasionally.

If impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self are truly realised every time phenomena are contemplated, it amounts to rejection of the five aggregates called the “tortoise.” If you fail to contemplate, you will have no knowledge of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, or not-self. If you have pleasurable sensations at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and knowing, as they arise at the six sense-doors, you will go on regarding them as being permanent, pleasant, good, self, male or female, and find delight in them. This is taking delight in the “tortoise.” It would, therefore, amount to finding enjoyment and pleasure in the five aggregates.

To avoid having pleasurable enjoyment in the tortoise, it is advised to reject it. The method of rejection is to contemplate every time the physical and mental phenomena occur. If that is done, you will be able to distinguish between mind and matter. As you go on

contemplating and noting, their arising and dissolution will be known, which will lead you to the realisation of the insight relating to the three characteristics. If this knowledge is acquired, no attachment can take place regarding them as permanent. This will deter defilements from arising. Otherwise, you will still have a mistaken notion with attachment that a thing is beautiful, good, or pleasurable, that it is a being or a person.

What is meant by rejecting the tortoise is to dispel the five aggregates. If the five aggregates are contemplated as they occur, it will be in conformity with the statement made in this Sutta.

Then, the question may arise as to what extent these five aggregates should be contemplated and rejected? The answer is: "They should be contemplated up to the stage of knowledge of adaptation (*anuloma-ñāṇa*) on the threshold of the Noble Path, which leads to maturity knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*), and Path knowledge (*ariyamagga-ñāṇa*), and then rejection of the aggregates should follow. While such rejection is being made in the course of contemplation, the arising and passing away of the mental and physical phenomena will be known with the result that the three characteristics will become manifest. When this **knowledge of comprehension** (*sammāsaṇa-ñāṇa*) becomes stronger, complete and clear awareness will take place of the arising and dissolution of the sensations in the beginning and the end of the phenomenal processes while being contemplated and noted every time they occur.

This precise knowledge or awareness of the ever-changing phenomena, arising and passing away in an accelerated motion, is **knowledge of arising and passing away** (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*). Again, when this knowledge gains maturity, every time it is noted, the vanishing of the sense-objects is more clearly manifested and becomes more noticeable than their arising. This knowledge and awareness of the process of vanishing in pairs of the sense-object and the knowing mind at every moment of contemplation is called **knowledge of dissolution** (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). Having perceived that both the knowing mind and the phenomenal sense objects are incessantly dissolving and vanishing both within and outside, it would occur to the meditator that "nothing is dependable and everything is really frightful." This is what is called awareness of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*). When such awareness takes place, all sensations that

are known and the knowing mind successively appearing will be considered as being faulty and undesirable in many different ways. This is known as knowledge of misery (*ādinava-ñāṇa*). If, from among the many faults that have been realised by the knowledge, reflection is made in connection with sensual pleasures, they will appear similar to a cleaver and a chopping-board.

## A Cleaver and Chopping-board

Relating to the question as to “What is meant by the cleaver and the chopping-board (*ka asisūnā*),” the Buddha replied:

*“Asisūnāti kho bhikkhu pañcanneytaṃ kāmaguṇānaṃ ādhivacanam.”*

The above answer denotes: “Bhikkhu! The cleaver (*asi*) and the chopping-board (*sūnā*) refer to the five strands of sensual pleasures (*kāmaguṇa*) — pleasurable sights, sounds, odours, tastes, and contacts.” When meat needs to be cut, it should be cut with a cleaver after placing it on a chopping-board. In the same way, the defilements cut and slice all sentient beings, using the five strands of sensual pleasures as a base or chopping-board. It means that having found pleasure and delight in the five strands of sensual pleasure due to defilements, people are in trouble and suffering. To gain sensual pleasures, one has to strive, undergoing great physical and mental hardships. While so doing, if unwholesome deeds are committed, one will go down to the four lower realms after death. It is analogous to being tortured and sliced with the cleaver of human passion (*rāga*), having been placed on a chopping-board. Even if one is fortunate enough to be reborn in the human or celestial realms by virtue of one’s merits, one will have to face death eventually, since death is inevitable in any form of existence. One meets with death because of suffering brought about by defilements. It resembles killing by cutting with the cleaver after being placed on the chopping-board by perceptions of sensual pleasures.

Since time is limited, I will not elaborate. In brief, the meaning of the statement: “Reject the cleaver and the chopping-board” means to contemplate pleasurable sensations with the knowledge of misery and reject the attachment to sensual pleasures.

When becoming aware of the unsatisfactory condition through the knowledge of misery no pleasurable feeling will arise on contem-

plating or recollecting pleasures. The mind becomes wearied by them. There is also feelings of disgust. The mind is devoid of pleasure knowing fully the truth of psycho-physical phenomena that have occurred. This awareness is **knowledge of disgust** (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*).

The Buddha has taught how this knowledge arises as follows: "He becomes weary of sights (*rūpesupi nibbindati*), he becomes weary of eye-consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇepi nibbindati*), he becomes weary of mental objects (*dhammesupi nibbindati*), he becomes weary of mind-consciousness (*manovīññāṇepi nibbindati*)."<sup>1</sup>

On becoming weary, the desire arises to abandon or get released from this body and mind. This is **knowledge of desire for deliverance** (*muñcitu kamyatā-ñāṇa*). Wishing to gain deliverance, contemplation should be made continuously as usual. When contemplated again and again, a special awareness occurs that is extraordinary. This special awareness is **knowledge of re-observation** (*paṭisañkhā-ñāṇa*). As this knowledge gains maturity, awareness that can view psycho-physical phenomena with equanimity arises, which is **knowledge of equanimity about formations** (*sañkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). Among the stages of insight knowledge, this is the best next to knowledge of adaptation. Therefore, when this knowledge arises, one feels great bliss, causing an extremely delicate passion for the Dhamma (*dhamma-rāga*). If this passionate feeling cannot be discarded, the knowledge of the Path (*magga-ñāṇa*) and its Fruition (*phala-ñāṇa*) will not be achieved. It is therefore of paramount importance to abandon this passion for the Dhamma.

## A Piece of Flesh

Of all the fifteen riddles, it has been given the name of "*maṃsapesi*," i.e. a piece of flesh, in view of its prime importance. Therefore, in response to the question that was put as: "What is the meaning of the expression-"a piece of flesh?," the Buddha gave the reply:

*"Maṃsapesi'ti kho, bhikkhu, nandīrāgassetam adhivacanaṃ."*

It means: "Bhikkhu! The meaning of "a piece of flesh" is sensual delight (*nandīrāgasa*), that is desire that inclines towards pleasure." People who are non-vegetarians are very fond of meat. Lions, tigers, and jackals, or eagles and crows and other birds of prey are also

<sup>1</sup> In the "Fire Sermon," the Āditta Sutta, S.iv.19 (ed.)

fond of meat. All those beings who crave for meat generally circle around it. Ants, crows, and dogs have to be scared away from meat. Flies also swarm round the flesh because they relish it. In the same way, the nature of pleasurable sensations and attachment are relished by all. Music and melodious sounds are liked by everyone. People enjoy fragrant odours, and relish delicious food.

They long to enjoy tactile pleasures, and immerse themselves in fanciful imagination. This mental inclination sensual delight. For them life is really pleasurable. Even in listening to the sermons, they would appreciate them more if the speaker's voice is pleasing, and want to hear humorous and interesting stories.

In general, most people do not enjoy reading scriptural texts as these may not invoke delight. That is why novels, romantic stories, or comics are best sellers. People have an insatiable appetite for them because famous authors can arouse sensual delight. Even tragic or thrilling stories arouse sympathy or fear, anxiety or anger, though the readers know that these stories are fictitious. Being stimulated and impelled by sensual delight, they have spent their money to buy the books that appeal to them. They also have an appetite for plays, concerts, films, or popular songs, which stimulate pleasure and delight. Some people enjoy taking liquor, because they give them pleasure and free imagination.

Sensual delight dominates people in worldly life. Such delights must be rejected in the process of contemplation. In fact, it was rejected earlier by abandoning the hindrance of sensual desire. If the gross forms of sensual delight cannot be rejected, it won't even be possible to listen to sermons, let alone to practice meditation.

Those who delight in sensual pleasures stay away from monasteries or pagodas. They are reluctant to pay even a brief visit to such holy places to gain merits. Then too, during the course of contemplation, sensual desire may arise. It so happens that when rejoicing in reflecting on the various phenomena as having the nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, as stated earlier, one merely notes them as such. While noting thus, the arising and passing away of phenomena becomes very vivid and clear.

One will then feel mental and physical ease, and become poised. Sensations seem to arise automatically, and awareness also becomes automatic. At that stage when noting is smooth, radiance or bright

lights may appear. One may feel as if floating in the air or riding on the waves. The mind becomes buoyant with rapture (*pīti*). At this point, one may be satisfied with what is happening. That means finding the Dhamma delightful with feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. This is also sensual delight — the piece of flesh.

Delight should therefore be dispelled by contemplating and noting it. Of course, it has already been embraced in the rejection of the tortoise. As mentioned earlier, after passing beyond this stage, insight will be developed, eventually leading to knowledge of equanimity about formations. With this realisation, noting becomes smooth and easy, requiring no special effort to become conscious of whatever occurs. Awareness of the arising and dissolution of mental and physical phenomena becomes spontaneous, and keen consciousness of mind occurs continuously for five, ten, twenty, or thirty minutes, or even one, two, or three hours, without any physical discomfort such as stiffness, aches, pain, hotness, or fatigue. Relaxation and comfort will be felt while remaining in the sitting posture, which is considered agreeable. This kind of appreciation with great satisfaction is also sensual delight. This satisfactory feeling of awareness should be continuously contemplated and noted, and if it noting persists, it will grow progressively, accelerating the process of noting with awareness. It will be something like making a dash to the winning post in a running event. The mind that is noted will repeatedly appear and vanish in an instant. This will eventually lead to the stage of cessation and total eradication of the phenomena of the arising and passing away of mind and matter. All of a sudden, *nibbāna* is seen in a flash. When it is attained, the realisation of the Noble Path (*sotāpatti-magga-ñāṇa*) and its Fruition (*phala-ñāṇa*) occurs. This is how the Path and its Fruition are attained after rejecting sensual delight.

On attaining the first path, and becoming a Stream-winner, if one continues to contemplate, knowledge of equanimity will be reached but sensual delight may not yet appear. If enjoyment with the taste of Dhamma occurs with delight, if the satisfactory condition that is felt is contemplated further, then noted and rejected, one will reach the Path of a Once-Returner. Thereafter, if a Once-Returner contemplates and notes, progress will be made towards knowledge of equanimity by which delight in the Dhamma will be enjoyed. The sensation would seem pleasurable. If one feels rejoices in that sensation, no further

progress will be made. However, if this pleasure is contemplated, noted, and rejected, the path of a Non-Returner will be attained.

If a Non-Returner continues with contemplation diligently, progress will be gained by stages. Thus, when the knowledge of equanimity is attained, the taste of Dhamma will be extremely delightful. If one remains contented with the delight derived from this agreeable knowledge of equanimity, one may be said to have been stricken with delight in the Dhamma. If that delight is contemplated ordinarily without being able to reject it, no further progress will be achieved. Such a person, after death, will be reborn in the Pure Abodes (*Suddhavāsa brahmāloka*), having failed to attain the path of Arahantship in this lifetime. Referring to this, it has been taught as: “*Tenava dhamma rāgena tāya dhammanandiyā opapātiko hoti tatthā parinibbāyi.*”

The above conveys the meaning that because of attachment to the insight knowledge of equanimity and clinging desire, rebirth takes place in the Pure Abodes. After becoming an Arahant in this abode, when the life-span expires, one will attain final cessation (*parinibbāna*). This is the Teaching that explains how the attainment of Arahantship has been hindered in the present existence because of this “piece of flesh,” called sensual delight. It should, therefore, be rejected. The expression “reject the piece of flesh” means reject sensual delight. This was elucidated by the Buddha himself. The statement “reject sensual delight” has been explained by the Commentary, which says the meaning is: “Total rejection of sensual delight is made by attaining the path of Arahantship.” Hence, the motto says: “What is the piece of flesh? It is human passion, which arouses sensual delight.”

## The Dragon

If anyone advances in the progress of insight, by rejecting this sensual delight, they will attain the Path and Fruition of Arahantship and become an Arahant completely free from sensual delight. On becoming an Arahant, extinct from all kinds of defilements, one is deemed to have come across the dragon. In reply to the question put as: “What is meant by the dragon (*ka nāgo*)?” the Buddha replied:

“*Nāgo’ti kho bhikkhu, khīṇāsavassetam bhikkhuno adhivacanam.*”



The gist of the above answer is: “Bhikkhu! The dragon (*nāga*) refers to an Arahant.” The statement that a dragon is found, conveys the meaning that having attained Arahantship one becomes an Arahant. As one has personally found the dragon as an Arahant free from all defilements, the Buddha is clearly known to him as a genuine Arahant. It would, therefore, be tantamount to meeting the Buddha. Having personally got rid of all defiling human passions, one knows for certain and becomes elated that the Buddha taught this Dhamma with his supreme wisdom gained from personal experience as an Enlightened One who has escaped all fetters. This is how the Buddha or the dragon is found. The motto is: “What is the dragon? It is the Arahant who has exterminated the human passions, which includes sensual pleasures, desire for existence, ignorance, and wrong views.

This is the end of the Sutta, so let us recite the last answer to remember: “The water-strainer refers to the hindrances; the tortoise to the aggregates, sensual passions to the chopping-board; flesh means sensual delight; and the dragon refers to the Arahant.”

### Worship the Dragon

When the ‘dragon’ was found, the Brahmaṇa Teacher had said as to what should be done. He had stated as follows:

*“Tīṭhatu nāgo, mā nāgaṃ ghaṭṭesi; namo karohi nāgassā’ti.”*

This means: “Let the dragon stay where it lies. Do not disturb or harm this dragon. The dragon should be revered and worshipped.” It means that after becoming an Arahant, there is nothing more to be done and nothing else to be rejected.

### How to Worship the Dragon

What is meant by the statement: “The dragon should be revered and worshipped.” It means: “As one had become an Arahant, one had actually found the Buddha.” Therefore, worship the Omniscient Buddha, since he, as an Arahant himself had found the dragon. Arahants ardently and willingly revere the Buddha without anyone’s advice or encouragement. All who meditate have the utmost reverence for the Buddha, having tasted the delights of the Dhamma. How to worship the Buddha is taught in the Cūlasaccaka Sutta of the Mūlapaṇṇāsa, Majjhimanikāya.

*“Buddho so bhagavā bhodāya dhammaṃ deseti.”*

Marvellous indeed is the Buddha, really worthy of reverence and refuge, who having fully realised the Four Noble Truths has taught all beings the truth of the noble Dhamma with his universal love, boundless compassion, and all-knowing wisdom. The Buddha taught and prescribed the way to escape the miseries of existence by expounding the Four Noble Truths in detail, citing various examples and illustrations, which will be explained in brief.

Contemplate at every moment all phenomena occurring at the six sense-doors, arising from the six perceptions, six types of consciousness, six kinds of contact, and six feelings. This is the essence of the Tipiṭaka. The senses arising from the six doors or apertures — the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind — should all be contemplated. Each door has five attributes. Six times five is thirty. If these thirty dhammas are contemplated to know the truth, the Path of Arahantship will be reached, leading ultimately to the attainment of nibbāna. Concisely taught, this would be comprehensive enough. If taught in such an abbreviated form, some people may not be able to comprehend. The Tipiṭaka — the three baskets of the Canon — are voluminous. With great compassion, the Buddha taught throughout his life, taking great pains to save mankind. This is the way in which Arahants worship the Blessed One. Let us bear in mind that we have realise the truth of the Dhamma by adhering to and practising all that has been taught, and thus we will pay our heartfelt homage to the Buddha.

The Blessed One would have avoided great trouble and hardship if he had remained without teaching and proclaiming the Dhamma, after attaining Enlightenment. If he had absorbed himself in *jhāna* and the attainment of fruition (*phala samāpatti*), he would have found ecstatic delight. However, without seeking his own happiness by remaining in a trance, he taught the Dhamma tirelessly throughout a period of forty-five years for the welfare and happiness of many. Let us, therefore, revere the Buddha again with our immense gratitude and recite as follows:

*“Buddho so bhagavā bhodāya dhammaṃ deseti.”*

The Blessed One in whose refuge mankind has found respite and shelter, having fully realised the Four Noble Truths in an

analytical way, has taught the Four Noble Truths out of great compassion, with infinite wisdom and foresight to enable all beings to see the light of the Dhamma.

There are five neatly phrased compliments to be borne in mind in the way of worshipping the Buddha:

1. The Buddha gained realisation by his own unaided effort and he taught all beings the universal principles of the Dhamma.
2. Having himself rejected all defilements, the Buddha tamed other beings by his teachings showing them the way to entertain right thoughts.
3. The Buddha, having reached a state of perfect mental tranquility, being endowed with noble-mindedness, he taught all beings to become knowledgeable, gentle, and calm like him.
4. The Buddha, having escaped from the whirlpool in the ocean of *saṃsāra*, taught all beings how to gain liberation from the miseries of existence, and how to reach the far shore of *nibbāna* on the other side of the vast ocean of *saṃsāra*.
5. The Buddha, having personally and fully extinguished the fires of lust and defilements, taught the Dhamma to mankind to enable them to extinguish the burning defilements, which have encompassed them in their worldly lives. Relating to the above, the first is expressed in the following phrase:

*“Buddho so bhagavā bodhāya dhammaṃ deseti.”*

And the second runs as follows:

*“Danto so bhagavā damathāya dhammaṃ deseti.”*

These who practise in compliance with the teachings of the Buddha become more cultured and refined, commensurate with their ability to practise with diligence. This is the benefit derived from the Buddhist way of life and culture. In the way of personal behaviour and speech, people can become elegant, gentle, and noble. The rule of moral training is such that they will refrain from killing or ill-treating other living things. Verbally too, they will avoid speaking falsehood and causing vexation to others. Thus, they will become highly cultured and civilised. This falls within the ambit of morality. When it comes to the realm of concentration, if one really practises the Dhamma diligently, no ill-will or resentment can take hold. In the domain of wisdom, if one practises

seriously, the seeds of the defilements will not germinate. Passionate desires like greed or anger will not even arise.

In ancient times, before the emergence of the Buddha, the people may be said to have been rather primitive and uncouth from the point of view of Buddhist culture, because human passions were uncontrolled and free to roam. According to the scriptures, the Buddha's teaching had spread to Burma during the time of King Thiri Dhammāsoka (Emperor Asoka), 236 years after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha. At that time when religious missions were sent out to proclaim the Dhamma to nine countries, Suvāṇṇabhūmi was one of the places the missionaries visited. The majority are of the opinion that Suvāṇṇabhūmi is the town of Thaton in the Union of Burma. However, some scholars say that it was the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. It is obvious that the Buddha's teaching once flourished in Thaton district. It appears to have spread to Thaton in Burma from Sumatra. In those days, one Venerable Soṇa and Venerable Uttara came to Burma as missionaries. It seems that Burma has inherited the Buddhist culture from that time onwards. Before that era, people in Burma were under-developed from the point of view of civilization and culture, and therefore, they must be deemed to have become cultivated and polished only after year 236 of the Buddhist Era. It was then present only in Lower Burma. According to the history of Burma, about the year 940-950 B.E.,<sup>1</sup> when upper Burma was under the reign of the famous King Anawrathā, Shin Araham was invited by the King for the promulgation of the Buddha's teaching (which later had sprung up from Pagan). Buddhist culture must be said to have become flourished in Burma since then.

It is vital to preserve and maintain the Buddhist culture inherited from the Buddha's dispensation, which has been handed down to us from our forefathers. If we fail to practise the Dhamma, this refined culture will dwindle, and if this teaching fades away, the people, not knowing the Buddha and his Dhamma, will come to ruin through indulging in all manner of vices and evil deeds. Such an unfortunate outcome would be disastrous for the Burmese culture.

About five years ago, I went to Indonesia on a religious mission. Buddhism had once flourished there, and traces of it could still be seen. At some later date, with the introduction of their own religion by the Muslims ruling that country, it has become an Islamic State.

---

<sup>1</sup> Burmese Era, 1014-1077 C.E.

There are now only a few Buddhists in Indonesia. During my stay, after having observed the activities of the people there, I happened to recollect a religious piece of writing, a passage extracted from the Dhamma, which runs as quoted below:

*“Buddho loke samuppanno hitayā sabba paninaṃ.”*

“The Buddha appeared in the world for the benefit of all beings.”

Now that over 2,500 years have elapsed. The Indonesian people did not seem to have any knowledge of the birth of the Buddha. Generally, even in villages within Burma, though the inhabitants are all Buddhists, it occurs to me that the Buddha’s teaching in these Burmese villages and hamlets could one day sink into oblivion. If this should happen, the state of affairs will be really pitiable.

We should, therefore, remain on guard with constant vigilance to protect the Buddhist culture from deterioration and destruction. The method of protection is to personally practise morality, concentration, and wisdom. In particular, efforts should be made to practise meditation to reach the stage of a Stream-winner. It is also necessary to encourage to all future generations — your children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren — to continue practising meditation in order to preserve and prolong this noble heritage of the Buddhist culture.

The Buddha, in whom we all take refuge, having eliminated all defilements, and become fully knowledgeable and highly cultured, has shown us the way with his penetrating foresight and deep wisdom to get liberated from the defilements in the same way that he himself succeeded in doing.

*“Santo so Bhagavā samathāya dhammaṃ deseti”*

The Blessed One, on whom reliance has been and is being made by all of us, having gained peace and tranquility of mind by getting rid of human passions and sensual desires, and having had a benevolent desire wishing all other beings to attain mental peace and calmness, has taught and taught us nobly to see the Truth of the Dhamma by invoking his noble wisdom which serves as a forerunner.

*“Tiṇṇo so Bhagavā taraṇāya dhammaṃ deseti.”*

The Blessed One, in whom we all have to seek refuge, having crossed the wide and deep ocean of *saṃsāra*, and reached the far shore of nibbāna, has taught the Dhamma with great compassion and profound wisdom to enable humanity to escape from all miseries and cross the ocean of *saṃsāra*.

All beings are drifting in the raging torrent of *saṃsāra*. This torrential flood consists of four floods: *kāmogha*, *bhāvogha*, *diṭṭhogha*, and *avijjhogha*. *Kāmogha* is the flood of sensual desire. A whirlpool or flood can drown a person. The same fate will befall someone who gets dragged into the whirlpool of sensual desire. If that person can perform the meritorious deeds of charity (*dāna*), morality (*sīla*), etc., he or she might have some relief by being reborn in the fortunate destinies (*sugati*) of heaven or the human world. If not, having committed evil deeds by resorting to killing or injuring living beings, stealing, cheating or fraud, he or she will be reborn in the four lower realms. This is being sucked into the whirlpool or swept away by the current of sensual desire.

Those who have performed meritorious deeds in the present existence will be reborn in the human or celestial worlds after death, where they will again have to undergo the same miseries of old age, sickness, and death, as well as encountering various kinds of physical and mental distress. This is being swept along in the stream of sensual desire towards the fortunate destinations in the sensual planes.

*Bhavogha* means clinging and attachment to pleasant existences of the realms of form and the formless realms of the *brahmā* realms. In these existences too, death will eventually take place. This amounts to succumbing to death by drowning in the ever raging torrent of existence.

*Diṭṭhogha* is the flood of wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*).

*Avijjhogha* indicates the acceptance of the erroneous concept of permanence, happiness, and self or ego, instead of the true nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Because of this ignorance (*avijjā*) and wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*), one will go down to the four lower realms with the consequence of misery and all kinds of suffering. Even in the world of human beings and gods, one will come across manifold suffering. In the *brahmā* realm too, death is inevitable. Therefore, this is nothing but killing a being by drowning him in the torrential floods called 'avijjā' and 'diṭṭhi.'

The Buddha taught this noble Dhamma to save all beings from the ocean of *saṃsāra*, in which they are drifting, to reach a safe zone, the deathless nibbāna. Therefore, the Buddha has exhorted us — all mankind — to take refuge in the Dhamma and work out our own salvation with diligence.

*“Parinibbuto so bhagavā parinibbānāya dhammaṃ deseti.”*

The Blessed One, who is truly worthy of reverence by all of us, having eliminated all human passions, has taught all mankind and shown us the Light of Dhamma with great compassion and profound wisdom to render benefit to all living beings enabling them to extinguish all defilements.

Now the explanation of the Vammika Sutta has been comprehensively covered. As stated in the Sutta, Venerable Kumāra Kassapa, after exterminating human passions, had become an Arahant. Some time later, Venerable Kumāra Kassapa was given the pre-eminent title of *“Etadagga,”* extolling him as the noblest and the most learned monk among his disciples who could preach the Dhamma in a most distinctive way.

## Conclusion

“Seeing a big ant-hill, smoking by night, and ejecting flames by day, the noble teacher instructed his intelligent pupil to investigate. On digging it with a hoe, he discovered a bolt, a toad, a junction, a water-strainer, a tortoise, a cleaver, a chopping-board, a piece of flesh, and a dragon, making a total of fifteen riddles.”

1. The ant-hill refers to the body; smoking by night to imagination; ejecting flames by day to performing actions; the noble teacher is the Buddha; the intelligent pupil is the meditator.

2. The hoe refers to knowledge; digging to exertion; the bolt is ignorance; the toad refers to anger; the junction to doubt. It is for you to know all about yourself.

3. The water-strainer is the hindrances; the tortoise is the aggregates; sensual desires are the chopping-board; sensual delight is the piece of flesh; and the dragon is the Arahant; and this is for you to learn by heart.

### **The Beneficial Results of Insight**

If impermanence is seen, then unsatisfactoriness is obvious. If unsatisfactoriness is reflected upon, the perception of not-self becomes clear. When not-self is revealed it leads into the stream to nibbāna, which if realised, brings certain liberation from the four lower realms of suffering.

May all those good and pious people who form this congregation, by virtue of having given devoted attention to this discourse on the Vammika Sutta, be forever free from all dangers and disaster. May they be able to practise insight meditation diligently as instructed in this Sutta. After passing through the different stages of insight knowledge up to path knowledge, may they soon attain the bliss of nibbāna and be fully emancipated from all miseries and sufferings.

*Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu*



# Index

## A

- aggregate of consciousness  
(*viññāṇakkhandhā*), 85
- aggregate of feeling  
(*vedanakkhandhā*), 85
- aggregate of mental formations  
(*saṅkhārakkhandhā*), 85
- air element (*vāyodhātu*), 25-28, 38,  
46, 73-74, 80
- anger (*vyāpāda*), 83
- annihilationism (*ucchedadiṭṭhi*), 79
- ant-hill (*vammika*), 1-6, 20-21, 23-25,  
28, 30, 33, 40, 45, 46, 58, 63, 101
- attainment (*samāpatti*), 49
- attainment of fruition (*phala  
samāpatti*), 96
- awareness of fearfulness (*bhaya-  
ñāṇa*), 89

## B

- bliss of liberation (*vimuttisukha*), 52
- body hairs (*loma*), 22
- bolt (*laṅgiṃ*), 3-6, 40, 47, 53, 55, 57,  
58, 61, 65, 101

## C

- cessation of perception and  
feeling (*nirodhasamāpatti*), 55, 56
- characteristic (*lakkhana*), 72
- charity (*dāna*), 8, 39, 81, 100
- chopping-board (*sūnā*), 5, 6, 40, 90,  
95, 101
- cleaver (*asi*), 5, 6, 90, 101
- compassion (*karuṇā*), vii, 8, 41, 45,  
60, 62, 96-97, 100, 101
- concept (*paññatti*), 72
- contemplation of consciousness  
(*citānupassanā*), 37, 64
- contemplation of feelings  
(*vedanānupassanā*), 37
- conundrums (*paheḷi*), 5

## D

- death (*maccaṇā*), 9
- digestion (*pācakatejo*), 26
- dispensation (*sāsana*), 6, 7, 13, 33,  
44, 49, 98
- district (*janapadaniruttiṃ*), 5
- doubt (*vicikicchā*), 63
- dragon (*nāga*), 5-6, 40, 94-95, 97, 99,  
101
- dry-visioned Arahant (*sukkha-  
vipassaka*), 10

## E

- earth element (*paṭhavīdhātu*), 6, 9,  
21, 24-28, 30, 46, 74
- emitting smoke (*dhūmayānā*), 2, 5,  
20, 30, 40, 80
- equanimous feeling (*upekkhā-  
vedanā*), 85
- eternalism (*sassatadiṭṭhi*), 79
- expelling bright flames (*pajjalanā*),  
31

## F

- fever (*santappatejo*), 26
- final cessation (*parinibbāna*), 12,  
19, 94, 98
- fire element (*tejodhātu*), 25-28, 74
- fire of decay (*jīraṇatejo*), 26
- first person (*amhayoga*), 55
- five aggregates, 40, 72, 82, 85-86,  
88
- five aggregates of grasping  
(*upādānakkhandhā*), 51
- five hindrances (*pañca-nīvaraṇa*), 81
- five strands of sensual pleasures  
(*kāmaguṇa*), 90
- five workers (*karaka maggaṅga*), 39
- formless realm (*arūpaloka*), 56
- fortunate destinies (*sugati*), 100
- function (*rasa*), 72, 76

function of movement  
(*samudīraṇa-rasa*), 74

## H

head hairs (*kesa*), 21  
heart-base, 78  
hoe (*kuddāla*), 45  
huge army (*mahāsenā*), 9

## I

ignorance (*avijjā*), 40, 48, 53, 58, 65,  
66, 80, 95, 100, 101  
impermanence (*anicca*), 88

## K

knowledge (*ñāṇa*)  
analytical knowledge of body  
and mind (*nāmarūpapariccheda-  
ñāṇa*), 84  
of adaptation (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), 89  
of arising and passing away  
(*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*), 89  
of desire for deliverance  
(*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*), 91  
of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*), 91  
of dissolution (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*), 89  
of equanimity about formations  
(*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*), 91  
of fruition (*phala-ñāṇa*), 7, 19, 44,  
53, 83, 91, 93, 96  
of misery (*ādinava-ñāṇa*), 90  
of previous existences  
(*pubbenivāsa-ñāṇa*), 51  
of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhā-  
ñāṇa*), 91  
of the path (*magga-ñāṇa*), 19, 91

## L

Law of Dependent Origination  
(*paṭiccasamuppāda*), 51  
league (*yojana*), 18  
learning (*sutamayapaññā*), 48  
loving-kindness (*mettā*), 41

## M

manifestation (*paccupatṭhāna*), 72  
materiality (*rūpa*), 20, 27, 35, 52, 72  
meditation experience (*paṭipatti*), 56  
mental formations (*cetasikā*), 75, 82  
mentality (*nāma*), 72, 75, 87  
mindfulness of breathing, 13  
mind-made (*manomaya*), 56  
morality (*sīla*), 8, 12, 33, 34, 39, 41-  
42, 44, 45, 55, 81, 97, 99  
moving (*samudīraṇa*), 74

## N

neither perception nor non-per-  
ception (*nevasaññā-  
nāsaññāyatana*), 49, 51  
non-returner (*anāgāmi*), 94  
Non-returner (*anāgāmi*), 11-13, 17,  
94  
nothingness (*ākāraññāyatana*), 50  
not-self (*anatta*), 88

## O

on good terms (*saṅgaram*), 9  
only path (*ekāyano maggo*), 40

## P

passion (*rāga*), 90  
passion for the dhamma (*dhamma-  
rāga*), 91  
path (*magga*), 39  
path factors (*maggāṅga*), 38  
patience (*khanti*), 62  
perfections (*pāramī*), 7, 11, 13, 40,  
44, 68  
piece of flesh (*mamsapesi*), 5, 6, 28,  
40, 91, 93-94, 101  
pleasant feeling (*sukha-vedanā*), 85  
proximate cause (*padaṭṭhāna*), 72  
psychic powers (*iddhi*), 10-11, 56  
purity of mind (*citta-visuddhi*), 83  
purity of morality (*sīla-visuddhi*), 83

## R

- rainy season (*vassa*), 1  
 rapture (*pīti*), 18, 93  
 realisable by oneself (*sandiṭṭhiko*), 69  
 reasoning (*cintāmayapaññā*), 48  
 recollection of death (*marañānussati*), 8, 9  
 right action (*sammākammanta*), 34, 39  
 right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*), 34, 38  
 right effort (*sammāvāyama*), 34  
 right exertion (*sammappadhānaṃ*), 8, 47, 69  
 right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), 34, 39  
 right mindfulness (*sammāsati*), 38  
 right speech (*sammāvācā*), 34, 38, 39  
 right thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*), 34, 38  
 right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*), 34

## S

- scriptural learning (*pariyatti*), 55  
 self (*atta*), 26, 79, 88, 100  
 sensual delight (*nandirāgasa*), 91-94, 101  
 soul (*atta*), 69  
 speedily attaining knowledge (*khippābhiññānaṃ*), 19  
 strive with heedfulness (*appamādena sampādetthā*), 35  
 supernatural powers (*abhiññā*), 8  
 supernatural vision (*dibbacakkhu*), 51

## T

- teacher of gods and men (*satthādeva manussānaṃ*), 41  
 third person (*namayoga*), 55  
 thirty-two body parts (*koṭṭhāsa*), 21  
 toad that swells (*uddhumāyika*)  
 when touched, 3-6, 40, 58-61, 63, 67, 80, 101  
 toe-nail (*nakhapiṭṭhi*), 4  
 tortoise (*kummo*), 5, 40, 85, 87, 88, 93, 95, 101  
 training (*sikkhā*), 33, 42, 97  
 transcendent (*lokuttara*), 45

## U

- ultimate realities (*paramattha*), 64, 72, 74  
 unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), 39, 86, 88, 92, 100, 102  
 unwholesome action (*akusala-kamma*), 39

## W

- water element (*āpodhātu*), 5, 25-28, 30, 74  
 wholesome action (*kusala-kamma*), 39  
 with immediate result (*akāliko*), 69  
 world cycle (*kappa*), 50  
 world of beings (*sattaloka*), 33  
 worldlings (*puthujjana*), 22, 87  
 wrong-view (*micchā-diṭṭhi*), 100

## Index of Proper Names

- Ariyāvāsa Sutta, [33](#), [55](#), [56](#)  
 Ālāra Kālāma, [49](#), [51](#), [52](#)
- Bāhiya Dārucīriya, [14](#), [17](#), [19](#), [20](#)  
 Bāhiya Sutta, [19](#)  
 Bhaddekaratta Sutta, [8](#)  
 Bhikkhuṇī Somā, [58](#)  
 Blind Men’s Grove (Andhavana),  
[20](#)
- Dabba, [13](#), [19](#)  
 Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta, [13](#)
- Hitopadesa, [15](#), [16](#)
- Kumāra Kassapa, [vi](#), [1](#), [2](#), [6](#), [20](#), [31](#),  
[45](#), [81](#), [101](#)
- Mount Popa, [7](#)
- Nirodha Sutta, [56](#)
- Pukkusāti, [13](#), [19](#)  
 Puṇṇovāda Sutta, [18](#)
- Sabhiya, [13](#), [20](#)  
 Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, [35](#), [40](#), [57](#), [64](#),  
[69](#), [70](#)  
 Sāvatti, [17](#), [18](#), [60](#)  
 Soppāraka, [14](#), [18](#)  
 Suddhavāsa, [12](#), [13](#), [17](#), [20](#), [94](#)  
 Suvaṇṇabhūmi, [14](#)
- Taxila, [13](#)
- Uddaka, [51](#)
- Venerable Assaji, [68](#)  
 Venerable Bhaddiya, [68](#)  
 Venerable Koṇḍañña, [68](#)  
 Venerable Lāḷudāyī, [55](#)  
 Venerable Ledi Sayādaw, [54-56](#), [70](#),  
[72](#)  
 Venerable Mahānāma, [68](#)  
 Venerable Theelon Sayādaw, [72](#)  
 Venerable Vappa, [68](#)  
 Visuddhimagga, [37](#), [68](#), [71](#), [72](#)