


The Truth

Taught by
All The Buddhas



Bhikkhu Revata

The Truth Taught by All the Buddhas



The Buddha of this era and the Buddhas of past eras have all taught only two kinds of truths, and nothing more than these:

‘I have taught the Dhamma that I myself have directly penetrated. All the Dhamma I taught between the day I became enlightened and the day I took final Nibbāna – all the Dhamma I have taught are true. There is nothing I have taught which is untrue.’

‘I have not taught a Dhamma which you cannot practise.’

Sañjaya Belatthiputta replied, ‘All the wise will go to the Buddha. The fools will come to me. Do not worry.’

A person can poison others, but the Dhamma will never poison anyone. Depend on the Dhamma; then, and not on the person.

Mentality does not originate in the brain. In fact, there is not the slightest trace of mentality in the brain.

The way many of us have practised vipassanā in the past is like sitting for an exam without having done any preparation. We do not really have any objects to contemplate. From today on, never just go and sit; prepare first.

One day we all must leave this body behind. This body itself is useless; it is a repulsive body. However, we can also make use of this body. If one can dig the Dhamma out from this useless and repulsive body, one's body will prove very valuable. This is the only use one can make of this body.

Seeing the truth means seeing all living and non-living things, all the countless things that exist, as one. Whatever one sees, one knows that without exception it is just this – which is arising and perishing rapidly all the time in the form of sub-atomic particles. Therefore, one no longer has confusion, because everything becomes the same, regardless of whether one likes or dislikes it, or whether one loves it or hates it. One's vision becomes clear.

The authentic Dhamma is what we should propagate and impart to others, if we have the intention and circumstances to do such propagation. It is our responsibility to do so, for our own good and the good of many others, including future generations.

If one wants to be healthy, one needs to sustain a healthy mind by not allowing unhappiness to come in and by preventing sorrowful feelings from influencing one's mind. We should always find the way to develop a healthy mind.

Our kamma is faithful. Good kamma always gives good results, and bad kamma always gives bad results. They are always faithful in giving their respective results. Carefully consider whether you would like to continue your life's journey with good faithful kamma or with bad faithful kamma. The choice is yours.

Maintaining interest in self-admonishment is the way to grow up, as opposed to the way to grow old. The foolish person grows old; the wise person grows up.

Other people cannot make you unhappy unless you allow them to do so.

If one wants to open the door to Nibbāna, and to remove defilement, which is the cause of suffering, and to attain liberation, one must follow the Buddha and not any particular teacher.

Those who reject the Abhidhamma are insulting the Omniscient Knowledge of the Buddha. He alone was able to teach the Abhidhamma, because He alone possessed Omniscient Knowledge.

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TAUGHT BY
ALL THE BUDDHAS

Bhikkhu Revata

*Namo kassa bhagavato arahato
sammā sambuddhassa*

THE TRUTH
TAUGHT BY
ALL THE BUDDHAS

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*Dedicated to all the Sangha
who have sustained the
original teachings of the Buddha
and kept them unadulterated
over the centuries.*

SABBADĀNAṂ DHAMMADĀNAṂ JINĀPI
The gift of truth excels all other gifts.

A GIFT - NOT FOR SALE

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Bhikkhu Revata

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INTRODUCTION

After attaining Full Enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of His life – forty-five years – going about teaching others the truth He had realised for Himself.

The truth the Buddha realised and taught is still available to us today. It is profound and far reaching. It consists of conventional truth and ultimate truth. There is no truth in the entire world that is not contained in these two truths. Outside of the conventional truth and ultimate truth taught by the Buddha, there is no truth whatsoever. What the Buddha taught explains everything completely.

Having access to both the conventional truth and the ultimate truth taught by the Buddha is an extremely precious opportunity. It is very beneficial to learn and study the Dhamma, but the profound nature of the Buddha's teaching becomes startlingly clear when it is practised. These two truths can liberate us from all suffering.

Hearing or reading the two truths taught by the Buddha is not enough for liberation. Knowledge is beneficial and necessary, but seeing for oneself is the only way to attain freedom from suffering.

The defilements that afflict our minds and cause us suffering are rooted in ignorance. Chief among the defilements is craving, the cause of suffering. One cannot simply stop craving by an act of will. One needs to know and see the truth of things as they really are, *yathābhūta-nāṇa-dassana*, which essentially means knowing and seeing ultimate

truth. Even though all of the Buddhas wanted to emphasise ultimate truth and would have preferred to teach only that, they never left conventional truth behind when expounding the profound Dhamma to the world in order to help us understand ultimate truth. What conventional and ultimate truth are is elucidated in this book. When one truly knows and sees ultimate truth, ignorance is eliminated, and one becomes truly wise. When one attains knowledge and vision of the way things are, craving ceases. Suffering ceases. One realises the truth that the Buddha Himself realised. One attains Nibbāna.

What is necessary to be practised and realised is explained in this book.

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The Truth Taught by All the Buddhas

Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth

How many truths are taught by all the Buddhas? The Buddha of this era and the Buddhas of past eras have all taught only two kinds of truths, and nothing more than these. There are no other truths besides these two in the entire world. Everything in the entire world falls under one of these two kinds of truths. If we want to know how to live and how to die and how to make an end of suffering, we all need to know these two truths. The two truths which all the Buddhas taught are conventional truth and ultimate truth.

This may be a new idea for you. You are certainly familiar with the Four Noble Truths. We can classify the Four Noble Truths as Ultimate Truths, since they are true at all times and in all circumstances. By contrast, conventional truth is that which people agree upon by consensus and hold in common. It is therefore changeable and relative to some extent; it is not always and everywhere true. Ultimate truth is independent of consensus; it is true regardless of whether anyone agrees with it or even so much as recognises it.

The Truth Taught by All the Buddhas

Consider, as an illustration, that people agree to name a certain shape as ‘man’. They agree to name another shape as ‘bull’. They agree to name yet another shape as ‘horse’. If someone points to a horse and says, ‘That is a horse’, the statement is true conventionally. Likewise, if someone asserts the existence of men and women, devas and brahmās, fathers and mothers, and so forth, such assertions are true by virtue of common consensus. Yet it is also true to state that there are no men or women, no fathers or mothers, no sons or daughters, and no horses or trees, because such statements as these are true in light of the ultimate truth taught by the Buddha. So both sets of statements are true. The former is true from the conventional point of view; the latter, from the ultimate point of view.

While all the Buddhas wanted to emphasise ultimate truth and would have preferred to teach only that, they never left conventional truth behind when expounding the profound Dhamma to the world. On the level of ultimate truth, there is no man, no woman, no deva, no brahmā, no father, and no mother. The conventional rules that govern society and relationships do not apply here. Hearing only the teaching of ultimate truth, people might hold wrong view and not observe social conventions. If one were to accept only the ultimate point of view, one could do every possible wrong – or rather, there would be no possibility of wrong and no mistakes because there would be no man or woman or father or mother or any person at all to experience the results of one’s actions. Nor would there be anyone to perform wholesome deeds, because there would be no being who does them. There would be no point in accumulating wholesome kamma or in avoiding wrong actions. Had the Buddha taught only ultimate

truth, people would not follow the rules of society, and many undesirable things would occur in the world.

Conventional Truth

Concepts

Nevertheless, conventional truth does not ultimately exist. To understand how this is so, it is necessary to understand what concepts are. The Pāli word for concept is *paññatti*. In the Abhidhamma the Buddha taught two classifications of concepts. The first is ‘concept-as-meaning’ (*atthapaññatti*), which is the idea indicated by a particular designation, or the meaning indicated by a name or word. The second is ‘concept-as-name’ (*nāmapaññatti*), which is the name or word that conveys a particular meaning or idea or indicates a designated thing.¹

Nāmapaññatti, or ‘concept-as-name’, can also be termed *saddapaññatti*. *Sadda* means ‘sound’ or ‘voice’. When we say the word ‘man’ our voice produces this particular sound or series of sounds. The sound of the word expresses the concept. The sound, of course, is not visible; it can’t be seen. But if you write down the word, ‘m-a-n’, the written word ‘man’ can be seen and read, and the concept is expressed in a visible way. This is also *saddapaññatti*. So through *saddapaññatti*, concepts are expressed.

¹ CMA Chapter VIII: Compendium of Conditionality, Analysis of Concepts, pages 325-328. See also PoP, footnote 11, pages 233-235.

As for *atthapaññatti*, or ‘concept-as-meaning’, the audible sound of the word ‘man’ allows the hearer to understand what is meant. When you hear the word ‘man’, you understand what it means, and you will not conceive the idea of a woman or a tree or anything else. The same holds true for the written word. *Atthapaññatti* is the understood meaning. So, by means of *saddapaññatti* and *atthapaññatti*, concepts are expressed and understood. Meaning is conveyed.

So, *atthapaññatti* are the meanings conveyed by the concepts, while *nāmapaññatti* are the names or designations that convey that meaning. For example, the notion of a four-legged furry domestic animal with certain physical features and traits is the concept-as-meaning of the term ‘dog’; the designation and idea ‘dog’ is the corresponding concept-as-name.

Conventional Truth Is Relative and Arbitrary

Concepts (*paññatti*) are conventional truth. *Paññatti* is rather arbitrary and relative, and it cannot be true at all times and in every place. It does not really matter whether we call the sun ‘sun’ and the moon ‘moon’ or vice versa, provided there is consistency of usage and the possibility of common understanding. The name given to an object is arbitrary. We are able to convey meaning by using words in this way due to common agreement. While it may be true to say ‘This is a tree’ or ‘That is a dog’, the truth value of such statements is solely due to consensus. It is conventional truth, not universal or absolute truth.

Conventional Truth Is Relative and Arbitrary

The relative and arbitrary nature of conventional designations is further illustrated by the fact that the designation of a thing changes when the form of the thing itself changes. For instance, the form of a tree changes when we cut it down and saw it up into pieces of a certain shape. Then we can no longer call it a tree but we call it ‘boards’, even though the boards are made up of the same combination of elements as the tree, because these elements are no longer in the form of a tree but in the form of boards. Then if we fashion the boards into the shape of a table, we call the new form ‘table’ and not ‘tree’ or ‘boards’. Thus, when a thing changes from one form to another, we can no longer call it by its previous name – ‘*Yasmiṃ bhinne, buddhiyā vā avayavavinibbhoge kate na taṃsaññā*’ which means ‘The original perception (labelling or naming) of an object is no longer applicable when it is broken, or when it is analysed by knowledge and divided into its constituent parts’.²

The same principle holds true not only when there is a change in external shape but also when something is deconstructed into its constituent parts. Consider that the human body is made up of many parts. Suppose a medical student or a coroner were to dissect a human body and lay out all its various parts on a table. There we would see head-hair, eyes, teeth, lungs, liver, stomach, kidneys, and so forth. Would we call these parts a man, or a woman, or a human body? No, it is no longer any of these things. We now see just parts of the body – head-hair, eyes, teeth, lungs, liver, stomach, kidneys, and so forth.

² Subcommentary to DN.I.9 Poṭṭhapādasuttam (DN 9 The Discourse Concerning Poṭṭhapāda).

If we disassemble a car into its constituent parts – engine, steering wheel, brakes, chassis, and so on – we can no longer apply the name ‘car’ to these disconnected parts. So again, when a thing changes from one form to another, it can no longer be called by the previous name. What was true before – ‘This is a body’, ‘This is a car’ – is no longer true; the prior assertion is therefore merely conventional truth. In the very same way, if we analyse with Insight Knowledge, we see that conventional truth does not really exist. How this happens will be explained later in the book.

The Importance of Conventional Truth

Even if conventional truth does not ultimately exist, we should not conclude that it is somehow unimportant. On the contrary, we need to recognise its vital importance. The act of making an offering may serve as an example. Four conditions are needed to make an offering: a donor, a receiver, something to offer, and the intention to offer it. Of these four, the first three are conventional truth, or *paññatti*. The intention to offer is ultimate truth; it is volition, which is *cetanā*. It is one of the fifty-two *cetasika*, or mental factors, and is classified as ultimate truth. Thus, we cannot make an offering without conventional truth, because three of the four necessary conditions are conventional truths. So conventional truth is indispensable even for just making an offering successfully.

Moreover, consider that we make offerings because we know the benefits of doing so. By making an offering, we can be reborn in a good realm, such as the celestial realm or the human realm. As for celestial beings and the celestial realm, and human beings and the human realm, these

The Importance of Conventional Truth

are all conventional truth. They are paññatti. So here again, without conventional truth, we would have no means or opportunity to make an offering, because in the absence of conventional truth there would be no celestial beings or human beings or any result of performing good kamma. Therefore the Buddha taught both conventional truth and ultimate truth.

You use the term ‘mother’ to designate the person who gave birth to you and fed you and raised you. You relate to her as your mother, in a way that is different from how you relate to any other woman. You cannot treat your mother in the way you would treat any other woman. Likewise, you relate to your father as your father, and you do not treat him as you would any other man. The same is true of your brothers and sisters and those who are ordained; you relate to all these people in a particular way that is different from the way you relate to someone who is not your brother or sister or a monk or a nun. While these relationships are conventional truth, it does not make them any less true or somehow unimportant. It would be unwholesome if we failed to respect conventional truth in these matters. On the contrary, conventional truth is very important, as we see here. When people do not respect conventional truth, the world is beset with much unwholesomeness.

Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar is revered by devout Buddhists. It enshrines the relics of four past Buddhas and the things they used. Devout Buddhists visit the shrine respectfully, with unshod feet and appropriate dress, and they behave respectfully while they are there. They ask non-Buddhists who visit the shrine to do the same. Some

people who are not devout Buddhists have been critical of this devotion and have even said, ‘Buddhists pay respect to a pile of bricks.’ But Shwedagon is called, and indeed is, a pagoda; it is no longer a mere ‘pile of bricks’. Instead, it is something to be respected. Similarly, when something is designated as a meditation hall, people behave themselves inside it in a particular way, and not as if they were in any other sort of hall, or in an auditorium. Without due respect with regard to conventional truth, unwholesome behaviour occurs. This is the importance of conventional truth.

In the *Singāla Sutta*,³ the Buddha has explained the duties of fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, and people in various social positions. If we are in the position of a father, we must fulfil the duties of a father. It is the same for a mother. If our role is that of a son or a daughter, we must fulfil our duties as sons and daughters. Otherwise, we cannot live harmoniously, and human society cannot function. The Buddha used conventional truth to teach us these things.

Means to Convey the Profound Dhamma

Of course, the Buddha taught many other things as well. Above all, He taught the way to make an end of suffering. In addition, the Buddha taught how to fulfil *pāramī* (perfections) in order to become an Omniscient Buddha, a Pacceka Buddha (a solitary Buddha), a Chief Disciple, a

³ DN.III.8 *Singālasuttaṃ* (DN 31 The Discourse Concerning *Singāla*), also known as *Sīgālovādasuttaṃ* (The Discourse on Advice to *Singāla*).

Means to Convey the Profound Dhamma

Great Disciple, and an ordinary Arahant Disciple. Over and over the Buddha explained what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. In teaching all these things, the Buddha made use of conventional terms and conventional truth. We see how necessary conventional truth is. Without it, we would be utterly unable to receive and understand the teachings of the Buddha, and we would have no chance of liberation.

Moreover, conventional truth is essential not only to receiving the Dhamma but also to the very possibility of expressing ultimate truth. This point is strikingly clear in the case of Pacceka Buddhas, solitary or private Buddhas, who arise in the world during those times when a Sammāsambuddha, an Omniscient Buddha, does not arise, and the teaching of the Dhamma is consequently not available. Like Sammāsambuddhas, Pacceka Buddhas are also Self-Enlightened Buddhas; They attain Enlightenment by Their own efforts, unaided by any teachers.

However, when a Sammāsambuddha attains Fourth Path Knowledge, this Path Knowledge is associated with Omniscient Knowledge. The Fourth Path Knowledge of a Pacceka Buddha is not associated with Omniscient Knowledge. It is the Omniscient Knowledge of a Sammāsambuddha that that enables Him to explain the nature of the Dhamma in words by using conventional truth. After hearing the explanation of the Omniscient Buddha in words of conventional truth, we ourselves can follow the teaching and practise for the attainment of Nibbāna. We can also impart the teaching to others by the same means and for the same end. However, even though a Pacceka Buddha has penetrated the profound Dhamma,

He lacks Omniscient Knowledge and is therefore unable to use conventional truth to explain the nature of the profound Dhamma in words.

The Commentaries explain that the Enlightenment of a Pacceka Buddha is like the dream of a mute person.⁴ A mute person cannot explain what he has dreamt. Pacceka Buddhas are like this. For that reason, when a Pacceka Buddha arises in the world, He cannot express in words the nature of *Paramattha Dhamma* (Ultimate Dhamma) that He has penetrated, nor can we receive the necessary teaching to practise for the attainment of Nibbāna. We have no opportunity to hear the explanation of the true nature of Dhamma in conventional terms. The way to Nibbāna, then, does not appear with the arising of a Pacceka Buddha.

Thus the indispensable importance of conventional truth is quite clear. The Omniscient Buddha conveyed the nature of Dhamma to us by means of conventional truth. Unless we hear the explanations in words of conventional

⁴ Commentary to Sn.I.3 Khaggavisāṇasuttam (The Discourse on the Rhinoceros Horn):

Buddhā sayañca bujjhanti, pare ca bodhenti. paccekabuddhā sayameva bujjhanti, na pare bodhenti. attharasameva paṭivijjhanti, na dhammarasaṃ. na hi te lokuttaradhammam paññattim āropetvā desetum sakkonti, mūgena dīṭṭhasupīno vīya vanacarakena nagare sāyitabyañjanaraso vīya ca nesam dhammābhisamayo hoti.

Buddhas are enlightened by themselves and they enlighten others: Paccekabuddhas are enlightened by themselves (but) they do not enlighten others: they comprehend only the essence of meaning (*attharasa*), not the essence of the idea (*dhammarasa*). Because they are not able to put the supramundane Dhamma into concepts and teach it, their realisation of the Dhamma is like a dream seen by a dumb man or like the taste of a curry from the city to one who lives in the forest.

truth, we have no opportunity to hear the Dhamma in such a way as to enable us to understand and follow and practise it. After the Buddha became the Fully Enlightened One, He expounded the Dhamma using conventional truth for forty-five years. All the Omniscient Buddhas expounded the profound Dhamma using conventional terms to make the profound Dhamma accessible to people. These very words are themselves conventional truth through which the Dhamma is accessible. So conventional truth is very important.

A Difficult Thing Done by the Buddha

The Milindapañha⁵ (The Questions of King Milinda) is a profound book that every Buddhist should read. At one point in this book⁶ King Milinda asks the Mahāthera Nāgasena, ‘Bhante, what very difficult thing did the Buddha do in His lifetime?’

The Mahāthera Nāgasena responded, ‘Yes, the Buddha did one thing that was exceptionally difficult. Before I tell you what it was, let me first ask you a question. There are five great rivers in Jambudīpa (ancient India), namely, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Aciravatī, the Sarabhū, and the Mahī. All of them flowed into the great ocean. The water from these five rivers all mingle together in the great ocean. So, King Milinda, suppose someone takes in the palm of his

⁵ Unique to the Burmese Khuddaka Nikāya, the Milindapañha recounts a profound and engaging discussion of the Dhamma between an Arahant bhikkhu named Nāgasena and Menander, the Graeco-Indian king of Bactria.

⁶ Mil.III.7.16 Arūpadhammavavatthānadukkarapañho (The Questions of King Milinda, Book III, Chapter 7, Question 16, page 133).

hand a certain amount of water from the great ocean and tastes the water with his tongue; is it possible to distinguish that this is the water from the river Gaṅgā, or this is the water from the river Yamunā, or this is the water from the river Aciravati, or this is the water from the river Sarabhu, or this is the water from River Mahi? Is it possible?’

King Milinda replied, ‘This is a very difficult task to do.’
(We can say that this is an impossible task to do.)

So the Mahāthera Nāgasena said to King Milinda, ‘The Buddha accomplished a task more difficult than this.’

In our physical heart, there is one particular place where blood gathers. If we form our palm into the shape of a scoop, there is a certain amount of liquid that can be collected in that space. This is about the same as the amount of blood that gathers in this certain part of our physical heart. Yet, in the very small amount of blood gathered at that small place in the heart, the Buddha could distinguish and name consciousness and each of the many different associated mental factors present there. He could discern the mentalities arising dependent on the heart-base within the heart and say, ‘This is consciousness, this is contact, this is feeling, this is perception, this is volition, this is one-pointedness of mind, this is life faculty, and this is attention.’ In this way the Buddha had discerned altogether sometimes thirty-four mentalities, sometimes thirty-five mentalities, various combinations of consciousness, and the fifty-two associated mental factors. The Buddha could distinguish and name all the wholesome and unwholesome mentalities. This accomplishment is much more difficult than distinguishing among the waters of the five great rivers.

Discerning the mentalities which arise in the blood gathered in our physical heart is more difficult than distinguishing among the waters of the five great rivers gathered in the ocean. Pacceka Buddhas are enlightened by themselves: they comprehend only the nature of the Dhamma, but they are unable to express in words what they have penetrated or to teach it to others. For our part, if we never had the chance to hear, ‘This is consciousness, this is contact, this is feeling, this is perception, this is intention, this is one-pointedness of mind, this is life faculty, this is attention’, would we ever have the capacity to understand such a truth on our own? So again, when a Pacceka Buddha arises in the world, He cannot enable others to attain Enlightenment as He has, because He cannot explain the nature of the Dhamma in words.

Citing this exchange between King Milinda and the Mahāthera Nāgasena, some meditation teachers say that it is impossible to distinguish mentality. However, the Mahāthera Nāgasena did not say that it is impossible to distinguish mentality but that it is very difficult to do so. As the Buddha said, ‘*Samādhim, bhikkhave, bhāvētha. Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*’ – ‘Bhikkhus, develop concentration. One who is concentrated knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are.’⁷ The Four Noble Truths are Suffering, the Origin of Suffering, the Cessation of Suffering, and the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Suffering is birth, ageing, sickness, death, being together with what one dislikes, being

⁷ SN.V.12.1.1 Samādhisuttam (SN 56.1 The Discourse on Concentration).

separated from what one loves, and not getting what one wants.

Still, these things are just ordinary suffering; to realise the Dhamma, one needs to go deeper. So in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha also said, ‘*Samkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*’ – ‘In brief, the five clinging aggregates are suffering.’⁸ What are the five clinging aggregates? The materiality aggregate, the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, the volitional formations aggregate, and the consciousness aggregate. The five clinging aggregates, and ultimate materiality and mentality, are one and the same thing. Hence we can paraphrase what the Buddha said as follows: ‘One who is concentrated will know and see Suffering, which is ultimate mentality and materiality.’ Ultimate mentality comprises consciousness, contact, feeling, perception, intention, one-pointedness of mind, the life faculty, attention, and many other mental factors. The Buddha guarantees that one who is concentrated will know and see these ultimate mentalities. Such discernment is possible. For more than thirteen years I have been teaching foreigners and local people how to distinguish and to analyse ultimate mentality in the blood collected in the heart. Anyone who aspires to discern these things needs to develop concentration first.

⁸ SN.V.12.2.1 Dhammacakkappavattanasuttam (SN 56.11 The Discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma).

Kamma and Its Results

Leaving aside ultimate truth, though, it is true conventionally that there is man, there is woman, there are devas, there are brahmās, there is a human realm, there are celestial realms, and there are brahmā realms. If we don't accept conventional truth, we will not accept the existence of human life and the human realm or celestial beings and the celestial realms. The same is true in the case of brahmā beings and the brahmā realms. Similarly, there are four woeful states⁹ where beings are born due to the bad kamma they have accumulated.

There is past, there is present, and there are future existences too. There is kamma and its results. There are the workings of kamma. There are low-born persons and high-born persons as well. There are those who are beautiful and those who are ugly. There are those who are wise and those who are foolish. If you agree with all these assertions, you accept conventional truth. Then, if there are humans, there will be the cause of human rebirth. If there are celestial beings, there will be the kamma which causes rebirth in the celestial realms.

Only the Buddha discovered the cause of rebirth in the human and celestial and brahmā realms. Without the Buddha, we would not know exactly the cause of rebirth in the good realms. The Buddha came to know for Himself that the cause of such good rebirth is threefold: *dāna* (making

⁹ The four woeful states are the hell realm, the animal realm, the ghost realm, and the realm of the *asuras*.

offerings), *sīla* (practising morality), and *bhāvanā* (practising meditation).

Wholesome kamma such as making offerings and practising morality can be the cause of rebirth in the human realm and the celestial realms. The potency and effect of that wholesome kamma can vary according to whether we committed that kamma with or without strong volition, wisdom, joy, and other such mental factors. We may also be attached to the life of human existence or celestial realm existences. Depending on the type of wholesome kamma and the strength of our attachment to a particular realm of existence, we will be reborn into either the human realm or the celestial realms if that wholesome kamma appears in the near-death moment. But wholesome kamma of this sort cannot cause us to be reborn into the brahmā realms. If the Buddha had not arisen in this age, we would not be able to know the cause of rebirth in the brahmā realms.

These consist of the first jhāna brahmā realms, second jhāna brahmā realms, third jhāna brahmā realms, and fourth jhāna brahmā realms. In the first jhāna brahmā realms, the brahmā beings spend most of their lifetimes entering and practising first jhāna concentration. If they have the capability, they may sometimes practise higher jhāna concentrations. The brahmā beings of the second jhāna brahmā realms spend most of their lifetimes entering and practising second jhāna concentration; if they have the capability, they may also enter and practise higher jhāna concentrations. It is likewise for the third and fourth jhāna brahmā realms.

Those who want to be reborn in one of the brahmā realms must attain the corresponding level of jhāna concentration

and must practise mastery of it. If they can then enter and maintain jhāna up to the near-death moment, they will be reborn in the corresponding jhāna brahmā realm after death and will appear there with a fully formed body. There will be no conception in a maternal womb. This is possible if one trains one's mind to practise ānāpāna meditation, kasiṇa meditation, mettā meditation, or any other type of meditation resulting in jhāna concentration, and attains mastery of any of the four material jhānas, and maintains jhāna concentration up to the near-death moment.

If we do not accept conventional truth, we will not acknowledge human existences and the human realm. We likewise cannot accept the existence of celestial beings and the celestial realms. Without accepting the existence of the human and celestial realms, we cannot accept the causes for rebirth into those realms either. If we do not accept the causes of rebirth into higher realms, we will not find the opportunity to accumulate wholesome kamma by making offerings, practising morality, and meditating.

There is great variety among the billions of people alive on this planet right now; in fact, no two are exactly alike. Some are attractive and some are unattractive. Some are wise while others are foolish. Some are high-born; others, low-born. All these differences are the results of different causes. There are differences in the causes; hence there are differences in the results. If it is God who causes these differences, I say that such a God has no mettā. Everyone wants to be attractive and wise and high-born, but not everyone is so; therefore, if it was a God who created the unattractive and the foolish and the low-born, then that God

has no mettā. This same God is said to have created animals – land creatures, water creatures, and creatures of the air – for human beings to eat as food. Such a God has no mettā, and advocating the killing of animals for food is a very dangerous teaching and profoundly wrong thought. However, it is not some God that creates all of us, but our own kamma.

The central teaching of the Buddha is the Law of Kamma. A Buddhist is someone who believes in the Law of Kamma. If you want to know the causes of rebirth in the four woeful states or the human realm or the celestial realms or the brahmā realms, you can know and see those causes directly for yourself by practising meditation. The Buddha said, ‘I have taught the Dhamma that I myself have directly penetrated. All the Dhamma I taught between the day I became enlightened and the day I took final Nibbāna – all the Dhamma I have taught are true. There is nothing I have taught which is untrue.’¹⁰ Elsewhere the Buddha said, ‘I have not taught a Dhamma which you cannot practise. I have taught only a Dhamma which you can practise.’¹¹ The Buddha taught His disciples to practise in order to penetrate the Law of Kamma, so we know that it is possible to do so. Therefore, we are

¹⁰ AN.IV.1.3.3 Lokasuttam (AN 4.23 The Discourse on the World):

‘Bhikkhus, whatever the Tathāgata speaks, utters, or expounds in the interval between the night when he awakens to the Unsurpassed Perfect Enlightenment and the night when he attains Final Nibbāna, all that is just so and not otherwise; therefore he is called the Tathāgata.’

¹¹ AN.II.2.9 Adhikaraṇavaggo (AN 2.19 Chapter on Disciplinary Issues).

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teaching meditators to know and to see the Law of Kamma.

You make offerings and practise morality and meditation in expectation of a better future life because you believe in kamma and its results. The Law of Kamma is true. One day, if you have developed concentration, you will know and see kamma and its results directly. As the Buddha said, ‘One who is concentrated knows and sees the Dhamma as they really are.’ The cause of this existence must be directly penetrated. Only at that time, your faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the Law of Kamma will have been developed deeply through direct knowledge, not by theoretical knowledge. This is what we must aim for. This is another step we must take and go towards. Do not be satisfied with your current standpoint.

Consider what your standpoint is at present. You believe in the Law of Kamma, but your belief is not unshakable. It can be shaken. This is because you know the Law of Kamma only through the teachings you have received from your teachers; you do not know for yourself through direct realisation. Therefore, we all have a responsibility to develop unshakable faith. Developing unshakable faith is your own responsibility, and no one else’s – not your teacher’s, not even the Buddha’s. However, your teachers are responsible for guiding you in your efforts to know and see these truths, if you are willing to be guided in this way.

The Danger of Partial Understanding

Partial understanding is dangerous. During the time of the Buddha, there were ascetics who could attain the supernatural power of divine eye.

With divine eye, some ascetics saw a person who had done evil in life being reborn in hell after dying, so they theorised that evildoers go to hell. Yet, some other ascetics saw someone who had done evil taking rebirth in a celestial realm after dying, so they concluded that evildoers go to heaven. Other ascetics happened to see with their divine eye someone who had done good being reborn in a celestial realm after dying, and they concluded by theorising that good persons go to heaven. Then some other ascetics saw someone who had done good taking rebirth in hell after dying, so they theorised and taught others that good persons go to hell. Since these theories were formed according to what they had seen with their divine eye, each teacher held strongly that his own view was true, and that the view of others was untrue.¹²

These ascetics were not disciples of the Buddha; they practised outside the Buddha's teachings. They did not practise under the guidance of the Buddha. Each held firmly to his own point of view, which was derived from partial understanding; this is very dangerous for oneself and for others. This is especially so for those who hold the views that those who do evil go to heaven and those who do good go to hell. People who hold such views will not see the

¹² MN.III.4.6 Mahākammavibhaṅgasuttam (MN 136 The Discourse on the Greater Exposition of Action).

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danger of doing evil deeds and the benefits of performing good deeds. Thus, they may live with confusion and so may tend to engage in doing evil deeds which will bring suffering to themselves and to others, both in the present and in the future.

The Buddha expounded on this point because He wanted to make it clear why some who seem to be evildoers go to heaven, while those who seem to be doers of good go to hell. It is possible that good men go to hell, but not because of the good actions they have done. Similarly, evildoers may go to heaven, but not because of their bad actions. The reasons are not understood by those who have merely attained supernatural powers. They lack full knowledge of kamma and its results, which is the domain only of a Buddha, Who possesses the ten powers of a Tathāgata¹³ as well as Omniscient Knowledge. Those who lack such knowledge and discernment also lack Insight Knowledge, which can be taught only by a Buddha. Therefore, they are not able to discern the causes for rebirth into good realms and the causes for rebirth into bad realms. They just happen to see someone who has done good take rebirth in hell after dying, and they conclude with the theory that good people go to hell. Then they see someone who has done evil take rebirth in a celestial realm after dying, so they conclude that evildoers go to heaven. They do not know the real reason, but the Buddha explains it.

¹³ MN.I.2.2 Mahāsīhanādasuttam (MN 12 The Greater Discourse on the Lion's Roar).

Now, except for one who has completely eradicated all defilements, no one is always wise, and no one is always foolish. Sometimes we do what is foolish and ignorant, and sometimes we do what is wise. It is not because we are born as humans that we become wise or foolish; it is because we can bring our defilements under control that we become wise. Conversely, it is because we cannot bring our defilements under control that we become foolish. This is entirely our own responsibility, so there is no reason to blame anyone else; instead, we should admonish ourselves. We should bring our defilements under control instead of blaming or admonishing others. We can give others suggestions, but there is no need to give anyone any orders. Finding fault with either oneself or others is not the way to make progress. Correcting oneself is the way to self-improvement, and giving others suggestions on how to be wise and do good is the way to help others improve. So we should be good friends to each other. There is no reason to complain about anyone.

As for those who have attained supernatural powers, and who see someone who spent time making offerings and practising morality and meditating take rebirth in hell, they theorise that good persons go to hell. Without true knowledge, they cannot explain this. However, the Buddha explained that there are times when we bring our defilements under control and do many good things. At other times, we cannot bring our defilements under control and do many bad things. If the ensuing bad kamma is strong enough to give its results at our near-death moment, we will be reborn into hell or into one of the four woeful realms. Even though we have done good actions, it is the bad actions we have done which mature and appear at our

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near-death moment. Likewise, we may take rebirth in a higher realm if our good kamma gives its results at our near-death moment, in spite of the wrong we have done. Nevertheless, according to the Buddha's teaching, although the other good and bad actions done in life may not come to maturity at the near-death moment, they may give their results at some other time when the right conditions are present.

Those who have merely attained supernatural powers have no such understanding. They do not have the ability to discern ultimate materiality and mentality and are consequently unable to discern the kamma that appears at the near-death moment of a dying person which determines the realm of rebirth. They are able to see only the outward display of actions performed by a certain person and not that person's mind in the form of ultimate mentality. The Law of Kamma is thus fully known only to a Buddha and not merely to one with supernatural powers. Even though someone has attained supernatural power, the teachings of such a person would be very dangerous if he possesses only partial understanding and if he does not know how to wield that power in the right way. So we cannot rely on those who have attained supernatural power if they do not have true knowledge.

A specific example of an evidently good person taking an unfortunate rebirth is that of Queen Mallikā, the queen of King Pasenadi of Kosala. Queen Mallikā had accumulated much wholesome kamma. She went to see the Buddha, she listened to the Dhamma, she made offerings, and she practised morality. On a certain day, however, she deceived the king. She then felt guilty about her deception,

and that kamma appeared at her near-death moment. King Pasenadi, after his queen had passed away, visited the Buddha to ask Him where Mallikā had been reborn.

The Buddha knew well that Queen Mallikā fell into hell after she died, so the Buddha used His psychic powers to prevent King Pasenadi from asking his question. For seven days he could not put his question to the Buddha; whenever he met with the Buddha, King Pasenadi would forget to ask. Only after seven days had past would the Buddha allow King Pasenadi to ask the question. The Buddha knew that after seven days, Queen Mallikā would finish her time in hell and would be reborn in heaven because she had done much wholesome kamma, whereas the bad kamma she had done was very little.

Even though Queen Mallikā was generally a good person, she fell into hell because the bad kamma she had accumulated through her wrong actions gave its results at her near-death moment; she was not born in hell due to her good actions. However, her good kamma caused her to take rebirth in heaven soon after; hence, you do not need to worry that the good kamma you have done will go to waste, since it will give its fruit in due time.

The Buddha did not emphasise the person; instead, the Buddha emphasised the Law of Kamma. In expounding this law, the Buddha taught that ‘good begets good, and bad begets bad’.¹⁴ Good kamma gives good results, and

¹⁴ AN.I.15.284-295 *Aṭṭhānapāli* (AN 1.284-295 The Chapter of Discourses on Impossible):

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bad kamma gives bad results. This is true without exception. The example of Queen Mallikā shows that we need to understand the relationship between causes and results, both good and bad.

‘It is impossible and inconceivable, bhikkhus, that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could be produced from bodily misconduct...verbal misconduct...mental misconduct; there is no such possibility. But it is possible that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result might be produced from bodily misconduct...verbal misconduct...mental misconduct; there is such a possibility.’ (284-286)

‘It is impossible and inconceivable, bhikkhus, that an unwished for, undesired, disagreeable result could be produced from bodily good conduct...verbal good conduct...mental good conduct; there is no such possibility. But it is possible that a wished for, desired, agreeable result could be produced from bodily good conduct...verbal good conduct...mental good conduct; there is such a possibility.’ (287-289)

‘It is impossible and inconceivable, bhikkhus, that a person engaging in bodily misconduct...verbal misconduct...mental misconduct could on that account, for that reason, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world; there is no such possibility. But it is possible...be reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell; there is such a possibility.’ (290-292)

‘It is impossible and inconceivable, bhikkhus, that a person engaging in bodily good conduct...verbal good conduct...mental good conduct could on that account, for that reason, with the breakup of the body, after death, be reborn in the plane of misery, in a bad destination, in the lower world, in hell; there is no such possibility. But it is possible...be reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world; there is such a possibility.’ (293-295)

The Meditator with a Scar

Another illustration of the Law of Kamma is the story of a meditator who could discern his past lives. This meditator had been born with a scar on his head; it was not something he acquired during birth or after he was born. The scar was not the result of any wound and could not be explained. Without the opportunity to practise the way the Buddha taught, it would have been impossible for him to realise and understand the causes for his scar.

This meditator could practise well and developed absorption concentration up to fourth jhāna. Then he was able to discern ultimate mentality and materiality, which are the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering. After that, he was instructed to know and see the Second Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering; so he discerned his past life. He could discern his *nāma* (mentality) and *rūpa* (materiality) of yesterday, of the day before yesterday, of five days before, of ten days before, of one month before, of one year before, of five years before, and so on, up to the time when he was in his mother's womb.

This achievement may seem impossible, especially since most people are unable to discern the *nāma* and *rūpa* of even one minute ago. It is impossible for those who have no concentration to see the First Noble Truth, ultimate mentality and materiality. If they have no such ability, they cannot discern the *nāma* and *rūpa* of the past, no matter how recent or distant. However, those who have attained concentration are able to discern *nāma* and *rūpa* far into the past, even many years past. Meditators must discern back

to the stage when they were in their mother's womb, because that was when their *nāma* and *rūpa* began. This is the starting point of the Noble Truth of Suffering for this very life.

The meditator with the scar on his head did just that; he saw ultimate mentality and materiality in the beginning of his life in his mother's womb. His investigation had reached the point where three very significant stages follow one another. These three stages are the near-death moment of the previous life, the death consciousness of that life, and the beginning stage of the present life in the mother's womb (rebirth-linking consciousness). The rebirth-linking consciousness follows the death consciousness immediately, with no gap between them whatsoever. Even though they span two successive lives, this life and the past life, they are right next to each other. Here, then, the meditator was instructed to discern the causes of the beginning stage of *nāma* and *rūpa* in this life, namely, the causes which would appear at the near-death moment of the preceding life. This is how the Buddha taught us to investigate.

When he tried to discern his past life to see the object that appeared at the near-death moment, he felt shortness of breath, and he would feel it whenever he tried to discern backwards at this stage. Initially, he did not understand the reason for the shortness of breath he encountered. He was instructed to go forward and backward repeatedly around this stage to look for the reason. Finally, he understood that he had been drowning at the near-death moment. On realising that he had been drowning, he was instructed to go further backwards to investigate the reason,

and he saw that people had put him into a bag and then dropped the bag into the water. Then he was instructed to go further back. Doing so, he saw himself captured and tortured by many people. He suffered a cut on his head which resulted in the scar he bore in the next life. This all befell him because he had been a thief in that previous life.

Despite having been a thief and dying a horrible death, he was reborn as a human being, which is a fortunate rebirth. This may seem surprising; one might justifiably expect rebirth in the woeful realms for someone who was such a notorious thief that he was pursued, captured, tortured, and finally drowned in retaliation. Someone with supernatural powers but without correct knowledge might conclude from this example that evildoers go to good destinations. However, this meditator was able to discern that, at the near-death moment, the object that appeared in his mind was offering food to a bhikkhu. It is not the case that one of his bad deeds had given results in the form of rebirth in a good realm; rather, a good deed that he had done in that life matured to give its result at the near-death moment. It is undeniable that, in his previous life, he had done evil by stealing because he could not control his defilements; but at least once in his life, he had done good by offering to a bhikkhu. That good kamma gave its results at the near-death moment, and so he could be reborn as a man in this life. He could practise meditation very well in this life because he had practised meditation in other past lives. It is clear that if we can't bring our defilements under control, we can be foolish; therefore, we all need to bring our defilements under control.

It was very fortunate that a good object appeared at the near-death moment of a being who was suffering severely by being tortured and drowned. Generally speaking, it is very difficult for a good object to appear at the near-death moment of such a person. No one can tell where our mind will incline at the near-death moment or what object will be strong enough to appear. If we are unfortunate, our experience may be like that of Queen Mallikā.

Therefore, we need to acquire some certainty about how we might pay attention to a good object at the near-death moment. We need to prepare beforehand. We should not leave it up to chance or to our good fortune to determine whether a good object or a bad object appears at our near-death moment. Instead, we should rely on our mindfulness, our effort, our *chanda* (wholesome desire), and our good qualities. We all need to prepare these things beforehand.

Conventional truth is the truth all of us use and apply in our daily lives. The Buddha employs the same conventional truths and conventional terms to teach the Dhamma. Sometimes the Buddha used conventional terms to guide us in how to live in the conventional world; at other times the Buddha used conventional terms to introduce ultimate truths and teach them to us.

The Wise and the Foolish

We can cite the Maṅgala Sutta¹⁵ as an example. The first stanza of this sutta is as follows:

*Asevanā ca bālānaṃ,
Paṇḍitānañca sevanā,
Pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

Not to associate with the foolish,
To associate with the wise,
To honour those who are worthy of honour:
This is the highest blessing.

Here the Buddha talks about the wise and the foolish. The words itself are conventional terms, the definitions of ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’ are conventional truth, and what the words refer to are conventional truth.

When one hears the word ‘man’ one immediately knows what is meant. If we write the word down, we can read it and also immediately know what is meant. Both hearing and reading are saddapaññatti, or nāmapaññatti (concept as name). Understanding what is meant is atthapaññatti, or concept as meaning. We can refer to the explanation of the Buddha to make sure we understand what He meant by ‘wise’ and ‘foolish’. The Buddha said that there are three things by which the fool can be known – bad bodily conduct, bad verbal conduct, and bad mental conduct,

¹⁵ Khp.5 Maṅgalasuttam (Khp 5 The Discourse on Blessings).

and that there are three things by which the wise can be known – good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, and good mental conduct.¹⁶ Let me here repeat that it is not because we are born as humans that we become wise or foolish; it is because we can bring our defilements under control that we become wise. Conversely, it is because we cannot bring our defilements under control that we become foolish. So we can be wise, or we can be foolish.

Therefore we must train our minds to control our defilements and keep the defilements under control. Even though our mental actions are not yet pure, we should neither act nor speak according to the instructions of the defilements. We must bring the instructions of the defilements under our control. This is important. We all must train in this way, in order to benefit ourselves and to avoid falling into the four woeful states. This is something we can do. It is not impossible if we are mindful.

The Buddha said, ‘All danger and harm are caused by the foolish, not by the wise.’¹⁷ Whenever we fail to control our defilements, we bring about harm and danger for both ourselves and others. Therefore, when we hear the word ‘foolish’ we need not look very far; in fact, we should look very nearby. We should not allow ourselves to be foolish. Since real progress depends on honesty, it is essential that we know ourselves. If we look far away, at others, and point to someone else and say, ‘That person is foolish; I

¹⁶ AN.III.1.1.2 Lakkhaṇasuttaṃ (AN 3.2 The Discourse on the Characteristics).

¹⁷ AN.III.1.1.1 Bhayasuttaṃ (AN 3.1 The Discourse on Peril).

am wise,' it is a problem. Instead, we must develop honesty. We must know who we are. At times we can be wise, but at times we can also be foolish.

In accordance with the Buddha's teaching, we should take a keen interest in admonishing ourselves, more so than in admonishing others. We can give others suggestions, but there is no need to give anyone orders. We ourselves are under training and are in need of constant admonishment. Without it, we cannot make progress. Self-interest means interest in admonishing oneself. This too is very important. Maintaining interest in self-admonishment is the way to grow up, as opposed to the way to grow old. Nowadays many people are merely growing old. The foolish person grows old; the wise person grows up.

The commentary explains what is meant by 'foolish' as follows: '*Bālānanti balanti assasantīti bālā, assasitapassasitamattena jīvanti, na paññājīvitenāti adhippāyo*' – 'Those who breathe just to live are the foolish. Not led by wisdom, they breathe just to live.'¹⁸ It continues: '*Paṇḍitānanti paṇḍantīti paṇḍitā, sandiṭṭhikasamparāyikesu atthesu nānagatiyā gacchantīti adhippāyo*'. This means that those who are 'led by wisdom', who live their lives under the influence of wisdom, are those who know how to act for their own good in the present and how to provide for their good in the future, as well as how to act for the good of others in the present and the future, and for both themselves and others in both the present and the future. As the commentary says, this is what it means to be wise.

¹⁸ Commentary to Khp.5 Maṅgalasuttaṃ (Khp 5 The Discourse on Blessings).

Again, as the Buddha said, all danger and harm are caused by the foolish, not by the wise. It is like a hut that is on fire: Even if it is a small hut that is on fire, it can eventually burn down an entire city. In the same way, if a foolish person appears in a certain place, such a person can destroy everything. All harm and danger are caused by the foolish, not by the wise.

The doors to the four woeful states are wide open to the fool. Therefore, one should remember the explanation that appears in the commentary to the Dhammapada, where the words of the Buddha are quoted: ‘*Pamattassa ca nāma cattāro apāyā sakagehasadisā*’ – ‘For the heedless, the four woeful states are like their permanent home.’¹⁹ We are heedless whenever we do not control our defilements. If instead we want to be wise, we must bring our defilements under control. In order to do that, we must be heedful, and not heedless.

The Aspiration of Bodhisatta Akitti

Understanding the danger of associating with the foolish, the bodhisatta made an aspiration in one of his previous lives. In that life, his name was Akitti, and he was very rich. Nonetheless, he gave up all his living and non-living things and renounced the world. Then he practised very seriously, which is not an easy thing to do. At that time, the king of the devas wanted to know why he was practising seriously on an island, so he approached the bodhisatta by

¹⁹ Commentary to Dh. 1 Cakkhupālattheravatthu (The Story of the Elder Cakkhupāla).

creating a human body for himself and asked many questions. After a long exchange, the king of the devas invited the bodhisatta to make an aspiration, and the bodhisatta uttered the following:

*Bālaṃ na passe na sune, na ca bālena samvase,
bālenallāpa sallāpaṃ, na kare na ca rocaye.*

May I not meet with a fool.
May I not hear from a fool.
May I not associate with a fool.
If I need to converse with the fool,
May I not take delight in his speech,
And may I not follow and act according to his
speech.²⁰

We can say that encountering a fool is not a desirable thing, yet sooner or later all of us meet with a fool or speak with one. Sometimes we even take delight in speaking with the fool or even follow what the fool tells us. This is regrettable, and it happens to us because we have not made the contrary aspirations before in our lives. From today onwards, then, we must make an aspiration not to meet with the fool, not to speak with the fool, not to take delight in the fool's speech, and not to follow what the fool tell us to do.

The king of the devas responded by asking, '*Kinmu te akaraṃ bālo, vada kassapa kāraṇaṃ, kena kassapa bālassa, dasanaṃ nābhikaṅkhasi*' – 'What have the foolish done to you? Why do you aspire not to see a fool?' The bodhisatta answered:

²⁰ Jā.XIII.480 Akittijātakaṃ (Jā 480 The Birth Story of Akitti).

The Aspiration of Bodhisatta Akitti

*Anayaṃ nayati dummedho, adhurāyaṃ niyuñjati.
Dunnayo seyyaso hoti, sammā vutto pakuppati.
Vinayaṃ so na jānāti, sādhu tassa adassanan'ti.*

The fool guides us to that which is not the right way;
The fool engages in what is not suitable to do;
The fool greatly delights in bad deeds;
If we say something good, the fool feels very angry;
The fool does not observe the rules.
Therefore, it is very good not to see a fool.

The fool practises neither the rules of society nor the rules of ordained persons because he does not know them.

The phrase '*anayaṃ nayati dummedho*' – 'the fool guides us to that which is not the right way' – merits further examination. It means not to be a fool in this present life. Do not be someone who gives others misguidance. For example, some people in this world maintain that their God has told them, 'If they do not believe me, they are evil; you must kill them for me. If you do so, you will be reborn in heaven.' This is how the fool guides people in what is not the right way. As the Buddha said, 'All harm and danger are caused by the foolish, not by the wise.' Many also teach that their God said, 'I have created all these animals for you to eat. Doing so is not unwholesome.' Some even believe that killing animals for food is wholesome, because it will release them from their animal lives. In this manner also the fool guides others in what is not the right way.

There are many who claim to be Buddhist teachers and to benefit others with their teachings but who in reality cause others harm by guiding them into a wrong way of practice. For instance, the Noble Eightfold Path is the way leading

to the end of suffering. Whoever wants to make an end of suffering needs to practise the Noble Eightfold Path in its entirety. This is the only way. To be an ordinary disciple, or a great disciple, or a chief disciple, one needs to practise the Noble Eightfold Path. Even to be a Buddha, one needs to fulfil pāramī for at least four incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons, and then one also needs to practise the Noble Eightfold Path. There is no other way. We should take careful note that practising the Noble Eightfold Path means practising *all* eight factors of the Path – Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration (*Sammā-Diṭṭhi*, *Sammā-Saṅkappa*, *Sammā-Vācā*, *Sammā-Kammanta*, *Sammā-Ājīva*, *Sammā-Vāyāma*, *Sammā-Sati*, and *Sammā-Samādhi*). However, nowadays there are some who teach that it is not necessary to develop the factor of concentration. They maintain that it is possible to make an end of suffering and realise Nibbāna without developing concentration. There are teachers who guide our Buddhists in this way. But the Buddha said, ‘*Samādhim, bhikkhave, bhāvētha. Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*’ – ‘Bhikkhus, develop concentration. One who is concentrated knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are.’

It is contrary to the Buddha’s teachings to say that concentration is not necessary, and such ‘teachers’ are guiding others towards what is not the right way. Without concentration, the way leading to Nibbāna would be a ‘Noble Sevenfold Path’. Teaching others to practise a ‘Noble Sevenfold Path’ is a case of a fool guiding others towards the wrong way.

If one does not develop concentration, Right View will not be attained. Without Right View, only a ‘Noble Sixfold Path’ remains.

If one thinks that the development of concentration is unnecessary, one will not practise Right Mindfulness; consequently one is left with only a ‘Noble Fivefold Path’.

Right Thought, as a wholesome practice to accumulate merits, is the three right intentional thoughts of renunciation, non-ill-will, and non-harming;²¹ but to develop it on the supramundane level – the level necessary for the realisation of Path and Fruition, the practice of concentration is necessary. Concentration itself is supported by Right Thought, which is the mental factor *vitakka*, the application of the mind.²² *Vitakka* simply applies the mind to the object, but when *vitakka* is cultivated along with the development of concentration, it becomes a factor of *jhāna*. Therefore, if one does not develop concentration, one cannot further develop the Path factor of Right Thought. In that case, one is left with a ‘Noble Fourfold Path’. Likewise, if one does not develop concentration, Right Effort cannot be further developed either, and one is practising only a ‘Noble Threefold Path’.

²¹ MN.III.2.7 Mahācattārīsakasuttaṃ (MN 117 The Discourse on the Great Forty).

²² Aṭṭhasālinī 1. Cittuppādakaṇḍo, Kāmāvacarakusalapadabhājanīyaṃ, Dhammuddesavāro, Yevāpanakavaṇṇanā (*The Expositor*, 1920, vol. I, page 177, published by the Pali Text Society): ‘*Vitakko jhānaṅgāni patvā vitakko hoṭṭi vutto, maggaṅgāni patvā sammāsaṅkappoti*’ – ‘*Vitakka* is spoken of as such by way of *jhāna*-factors; and as Right Thought by way of Path-factors’.

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Without concentration, only three Path factors remain in the end – Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. These are just *sīla*, the training of morality. One cannot attain Nibbāna with nothing but *sīla*.

Therefore, if someone offers to guide us and says, ‘One does not need to develop concentration. Without developing concentration, one will know and see the Dhamma as they really are’, it is clear that such a ‘teacher’ is not guiding us towards the right way. This is why the bodhisatta Akitti made such an aspiration.

We ourselves have met with the fool, have heard from the fool, have taken delight in his speech, and have followed him. Moreover, we as teachers must be very sure not to guide our disciples into what is not the way.

Following his aspiration concerning foolish people, the bodhisatta continued with the opposite:

*Dhīraṃ passe suṇe dhīraṃ,
Dhīrena saha saṃvase,
Dhīrenallāpasallāpam,
Taṃ kare tañca rocaye.*

May I meet with the wise.
May I hear from the wise.
May I associate with the wise.
May I converse with the wise and take delight
in his speech,
And may I follow and act according to the in-
structions of the wise.

The Aspiration of Bodhisatta Akitti

A wise person is not readily found, nor is the opportunity to hear a wise one's speech. Even more, only the Buddha is wise. Apart from the Buddha, there is no one else who is truly wise. Wise teachers are nothing more than representatives of the Buddha. If the Buddha had not established the order of the Saṅgha, we would not now be able to hear the words of the wise. Teachers are not actually the wise persons, although they may seem wise because of the Buddha. Unless teachers preserve the teachings of the Buddha and teach as the Buddha taught, they are foolish rather than wise. Teachers who desire to be wise and not foolish must preserve the teachings of the Buddha; they must follow the words of the Buddha and teach their disciples what the Buddha has taught.

After the bodhisatta Akitti voiced his aspirations concerning the wise, the king of the devas asked, 'What did the wise do? Why do you want to see the wise?' The bodhisatta answered:

*Nayaṃ nayati medhāvī, adhurāyaṃ na yuñjati,
sunayo seyyaso hoti, sammā vutto na kuppati,
vinayaṃ so pajānāti, sādhu tena samāgamo'ti.*

The wise one guides us to what is the way.
The wise one engages in what is suitable to do.
The wise one takes great delight in what is good.
When what is good is said, the wise one is very
happy.
The wise one knows the rules of society
and the rules of ordained persons.
For these reasons, association with the wise one
is very good.

To Honour Those Worthy of Honour

Now we are going to talk about the third and final blessing mentioned in the first stanza of the Maṅgala Sutta. The text reads: ‘*pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṃ*’ – ‘To honour those worthy of honour’. Thus the third blessing is honouring (*pūjā*) those worthy of honour (*pūjanīyānaṃ*).

The Fully Enlightened Buddhas are most worthy of honour because They have no vices and possess all virtues. They are Perfect and Omniscient. Next after them are Pacceka Buddhas and Noble Ones. Even if one honours them in just a small way, or only a little, it will greatly contribute to one’s welfare and happiness for a long time. Sumana the garland-maker and Mallikā provide us with just two examples of how one derives great benefit from even small gestures of honour and reverence towards a Buddha.

A garland-maker named Sumana had to supply King Bimbisāra of Rājagaha with jasmine flowers every morning. One day, as he was going to the king’s palace with jasmine flowers, he saw the Buddha coming into town for alms-food. The Buddha was surrounded by a halo of light and was accompanied by many bhikkhus. Seeing the Buddha in His resplendent glory, Sumana felt a strong desire to offer the jasmine flowers to the Buddha. There and then, he decided that, even if the king were to drive him out of the country or punish him with death, he would not offer the flowers to the king for that day. Thus, he showered the Buddha with those jasmine flowers, and threw them to either side of the Buddha, and behind Him, and over the Buddha’s head.

The flowers which Sumana tossed above the Buddha's head remained hanging in the air and formed a canopy of flowers, while those tossed behind and to either side formed walls of flowers. These flowers remained in these positions and followed the Buddha as He moved on and stopped whenever He stopped. The Buddha proceeded, surrounded by walls of flowers and beneath a canopy of flowers, and with the six-coloured rays of light emanating from His body. He was followed by a large entourage, as thousands of people in and around Rājagaha came out of their houses to pay obeisance to the Buddha. As for Sumana, his entire body was suffused with delightful satisfaction (*pīti*).

The wife of the garland-maker Sumana then went to the king and said that she had nothing to do with her husband's failure to supply the king with flowers for that day. The king, being a Sotāpanna himself, felt quite happy about what Sumana had done with the flowers. He came out to see the wonderful sight and paid obeisance to the Buddha. The king also took the opportunity to offer alms-food to the Buddha and His disciples. After the meal, the Buddha returned to the monastery, and the king followed Him for some distance. On arriving back at the palace, King Bimbisāra sent for Sumana and offered him a reward of eight elephants, eight horses, eight male slaves, eight female slaves, eight magnificent sets of jewels, eight thousand coins, eight maidens, and eight choice villages.

Back in the monastery, the flowers dropped off of their own accord as the Buddha entered the Perfumed Chamber (*Gandhakuṭi*). The Venerable Ānanda asked the Buddha what benefits Sumana would gain by the good deed

he had done that day. The Buddha answered that, because Sumana had made an offering to the Buddha without any consideration for his own life, Sumana would not be born in any of the four woeful states for the next one hundred thousand world cycles, and that he would eventually become a Pacceka Buddha. That night, at the end of the usual discourse, the Buddha spoke in verse as follows: ²³

That deed is well done if, having done it, one
has no regret,
And if one is delighted and happy with the re-
sult of that deed.

Sumana's example shows us how honouring a Buddha even in just a small way will greatly contribute to our welfare and happiness for a long time to come.

We shall relate another example, that of Mallikā.²⁴ Queen Mallikā was originally a poor flower-girl. One day, she was going to the park and carrying some rice gruel to eat. Then she saw the Buddha on His alms-round. Great faith arose in her, and she spontaneously put all the rice gruel in His bowl with great joy. Then she did obeisance. Afterwards, the Buddha smiled and told the Venerable Ānanda that, as a result of her offering, Mallikā would that very day become King Pasenadi's chief queen.

²³ Dhp. 68:

*Tañca kammaṃ kataṃ sādhu, yaṃ katvā nānutappati.
Yassa paṭito sumano, vipākaṃ paṭisevati.*

²⁴ Commentary to Jā.VII.2.415 Kummāsapiṇḍijātakaṃ (Jā 415 The Birth Story on Rice-Gruel Alms).

King Pasenadi was riding back to Sāvattthī from battle with King Ajātasattu. He had lost the battle and was unhappy. Mallikā was in the park and was singing because of the joy she felt from her offering. King Pasenadi heard her singing and approached her. He talked to her and discovered that she was unmarried. Then he stayed with her for some time, and she comforted him. Afterwards, he obtained permission from her parents to marry her, and that very day, he made her his chief queen. Mallikā's joyous offering and her obeisance to the Buddha had functioned as presently-effective kamma.

These examples show that honouring Buddhas, even in only a small way, will greatly contribute to our welfare and happiness for a long time to come. Acquiring welfare and happiness by honouring Pacceka Buddhas and Noble Disciples should be understood in the same way. There is still something even more beneficial than honouring those worthy of honour by offering them material gifts, and that is paying them true honour by practising the Dhamma. Therefore, a lay person truly honours the Buddha by taking the Three Refuges and observing the precepts – five precepts on ordinary days and eight precepts on uposatha days. An ordained person truly honours the Buddha by fulfilling the fourfold purification of *sīla*, which consists of *pātimokkha-saṃvara-sīla* (patimokkha restraint morality), *indriya-saṃvara-sīla* (faculty restraint morality), *ājīva-pārisuddhi-sīla* (livelihood purification morality), and *paccaya-sammissita-sīla* (requisites-related morality).

It is just as the Buddha told Venerable Ānanda at Kusinārā just before His Final Parinibbāna: ²⁵

Ānanda, these sāla trees have burst forth into an abundance of blossoms out of season, which fall upon the Tathāgata's body, sprinkling it and covering it in homage. Divine coral tree flowers fall from the sky, divine sandalwood powder falls from the sky, sprinkling and covering the Tathāgata's body in homage. Divine music and song sound from the sky in homage to the Tathāgata. But it is not to this extent that a Tathāgata is worshipped, honored, respected, venerated, or paid homage to. Rather, Ānanda, whatever monk, nun, layman or laywoman abides by the Dhamma, lives uprightly in the Dhamma, walks in the way of the Dhamma, such a one honours the Tathāgata, reveres and esteems him and pays him the supreme homage. Therefore, Ānanda, thus should you train yourselves: 'We shall abide by the Dhamma, live uprightly in the Dhamma, walk in the way of the Dhamma.'

The highest honour we can offer to the Buddha therefore is diligently and properly practising the Dhamma taught by the Buddha and living the holy life in accordance with the Dhamma-Vinaya. Similarly, we can understand how we should properly honour Pacceka Buddhas and Noble Disciples.

Moreover, in the case of laypeople, younger siblings should honour their elder siblings, and children should

²⁵ DN.II.3 Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ (DN 16 The Discourse on the Great Parinibbāna).

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honour their mothers and fathers. All these ways of honouring will bring meritorious results, among them longevity and other benefits, and so they are forms of blessings. In the same way, the Buddha explained that ‘respecting mothers and fathers, ascetics and brahmins, and the head of the clan’ will lead to ‘increase in life-span and good appearance’.²⁶

To sum up the three blessings taught in this stanza: not to associate with fools, to associate with the wise, and to honour those worthy of honour, this is the highest blessing (*etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ*).

These then are some examples of how the Buddha teaches us by means of conventional terms and how He gives explanations to people who use only conventional terms and understand only conventional truths. The foolish and the wise and those worthy of honour are all conventional truth. Using conventional terms, the Buddha taught those living in the conventional world and explained to them how to live, how they could improve themselves, and how to skilfully navigate the round of rebirths instead of wandering aimlessly in it.

Living in a Suitable Locality

To this end, the Buddha uttered the following stanza of the Maṅgala Sutta:

Patirūpadesaṅgāso ca,

²⁶ DN.III.3 Cakkavattisuttaṃ (DN 26 The Discourse on the Wheel-Turning Monarch).

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*Pubbe ca katapuññatā,
Attasammāpanidhi ca,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

To live in a suitable locality,
To have done meritorious deeds in the past,
To set oneself on the right course:
This is the highest blessing.

The commentary explains the meaning of the stanza: ‘*Patirūpadesaṅgāso nāma yattha catasso parisā vicaranti, dānādīni puññakiriyaṅgavattāni vattanti, navaṅgaṃ satthu sāsanaṃ dibbati, tattha nivāso sattānaṃ puññakiriyaṅga paccayattā maṅgalanti vuccati*’. Here ‘suitable locality’ means a place where one can find four types of persons – bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, laymen, and laywomen – in other words, those who maintain the Buddhasāsana, the teachings of the Buddha. It is a place where one can make offerings and do every kind of wholesome deed, and where the nine divisions of the Buddha’s Dispensation²⁷ are shining and flourishing. It is also a place where good people get the opportunity to do wholesome kamma such as making offerings, practising morality, meditating, and practising samatha and vipassanā for the realisation of nine kinds of supramundane

²⁷ The nine divisions of the Buddha’s Dispensation (*navaṅgaṃ satthu sāsanaṃ*) are: *suttaṃ, geyyam, veyyākaraṇaṃ, gāthaṃ, udānaṃ, itivuttakaṃ, jātakaṃ, abbhutadhammaṃ*, and *vedallaṃ* (discourses, mixed prose and verse, expositions, verses, inspired utterances, quotations, birth stories, amazing accounts, and questions-and-answers). This is the early ninefold division of the Dhamma, eventually superseded by the arrangement of the texts into the five Nikāyas. See AN.IV.3.1.2 *Dutiyavalāhakaṃ* (AN 4.102 The Second Discourse on Clouds), among others.

Dhamma. This is the sort of place where we should live. It is called a suitable place, a suitable locality.

If we are still in a certain place where there are no bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen, or laywomen, we must make the place we stay a place where there are such persons. It must be a place where one can find people who have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha and who are supporting the Buddhasāsana, the teachings of the Buddha. Only then will it be a suitable place. Otherwise we will have no opportunity to hear the Dhamma, and it will be as if we are living in wilderness.

The four types of persons are conventional truth. If you live in a place where such people are found, you are very fortunate. You are also fortunate to be staying in a suitable place if, where you are, you get the opportunity to make offerings and practise morality and hear the true teachings of the Buddha. In such a place one gets the opportunity to hear the Dhamma, to hear both conventional and ultimate truth, as it has been taught by the Buddha.

The nine kinds of supra-mundane Dhamma are the four Path Knowledges, the four Fruition Knowledges, and Nibbāna. If there is no one who can teach the way leading to Nibbāna, these nine kinds of supramundane Dhamma will not be available. No matter what the actual place, if teachers are not teaching the way the Buddha taught, it is impossible for anyone to attain the four Path and Fruition Knowledges. Even in places where the teachings of the Buddha are flourishing, there are also many teachers who are teaching many different ways, so everyone needs to be careful. Not all so-called teachings are true. It is every

practitioner's individual responsibility to inquire and investigate whether a particular teaching is really the true teaching of the Buddha.

Differentiating Right Teaching from Wrong Teaching

Before the Buddha attained final Nibbāna, His disciples asked Him how they might differentiate between right teaching and wrong teaching. The Buddha explained as follows:²⁸ 'Suppose a monk explained the Dhamma and then said, "What I am teaching all of you is what I heard directly from the Buddha." Even if he were to say so, please do not be in a hurry to accept what he says, and do not be in a hurry to reject it. Compare his teachings with what I have taught in the Suttanta, in the Vinaya (the monastic discipline), and in the Abhidhamma. Only when you see that it is in accordance with what I have taught should you accept his teaching. If it is not in accordance with what I have taught, please reject it.' Therefore, one needs to examine whether or not what a teacher tells one is really true. This is one's own responsibility.

In the Buddha's example, it was a monk who said, 'What I am teaching all of you is what I heard directly from the Buddha.' If his claim was true, then that monk had actually met with the Buddha. However, the Buddha said not to accept his words immediately even in this situation. Nowadays there is no one who can claim to have met with the Buddha, so if someone does not respectfully teach the

²⁸ DN.II.3 Mahāparinibbānasuttaṃ (DN 16 The Discourse on the Great Parinibbāna).

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Dhamma, such a teacher may guide others in the wrong way. We must respect the Dhamma, we must respect the Buddha, and we must respect ourselves also. If we do not respect ourselves, we will do whatever we like. We must understand our standpoint. We have no Omniscient Knowledge, so we cannot teach just any way we like, because the teachings on the way leading to Nibbāna appeared because of the appearance of the Omniscient Buddha; if we do not teach His teachings, we are not acting for our own good or for the good of others. On the contrary, we are destroying ourselves as well as others. Therefore, we must always keep this advice in mind.

There are many teachers who, with no ill intent, fall short of teaching the Dhamma in all its fullness, or whose teaching is incorrect in some way or other. In other words, there are many teachers who do not teach the flawless Dhamma that was imparted to us by the Buddha. We should consider that such teachers teach according to their own abilities, limited as they may be, and that they themselves may not even be aware that what they are teaching is not in accordance with what the Buddha taught.

Nonetheless, we may very well be able to learn something from such teachers. We should learn, but we must also know how to discern whether or not to continue learning and practising under their guidance. Even though they cannot teach according to what the Buddha taught, and instead teach meditation by explaining and interpreting the words of the Buddha according to their own limited understanding, they still provide us with the opportunity to practise meditation. If they have no bad intentions, they are not doing anything bad. The main consideration is that

we cannot reach the goal by following them; they can take us only so far along the Path. We may have been drawn to these teachers because they were well-known and were admired by many people, ordained persons among them, and so we learned from them. Because of them we became interested in meditation and started to practise. Having had this opportunity, we get another opportunity later on which we can compare with the first. Then we come to know that our previous study and practice was according to the tradition of the teacher and not according to the teaching of the Buddha. We should nevertheless be grateful, recalling that our interest in meditation arose because of our former teachers.

I have had experience with these matters in my own life. When I was a lay person, I practised meditation. At the time, I thought that all bhikkhus taught what the Buddha Himself taught. I believed in them. As lay persons, we wanted to be successful and wealthy and prominent. Our goals were sensual goals. Seeking the Dhamma then was just a temporary pursuit; it was not our main priority. We lacked the means to distinguish between what was right and what was wrong; we had only the bare circumstances to learn what the teacher was teaching. Therefore, I didn't know whether what I was practising was right or wrong. Only when the sense of urgency arose in me did I decide to choose ordained life. At that point, my purpose in ordaining was to make an end of suffering. My goal completely changed. I was no longer set on finding the way to gain and fame; instead, my goal became finding the way to liberation. I therefore needed to find out what the Buddha actually taught. It was only then that I got the opportunity to study the teachings of the Buddha, so that I could

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compare them with what I had practised before. What was right and what was wrong became known to me at that time. I was very fortunate.

If we are outside of the order of the Saṅgha, it is not easy for us to understand the subtle differences between right and wrong teaching and between right and wrong practice. It is only when we enter the order of the Saṅgha that we can know the Dhamma more deeply. My advice, therefore, is to deepen your study of the teachings of the Buddha and to take responsibility for yourself. You are responsible for your own goodness.

We are greatly influenced by the environment into which we are born. Had I been born in America, I might be a Christian. Had I been born in Iraq, I might be a Muslim. Had I been born in Taiwan, I would almost certainly have been a Mahāyāna bhikkhu. Since I was born in Myanmar, I became a Theravāda bhikkhu. This is something we need to understand, and we do not need to complain about the environmental factors surrounding our birth. After we have grown up, we are intelligent enough to depend on our efforts to know what is true. This is our responsibility.

I have many disciples from many different countries – from America, from Germany, from Canada, and from Japan. Some of them were raised as Christians because they were born into Christian environments. After they grew up, however, they had freedom to think; and being intelligent, they studied this and that. Finally they found what they wanted in the teachings of the Buddha, and then they chose their way accordingly. Therefore it is important not to follow traditions but to follow the true teachings of the Buddha. This is the fact.

Depend on the Dhamma, Not the Person

In the advice the Buddha gave to His disciples in this matter, the one who is claiming to teach the truth is a monk who also claims to have heard and received that teaching from the Buddha's own lips. Yet as an embodiment or source of truth, there is a difference between a person and the Dhamma itself. Of these two, the Buddha accorded more importance to the Dhamma. However, in actual practice people in general accord more importance to the person. If they hear that such and such a teacher is very famous, they approach that person; they see the attraction of fame and renown. This is what they see; this is the way the world goes, in the case of most people. We on the other hand must work to improve ourselves.

The reason for this state of affairs is that people do not know and do not see the Dhamma initially; they see the person first. If a teacher is well known and has a lot of companions and followers, people also want to follow. This is the way it is happening. It may be quite reasonable and good if the teacher we approach is well known and has a lot of followers, but we need to observe respectfully and learn whether or not what such a teacher teaches is in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. If it is in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, then yes, we must follow – but even then, what we should follow is not the person but the Dhamma. If one encounters teachings that conflict with the teachings of the Buddha, we must honestly acknowledge the fact of the matter. We must have the courage to accept the truth, and we must courageously reject non-truth. This is the advice of the Buddha.

Nonetheless, we need to be right minded. We may have had many teachers since we were young, and they have taught us many good things. They taught us how to make offerings and practise morality and meditate. They have bestowed on us many good things. Liberation, however, is the way leading to Nibbāna, and it is not something everyone can teach. Some teachers emphasise the teachings of the Buddha in the form of *pariyatti*, learning knowledge, so that they have a great deal of knowledge acquired through learning but do not have much knowledge of actual practice. If we learn from these teachers, they may explain things on the basis of what they understand; there is nothing wrong with that. There is no reason for us to criticise them just because they are not necessarily skilful. When one finds it necessary to ‘reject non-truth’ in such a situation, it should be done not with anger but with wise attention. This is important. One should approach them for all the goodness they have, yet one should also withdraw from them for what they cannot do. Only in acting thus will one have positive thinking and be right minded. Then one will not harm oneself, nor will one harm others.

In these matters we should emulate Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahāmoggallāna, neither of whom had learned from the Buddha from the outset. They practised under a certain well-known teacher at first, but when they heard the teachings of the Buddha, they became Noble Ones. They rightly held the following view: ‘We are grateful to our teacher. We must practise the way good friends practise.’ All of us must be good friends to our parents, our brothers and sisters, our followers, and our teachers as well.

When Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahāmogallāna resolved to practise under the Buddha, they remembered their former teacher, Sañjaya Belatthiputta, and said to themselves, ‘Our teacher is wise. We should introduce the true teachings of the Buddha to him.’ Then they approached their former teacher and said to him, ‘Teacher, the Omniscient Buddha has arisen in the world. He teaches the true Dhamma. Many have become enlightened under His guidance. Teacher, you also should approach Him and practise under His guidance.’ However, Sañjaya Belatthiputta replied, ‘All the wise will go to the Buddha. The fools will come to me. Do not worry.’ In this way they accomplished their duties as disciples. We must do what we need to do; the final decision will be made by our teachers, our elders, and our parents themselves, and it is not our concern. All we need to do is be a good friend to all of them, and to all the people we meet.

In this world, the foolish outnumber the wise; hence Sañjaya Belatthiputta said, ‘You do not need to worry. There are a lot of fools in the world. They will come to me.’ Here it is clear how very difficult it is sometimes to give up one’s attachment even to something that is not very valuable; because of our defilements, we are strongly influenced by the likes and dislikes caused by our defilements.

I am very fortunate in that, since I was young, I have been a very good observer. When I met with people of my own age and people who were very much older than I, I came to know that not all old people are wise or reasonable. I also came to know that even young people could sometimes be wise and reasonable despite their few years. I

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came to know that wisdom does not depend on age. Therefore, I could never feel confident simply because of a person's seniority in age or reputation; I would need to take time to assess the person instead. So I am fortunate. If you like, you can also do the same.

My advice, therefore, is to depend on the Dhamma, not on the person. No matter who the teacher is, do not depend on the teacher, but depend on the Dhamma instead. The Dhamma is reliable, whereas a person is changeable. The Dhamma will never change. A person can poison others, but the Dhamma will never poison anyone. Depend on the Dhamma, then, and not on the person. Best of all, a person who imparts the Dhamma is someone on whom you can rely for the time being. If, however, you see the person change, you need to take care; you need to be a good observer. The Dhamma and the person need to be distinguished one from the other.

Having Done Meritorious Deeds in the Past

The commentary explains '*Pubbe ca katapuññatā*' – 'To have done meritorious deeds in the past' – in the stanza cited above as follows: '*Pubbe katapuññatā nāma atūtajātiyaṃ bud-dhapacceka buddhakhīṇāsava ārabha upacitakusalatā, sāpi maṅgalam*' – "To have done meritorious deeds in the past" means having accumulated wholesome actions in previous existences towards the Buddhas, the Pacceka Buddhas, or those who have eradicated all taints. This is also a blessing.'

Our faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha is due to our having accumulated wholesome kamma related

to Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and disciples of the Buddhas. For that reason, we have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha in this very life. Our faith is related to our past accumulated kamma; and without the support of such past kamma, such faith would be impossible. Because we accumulated meritorious actions in the past, we have had the opportunity to take conception in the womb of a mother who believed in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. For this reason as well, we have had the opportunity to be reborn in a place where the teachings of the Buddha are available. In this way we become people who have faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Our faith in the Triple Gem is related to *pubbe ca kataruṇṇatā*, the meritorious actions we have done in the past.

Each of us would surely like to encounter a faithful person, a faithful friend, and have such a person in our lives. A faithful person is difficult to find. In looking for a faithful person of this sort, we are seeking someone external to ourselves. However, we seek for another person, external to us, while we can hardly be said to be faithful to ourselves. If we are unfaithful even to ourselves, it is unreasonable to expect someone else to be faithful to us.

Nonetheless, there is something – not an actual person, but something like a person – which is truly faithful to us all the time. It is our kamma. Our kamma is faithful. If you have accumulated good kamma, it is faithful. If you have accumulated bad kamma, it is also faithful. They never give inconsistent or unreliable results. Good kamma always gives good results, and bad kamma always gives bad results. They are always faithful in giving their respective

results. Carefully consider whether you would like to continue your life's journey with good faithful kamma or with bad faithful kamma. The choice is yours.

Kamma is a faithful person. If you are praised by many, be happy with it. Your faithful factor, kamma, is giving its results. Be happy if you are criticised or blamed by many as well, for this is also your faithful factor giving its results. No one else does it. Your kamma is faithful.

In this manner, what we have accumulated in the past guides us in deciding which way to go. Consider again the many disciples I have from many different countries: Their kamma caused them to be reborn in a place where there are no teachings of the Buddha, but in their past they accumulated good kamma related to the Buddha's teachings. Hence, when they grow up, they hunger for the Dhamma and long for it. This is their kamma factor, their faithful factor. This is also why they cannot stay in the places where they were born; their kamma drives them to go to a place where they can find the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, kamma is really faithful.

If someone loves listening to the Dhamma, it is because of *pubbe ca katapuññatā*; such a person has this support. The Buddha said that if we see a certain result, the main cause is in the past, while the present cause is only the supporting cause. Consider the fact that many people in the world want to be wealthy. Many of them put a lot of effort into their desire for wealth. Not all of them become wealthy, however. Suppose there are two people in very similar circumstances who both set out to become rich. The first puts in a lot of effort towards that goal, but the second expends even more effort; yet the first becomes wealthy,

while the second fails to do so. The explanation is that if the main cause, which is past kamma such as making offerings, is lacking or insufficient, it is impossible to become rich, however much present effort is expended. There has to be the main cause which is in the past. However, even if there is sufficient past cause, there will be no present support if we do not make an effort in the present, and the goal will not be realised. There must be past main cause as well as present supporting cause.

The same principles apply to practising meditation. Some can develop concentration within a short time while others cannot, even though they make a great deal of effort. All of them try. However, because there is weak past kamma related to meditation, some may not see the results quickly, or they may not see the results at all. In this way, the attainment of jhāna absorption concentration is very much related to our past accumulated kamma, although we also need present support. Still, even if one has sufficient past accumulated kamma, and even if one has practised jhāna absorption concentration in the past, it is impossible to attain jhāna absorption concentration if we do not practise in the present. Therefore, the past main cause and the present supporting cause must meet together, and only then can we see the results we want to see. Hence the Buddha said the main cause is past kamma, while present effort is the supporting cause.

The Simile of Digging a Well

According to my teaching experience, meditation practice for developing concentration is like digging a well. If you dig a well very far from the river or sea, you need to dig

The Simile of Digging a Well

very deep; but if you dig a well close to a river, the water comes up very quickly. The practice of meditators who have succeeded with samatha meditation in the near past is like digging a well near the river, and the results come very quickly. If success in samatha occurred in the more distant past, maybe in the fourth past life or the fifth past life, then they have practised well but not as recently, and so they need to take a little more time.

Therefore, those who have not seen the desired results should not make the wrong judgement and conclude that they do not have enough pāramī. If you feel your meditation is not going as well as you would like, perhaps you yourself have practised only in the rather remote past, and so you simply need to dig a little deeper. This is a very practical assessment. I have some disciples who have succeeded in their practice in just a short time. Some practised successfully within a few days, others within one month, and still others within two months. Then there are some who take one year, and others may even take four years. They are all very determined, and I respect them. I never find fault with my disciples. However much they try, I help them, because we need to be patient until the time has ripened. Therefore, be mindful, and be determined to continue with the journey – the journey which is our most important journey, our Dhamma journey.

If we look at our previous life from the perspective of our present life, it is our past. If we regard our present existence from the perspective of our future, then this present life will become our past. Therefore, in this very life we must engage more and more in doing wholesome deeds. This is *pubbe ca katapuññatā* for the future. Our present life

is the existence in which we can really do something. If you have not yet discerned your past through concentration practice, you do not know your past. However, you can surely act in this very life, so try your very best right now.

Organising a meditation retreat is no easy task, so the organisers have the opportunity to accumulate a lot of good kamma. Dhamma workers get a great opportunity to accumulate wholesome kamma. For the benefits of those who want to practise meditation, they organise and help and do the many things that are necessary to provide support. If we view the present from the standpoint of the future, we see that, in all we are doing, we are accumulating wholesome kamma, which is *pubbe ca katapuññatā*. Be happy about that.

Setting Oneself on the Right Course

The last supreme blessing enumerated in the cited stanza is ‘*attasammāpaṇidhi ca*’ – ‘to set oneself on the right course’. This is also a very important factor. The commentary says: ‘*Attasammāpaṇidhi nāma idhekacco attānaṃ dussīlaṃ sīle patiṭṭhāpeti, assaddhaṃ saddhāsampadāya patiṭṭhāpeti, macchariṇ cāgasampadāya patiṭṭhāpeti. ayaṃ vuccati “attasammāpaṇidhī”ti, eso ca maṅgalaṃ*’. This means that those who had been unvirtuous before, now improve themselves by embarking on the way to be virtuous. In other words, those who failed to practise morality in the past begin to practise morality. Those who had no faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, as well as kamma and its results, now find the way to develop such faith. Those who were stingy start to

Setting Oneself on the Right Course

practise generosity. This is the way we set ourselves on the right course.

This change of behaviour is related to *pubbe ca katapuññatā* in that, if we set ourselves on the right course, we have the opportunity to do more wholesome deeds. If we accumulate more and more wholesome kamma, it is as if we are making an appointment to meet with our faithful friends in the future – not bad ‘faithful persons’, but good faithful friends. If one does not set oneself on the right course, one will do many unwholesome things and pile them up, and will have bad faithful friends in the future. May you be able to continue your future journey with good and wholesome faithful friends!

The Endless Pursuit of Sensuality

Returning to the topic of conventional truth, it is very helpful to understand that the Buddha taught conventional truth because there are many who do not see the fault and the danger of sensuality, and who instead see only happiness in sensuality, so that they wander endlessly in the round of rebirths, one after another. For people such as these, it is necessary to use conventional truth to explain to them how to live, how to make their living, and how to point themselves in the right direction.

Very few perceive the fault and danger of sense pleasure. On the contrary, people in the world go running in pursuit of sensuality because they see the happiness it gives. Even the Buddha Himself observes, ‘I do not say that there is

no happiness in sensuality. There is. That is why people pursue sensuality.’²⁹

All the various sense pleasures of the world are attractive to our minds; we enjoy sensuality very much. If the Buddha had not appeared in the world, we would do nothing but run after sensuality, with not the slightest thought of propriety. We would pursue sensuality endlessly and without restraint. When the Buddha arose in the world, however, He expounded on what is wholesome and the results of wholesomeness, as well as what is unwholesome and the results of unwholesomeness. Because the Buddha arose in the world, we have come to know that there are human beings, celestial beings, and brahmā beings, and that there is a realm where human beings live, realms where celestial beings live, and realms where brahmā beings live. There is also a state of hell in which hell beings live. Because the Buddha arose in the world, we get the opportunity to know that there are four woeful states.

One of the four woeful states is the animal realm. Of course, even had the Buddha not arisen in the world, people would certainly be aware of animals, because we see many of them all around us. However, we would not know that there is a connection between them and us. Even now, many people hold the wrong view that animals have been created for us to eat. Because of the arising of the Buddha, we can acquire the right view in this regard. Animals are a part of our own lives. If you were to discern your past lives, you would come to know that unfortunately you have been

²⁹ AN.III.3.1.3 Dutiyāssādasuttaṃ (AN 3.105 The Second Discourse on Gratification).

born as an animal in some of your past existences, because you have been born in many different existences along the round of rebirths.³⁰ Except for the Pure Abodes in the brahmā realm,³¹ there are no existences into which we have never been reborn in the past. Only the Buddha, by His arising in this world, could enlighten us as to the truth in these matters. If He had not arisen in the world, we would still be utterly and completely blind, for ‘blind is this world’, as the Buddha said.³²

One of my disciples could discern his past lives very deeply; he came to know his past and was very sorry for it.

³⁰ SN.II.4.2.3 Timsamattasuttam (SN 15.13 The Discourse Concerning Thirty Bhikkhus):

‘Dīgharattam vo, bhikkhave, gunnaṃ sataṃ gobhūtānaṃ... mahimsānaṃ sataṃ mahimsabhūtānaṃ... urabbhānaṃ sataṃ urabbhabhūtānaṃ... ajānaṃ sataṃ ajabhūtānaṃ... migānaṃ sataṃ migabhūtānaṃ... kukkuṭānaṃ sataṃ kukkuṭabhūtānaṃ... sūkarānaṃ sataṃ sūkarabhūtānaṃ... sīsacchinnānaṃ lohitaṃ passannaṃ paggharitaṃ, na tveva catūsu mahāsamuddesu udakam’.

‘For a long time, bhikkhus, you have been cows, and when as cows... buffalo... sheep... goats... deer... chickens... pigs... you were beheaded, the stream of blood that you shed is greater than the waters in the four great oceans’.

³¹ The Pure Abodes (*Suddhāvāsa*) are the five highest planes in the fourth jhāna realm. The inhabitants of these five planes are only Non-Returners (*Anāgāmī*) and Arahants. Beings who become Non-Returners elsewhere are reborn here, after which they will not be reborn in any realms other than the Pure Abodes, until they attain Arahantship.

³² Dh. 174:

*Andhabhūto ayaṃ loko, tanukettha vipassati,
Sakuṇo jālamuttova, appo saggāya gacchati.*

Blind is this world; here only a few possess insight.
Only a few, like a bird escaping from the net, go to a realm of bliss.

He had committed sexual misconduct towards a very virtuous lady. When that unwholesome kamma matured at his near-death moment, a very strong fire appeared in his mind. He fell straight into hell. In this way there is hell and the cause for falling into hell, such as sexual misconduct. Nonetheless, only when the Buddha arose in the world did we get to know kamma and its results.

The Art of Living

Some have the view that our lives span no more than the time between the cradle and the grave. They say that everything ends with death, and that one should therefore enjoy whatever one wants to enjoy between birth and death. Many people hold this pernicious view. Much to the contrary, living is actually an art.

It is because of the teachings of the Buddha that we know how to live, and even then we know only partially or to a certain extent how to live. If the Buddha had not appeared in the world, we would not really know how to live properly, and it would be a case of the blind leading the blind. If the Buddha had not appeared in the world, we would be blind to the workings of kamma too. We would be the cause of our own suffering, because we are blind – blind to the truth. Living, then, is an art, but it is so only after we acquire the knowledge available to us through the teachings of the Buddha; then we adjust our way of living and fine-tune it. We try the art of living, and try to make an art of living.

We get such knowledge through hearing the teachings of the Buddha, which have been passed down in a way that

we can understand, namely, in terms of conventional truth. Conventional truth teaches us how to live. Conventional truth teaches us how to improve. Conventional truth teaches us how to prepare for death. Conventional truth teaches us how to look forward to good future existences, and how not to do things that will cause us to suffer in the four woeful states. Conventional truth teaches us how to live harmoniously. Conventional truth teaches us how to develop the country, and how to respect each other. Conventional truth teaches us what each individual's responsibilities are. How important conventional truth is!

The religions of the world use only a single truth – conventional truth. This does not mean that they know it as the truth. They convey messages and teachings to their followers using conventional terms. This is just conventional truth. Even then, the conventional truth they teach falls short of the conventional truth taught by the Buddha. They use conventional terms in their teaching, in a mixture of good and bad. Therefore, their teaching is imperfect, because they cannot see beyond what they see with their eyes, so that their teachings are limited to what they can see and imagine. Unable to go beyond these limits, and lacking any real knowledge of ultimate truth, the teachers of the world's religions are blind, and in turn they misguide their followers. This is very dangerous.

However, the teaching of the Buddha is perfect precisely because the Buddha has knowledge of ultimate truth – a knowledge beyond what can be seen by the naked eye and beyond the sight of ordinary people, and a knowledge which is very deep. It is the knowledge of ultimate truth

that makes His teaching perfect. There is no flaw in His teaching; no one can find fault with it. His teaching is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end. We are thus very fortunate and should make every effort to sustain the Buddha's teaching. We should pass this teaching on to others just as it has been passed on to us. This is a responsibility all of us have. We must work hand in hand to fulfil this responsibility of ours.

Ultimate Truth

For Those Seeking an Escape from the Faults and Dangers of Sensuality

The Buddha's teachings on the level of conventional truth are very helpful for those who do not yet want to make an end of suffering but who want to live as free from suffering as possible. Because they see happiness in sensuality, they want to go on wandering in the round of rebirths; yet they can derive profound benefit from the conventional truth taught by the Buddha.

There are some, however, who sincerely want to make an end of suffering, because they see danger in sensuality, which the majority of people do not see. For such people, conventional truth is not enough. Anyone who truly sees the fault and the danger in sensuality will straightway leave home and renounce the world. The reason for not renouncing the household life is never anything other than the failure to perceive the danger inherent in sensuality. Our bodhisatta was twenty-nine years old when he re-

For Those Seeking an Escape from
the Faults and Dangers of Sensuality

nounced the world. The reason the bodhisatta left the palace at the age of twenty-nine was that he saw the inherent dangers and faults of sensuality, even though he had lived up to that time in the midst of great sensuality. The sense pleasure available nowadays cannot compare with the sensuality the bodhisatta was enjoying then, but he came into this existence destined to be a Buddha; therefore, when the time ripened, he could not remain in the palace any longer, so he left. One has the strength to leave home only when one sees the dangers and the faults inherent in sensuality.

It was the same when Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahāmoggallāna renounced the world in their youth. Both of them enjoyed sensuality and pursued it in early life because they saw happiness in sense pleasure. Finally, however, they came to see the faults and the dangers inherent in sensuality, so they decided to leave their homes. In this way, when someone sees the fault and the danger inherent in sensuality, they seek out and find the escape from this danger.

Nonetheless, if the Buddha had not appeared in the world, the way to escape from such danger would not have appeared. The Buddha taught ultimate truth as the way to escape from such danger. Those who see happiness in sensuality must practise according to the knowledge they have attained through hearing conventional truth; but those who see the fault and the danger of sense pleasure will conceive a desire to be free from all suffering and will aim to attain liberation. Desirous of going beyond the reach of all such danger, they will seek the way to escape. The way out of danger is through hearing ultimate truth, which they

can follow and practise. In the end, they will know and see the way to escape from all suffering. For this reason the Buddha taught the second truth – ultimate truth.

The Four Types of Ultimate Truth

There are four ultimate truths, or ultimate realities. They are *citta* (consciousness), *cetasika* (mental factors), *rūpa* (materiality), and Nibbāna. Consciousness, or *citta*, cannot arise alone. It arises together with associated mental factors, or *cetasika*. For example, while one listens to a Dhamma talk with happiness and wisdom, wholesome mentalities arise. In this case, these mentalities number thirty-four altogether, since there is consciousness arising together with thirty-three associated mental factors. As one listens, these consciousnesses and their associated mental factors arise very, very rapidly. Their repeated arising is very powerful, so that if such kamma were to appear at one's near-death moment, such a person would surely be reborn in either the celestial realms or the human realm.

Listening to the Dhamma without pleasant feeling will mean that the mentalities that arise will be thirty-three, because the mental factor of *pīti* (joy) will be lacking. If one also listens without understanding, the listening occurs without the mental factor of wisdom, and the mentalities will number thirty-two. In this way the number of the mentalities varies depending on the state of mind that arises as one is accumulating a certain kamma. For someone whose mind at that point in time has an understanding of the Law of Kamma and believes in it, then that person's mind is associated with wisdom. If someone is happy, the

The Four Types of Ultimate Truth

mind is associated with pīti. The arising of both wisdom and happiness means that there will be thirty-four mentalities in all. Mentalities such as these are superior to mentalities that are not associated with wisdom. When mentalities that are associated with wisdom give their results, such results are superior to those of mentalities that are not associated with wisdom.

Consciousness cannot arise alone; it arises together with associated mental factors. Mentality arises depending on its base – eye-consciousness on the eye-base, ear-consciousness on the ear-base, and so on. Mentality can take an object. Mentality inclines to know its object. Materiality, however, has no such ability and cannot take any object. Only mentality can take an object and inclines to know that object.

If a meditator is practising in a very quiet room and someone knocks on the door of the room, ear-consciousness arises, because ear-consciousness is mentality, and it inclines to take its object. This is the nature of mind. If a meditator senses the fragrance of incense or flowers in the room, nose-consciousness arises. Again, this is the nature of mind: It inclines to take its respective object. When one sits down to eat, taking some food and putting it into one's mouth, the taste of the food is experienced, because tongue-consciousness arises and inclines towards its object. This is the nature of mentality. When one then thinks, 'This tastes good. That tastes sweet. This tastes sour. This food tastes better than that,' all these assessments are done by one's mind. By contrast, materiality cannot do any of these things.

We humans have five aggregates, in which mentality arises based on materiality. Celestial beings also have five aggregates, so their mentality arises based on materiality as well. The mentality of animals arises based on their materiality, since they too have five clinging aggregates. The same is true of hell beings and rūpa brahmā, or fine-material brahmā; for all beings with five aggregates, mentality arises depending on materiality. However, arūpa brahmā, or immaterial-sphere brahmā, have only four *nāmakkhandha* (mentality aggregates), so their mentality arises without being based on materiality. Their mentality can arise without any material base. No one but a Buddha, One who can see beyond what is visible to the naked eye, can see these things.

Ultimate Truth Is Profound and Universal

However, if the Buddha had not appeared, it would be impossible to know such deep Dhamma. This is not perceptible in the realm of conventional truth; this is in the realm of ultimate truth. Therefore, it is a rare opportunity to hear this Dhamma, because the arising of a Buddha in the world is very rare. Just as rare is the opportunity to hear the Dhamma and to practise. Far more rare is the opportunity to penetrate the Dhamma. Now we have this opportunity to hear and practise, since we have been born while the teachings of the Buddha are still flourishing. We are especially fortunate to have encountered the Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, who worked all his life to make this profound Path appear again. It had almost disappeared because many do not know how to teach according to the Buddha's teaching. For the most part, teachers of our days have created new teachings and new traditions, because

the original Path is so very profound that sometimes teachers do not understand it properly. Do not miss this precious opportunity.

It is important to bear in mind that truth can be misconstrued or misapprehended because it is subtle and hard to understand. We humans also have a strong tendency to reject something as true simply because it does not agree with our personal inclinations and preferences. In turn, what people regard as true determines how they think and speak and act; and since what is regarded as right thought and speech and action varies greatly throughout the world – say, from county to country – it is obvious that what is regarded as true varies in the same way. This is because people's decisions as to whether or not something is true are very often based on their own likes and dislikes. In a word, for most people *preference* determines what is true, with the result that people in general do not really know the truth.

The Buddha, however, taught ultimate truth – the truth that is true at all times and everywhere and for everyone, whether hell beings or animals or humans or celestial beings. It applies to non-living things as well. Such truth cannot be denied. As disciples of the Buddha, we must set aside our likes and dislikes in favour of the actual truth. When occasion serves, this is the truth we must impart to others, whatever their preferences might be. In this way we are faithful disciples of the Buddha and preserve His teachings, which are the only way to liberation for all beings.

The ultimate truth taught by the Buddha, then, is universal. Conventional truth is not. To recall an illustration of

this point cited above, the name of a thing changes when the thing itself changes from one form to another – a tree can be sawn into boards, which can be made into a table; clay can be formed into bricks, which in turn can be used to build a meditation hall; wood can be processed into charcoal, which turns into ashes when burned. Thus, when something changes from one form to another, its name in terms of conventional truth also changes. It is not true all the time. It has changed according to changes in a particular form.

In this way, conventional truth is true to a certain extent, but untrue when it changes from one form to another. It is not true at all times; it is not universal. Unlike ultimate truth, conventional truth is changeable. Nevertheless, even though forms change, as do their names, the ultimate truth that exists in every form is the same. From the standpoint of ultimate truth, there is no change. Unlike conventional truth, ultimate truth is not changeable.

Twenty-Eight Types of Materiality

The Buddha taught twenty-eight types of rūpa in all. First there are the four great elements, which are underived concrete materiality. Then there are twenty-four types of derived materiality, which further subdivide into fourteen types of concrete derived materiality and ten types of un-concrete derived materiality. The four great elements are earth, water, fire, and wind. Concrete derived materiality comprises eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, nose-sensitivity, tongue-sensitivity, and body-sensitivity; their objects, colour, sound, smell, and taste; nutritive essence, life faculty, and heart materiality; and male sex materiality and female

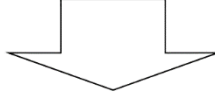
Twenty-Eight Types of Materiality

sex materiality. The ten types of unconcrete derived materiality are the space element, bodily intimation, verbal intimation, lightness, softness, wieldiness, generation, continuity, ageing, and impermanence. The distinction between concrete and unconcrete might also be expressed as either real or non-real, respectively.

The Twenty-Eight Types of Materiality

Four Types of Underived Concrete Materiality (*nippahanna-rūpa*)

Great Essentials (<i>mahābhūta</i>)	
1. Earth Element (<i>pathavīdhātu</i>)	3. Fire Element (<i>tejodhātu</i>)
2. Water Element (<i>āpodhātu</i>)	4. Wind Element (<i>vāyodhātu</i>)



Twenty-Four Types of Derived Materiality (*upādāya-rūpa*)

Fourteen Types of Concrete Derived Materiality (<i>nippahanna upādāyarūpa</i>)		
SENSITIVE / TRANSLUCENT MATERIALITY <i>(pasādarūpa)</i> Eye-Sensitivity (<i>cakkhupasāda</i>) Ear-Sensitivity (<i>sotapasāda</i>) Nose-Sensitivity (<i>ghānapasāda</i>) Tongue-Sensitivity (<i>jīvhāpasāda</i>) Body-Sensitivity (<i>kāyapasāda</i>)	FIELD MATERIALITY <i>(gocararūpa)</i> Colour (<i>vaṇṇa</i>) Sound (<i>sadda</i>) Smell (<i>gandha</i>) Taste (<i>rasa</i>) [5. Touch (<i>phoṭṭhabba</i>) {= earth, fire, wind}]	Nutritive Essence (<i>ojā</i>) Life Faculty (<i>jīvitindriya</i>) Heart Materiality <i>(hadayarūpa)</i> SEX MATERIALITY <i>(bhāvarūpa)</i> Male Sex Materiality <i>(purisabhāvarūpa)</i> Female Sex Materiality <i>(iṭṭhibhāvarūpa)</i>
Ten Types of Unconcrete Materiality (<i>anipphanna rūpa</i>)		
DELIMITING MATERIALITY <i>(paricchedarūpa)</i> Space Element (<i>ākāśadhātu</i>) INTIMATION MATERIALITY <i>(viññatirūpa)</i> Bodily Intimation (<i>kāyaviññatti</i>) Verbal Intimation (<i>vacīviññatti</i>)	CHANGE MATERIALITY <i>(vikārarūpa)</i> Lightness (<i>lahutā</i>) Softness (<i>mudutā</i>) Weldiness <i>(kammaññatā)</i>	CHARACTERISTIC MATERIALITY <i>(lakkaṇarūpa)</i> Generation (<i>upacaya</i>) Continuity (<i>santati</i>) Ageing (<i>jaratā</i>) Impermanence (<i>aniccatā</i>)

The twenty-eight types of materiality may be classified into

1. the four great essentials(*mahābhūta*) and
2. the twenty-four types of materiality derived from the four great essentials (*upādāya-rūpa*).

or

1. eighteen types of concrete materiality(*nippahanna-rūpa*) and
2. ten types of unconcrete materiality(*anipphanna-rūpa*)

Classification of Materiality by Way of Origination

We can also classify all materialities into four types according to the way they are produced, namely, as kamma-born materiality, mind-born materiality, temperature-born materiality, and nutriment-born materiality. These four kinds of materiality contribute to the composition of the human body. So this body is made up of four kinds of materiality: kamma-born, mind-born, temperature-born, and nutriment-born materiality. We will elaborate more on these four kinds of materiality by way of origination later. Now we will first look at the twenty-eight types of materiality.

The Four Essential Elements

In every living and non-living thing in this world, there are four essential elements, or *mahābhūta* – earth, water, fire, and wind. The four great elements are the essential components of every perceptible material form, whether humans or trees or buildings or mountains or whatever.

One sees trees as trees; yet if one analyses the tree, one finds earth element. One can confirm the presence of the earth element in a tree by feeling the sensation of hardness when one touches it. The earth element supports the co-existence of the other three elements; without the earth element, the other elements could not co-exist in the tree. With the support of the earth element, however, the water element, the wind element, and the fire element can exist. The earth element also supports the other rūpa in existing

together. So, trees appear solid because of the earth element.

If the tree were to be cut down and ground into a very fine powder, like 'tree particles', the water element would be needed to recombine them into a solid form. The water element has the characteristics of cohesiveness and fluidity. It makes the many 'tree particles' cohere or hold together as a solid tree. This is like adding water to flour, so that the flour particles cohere into a lump.

If one touches the tree, one might sometimes feel either warmth or coldness. This indicates the presence of the fire element in the tree. The fire element indicates temperature and so includes heat and cold. Coldness makes things hard, while heat makes things soft.

Early each morning, soon after waking up, I take a bee pollen supplement that comes in a capsule made of sticky rice. According to the Vinaya, I cannot eat the outer capsule before dawn, so I need to remove the bee pollen powder from its capsule. Sometimes it is very cold in the early morning, and the capsule is so hard that it cannot be opened easily, and I need to warm it in front of a heater. Then it becomes soft enough for me to take the bee pollen out of the capsule. In this way heat warms things up and makes them soft and flexible, and the fire element, in the form of heat and cold, changes things.

Likewise, even in the wood of a tree one can feel a bit of give, a little softness, if one presses it, because fire makes it soft. At times the wood feels hard because the surrounding air is very cold. In the same way, when the tree is changed into boards, the same elements present in the

The Four Essential Elements

form of the tree are perceptible in a board's hardness, softness, warmth, and coldness. The board retains its shape because the water element holds it together.

As for the remaining element, the fact that a tree is standing upright is due to the presence of the wind element, which has the characteristics of pushing and supporting. A person can sit up because of the wind element, which pushes and supports the body so that a sitting posture can be maintained. Even lying on a bed is due to the wind element. Again, however, there is not only the wind element, but all the four elements are present, helping one another. All four elements co-exist in every single material form, both living and non-living. This is true at all times and in every form, even if it changes from one form to another. Therefore, this is ultimate truth.

Small children often play with a rubber form which can be inflated into a balloon. Without support from the wind element, a balloon would not be able to keep its shape. When one blows air into the balloon, the air pushes the wall of the balloon outwards. It changes from something shapeless and limp to something with a rounded shape and a certain firmness. This is a clear example of how the wind element pushes and supports.

The wind element is also responsible for motion. For example, when we breathe in, our chest expands, pushing outwards, and then contracts. Any vibration, rotation, and pressure that we feel is also due to the wind element. When a very energetic feeling takes hold of the body, this is also due to the wind element. This can happen when one practises *qigong* a lot; and if the energy becomes too strong, it

can interfere with one's meditation practice, so moderation is needed in such an instance. Again, the energy is due to the presence of the wind element.

The four great elements are the fundamental material elements; they exist together and are inseparable. Every material thing, ranging from the most infinitesimal particle to the most massive object, is made up of these four great elements. They comprise every material thing, no matter what its form. In this way, these four great elements make up trees, wood, tables, charcoal, and ashes. All four co-exist all the time in every material object, even though the form changes from one to another.

The Eight Inseparable Materialities

In addition to the four great elements, there are another four types of materiality that occur in all material things. They are colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence. The first three are familiar and easily understood. Each of these is related to the four great elements that co-exist in all material things; the colour one sees is the colour of the four elements, the smell one senses is the smell of the four elements, the taste is that of the four elements. Nutritive essence is the substance that causes something to happen. To put it simply, nutritive essence is the nutrients that provide the nourishment essential for the maintenance of life and for growth. However, while the nature of nutritive essence is to cause something to happen, its effects may not always be favourable. For instance, in the case of poison, its nutritive essence may bring harm instead.

The Eight Inseparable Materialities

Trees and plants are nourished by water drawn up through their roots. To be more exact, they are nourished by the nutritive essence found in water and in the dissolved minerals. In order to provide the nourishment that is essential for the maintenance of health and life and for growth, one should eat foods that are rich in nutrients. While all natural foods are rich in nutrients, processed foods are nutritionally poor. One should avoid eating any kind of processed food to be healthy and strong. When both nutritious natural food and processed food are analysed, we can see that both contain nutritive essence. The difference in their contribution to one's health and their effect on it lies in the different qualities of the nutritive essence in the respective type of food.

Just as the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind co-exist in every material thing, so these four materialities of colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence are present in every material form, whether it is a tree or a table or a building or a tomato or a papaya or poison or water. Every one of these things has colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence, in addition to the four great elements. If water is ultimately analysed with the light of concentration, then colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence can be discerned in addition to the four great elements. In the same way, these materialities can be discerned in a tomato and a papaya and any kind of vegetable or fruit and even in poison. Therefore, all these eight materialities together are termed 'inseparable materialities' (in Pāli, *avinibbhoga rūpa*). They are present in every material form, even though that form may change from tree to board to building, for example. All eight inseparable materialities are always present in every material form. They co-exist, arising and perishing

together, in a group called a *rūpa kalāpa* in Pāli, which means ‘material group’ or ‘materiality cluster’.

There are many types of such materiality groups, or *rūpa kalāpas*. Every *rūpa kalāpa* can be thought of as a sub-atomic particle. They are very small – very, very tiny. They are arising and perishing very, very rapidly all the time. Those who want to see Nibbāna and make an end of suffering and attain liberation must see these *rūpa kalāpas* which are ceaselessly arising and perishing very rapidly, and to see the ultimate materialities which are present in each of them. We will discuss later how such discernment is possible for those with concentration.

The Materiality of the Six Sense Bases

As explained above, human beings possess the five aggregates of materiality and mentality. Hence, in humans, mentality arises based on materiality. Such a materiality is called a base – a physical support for the occurrence of mentality. The base for each of the five physical sense-consciousnesses is its respective sensitivity. Hence, eye-consciousness arises based on eye-sensitivity, ear-consciousness arises based on ear-sensitivity and body-consciousness arises based on body-sensitivity.

Eye-consciousness is mentality, and its base is eye-sensitivity. Someone who is blind cannot see because there is no eye-sensitivity, in which case eye-consciousness cannot arise. Seeing occurs because the colour of the visible object impinges on the eye-sensitivity and eye-consciousness arises, just as hearing occurs because sound impinges on the ear-sensitivity and ear-consciousness arises. Of course,

The Materiality of the Six Sense Bases

seeing is impossible in the dark, so light is also a necessary condition for eye-consciousness to arise. Another condition is attention. Eye-consciousness arises only when the four conditions of eye-sensitivity, visible object, light, and attention are met.

Eye-sensitivity, then, is the sensitivity which can be impinged upon by the visible object, or the colour object. Only based on eye-sensitivity can eye-consciousness arise. Therefore, the Buddha says that mentality arises based on materiality. Such things can be taught only by the Buddha, Who has knowledge and vision beyond what is visible to the naked eye. One cannot learn such things at any of the world's famous and prestigious universities, where they can teach what can be seen and heard, but not what is beyond the scope of the naked eye.

We are able to hear because of ear-sensitivity, and because sound impinges on ear-sensitivity. If one inserts ear plugs firmly into one's ears, one will not be able to hear. As the Buddha says, for hearing to occur there must be sound, ear-sensitivity, space, and attention. Only when these four conditions are met does ear-consciousness arise. Only a Buddha can teach such a detailed truth.

Smells and aromas, both pleasant and unpleasant, are experienced due to nose-sensitivity. For smelling to occur, there must be a smell, nose-sensitivity, and attention. Until now one may not have been aware that the sense of smell also requires the medium of air. Only when these four conditions are met does smelling occur.

When we eat, we experience various flavours, either pleasant or unpleasant, through our sense of taste. Food tastes

good or bad to us because of tongue-sensitivity. Tasting requires not only tongue-sensitivity but also the presence of food with its particular flavour. Moreover, if one's mouth is completely dry, one cannot experience the taste, so there must be liquid as one of the causes that enables one to sense the taste. In the case of tasting, then, there are four conditions as well: tongue-sensitivity, taste object, water or liquid, and attention. Only when these four conditions are met does tongue-consciousness arise.

Touch as a sensation arises because of body-sensitivity. There must also be a tangible object. There must be body-sensitivity. In addition, there must be the hardness of the earth element, and there must be attention. Thus, there are these four conditions for body-consciousness to arise: body-sensitivity, tangible object, hardness, and attention. Hardness is specified because, no matter how soft the tangible object is, it still has some degree of hardness. If I say there is hardness in the wind, do you agree with me? Consider that there is hardness in the wind, which in its blowing exerts pressure that is felt by the body. There is likewise hardness in water, and it is quite tangible if one strikes the surface of a pool of water very hard. Similarly there is hardness in a burning fire, and one can feel that hardness by vigorously striking at the fire with one's hand. Therefore, whatever is tangible has as its base the four elements – earth, water, fire, and wind; among these, the tangible ones are earth, fire, and wind.

Body-sensitivity pervades the entire body. When one strokes one's face or arm with a feather, one can feel the touch because there is body-sensitivity in both these parts of the body. Touch can be felt on the nose, and one can

The Materiality of the Six Sense Bases

feel the touch of a cotton swab inside one's ear. The tongue and the eye likewise register the sensation of touch. All these bodily sensations occur due to the fact that body-sensitivity pervades the entire body.

When any of the sensitivities proper to each of the five physical senses – eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, and so forth, is impinged upon by its respective sense object under the right conditions, the respective sense-consciousness arises.

As was said above, according to the Buddha's teaching, there is inside the heart a very small place that is about as big as the inside of one's scooped palm. Blood gathers in this place in the heart, and many materialities can be found there. Among these is heart materiality, *hadaya rūpa*. Memory and thought arise based on heart materiality. In fact, other than the consciousness of the five sense organs, namely, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness, all other consciousness arises based on heart materiality. This is the last of the six sense bases (eye-base, ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, and heart-base) which comprise one category of ultimate materiality, or *rūpa*. One day, if you have developed concentration, you will be able to discern them there.

With the exception of body-sensitivity, all the above sensitivities and heart materiality are found only in the respective sense organs – eye-sensitivity is found only in the eye, ear-sensitivity is found only in the ear, nose-sensitivity only in the nose, tongue-sensitivity only in the tongue, and heart materiality is found only in the blood within the heart. Body-sensitivity, on the other hand, spreads

throughout the body; it allows us to feel sensations throughout our bodies. When someone pulls one of our ears, we feel the pull because of the presence of body-sensitivity in our ear. The body-sensitivity in our ear is impinged upon by the touch, allowing us to feel the pull.

Hence, each of the first four sense organs has two sensitivities – its respective sensitivity and body-sensitivity. The eye has both eye-sensitivity and body-sensitivity, the ear has both ear-sensitivity and body-sensitivity, and so on. The body has only body-sensitivity. In the heart, there are both heart materiality and body-sensitivity. These are materialities that all human beings, generally speaking, have in common.

The Six Sense Doors

Another term that pertains to the six senses is ‘the six sense doors’. The word ‘door’ denotes the channel through which the mind interacts with its objects.

For the five physical senses, each sense door corresponds to its respective sensitivity. Hence, the eye-door is eye-sensitivity, the ear-door is ear-sensitivity, and the body-door is body-sensitivity. One will realise by now that, for the five physical senses, the respective sensitivity then acts as both a base and a door.

Thus the eye-sensitivity is both a sense base for the arising of eye-consciousness together with its associated mental factors, as well as the sense door through which the colour of the visible object becomes accessible to the mentalities occurring in an eye-door mental process.

The Six Sense Doors

The eye-sensitivity is both the eye-base as well as the eye-door. Similarly, the ear-sensitivity is both the ear-base and the ear-door, while the body-sensitivity is both the body-base and the body-door.

For the sixth sense, which is mind, heart materiality is the heart-base – the base for the arising of mentalities; but the mind-door is the *bhavaṅga* consciousness, also known as the life continuum. The *bhavaṅga* is bright, and it arises based on heart-base. When one reflects back on something one has heard – on a Dhamma talk, for instance – this reflection arises at the mind-door. Reflection and memory are related to the mind-door. Every object one has experienced and encountered in one's life can be remembered by means of the mind-door – the objects of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

Whenever any of the five sense objects impinges on its respective sense door, it also impinges on the mind-door at the same time. A visible object impinges on the eye-sensitivity and on the *bhavaṅga* at the same time. Audible objects impinge simultaneously on ear-door and mind-door, smell objects on nose-door and mind-door, taste objects on tongue-door and mind-door, and tangible objects on body-door and mind-door. Every sense object impinges on two doors simultaneously.

To make this clearer, take the experience of listening to very loud music with heavy bass as an example. The sound impinges on one's ear-sensitivity, and at the same time it impinges on the mind-door or *bhavaṅga*. One can therefore distinctly feel the vibrations at the heart area in addition to hearing the sound. With concentration, one can know and see this directly.

Objects of the Physical Sense Doors

The senses and their objects require some explanation. In the list of the twenty-eight types of materiality, it will be noted that five physical senses are listed, but only four sense objects – colour, sound, smell, and taste. Body-sensitivity, or the sense of touch, has as its object that which is tangible. What body-sensitivity can feel is the earth, fire, and wind elements, or more precisely the characteristics of those elements, which are hardness, softness, roughness, smoothness, heaviness, lightness, heat, cold, pushing, and supporting. These tangible objects are already included in the classification as three of the four great elements. Water element is not an object of body-sensitivity, because the characteristics of the water element – flowing and cohesion – are not tangible. What one senses when one ‘feels’ water is the characteristics of the other three elements, whereas the characteristics of water element – flowing and cohesion – are only objects of mind.

Sound Materiality

Recall that the eight inseparable rūpa are earth element, water element, fire element, wind element, colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence. Sound is not included among them. Sound is not among the many different materialities found in the sense organs either. Among the twenty-eight materialities, however, sound is listed as concrete or real rūpa.

Sound is indeed real, but not in the same way as other real rūpa like the fire element or nutritive essence. As we have

discussed earlier, one aspect of the earth element is hardness. Sound is produced only when the earth element present in a rūpa kalāpa collides with the earth element present in another rūpa kalāpa. As a result, the rūpa kalāpa then contains the eight inseparable materialities plus sound, and the kalāpa, with its group of nine materialities, is called a ‘sound nonad kalāpa’. Thus, when we breathe in and out, we can hear the sound of our breathing, because the sound is produced by the striking together of the earth element of the kalāpas involved in the process of breathing. In this way, sound is real rūpa. Once one has attained concentration, one will be able to discern the tiny kalāpas involved in breathing and will know this for oneself.

Speech occurs similarly. The desire to speak produces many mind-born kalāpas that spread throughout the body; but when meditators discern how the voice is produced, they must emphasise the mind-born kalāpas that spread mainly around the vocal cords and pay particular attention to the earth element in those kalāpas. Meditators must also discern the hardness of the earth element in the kamma-born kalāpas in the vocal cords. When the earth element in the mind-born kalāpas produced by the desire to speak and the earth element in the kamma-born kalāpas of the vocal cords collide with each other in the area of the vocal cords, the sound of the voice is produced.

As the voice is produced dependent on the kamma-born kalāpas in the vocal cords, the quality of a person’s voice is a result of that person’s past kamma. One’s voice will exhibit a particular quality according to one’s kamma, so to some degree the pāramī of a person can be known by

listening to his or her voice. Thus we should reflect and consider how much our circumstances depend on our own kamma, even to the extent that, if one has accumulated good kamma, one will have a good voice. This applies to oneself as well as the people one meets. Sometimes there are people whose voice makes you want to listen to them speak; at other times a person's voice makes you not want to hear it. This is because of their respective past kamma. Those who have not told lies in the past, or have not used harsh speech, or engaged in useless talk or back-biting have a pleasant voice. People want to hear such a voice and listen to such a person speak. Therefore, you need to change your kamma in this very life.

In doing propagation work, we need to observe people, especially the way someone speaks and talks to others. We need to evaluate how people feel after listening to someone speak, and what their view of that person is after they hear from him. This is very important. In this regard the Buddha said, '*Mahāpuññā nāma manāpakathā honti*' – 'One with great merits has charming speech that everyone loves to hear.'³³ The Buddha is perfect, *mahāpuññā*, the One with great merits, so whoever heard His speech appreciated it very much. They loved His speech. His voice was like a brahmā's, very sweet and very beautiful. How happy you would be to hear the Buddha's voice! Therefore, in order to do good propagation work, we must have *mahāpuññā*, since our speech is related to our past kamma; otherwise people will not want to listen to us. In the same way, if we want to know whether a certain teacher has good pāramī

³³ Commentaries to AN.V.1.4.1 Sumanasuttam (AN 5.31 The Discourse Concerning Sumana) and DN.II.1 Mahapadānasuttam (DN 14 The Great Discourse on the Lineage).

and good kamma, we can observe those who are listening to that teacher to see if they are happy with what they hear, if they want to listen, or if they are ready to listen. Such things depend on the teacher's accumulated kamma. A teacher's high social standing and elevated worldly position and level of education and academic degrees do not really matter. We need to observe these matters carefully when we let someone do propagation work. This is something that you may not hear from anyone else; this is my understanding, and I am sharing it with you.

Nevertheless, having a lot of *puñña*, a lot of merit, does not necessarily mean one will have a pleasant voice; nor is it true that only those who have good voices have much merit. Someone might not have a good voice but might still have a lot of merit. Such a person will be someone who knows how to speak and how to choose the right words when speaking, so that people want to listen. Certainly there are such people – people to whom others want to listen, not because of their good voices but because what they say makes others happy. Otherwise, a pleasant voice notwithstanding, they will find it difficult to gain a hearing if they speak as they want and as they like without regard for anyone else.

One needs to train oneself in knowing how to speak, because it is a way of fulfilling *pāramī* so as to have a good voice and good *pāramī* in the future. Above all, we need to speak as we should, and not as we want; and in saying something we ought to say, we must choose the right words to say it. We must assess whether the time and place are suitable and whether the person who hears us is disposed to listen and able to be benefited.

The Buddha knew everything completely, so His speech was always suitable in these ways. As for us, who are not perfect, we need to give careful consideration to these questions – whom to address, when to speak, when not to speak; which words to use, and which words not to use. We need to train in these things. Suitable speech requires mindfulness on our part as well as mettā towards the person we are going to speak to. With good speech we can fulfil pāramī. If you speak the way you should, you can fulfil all ten pāramīs at once, just by speaking to someone. I have explained this at length elsewhere.³⁴

Sex Materiality

One type of materiality that is not the same for every human being is sex materiality, or *bhāva rūpa*. It is not the same for every human because, while all people have sex materiality, men have male sex materiality and women have female sex materiality. Bhāva rūpa is kamma-born materiality; whether one takes birth as a man or as a woman is due to one's kamma. Masculinity is due to the presence of kamma-born male bhāva rūpa, and femininity is due to the presence of kamma-born female bhāva rūpa. Sex materiality accounts for the differences between men and women – differences in facial characteristics, vocal register, physical size and strength, the shape of the limbs, their respective ways of speaking and moving and walking,

³⁴ See 'How to Fulfil Pāramī in Daily Life' in *A Journey of Self-Discovery*, by Bhikkhu Revata (Pa-Auk Meditation Centre, Singapore, 2015). The e-book version is available for download at www.pamc.org.sg.

Sex Materiality

and so on. When we see someone approaching from a distance, we can tell whether the person is a man or a woman even before we know who the person is. Bhāva rūpa determines whether a human being is male or female.

Finally, like body-sensitivity, bhāva rūpa occurs throughout the entirety of the body. Male sex materiality can be found throughout the body of a man, and female sex materiality can be found throughout the body of a woman. Therefore, eye-sensitivity, body-sensitivity, and bhāva rūpa are present in the eye; ear-sensitivity, body-sensitivity, and bhāva rūpa are found in the ear. It is the same for the nose and the tongue. The sex materiality in the sense organs is of course male in the case of a man, and female in the case of a woman. The respective bhāva rūpa is present in all the other parts of the body as well. For example, the bhāva rūpa present in the eyes is the reason for the difference one perceives in looking into the eyes of a man versus looking into the eyes of a woman. They are different. This is due to the presence of the male or female sex materiality in the eye.

Space Element

The space element (*ākāśadhātu*) belongs to the delimiting materiality (*paricchedarūpa*) category of the twenty-eight rūpa. It functions as a sort of borderline; it is the space between rūpa kalāpas. If we put a number of eggs into a bowl or a basket, we see space between the eggs; in the same way, there is space between the rūpa kalāpas. When one sees the space, one will also see the small particles – the rūpa kalāpas. Hence, the Buddha taught the space element in order to help meditators discern rūpa kalāpas.

This will be elaborated in more detail when we discuss four elements meditation later. Space element is non-real *rūpa*, and is not the object of *vipassanā*.

Intimation Materiality

In addition to the space element, another category of the twenty-eight *rūpa* is intimation materiality (*viññattirūpa*). It is of two types, bodily and verbal. Bodily intimation can be thought of as a material means of communication, such as eye movements or a hand gesture or a nod of the head. It is also non-real *rūpa*, and as such is not the object of *vipassanā*. One cannot contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self by paying attention to one's bodily intimation. The second type is verbal intimation, the movement of the mouth to produce speech to let others understand one's intention. Thus, the two types of intimation materiality are special behaviours of body and mouth which one uses to communicate one's thought or intentions to others or by means of which they are able to understand one's intentions.

Change Materiality

The next category is change materiality (*vikārarūpa*). The *rūpa* here are also non-real *rūpa*. There are three of them: *rūpassa lahutā*, which is physical lightness or the lightness of materiality; *rūpassa mudutā*, the softness of materiality; and *rūpassa kammaññatā*, the wieldiness of materiality, or the physical adaptability of materiality. One can move one's hand because of its lightness; when the hand is moved, it is in a state in which lightness of materiality is functioning.

One can also say that there is then a lightness of materiality in the body. When we are healthy, we can move as we like. At that time, all three change materialities are present: There is lightness of materiality, softness of materiality, and wieldiness of materiality. By contrast, when we are sick, we may not be able even to lift our hand. It is very heavy. These elements are then absent; there is no lightness or softness or wieldiness. The three elements classed as change materiality are non-real materiality. They appear on the basis of real materiality.

Characteristics Materiality

Four non-real rūpa remain, and they are categorised as characteristics materiality (*lakkaṇarūpa*). Of these, both *upacaya rūpa* (generation) and *santati rūpa* (continuity) are the genesis, arising, or birth (*jāti*) of matter. They differ in that generation is the first arising of a material process or the initial launching or setting up of that process. Continuity is the subsequently repeated or continued genesis of material phenomena in the same material process. For example, the first arising of the body decad kalāpa, sex decad kalāpa, and heart decad kalāpa at conception is generation, while the subsequent arising of those same kalāpas throughout life is continuity. The third, *jaratā rūpa*, is the decaying or ageing of the rūpa. The last one, *aniccatā rūpa*, denotes the moment of dissolution of every rūpa. After every rūpa arises, it perishes. That perishing is *anicca*, or impermanence. Aniccatā rūpa is the nature of dissolution.

From the above, we can see that there are three stages of rūpa – arising, static, and perishing. Upacaya rūpa and

santati rūpa both refer to the arising stage, jaratā rūpa refers to the static stage, and aniccatā rūpa refers to the perishing stage.

Conclusion on the Twenty-Eight Types of Rūpa

There are, then, ten types of unconcrete materiality, or non-real rūpa. Together with the eighteen types of concrete materiality, or real rūpa, these make twenty-eight types of rūpa in all. Although the unconcrete materialities are not objects of vipassanā, the Buddha taught us to discern all twenty-eight types of rūpa for the attainment of the first Insight Knowledge. Knowledge of the twenty-eight types of rūpa is essential for anyone who aspires to practise what the Buddha taught. Liberation is achieved through insight, and the first of the sixteen Insight Knowledges is *Nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*, the Knowledge of Discerning Ultimate Mentality and Materiality. If one succeeds in discerning the twenty-eight types of rūpa, one has attained half of this first Insight Knowledge; one has attained the Knowledge of Discerning Ultimate Materiality.

The Buddha imparted this teaching in the Abhidhamma; so anyone who does not accept the Abhidhamma is unable to attain even the first Insight Knowledge. Those who reject the Abhidhamma are insulting the Omniscient Knowledge of the Buddha. He alone was able to teach the Abhidhamma, because He alone possessed Omniscient Knowledge.

In the suttas, the Buddha explains many different Dhamma from different aspects according to the inclination of His listeners. He chooses the right words to fit the

capacity of those who hear them. In the Abhidhamma, however, the Buddha does not differentiate in this way. The teachings in the Abhidhamma apply universally to all things, whether humans or animals, living things or non-living things. The Buddha imparts ultimate truth in the Abhidhamma. Unlike Suttanta, the Abhidhamma does not emphasise the person; it emphasises what is true in the world at all times.

The Four Groups of Materiality by Way of Origination

As mentioned earlier, materiality can be classified into four groups according to its origin. Rūpa kalāpas can originate from kamma, from mind or consciousness, from temperature or the fire element, and from nutriment. These are known respectively as kamma-born materiality, mind-born materiality, temperature-born materiality, and nutriment-born materiality. These four groups of materiality comprise the human body.

Kamma-Born Materiality

The first type in this classification is kamma-born materiality. It consists of the three types of rūpa kalāpas found throughout the whole body (body decad kalāpa, sex decad kalāpa, and life nonad kalāpa) and the rūpa kalāpa specific to each of the sense organs aside from the body itself (eye decad kalāpa, ear decad kalāpa, nose decad kalāpa, tongue decad kalāpa, and heart decad kalāpa).

All kamma-born rūpa kalāpas have life faculty materiality as a ninth factor in addition to the eight inseparable materialities of earth, water, fire, wind, colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence. The life nonad kalāpa is made up of just these nine materialities. The life nonad kalāpa is so called because it has nine factors, and ‘nonad’ means ‘nine’; it also has life faculty as the ninth factor.

Decad kalāpas are so called because there are ten factors in each. The sex decad kalāpa has either male or female sex materiality as the tenth factor. The heart decad kalāpa has the heart materiality as the tenth factor, while the rūpa kalāpa specific to each of the five physical sense organs has the respective sensitivity as the tenth factor – the eye decad kalāpa has eye-sensitivity as the tenth factor, the ear decad kalāpa has ear-sensitivity as the tenth factor, and so on.

These rūpa kalāpas do not have their origin in mind, nutriment, or temperature; rather, they are directly related to our past kamma. It is therefore necessary to understand what kind of rūpa begins at the moment of human conception, because this rūpa is kamma-born materiality directly related to our past kamma.

Conception and Development in the Womb

To understand this, it will be helpful to cite the Indaka Sutta.³⁵ There the Buddha explained how the conception

³⁵ SN.I.10.1 Indakasuttam (SN 10.1 The Discourse Concerning Indaka).

Conception and Development in the Womb

and gestation of beings takes place in the wombs of their mothers:

Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha on Mount Inda's Peak, the haunt of the yakkha Indaka. Then the yakkha Indaka approached the Blessed One and addressed him in verse:

As the Buddhas say that rūpa is not the soul,
How then does one obtain this body?
From where do one's bones and liver come?
How is one begotten in the womb?

The Buddha answered with the following stanza:

*Paṭhamaṃ kalalaṃ hoti, kalalā hoti abbudaṃ.
Abbudā jāyate pesī, pesī nibbattatī ghano.
Ghanā pasākhā jāyanti, kesā lomā nakhāpi ca.*

In English this means:

First there is the *kalala*; from the *kalala* comes
the *abbuda*;
From the *abbuda* the *pesī* is produced; from the
pesī the *ghana* arises;
From the *ghana* emerge the limbs, the head-
hair, body-hair, and nails.

The beginning stage in the womb is called the *kalala* stage. Three kinds of kamma-born materiality arise at the *kalala* stage. The *kalala* is very small, about the size of a drop of oil placed on the tip of a thread made from three strands

of wool.³⁶ When meditators discern their past life, they need to go back to this stage, the *kalala* stage at the very beginning of this life. They need to discern the types of rūpa kalāpas which exist at this *kalala* stage, which is the first week of the embryo.

In the second week, the *kalala* stage changes into the *abbuda* stage. Medical science tells us that the size of the embryo during the second week is the size of a poppy seed. The commentary says that the colour of the *abbuda* is the colour of water in which meat has been washed.

From the *abbuda*, the *pesī* is produced. This is in the third week of the embryo. The *pesī* is rather shapeless, like molten tin, and is pink in colour. Scientists say that the embryo at this stage in the third week is the size of a sesame seed, that it resembles a tadpole more than a human, and that it is growing fast. The circulatory system is beginning to form, and the heart begins to beat.³⁷

In the fourth week of development, the *ghana* arises from the *pesī*. The commentary explains that the *ghana* is shaped like a chicken egg, but is not of the same size. Modern medicine tells us that, in the fourth week, the nose, mouth, and ears start to take shape, and the intestines and brain are beginning to develop. The embryo is about the size of a lentil at this stage.

³⁶ See commentary to SN.I.10.1 Indakasuttam (SN 10.1 The Discourse concerning Indaka).

³⁷ Source: www.babycenter.com.

Conception and Development in the Womb

In the fifth week, the limbs emerge from the *ghana*. In the commentary, the Buddha explains that ‘five pimples appear, the rudiments of the arms, legs and head’. Medical experts say that the embryo in the fifth week has doubled in size since the previous week and is about as big as a blueberry. It still has a tail, but this will soon disappear. Small hands and feet like paddles emerge from the developing arms and legs.

The Buddha gave this explanation of how a human embryo develops more than 2,600 years ago. The Buddha said that in the fifth week five pimples appear, the rudiments of the arms, legs, and head. Modern medical science also says that the fifth week is when little hands and feet that look more like paddles emerge from the developing arms and legs.

We admire scientists and doctors for their ability in these areas. Nowadays, with their sophisticated instruments, they can take sonograms and so forth and can know about human foetal development very clearly. They have helped us to know conventional truth.

The Buddha described this process of human gestation, from conception to embryo to foetus, more than 2,600 years ago, long before the advent of modern science with its impressive instruments. He went beyond even what present-day science can know: Only the Buddha has taught us how many types of *rūpa* arise at the moment of conception, at the *kalala* stage, the beginning stage in the womb, and only the Buddha has taught us how to practise so as to discern these things for ourselves.

From the ultimate point of view, at the *kalala* stage, for humans there are three kinds of rūpa kalāpa. In the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha it says, ‘*Paṭisandhiyaṃ pana, gabbhaseyyakasattānaṃ kāyabhāvaavatthudasakaṣaṅkhātāni tīni dasakāni pātubhavan’ti.*’³⁸ It means that with the arising of paṭisandhi or rebirth-linking consciousness, at the *kalala* stage, three types of decad rūpa kalāpas begin, namely, the heart decad kalāpa, the body decad kalāpa, and the sex decad kalāpa, which has male bhāva rūpa for males and female bhāva rūpa for females. Therefore, whether one is born as a man or as a woman is determined at the moment of conception; contemporary science is in agreement with the Buddha on this point.

In embryology, however, they can say definitely whether the foetus is male or female only after about fifteen weeks – almost four months of development – and only with the use of laboratory tests and instrumentation. The Omniscient Buddha taught that, by means of concentration, either masculinity or femininity is discernible from the very moment of conception, from the *kalala* stage. One can develop concentration and practise ultimate mentality and materiality so as to discern these matters from the ultimate point of view. By means of concentration and insight, one can discern for oneself the nāma rūpa of the past, all the way back to the very first stage in the womb of one’s mother.

³⁸ CMA Chapter VI: Compendium of Materiality, The Occurrence of Material Phenomena, page 255: ‘But at rebirth-linking the womb-born creatures there arise (at rebirth) three decads – the decads of body, sex, and the heart-base.

Medical science tells us that the circulatory system begins to form and the heart starts to beat in the third week. However, even though the physical form of the heart has not taken shape in the first week, at the *kalala* stage, mentality arises at that time. Heart materiality is the heart-base, the base of mentality. At the conception of human life, rebirth-linking consciousness arises based on heart materiality. Both mentality and materiality start at this stage. Life, therefore, begins at the *kalala* stage, and that is why abortion is killing, regardless of the stage of pregnancy.

The *kalala* at the inception of life is very small. Even though three kinds of rūpa kalāpa arise, there is not just a single body decad kalāpa, sex decad kalāpa, or heart decad kalāpa. These kalāpa arise in great numbers. Nonetheless, the *kalala* is very, very small.

Again, in the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha it says, ‘*Tato paraṃ pavattikāle kamena cakkhudasakāḍḍhī ca pātubhavanti*’ – ‘Thereafter, during the course of existence, gradually there arise the eye decad kalāpa and so forth.’³⁹ The eye decad kalāpa, ear decad kalāpa, nose decad kalāpa, and tongue decad kalāpa arise gradually. Scientists say that in the fourth week of the embryo stage the nose, mouth, and ears are starting to take shape. At the paṭisandhi time, however, there are not yet any eye decad kalāpas, ear decad kalāpas, nose decad kalāpas, or tongue decad kalāpas. Here mango seeds can serve as an example: Actual full-grown trees and fruits are not to be found in the mango seed, but there is the potentiality for them; still, trees and fruits are pro-

³⁹ As cited above.

duced only at the right time and under the required conditions. In the same way, only three types of rūpa kalāpas appear at the beginning stage in the womb; the other types of rūpa kalāpas appear later only at the right time and with the right conditions.

For each one of us, then, the rūpa of the present life began at the very moment of conception, and it arose as the kamma-born materialities of the body decad kalāpa, the heart decad kalāpa, and the sex decad kalāpa. No one could know this for sure if the Buddha had not arisen in the world.

Mind-Born Materiality

Mind-born rūpa kalāpas are made up of at least the eight inseparable rūpa.⁴⁰ The act of walking can be used to illustrate how mind-born rūpa kalāpas are part of the composition of the human body. When the desire to walk arises in the mind, it produces mind-born rūpa kalāpas in which the wind element is predominant. They spread throughout the body. The wind element has the characteristics of pushing and supporting, so it pushes the legs in such a way as to move the body forward. When the desire to write arises in the mind, mind-born rūpa kalāpas arise in which the wind element is predominant; they spread

⁴⁰ The most common type of mind-born rūpa kalāpa consists of the eight inseparable rūpa. In addition, mind-born rūpa kalāpas may also contain either bodily intimation, vocal intimation, and sound, or the three change materialities (lightness, softness, and wieldiness), as well as a combination of each of the intimations with the change materialities.

throughout the body and to the hand. Since the wind element has the characteristics of pushing and supporting, those mind-born rūpa kalāpas move the hand and fingers to write. Similarly, mind-born rūpa kalāpas in which the wind element is predominant are generated when the desire to sit upright arises in the mind; these mind-born rūpa kalāpas spread to the body, and the wind element in them helps to hold the body in an upright sitting posture. Mind-born rūpa kalāpas are important because without them it would be impossible to walk or write or sit upright, among many other things.

As I often say, we are teaching meditators to know these things practically, by their own experience. After they have developed concentration, we teach them how to know and see ultimate reality. For this they need to practise four elements meditation, which will give them the ability to see these rūpa kalāpas, or very small particles, throughout the body.

If, in a state of concentration, one moves one's finger and simultaneously observes the bhavaṅga, or mind-door, one will see the desire to move one's finger, while also seeing the many small particles produced by that desire. One will very clearly see many small particles spread throughout the body, even to the finger that one is moving. At that time, one understands that this movement occurs because of the desire, and that the desire produces mind-born rūpa kalāpas. Further analysis will enable one to see that the wind element is predominant in those mind-born rūpa kalāpas; and just as wind carries objects along, so too the predominant wind element carries all the rūpa kalāpas in

one's finger along and causes the finger to move.⁴¹ Then the movement of one's finger occurs.

While we are alive, there is no time or circumstance in which there is no mentality arising. An exception is during the attainment of *nirodha-samāpatti*, in which consciousness and mental processes cease for a predetermined period of time; but this is attainable only by Anāgāmīs (Non-Returners) and Arahants. Otherwise, the mind is active the whole time we are alive, and so desires arise incessantly. During our waking hours, there is not a single moment when some desire or other is not arising.

Mental activity occurs even during sleep, in the form of dreams. However, no dreams occur when we enter into very deep sleep, because we fall completely into the bhavaṅga mind state, in which the mind does not know any present object, nor does it dream. That bhavaṅga mind state takes as its object the near-death object of our previous life; in that previous life, it was the object of the near-death mental process that occurred on the verge of death before the death consciousness mind moment. Therefore, the near-death mental process of our previous life, the rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*) at the start of this life, the bhavaṅga mind states, and the death consciousness that is going to arise at the end of this life, all take the same object.

⁴¹ The movement is a long series of different mind-born rūpa kalāpas being produced in different places. The mind-born rūpa kalāpas that arise at the bending of the finger are different from the mind-born rūpa-kalāpas that arise at the straightening of the finger. Each rūpa kalāpa arises and passes away in the same place, and each new rūpa kalāpa arises and perishes elsewhere.

Mind-Born Materiality

Throughout one's life, there is not a single moment without consciousness. Every single consciousness takes an object. The five sense consciousnesses can take only present objects. On the other hand, consciousness in a mind-door process can take either past, present, or future objects or objects that are independent of time.

We today can know about the bhavaṅga mind state and its object only because the Omniscient Buddha has arisen in the world and taught us about these things. Those who maintain that the bhavaṅga mind state does not take any object think that way because of their blindness – as the Buddha says, 'Blind is this world.'⁴² Therefore, even when we are sleeping soundly, mind-born materiality is arising. In the course of our existence, any kind of mentality produces mind-born materiality, with the exception of the consciousness of the five sense doors (eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, and body-consciousness). All other mentality produces mind-born materiality.

The Influence of Mind-Born Materiality on the Body

The influence of mind-born materiality on our physical bodies merits some attention. In the months and weeks before people are diagnosed with cancer, it is often the case that their mind is not healthy. Before they come down with cancer, they are very sad and depressed and cannot organise their minds. They continuously have a very unhealthy state of mind over a long period of time, perhaps

⁴² Dhp. 174.

even for months. Such an unhealthy state of mind is the cause of many diseases, so if you want to be healthy, you need a healthy mind.

This is very practical. When one is feeling sad, it affects one's body. One has no energy and does not want to work, and even sitting in a chair is difficult. Low energy of this sort is due to an unhealthy mind, a mind that is unhappy. This produces deleterious mind-born materiality that spreads throughout the body, and every part of the body is negatively affected. In such a case, from the conventional point of view and the scientific point of view, the body is full of bad cells. An unhealthy mind produces deleterious mind-born materialities which have a very negative effect on the body.

Therefore, if one wants to be healthy, one needs to sustain a healthy mind by not allowing unhappiness to come in and by preventing sorrowful feelings from influencing one's mind. We should always find the way to develop a healthy mind. This is the way to live with happiness and health in both body and mind. This is very important.

By contrast, when one is very happy, the body feels light. One can do whatever one wants. One's body is flexible. When one subsequently feels very sad, the body changes. The differences are due to good and bad materiality. In this way, when meditators are entering absorption concentration, they do not feel pain. Instead, they experience a very pleasant feeling and are peaceful and calm, both physically and mentally. They mostly feel as if they have no body at all.

The Influence of Mind-Born Materiality on the Body

The reason is that the mind in absorption concentration produces very sublime materiality which spreads throughout the body and makes it very light and very soft, like cotton. Some meditators in absorption may feel as if they are flying or as if the body is floating in the air. This is the effect of mind-born materiality. This is one reason people say that a person who practises meditation well will be healthier. Indeed, if one spends almost the whole of every day practising meditation, the sublime mind-born materiality spreads throughout one's body, so that the physical body changes due to being permeated with such sublime materiality. This effect may not cure disease, but it certainly helps.

Therefore, it is very good to develop concentration. You may now have an intellectual understanding of mind-born materiality, but hopefully you will one day be able to understand it practically. Remember that one of the causes of having a healthy or unhealthy body is your mind. We all need to develop a healthy mind. Whether outside of meditation, or during meditation, or in day-to-day life, do not allow your mind to become unhealthy. Other people cannot make you unhappy unless you allow them to do so. You allow yourself to become unhappy. Cultivate wholesome deeds more and more, and avoid anything that is unwholesome, and you will feel happy and calm for the most part.

Mind-born rūpa kalāpas spread throughout the body and to every sense organ. Mind-born rūpa kalāpas are among the types of rūpa kalāpas found in the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. In each of these sense organs, there are mind-born rūpa kalāpas. Therefore, in the eye there are

eye decad kalāpas, body decad kalāpas, sex decad kalāpas, and mind-born kalāpas.

The eyes of a person whose mind is in a normal state are different from the eyes of the same person when he or she is angry. The eyes appear different in the presence or absence of anger because mind-born materiality spreads to the eyes and makes them change. An angry mind results in angry eyes. It also results in a trembling body. In this way, mind-born materiality affects the body very much.

Temperature-Born Materiality

Temperature-born rūpa kalāpas pervade every part of the body. It is born of the fire element that is present in all types of rūpa kalāpas, whether kamma-born, mind-born, nutriment-born, or temperature-born. Among their particular factors, they have in common the eight inseparable rūpa, from earth element up to nutritive essence. Whether living things or non-living things, every material form has at least these eight kinds of materiality, and no fewer than these. Therefore, every type of rūpa kalāpa has the fire element, and that fire element can produce new kalāpas. Because these new kalāpas are produced by the fire element, or temperature, they are called temperature-born kalāpas. Thus, the fire element from the different types of rūpa kalāpas – whether the eye decad kalāpa, the body decad kalāpa, the sex decad kalāpa, the life nonad kalāpa, the mind-born kalāpa, the temperature-born kalāpa, or the nutriment-born kalāpa – all can produce temperature-born materiality.

Temperature-Born Materiality

One should be grateful for temperature-born materiality and its source, the fire element of any kalāpa. We are healthy because our body is warm. Life would be very difficult without heat, especially if one lives in a cold climate. Warmth makes our bodies flexible and enables us to move as we need to move. When it is cold, it is hard for us to move. Our bodies need warmth. Also, I have already related the story of how I warm the capsules of bee pollen supplement in front of a heater when it is cold in the morning. Thus, temperature-born materiality and the fire element are important.

Nutrient-Born Materiality

Regarding nutrient-born materiality, one might expect that this refers to the food we eat. This is understandable, because we know that we are somehow nourished by eating food, and that we would not live long without doing so. If someone with concentration regards a plateful of food, the food will be seen to be nothing more than many small particles. These are temperature-born rūpa kalāpas, not nutrient-born rūpa kalāpas; so regardless of whether the food we eat for nourishment is meat or vegetables or rice or whatever, it is not nutrient-born materiality but temperature-born materiality.

When this food is eaten, it reaches the stomach. Lining the walls of the stomach is the digestive liquid, which consists of opaque kalāpas that are kamma-born. These are actually life nonad kalāpas. We might simply call them 'digestive liquid kalāpas'. In these kalāpas the fire element is very strong, so it supports the nutritive essence (*ojā* in Pāḷi) of the newly-eaten food kalāpa, which is temperature-born.

Nutritive essence cannot produce other kalāpas on its own. Only with the support of the fire element in the life nonad kalāpa can the nutritive essence of the newly-eaten food kalāpa produce nutriment-born rūpa kalāpas. Nutriment-born rūpa kalāpas then spread throughout the body. It is thus another type of materiality found at each of the five physical sense organs – eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body.

Therefore, the eyes of someone who has had no food to eat for a few days appear different from the eyes of someone who has eaten regularly over the same period of time. If we are strong and healthy, it is because of these nutrients. One who has developed concentration will be able to analyse and see these things. My explanation is the same as my teaching in that it is practical and not merely theoretical. A meditator must first learn in theory, and afterwards analyse in practice.

As for the ‘digestive liquid kalāpa’, properly termed the life nonad kalāpa, or *ḥvita-navaka-kalāpa* in Pāli, it exists not only on the walls of the stomach but throughout the entire body. Since the temperature or fire element in the life nonad kalāpa is very strong, it can accomplish digestion or assimilation not only in the stomach but also throughout the body. The eyes and the skin can incorporate the healing materiality present in eye drops and skin ointment because of the life nonad kalāpa. Without the life nonad kalāpa, one’s eyes and skin would not be able to assimilate the beneficial substances in the eye drops or the ointment.

The Abhidhamma Demonstrates the Buddha's Omniscience

All these things are explained in the Abhidhamma. If the Buddha had not appeared in the world, none of us would be able to know or understand them, because the truth concerning both living and non-living things is explained only in the Abhidhamma.

There are some unfortunate people who reject and deny and oppose the Abhidhamma. Do not listen to them; their teachings are dangerous. Instead, strive to cultivate a love for studying the Abhidhamma.

Indeed, it is because of the Abhidhamma that we come to know that the Buddha is an Omniscient One. The Abhidhamma is not something ordinary people can expound and teach. Its exposition and teaching are due solely to Omniscient Knowledge, as it is very deep and profound. It is the proper field only of One with the capacity to see what is beyond the scope of the naked eye, and One Who has Omniscient Knowledge. Even a Pacceka Buddha, a solitary Buddha, cannot explain the nature of ultimate truth in words, despite the fact that He penetrated it by Himself. Expounding the truths of the Abhidhamma is beyond the capacity of ordinary disciples, great disciples, chief disciples, and even Pacceka Buddhas. Only a Sammāsambuddha has the capacity to teach it in words.

Therefore, we all should take a strong interest in the Abhidhamma. Its teachings are not strange or alien to us; rather, they are urgently relevant and directly concern each

one of us, because only the truth contained in the Abhidhamma gives us profound knowledge about ourselves and other living beings as well as non-living things. Its truth is indispensable for the attainment of just the first *vipassanā-ñāṇa*, the first Insight Knowledge, which is the Knowledge of Discerning Ultimate Mentality and Materiality. No one can attain the first Insight Knowledge without the explanations of the Abhidhamma concerning ultimate mentality and materiality. The Abhidhamma is essential for genuine realisation.

Are Trees Alive?

Science considers plants and trees living things because they exhibit certain characteristics like respiration, growth, reproduction, and excretion. Plants and trees are living *things*, but are they living *beings*?

In India during the time of the Buddha, there were people who believed that trees have souls and would not allow anyone to cut them down. However, while human beings, for example, have kamma-born materiality, mind-born materiality, temperature-born materiality, and nutriment-born materiality, plants and trees lack three of these four. They have only temperature-born materiality, which consists of the eight inseparable materialities.⁴³ Even though

⁴³ A plant or tree therefore has at least eight ultimate materialities, from earth element to nutritive essence. A ninth materiality is also possible in the form of sound materiality. It is produced by the collision of the earth element materiality with its hardness when *kalāpas* strike against one another, giving rise to *sadda-navaka-kalāpa*

Are Trees Alive?

plants grow and reproduce, they cannot be considered living beings according to the Buddha's teaching, because they possess neither mentalities nor kamma-born materialities.⁴⁴

This goes against an opinion that was often held during the Buddha's time; it illustrates again that, if the Buddha had not appeared in the world, we would not be able to understand what is true and what is untrue. Once one has developed concentration and practised *nāma* and *rūpa* meditation systematically, and more specifically during the practice of *rūpa* meditation, one will have the opportunity to analyse whether trees have kamma-born materiality and so forth and will be able to decide for oneself if trees are living beings.

To understand why a tree grows and increases in size, we need to understand the production of temperature-born *kalāpas*. As explained above, all *rūpa kalāpas* have the fire element, regardless of whether they are kamma-born, mind-born, temperature-born, or nutriment-born. Take the example of the eye decad *kalāpa*, which is kamma-born. There is fire element in the eye decad *kalāpa*, and this fire element can produce new *rūpa kalāpa*. As this new

(sound nonad *kalāpas*). Unlike the eight inseparables, sound materiality is only possible and not always present.

⁴⁴ More specifically, at the very least either the life faculty materiality (*jīvitindriya rūpa*) or the life faculty mentality (*jīvitindriya cetasika*), a mental factor, or both, must be present for something to be classified as a living being. Life faculty materiality sustains only kamma-born materiality, which means it is found only in kamma-born *rūpa kalāpas*. On the other hand, life faculty mentality sustains the stream of mentality. Therefore, in the Vinaya, the act of killing (*pāṇātīpāta*) is defined as the cutting off of either one or both of the life faculties.

rūpa kalāpa is produced by temperature, it is called a temperature-born kalāpa. In this new temperature-born kalāpa, there is also fire element, and this fire element can produce another new temperature-born kalāpa. In this second generation temperature-born kalāpa, there is also fire element, which produces yet another temperature-born kalāpa. In this way, originating from the fire element of a kamma-born kalāpa, temperature produces about five or six generations of temperature-born kalāpas. After that, the fire element of the fifth or sixth generation of temperature-born kalāpa cannot produce new rūpa kalāpa anymore. Depending on its mode of origin and the power of the fire element, a temperature-born kalāpa may produce a number of generations of new temperature-born kalāpas.

However, a tree comprises only temperature-born kalāpas. The fire element in these temperature-born kalāpas produces many generations of new temperature-born kalāpas. In this way, temperature-born kalāpas are being produced one after another, and they are also perishing too. However, those kalāpas that perish are replaced by new kalāpas that arise. When favourable supporting conditions are present in the form of soil, water, and sunlight, the fire element in them supports the production of new rūpa kalāpas; then the arising of new kalāpas far outnumbers the perishing of old kalāpas. Consequently, from the fire element originally in the seed, the tree grows bigger and bigger. But one day some of this production stops, and perishing surpasses arising. The tree withers and finally dies.

Are Trees Alive?

Like a tree, all inanimate materiality is born of and maintained by the fire element. The fire element in, for example, stones, metals, minerals, and hardwood is very powerful and produces many, many generations of materiality. Such materiality can last a long time because of the strength of the fire element within it. By contrast, the fire element in, for example, softwood, tender plants, meat, and fruits is very weak, so that relatively few generations of materiality are produced and the materiality soon falls apart. The materiality falls apart because the fire element no longer produces new materiality but instead consumes itself: The materiality rots, falls apart, and dissolves.

When materiality is consumed by fire, such as when wood burns, it is because the fire element of the external materiality (the flames that strike the wood) supports the fire element of the internal materiality (the wood) and a huge amount of fire element bursts forth, which means the fire element becomes predominant, and so the materiality is consumed.

A similar process happens in the human body. We grow older day by day. We start out as babies and children, then we become attractive young adults, and we pass through our middle years until, if we survive, we find ourselves bent and wrinkled old men and women. When we are young, the rūpa kalāpas that arise greatly outnumber those that perish. After we reach maturity, fewer rūpa kalāpas arise with each passing year, until the balance shifts and newly arising kalāpas can no longer replace the ones that perish. This happens gradually; the process of ageing and the onset of old age are not obvious. Then day by day, year after year, the rūpa kalāpas that perish increasingly outnumber

the ones that arise. Perishing exceeds replacing more and more with each passing day. Our appearance changes, and the texture of our skin changes too. This is a natural law.

Also, many older people find that the fruit they eat is not as sweet or as tasty as the fruit they ate when they were young. It is not really so. Instead, when we become older and older, the number of tongue-sensitivity materialities becomes less and less, so that our sense of taste gradually becomes duller than before. Therefore, do not blame the fruit for not being as sweet as you remember, and do not blame your daughter for not cooking as well as you did when you were her age. Blame your old age. In this way, everything changes as we age and as time passes.

Types of Rūpa Kalāpas in the Sense Organs

As we have seen, several types of materiality are present in each of the six sense organs. In the body there are six types – body decad kalāpa, sex decad kalāpa, life nonad kalāpa, mind-born octad kalāpa, temperature-born octad kalāpa, and nutriment-born octad kalāpa. Each of the other sense organs has seven types of materiality, because it has its respective sense decad kalāpa (eye decad kalāpa, for example) in addition to the six types present in the body. One can also express this point differently by counting each factor individually – earth element, colour, life faculty, and the rest – so that one finds fifty-three types of rūpa in the body and sixty-three types in the other sense organs.

The 63 Types of Materiality of the Eye

Type	Mind-Born Octad Kalāpa (<i>cittaja-aṭṭhaka-kalāpa</i>)	Temperature-Born Octad Kalāpa (<i>utuja-aṭṭhaka-kalāpa</i>)	Nutriment-Born Octad Kalāpa (<i>āhāraja-aṭṭhaka-kalāpa</i>)	Life Nonad Kalāpa (<i>jīvita-navaka-kalāpa</i>)	Eye Decad Kalāpa (<i>cakkhu-dasaka-kalāpa</i>)	Body Decad Kalāpa (<i>kāya-dasaka-kalāpa</i>)	Sex Decad Kalāpa (<i>bhāva-dasaka-kalāpa</i>)	
Origin	Mind	Temperature	Nutriment	Kamma	Kamma	Kamma	Kamma	
Quality	Opaque	Opaque	Opaque	Opaque	Translucent	Translucent	Opaque	
Ultimate Materiality	1	Earth Element (<i>pathavi dhātu</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	2	Water Element (<i>āpodhātu</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	3	Fire Element (<i>tejo dhātu</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	4	Wind Element (<i>vāyodhātu</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	5	Colour (<i>vaṇṇa</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	6	Smell (<i>gandha</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	7	Taste (<i>rasa</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	8	Nutritive Essence (<i>ojā</i>)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	9				Life Faculty (<i>jīvitindriya</i>)	✓	✓	✓
	10					Eye-Sensitivity (<i>cakkhu-pasāda</i>)	Body-Sensitivity (<i>kāya-pasāda</i>)	Sex Materiality (<i>bhāva-rūpa</i>)

The Two Types of Vipassanā Practitioners

One will be able to know and to see ultimate materiality as the Buddha taught if one practises according to His teaching. In short, for genuine knowledge and vision of ultimate truth, one needs to practise vipassanā meditation as the Buddha taught it. Since the time of the Buddha, there have been two types of practitioners, namely, pure-insight practitioners on the one hand, and practitioners of serenity-and-insight on the other. Both types can open the door to Nibbāna. Some want to open the door to Nibbāna as pure-insight practitioners, and others want to open the door to Nibbāna as serenity-and-insight practitioners. Both ways are possible.

It is necessary to understand the similarities and differences between these types of practitioners. The way leading to Nibbāna is the same for both; it consists of the three trainings – the training of morality, the training of concentration, and the training of insight. This is the same for both types of practitioners. Those who want to be serenity-and-insight practitioners need to develop absorption concentration first. It is related to the second training – the training of concentration. When the Buddha taught concentration, He taught forty different samatha meditation objects. Thirty of those forty lead to absorption concentration, while the remaining ten lead only as far as access concentration. Since serenity-and-insight practitioners must first develop absorption concentration, they need to practise one of the thirty that leads to absorption concentration. Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is one of these. If one practises *ānāpānasati*, one can attain first jhāna absorption concentration, second jhāna absorption

The Two Types of Vipassanā Practitioners

concentration, third jhāna absorption concentration, and fourth jhāna absorption concentration. After attaining fourth jhāna, one is ready to proceed to the third training, the training of insight meditation.

When the Buddha taught the training of insight meditation, He taught only two meditation objects – rūpa meditation and nāma meditation. When the Buddha taught rūpa meditation, He taught four elements meditation. The commentary says, ‘*Duvidhañhi kammaṭṭhānaṃ rūpakammaṭṭhānañca arūpakammaṭṭhānañca*’ – ‘When the Buddha taught *vipassanā*, He taught rūpa meditation (*rūpakammaṭṭhāna*) and nāma meditation (*arūpakammaṭṭhāna*).’ The commentary also says, ‘*Tattha bhagavā rūpakammaṭṭhānaṃ kathento saṅkhepamanasikāravasena vā vitthāramanasikāravasena vā catudhātuvavatthānaṃ kathesi*’ – ‘When the Buddha taught rūpa meditation, He taught four elements meditation in a brief and a detailed method.’⁴⁵

Four elements meditation is used for vipassanā and is also one of the forty samatha meditation objects. The Buddha taught four elements meditation as rūpa meditation, which is the starting point of vipassanā practice. As a samatha meditation object, four elements meditation is one of the ten objects that lead only to access concentration.

When serenity-and-insight practitioners want to proceed to insight meditation, they first practise ānāpāna up to fourth jhāna. Then, if they want to start their insight prac-

⁴⁵ Commentary to *vedanānupassanā* section (the section on contemplation of feeling) in MN.I.1.10 Mahāsatiṭṭhānasuttaṃ (MN 10 The Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness).

tice with rūpa meditation, they must next practise four elements meditation systematically the way the Buddha taught. This is how serenity-and-insight practitioners practise; after developing absorption concentration, they begin insight meditation with four elements meditation, which is discerning rūpa.

By contrast, pure-insight practitioners have not developed absorption concentration, so they practise insight meditation directly. They must start their insight practice with rūpa meditation, for which they need to practise four elements meditation.

When the time comes to begin insight meditation, the practice is the same for both the meditator who has absorption concentration and the one who does not have absorption concentration. Both start vipassanā practice with four elements meditation. The difference between them is that one has absorption concentration and the other does not. The similarity is that, when they start practising insight meditation, both will begin by practising four elements meditation as rūpa meditation.

The stronger the concentration, the better the penetration. Therefore, as much as possible, we encourage meditators to develop ānāpāna absorption concentration. Their subsequent penetration will be deeper if they continue on from there. It is not a matter of being attached to absorption concentration; rather, we see how beneficial it is. However, if meditators encounter difficulties in developing absorption concentration, we consider the option of teaching them to practise four elements meditation directly and to start vipassanā as pure-insight practitioners.

Four Elements Meditation

The characteristics of the four elements were mentioned above, but they bear repeating here. Earth element has six characteristics: hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, and lightness. The water element has two: flowing and cohesion. The fire element also has two: heat and cold. Lastly, the wind element has two characteristics as well: pushing and supporting. There are altogether twelve characteristics which the meditator needs to discern systematically. When we teach four elements meditation, we teach meditators to start with the characteristics that are easiest to discern and then to progress to the more difficult ones. After that, we change to the order taught by the Buddha, which is the way I have just listed them: earth, water, fire, and wind. This is the order taught by the Buddha. I will not explain here the many details of how to practise four elements meditation; such an explanation is of more benefit when one actually practises.

If one discerns four elements systematically, one will see an improvement in one's concentration. When concentration improves, the body disappears. One sees just a block of four elements; one's whole body becomes just a block of four elements. One does not see a face, a hand, or a leg. At this point the perception of being, *satta-saññā*, disappears. This means the meditator has attained right view to a certain extent.

If one continues discerning these twelve characteristics in that block of four elements, concentration further improves, and the body will emit light – beginning with grey light, which gradually becomes white, until finally the

whole body becomes a block of bright light. That block of bright light is actually just a group of rūpa kalāpas. It has not been broken down into small particles, so the meditator sees them as a group; and because there is colour in every kalāpa, they are perceived as a block of bright light.

Now one needs to continue discerning four elements in that block of bright light in order to break it down into very tiny particles. If one continues discerning four elements in that block of bright light, it will finally break down into very small particles, which might be called sub-atomic particles. Some meditators may encounter difficulty when they try to break the block of bright light down into very small sub-atomic particles. In that case, they are instructed to see the space element (*ākāśadhātu*). The space element functions as a sort of border line; it is the space between rūpa kalāpas. When the meditator looks at the space element, the block of light will dissolve, and the meditator will then see very tiny particles.

The Buddha said that this whole world is made up of very tiny sub-atomic particles. If the block of light dissolves while one is practising together with many other practitioners, one can discern four elements in those who are sitting nearby or far away, and one will see everyone become nothing more than small particles. One does not see man or woman or anything else; everything becomes the same – just very tiny particles which are arising and perishing very rapidly all the time. If one discerns four elements in the floor or the cushion on which one is sitting or a Buddha statue or any other object, everything becomes very small particles. Everything becomes the same.

Whether one regards mountains, trees, flowers, living things, or non-living things, everything becomes the same – nothing more than tiny particles that constantly arise and perish. When this happens, one will agree with the Buddha and cease to disagree with or doubt Him. Sometimes we are inclined to disagree with the Buddha. Here we see men, here we see women; why then did the Buddha say there are no men, there are no women? There are! Why did the Buddha say that men and women do not really exist, and that there is only ultimate reality? We think this way sometimes. However, with the attainment of concentration and insight, one sees for oneself that there are no men, no women, no trees, no mountains, no Buddha images; instead, there are only very small particles. When one sees this, one will agree with the Buddha.

These are not my words. The Buddha Himself says, ‘I do not argue with the world; it is the world that argues with me.’⁴⁶ The world dares to argue with the Buddha because the world is blind. Only when people arrive at a true understanding will they no longer dare to argue with the Buddha. The Buddha is the One Who knew what lies beyond the scope of the naked eye. If one develops concentration and then practises four elements meditation systematically, one will know and will see what the Buddha taught.

⁴⁶ SN.III.1.10.2 Puppasuttam (SN 22.94 The Discourse on Flowers):

‘Nāhaṃ, bhikkhave, lokena vivadāmi, lokova maṃyā vivadati. na, bhikkhave, dhammavādī kenaci lokasmiṃ vivadati.’

‘Bhikkhus, I do not dispute with the world; rather, it is the world that disputes with me. A proponent of the Dhamma does not dispute with anyone in the world.’

However, these tiny particles are not yet ultimate materiality. They are still just the smallest concepts; they are rūpa kalāpas, materiality groups. Ultimate materiality is the rūpa or materiality that comprises every individual kalāpa, namely, earth, water, fire, wind, colour, smell, taste, nutritive essence, life faculty, sensitivity, and so forth. In order to understand ultimate materiality, one needs to analyse these rūpa in each rūpa kalāpa.

In discerning materiality in the eye, for example, in the way I have been describing, one will find that temperature-born, nutriment-born, and mind-born rūpa kalāpas have only eight ultimate materialities, up to nutritive essence. They are octad kalāpas.⁴⁷ However, the eye decad kalāpa has ten factors. The meditator needs to discern these one by one. The insight practitioner likewise needs to discern the ten kinds of ultimate materiality in the body decad kalāpa and the sex decad kalāpa, since they are two of the seven kinds of rūpa kalāpas in the eye.

As the Buddha said, ‘Bhikkhus, develop concentration. One who is concentrated knows and sees the Dhamma as they really are.’ After developing concentration, one will have the capability to discern these materialities in the eye

⁴⁷ Types of kalāpas other than octads are also possible. For example, the lightness et cetera undecad kalāpa (*lahutādekādasaka kalāpa*) consists of the eight inseparables plus the three unconcrete materialities of lightness, softness, and wieldiness. It arises only occasionally, under conditions of physical comfort, fair weather, good health, and so forth. Another non-octad kalāpa is the temperature-born sound nonad kalāpa, mentioned above. It likewise arises only under certain conditions. There are others besides these two.

as well as in the ear, nose, tongue, body, and heart.⁴⁸ One needs to discern in each sense organ according to the number of rūpa kalāpas found there, and to discern the ultimate materialities that exist in each rūpa kalāpa. The knowledge of ultimate reality attained in this way incomparably surpasses worldly knowledge. Even though scientists analyse materiality in many ways and conclude, for example, that the formula of water is H₂O, and that there are many different types of minerals, nevertheless the water and minerals they study is, from the ultimate point of view, nothing more than just groups of the eight ultimate materialities. This is a more profound knowledge.

We see many living things and non-living things. There are things we like and things we dislike. There are very beautiful things and things that are not beautiful, clean things and things that are not clean. Seeing these different kinds

⁴⁸ Here, the heart as a sense organ is used in a conventional sense. From the conventional point of view, it is explained that heart decad kalāpas are arising and perishing in a small place in the heart chamber where blood gathers. Based on the heart materiality in these heart decad kalāpas, bhavaṅga (mind-door) arises. However, when meditators discern materialities in rūpa meditation, they must practise from the ultimate point of view and disregard the conventional point of view. They do not start by paying attention to the physical heart. Instead, meditators are taught first to discern the bhavaṅga mind-door and then to pay attention to the rūpa kalāpas arising and perishing beneath the bhavaṅga. When they move one of their fingers, they see in the bhavaṅga the desire to move a finger. As the bhavaṅga arises based on heart materiality, so the desire to move a finger also arises based on heart materiality. As this desire arises in the bhavaṅga, meditators will be able to discern that the heart decad kalāpas are predominant among the many rūpa kalāpas beneath the bhavaṅga. They also need to discern the other types of rūpa kalāpas arising and perishing beneath the bhavaṅga.

of living and non-living things, we experience like and dislike, love and hate, and wanting and not wanting at different times. Sometimes we accept things, and at other times we reject and oppose them. All these different feelings make us suffer, and they arise because we see what we see as different things. Seeing the truth means seeing all living and non-living things, all the countless things that exist, as one. Whatever one sees, one knows that without exception it is just *this* – which is arising and perishing rapidly all the time in the form of sub-atomic particles. Therefore, one no longer has confusion, because everything becomes the same, regardless of whether one likes or dislikes it, or whether one loves it or hates it. One's vision becomes clear. This is possible to attain.

In other words, one realises that the true nature of the physical body is ultimate materialities in the small particles which are arising and perishing all the time. As they are ceaselessly arising and perishing rapidly, they are impermanent, so it is pointless and impossible to be attached to them. In this way one can remove attachment. Whatever arises and perishes all the time is subject to suffering. According to its causes it arises, and after it arises it perishes. Before it arises, there is no place where it is waiting to arise. After it perishes, there is no place where it is accumulating. It arises according to its causes and then perishes according to its nature. No one can tell it to arise or not to arise, neither can anyone tell it to perish or not to perish. It is beyond anyone's control. In this way it is non-self, *anatta*. With such an understanding, one will be on the path to make an end of suffering, because one understands the truth.

Four Elements Meditation

This is profound. This is beyond what can be seen with the naked eye. This is new vision, deep vision. This is what one can attain by practising meditation systematically. It is for those who want to attain liberation. It is for those who want to remove doubt and confusion. This is the way to prevent oneself from falling into the four woeful states. May you be able to engage in the practice of this profound path for the rest of your life!

Nowadays there are many teachers of insight meditation, with many different ‘methods’ being taught. Many of us have practised vipassanā in the past, myself included. However, none of us was taught to begin vipassanā practice with four elements meditation.

From what was said above, it is clear that, if one is a serenity-and-insight practitioner, one must develop absorption concentration and then go on to vipassanā by starting with four elements meditation, which is rūpa meditation. If one has no absorption concentration and wants to be a pure-insight practitioner, one needs to practise vipassanā directly. For such a practitioner as well, the Buddha taught that vipassanā practice should start with four elements meditation as rūpa meditation.

If one wants to open the door to Nibbāna, and to remove defilement, which is the cause of suffering, and to attain liberation, one must follow the Buddha and not any particular teacher. One should not follow a teacher who is not teaching what the Buddha taught; instead, one must practise the Dhamma. One must rely on the Dhamma and not on a person, because a person is changeable and unreliable.

The Truth Taught by All the Buddhas

As the Buddha Himself advised in His example of a monk who claimed to be teaching what he had heard directly from the Buddha: Do not be in a hurry to accept or reject a particular teaching. Instead, compare it against the teachings of the Buddha as they are found in the Vinaya, in the Suttanta, and in the Abhidhamma. If one finds that it is in accordance with what the Buddha taught, one should accept it. If it conflicts with what the Buddha taught, one should reject it. One must be brave enough to follow the true teachings of the Buddha.

When one comes across teachers who teach a way of practising vipassanā that differs from the way the Buddha taught, one should not criticise them personally; instead, one should put the blame on human nature. Such teachers follow well-known masters rather than the words of the Buddha. Since people in the world for the most part do the same, they follow famous teachers without comparing their teaching with the teaching of the Buddha. Such teachers instruct their disciples accordingly.

When one knows what the Buddha taught, one must act for one's own good and need not criticise anyone else. Criticism and complaint are unwholesome; choosing the right way is wholesome. Argument is unwholesome; quietly following the words of the Buddha is wholesome.

If no one is ready to listen, there is no point in trying to explain things to them. Giving is directed at those who are willing to receive, not for those who are unwilling to do so; one can give only to those who are receptive to one's gift. The Buddha Himself taught the Dhamma only to those who are ready to hear it. One should emulate the Buddha. Insisting on giving and focussing on one's own desire to

give is not the way the wise behave. Instead, one should observe whether someone is willing to listen to the Dhamma. If someone is willing to listen, one should explain it to them. One should avoid argument and complaint as much as possible. This is how one should act in every aspect of one's life, so as to cultivate wholesome deeds and avoid unwholesome ones.

Dhamma and Adhamma

On this topic the Buddha says:⁴⁹

Ye te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū adhammaṃ adhammoti dīpentī te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū bahujaṇahitāya paṭipannā bahujaṇasukhāya, bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Bahuñca te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū puññaṃ pasavanti, te cīmaṃ saddhammaṃ t̥hapentī'ti.

Bhikkhus, those who teach *adhamma* (wrong dhamma) as *adhamma* are acting for the good of many, for the benefit of many, for the welfare of many. They are accumulating much wholesome kamma. They will sustain the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha continues:

Ye te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū dhammaṃ dhammoti dīpentī te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū bahujaṇahitāya paṭipannā bahuja-

⁴⁹ AN.I.11.140 Adhammavaggo (AN 1.140 Chapter on Non-Dhamma).

The Truth Taught by All the Buddhas

nasukhāya, bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Bahuñca te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū puññaṃ pasavanti, te cimaṃ saddhammaṃ tḥapenti'ti.

Those who teach Dhamma as Dhamma are acting for the good of many, for the benefit of many, for the welfare of many. They are accumulating much wholesome kamma. They are sustaining the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha also explains the contrary: ⁵⁰

Ye te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū adhammaṃ dhammoti dīpentī te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū bahujanāhitāya paṭipannā bahujanāsukhāya, bahuno janassa anattāya ahitāya dukkhāya devamanussānaṃ. Bahuñca te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū apuññaṃ pasavanti, te cimaṃ saddhammaṃ antaradhāpentī'ti.

Those who teach *adhamma* as Dhamma are acting for the harm of many and for the detriment of many. They are accumulating much unwholesome kamma. They are promoting the disappearance of the teachings of the Buddha.

In the same way, the Buddha says:

Ye te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū dhammaṃ adhammoti dīpentī te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū bahujanāhitāya paṭipannā bahujanāsukhāya, bahuno janassa anattāya ahitāya dukkhāya devamanussānaṃ. Bahuñca te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū apuññaṃ pasavanti, te cimaṃ saddhammaṃ antaradhāpentī'ti.

⁵⁰ AN.I.10.130 Dutiyapamādādivaggo (AN 1.130 Second Chapter on Heedlessness).

Dhamma and Adhamma

Those who teach Dhamma as *adhamma* are also acting for the detriment of many. They are accumulating much unwholesome kamma. They are promoting the disappearance of the teachings of the Buddha.

Therefore, whether we are ordained or lay persons, the authentic Dhamma is what we should propagate and impart to others, if we have the intention and circumstances to do such propagation. It is our responsibility to do so, for our own good and the good of many others, including future generations.

In this way, if one wants to be a pure-insight practitioner, one needs to start with four elements meditation. This is Dhamma. I cannot teach someone who wants to practise vipassanā without beginning with four elements meditation because this would be adhamma. It would be for the destruction of many, for the detriment of many, and I would thereby accumulate much unwholesome kamma. It would promote the disappearance of the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, all of us are responsible for sustaining the true teaching of the Buddha. The true teaching of the Buddha is great, but it will disappear quickly if we fail to sustain it.

The issue of true Dhamma also concerns the matter of concentration. As the Buddha said, ‘*Samādhim, bhikkhave, bhāvētha. Samāhito, bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*’ – ‘Bhikkhus, develop concentration. One who is concentrated knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are.’

Consider the opposite of what the Buddha said: One who is not concentrated will not know or see the Four Noble Truths as they really are. Nowadays many teachers say that there is no need of concentration, and that one can realise Nibbāna without it. This is not Dhamma. If one follows teachers who say such things, one will find oneself in the company of the foolish. As the bodhisatta Akitti said, ‘May I not meet with a fool. May I not hear from a fool. May I not associate with a fool. If I need to converse with a fool, may I not take delight in his speech, and may I not follow and act according to his speech.’ Recall that, in replying to the questions of the king of the devas, Akitti said, ‘The fool practises what is not the way and directs others to it.’ In other words, the fool imparts wrong dhamma to others. Teachers who deny the necessity of concentration are the sort of fools Akitti hoped to avoid. In following the teachings of such a teacher, one will have no opportunity to know and see the true Dhamma as they really are. This is for the detriment of many.

I have met with many who have practised other traditions. I am not judging or condemning; I am telling the truth. They have good pāramī. Only when they hear the true teachings of the Buddha do they get the opportunity to practise samatha meditation, and they see that they can develop concentration. Then they can proceed to practise so as to know and see the Dhamma as they really are. Before they hear the true teachings of the Buddha, they have no such opportunity. They are very fortunate in that, even though they had not previously practised what the Buddha taught, their kamma enabled them to hear the true teachings of the Buddha, and so they could develop concentration. They could proceed along the way the Buddha

taught. They could know and see the Dhamma as they really are.

Therefore, if one does not practise the way the Buddha taught and has no opportunity to develop concentration, one loses everything, no matter how much pāramī one has. In this way, adhamma is for the detriment of many.

Discernment of Materiality

Distinguishing between truth and untruth on this level is relatively coarse compared to the subtle observation possible when practising vipassanā with concentration in order to discern ultimate materiality and mentality. In rūpa meditation, prior to the discernment of ultimate materiality, the initial object of one's discernment is the rūpa kalāpas, which are extremely small particles – unimaginably small. Only someone who has seen them with Insight Knowledge knows how they really look. However, one or two analogies may provide enough understanding to have at least an idea of the rūpa kalāpas that an insight practitioner is aiming to observe before discerning ultimate materiality.

One analogy is that of an old-fashioned television set, the sort of television everyone had before high definition digital displays and the like became available. When the set was switched on, it would take a little time for the signal to come in and the picture to be displayed; until then, the screen was filled with hundreds and hundreds of very tiny flickering dots. Eventually the signal would come in and the set would display an actual picture. However, the dots that would appear first were very numerous and very tiny

and would flicker. Although they were so small, they were still quite visible.

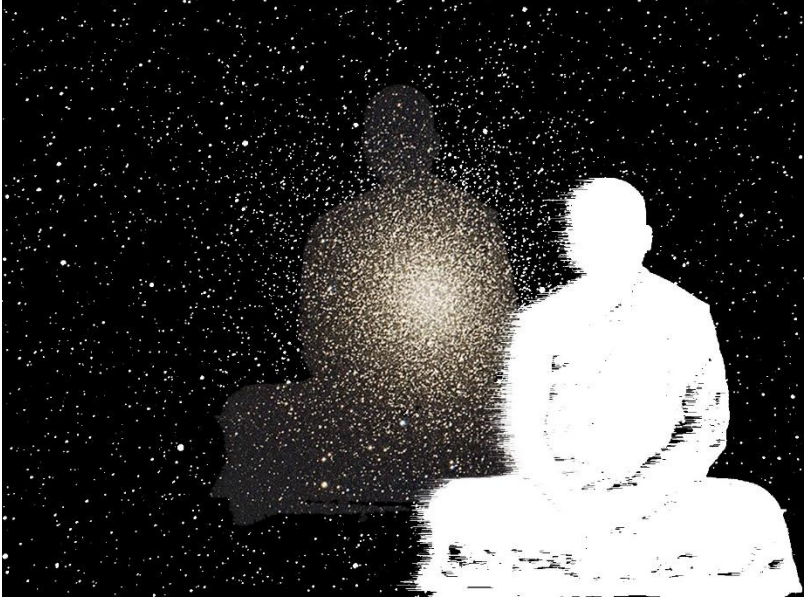
Rūpa kalāpas are like these dots in that they are numerous, very tiny, and are constantly arising and perishing. However, kalāpas are many times smaller than those dots. One cannot see them with the naked eye. If one could imagine many more such dots, of an exponentially smaller size, and imagine the shape of a human body composed entirely of a huge number of such infinitesimal dots, one would have a very rough idea of what a concentrated meditator sees while discerning materiality.

Another analogy is the tip of a ball-point pen. This is even smaller than those dots on the old television screens. Rūpa kalāpas are very tiny sub-atomic particles. Those who have the ability to see them can discern four elements in the tip of a ball-point pen if they choose to do so. Even though the tip is very small, they will see in it a great number of small particles. These cannot be seen with the naked eye.

One can imagine the form of one's body composed of such very tiny particles, arising and perishing very rapidly all the time. If one discerns four elements in those who are sitting nearby or others sitting far away, one sees them not as men or as women but as merely a group of tiny sub-atomic particles arising and perishing rapidly all the time. If one looks at one's eyes, one does not see eyes but instead sees nothing more than particles constantly arising and perishing with great speed. No matter which part of the body one looks at, every part of the body and the whole body itself appears the same. Internally, externally, living things, and non-living things – everything is the same. Everything is just tiny particles arising and perishing rapidly all the time.

Discernment of Materiality

They are not yet ultimate materiality; they are just the smallest concept.



When one manages to see these particles in one's body, one next needs to distinguish between translucent kalāpas and opaque kalāpas. One needs to do this before one can discern the ultimate realities in each kalāpa. For example, in the eye, the eye decad kalāpa and the body decad kalāpa are translucent; the remaining five kalāpas in the eye – sex decad kalāpa, life nonad kalāpa, mind-born kalāpa, temperature-born kalāpa, and nutriment-born kalāpa – are all opaque kalāpas.

The four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind are present in every kalāpa. The meditator needs to analyse the

elements and discern their characteristics. The earth element has six characteristics -- hardness, roughness, heaviness, softness, smoothness, and lightness. The water element has two characteristics: flowing and cohesion. The fire element has the characteristics of heat and cold, while the wind element has the characteristics of pushing and supporting. Altogether, then, twelve characteristics must be discerned in both translucent and opaque kalāpas.

As the particles are arising and perishing rapidly, one at first encounters difficulty in discerning them. To overcome this difficulty, one needs to ignore the perishing and instead emphasise the kalāpa itself. Only then can one discern them. Discerning must be done repeatedly because the particles are extremely small.

After discerning twelve characteristics in both translucent and opaque kalāpas, one needs to proceed to discerning colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence. The practitioner will see a variety of colours in the kalāpas. Meditators who succeed in discerning smell and taste do not report experiencing a good smell or taste. Nutritive essence is like the yolk of an egg; one will see it at the centre of each kalāpa.

One also needs to discern which kalāpas are translucent, and then distinguish between the body decad kalāpa, which is present in every sense organ, and the sense decad kalāpa respective to the sense organ one is analysing. Taking the eye as an example, one needs to determine which kalāpas are translucent, and then to distinguish between the eye decad kalāpas and the body decad kalāpas. Focusing on one particular translucent kalāpa, one observes to see if the colour of a nearby group of kalāpas impinges on

this specific kalāpa. If the colour impinges, one can conclude that it is an eye decad kalāpa. Discernment of this sort makes it clear that we see because a visible object impinges on the eye-sensitivity, causing eye-consciousness to arise. There is no need for the intervention of a deity or a creator; there is only cause and effect.

A similar procedure is followed to determine that a kalāpa is a body decad kalāpa, except that one discerns the hardness of a kalāpa that is very close by. If one observes the hardness impinging on the translucent kalāpa one is observing, one can conclude that it is a body decad kalāpa. This process of discernment needs to be done over and over again.

By contrast, the heart decad kalāpa is an opaque kalāpa. It is distinguishable by discerning the presence of the bhavaṅga, or mind-door, because the bhavaṅga arises based on heart materiality. The heart decad kalāpa is rather like a torch light. Suppose the body of the torch light is light grey in colour. If it is turned on, a bright light emanates from the end of the torch. The body of the torch is like the heart decad kalāpa, while the light that comes from it is bhavaṅga. One will see something similar when one discerns the heart decad kalāpa.

When one looks at a visible object, its image impinges on one's eye-sensitivity. At the same time, the same image impinges on the bhavaṅga. It appears there. In the same way, when one hears a sound, it impinges on one's ear-sensitivity as well as on one's bhavaṅga. In this way, it impinges on two doors at the same time. The same process occurs with the senses of smell, taste, and touch.

The Origin of Mentality

Scientists maintain that mentality arises in the brain. Whole books have been written about the human brain and how mentality works, about how the brain functions and how it overwhelms our lives. They describe in detail how the brain instructs the body to do various tasks, and they explain how different areas of the brain have particular functions. While we admire scientists, they nevertheless have no Omniscient Knowledge, even though they do a great deal of research. Science and its methods have yielded a great store of knowledge which would otherwise be out of our reach. Still, there are also many things that are beyond the reach of science. One of these is the origin of mentality. Without the teaching of the Omniscient Buddha, no one could know the origin of mentality.

According to the teaching of the Buddha, mentality does not originate in the brain. In fact, there is not the slightest trace of mentality in the brain. A scientist would feel quite dismayed to hear someone say such things. However, when one knows ultimate mentality for oneself by means of insight knowledge, one will clearly understand that mentality does not arise in the brain. It is simply a matter of fact, which can be verified empirically. We let meditators check to see for themselves whether mentality arises in the brain. After developing concentration, they clearly know there is no mentality at all in the brain. There they see only very small particles which are arising and perishing rapidly all the time. The brain is made up of nothing but very tiny particles. There is no trace of mentality in it.

The Origin of Mentality

Scientists arrive at their conclusions because they view things from the conventional point of view. They cannot reach the truth that way, and so they say mentality arises in the brain. If they are interested in truly knowing where mentality arises, they too can do so by practising meditation and by knowing directly through their insight knowledge, not by depending on any external instruments. Still, if they have no pāramī, it will be difficult for them; and if they feel compelled to rely on external instruments, it will be impossible. Concentration alone makes true knowledge possible.

Even without strong concentration, and without the resulting ability to know things from the ultimate point of view, it is possible to understand at least something about where mentality arises. To do so, one does not need to do anything more than reflect on things that one has experienced in daily life since birth, and that one will experience for the rest of one's life. Not a day goes by during which one does not experience feelings like happiness, unhappiness, pride, jealousy, fear, and so on. Clearly these feelings are mentality, not materiality. Moreover, they are experienced in the heart, not in the brain. When one feels joy, it affects the region of the heart. Happiness is felt in the heart. Likewise, when one feels sad, one feels the sadness in one's heart.

Even without knowledge of ultimate truth, then, one's everyday experience already gives an indication that mentality arises in the heart. Its origin is the heart and not the brain.

A word should be said about wholesome feelings versus unwholesome feelings, because one and the same feeling

can be wholesome at one time and unwholesome at another. For example, there are two kinds of happiness – wholesome happiness and unwholesome happiness. One is happy not only when one does something wholesome; one can also be happy while doing something unwholesome. One needs to distinguish between happiness associated with wholesome kamma, and happiness associated with unwholesome kamma. Both are associated with happiness, and so one feels happy. However, the happiness associated with doing wholesome things like making offerings and listening to a Dhamma talk is wholesome because the actions that occasion it generate wholesome kamma. This is wholesome happiness. By contrast, unwholesome kamma results from doing unwholesome things like listening to music, so even though doing so makes one happy, it is unwholesome happiness. The Buddha explains this in one of His discourses:

There are two kinds of happiness: the kind to be pursued, and the kind to be avoided.... Why have I declared this in regard to happiness? This is how I understood happiness: When I observed that in the pursuit of such happiness, unwholesome factors increased and wholesome factors decreased, then that happiness was to be avoided. And when I observed that in the pursuit of such happiness unwholesome factors decreased and wholesome ones increased, then that happiness was to be sought after.⁵¹

Thus, based on ordinary experience, we all have a sense that mentality arises at the heart. However, this intuition

⁵¹ DN.II.8 Sakkapañhasuttam (DN 21 The Discourse on Sakka's Questions).

The Origin of Mentality

still falls short of actually seeing the mental process. Whenever one feels happy or unhappy, mental processes arise very rapidly, one after another. They arise mostly based on heart materiality (*hadaya rūpa*). To see the mental process, one needs to develop concentration and discern ultimate materiality, because, in the *pañcavokārabhūmi*, the realm of beings with the five aggregates, mentality arises based on materiality. Therefore, one first needs to discern ultimate materiality thoroughly; only then will one be able to discern ultimate mentality, because all mentality arises based on materiality.

Profound discernment of this sort requires effort. We possess six sense organs, and all of them are directed outwards in an endless search for sense pleasure. Since our youth we have studied and learned a great deal and pursued our many interests in external things. We have spent a lot of time and money and effort – endless effort, because all our efforts in this direction never arrive at an end. There is always more. One will never come to know the truth through such pursuits; no matter how hard one tries, one will end up exhausted.

Instead of carrying on like this, we should change direction and seek the truth in this very body. Search inside, not outside. Direct your attention within, not without. How great that would be! Change direction and pay attention to your own body and not to external matters. You do not need money for this pursuit; all you need is to desire your own well-being and your own benefit.

Human beings seek happiness in the external world, but in vain; there is no real happiness in the external world. Real happiness lies within. It cannot be found anywhere

else. One will attain real happiness only when one knows the truth, and there is no chance of seeing the truth if one is always looking outward and pursuing happiness in the sensual world.

By observing everyday feelings, then, one can see that mentality arises not in the brain but in the heart. Mentality arises in the form of cognitive or mental processes. Above, I used the example of hearing a loud sound. One hears the sound at the ear, and at the same time it is felt at the heart. The sound impinges on the ear-door and on the mind-door or bhavaṅga simultaneously. This is the law.

This occurs with all five physical senses: When objects impinge on any sense door, they impinge on the mind-door at the same time. Therefore, every sense object impinges on two doors as it occurs. This is the way it really happens. It is most easily perceived in the case of very loud sound; it is not hard to observe how loud sound with a deep bass line impinges not only on one's ear-door but also causes vibrations in the area of the heart in the chest. One can sense it impinging on the ear and on the bhavaṅga at the same time.

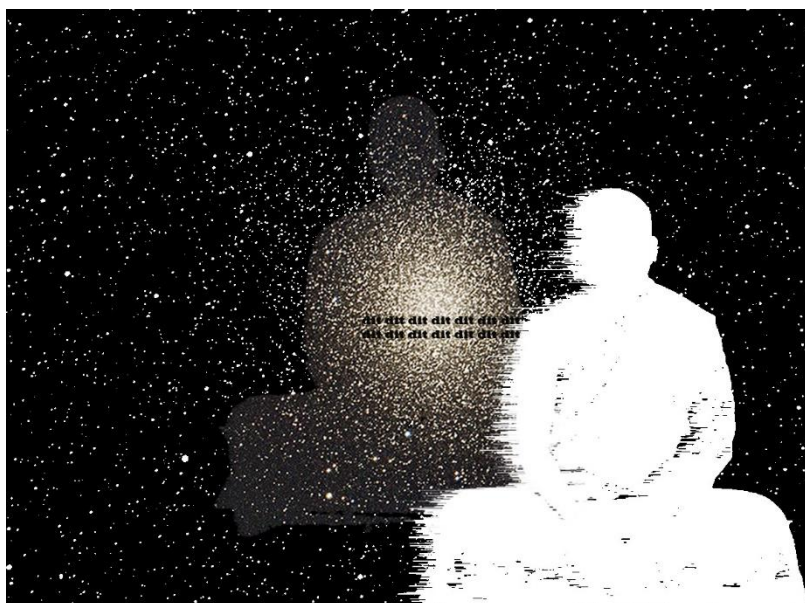
Eye-Door Mental Process

In a single mental process in which seeing occurs, seven distinct types of consciousness arise: five-door advertent consciousness, eye-consciousness, receiving consciousness, investigating consciousness, determining consciousness, impulsion (*javana*) consciousness, and registration consciousness. In an eye-door mental process, javana impulsion consciousness arises seven times, and registration

Eye-Door Mental Process

consciousness arises twice. In an eye-door mental process, then, there are fourteen mind moments altogether. This is just one example; the number may vary depending on the strength and the type of the object, among other factors.

These mind moments follow one another in very rapid succession. They are not observable by one who has not developed concentration and discerned ultimate materiality. However, meditators often report their experience as not unlike a very rapid series of tiny *dit*'s one after another – one *dit* for each mind moment, and fourteen *dit*'s altogether in a single physical sense-door mental process – *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit*. They are arising and perishing very, very rapidly. If one tries to demonstrate this '*dit dit dit...*' by vocalising the process through sheer effort, it will prove very tiring and ultimately impossible; but if one sees directly with insight, one will not feel



tired. Insight is very capable of such things, while human effort is incapable of them.

After the fourteenth mind moment, the process is interrupted by the bhavaṅga life continuum. The bhavaṅga takes the near-death object of the previous life. Next, mind-door mental process follows, which consists of three types of consciousness: mind-door advertent consciousness, impulsion consciousness, and registration consciousness. Impulsion arises seven times, and registration, twice. Thus, ten mind moments follow the interruption by the life continuum. Altogether, the eye-door mental process occurs as fourteen mind moments, then bhavaṅga interrupts, and then ten mind moments of the mind-door mental process follow.

The eye-door mental process with its fourteen mind moments can arise only one time whenever a visible object impinges on the eye-door. After the eye-door mental process, bhavaṅga interrupts, and then mind-door mental process with its ten mind moments follows many times – eye-door mental process, bhavaṅga, mind-door mental process, bhavaṅga, mind-door mental process, bhavaṅga.... Mind-door mental process follows many, many times. As mentality arises and perishes very rapidly, the colour of the object impinges on the eye-door many times over during the short time it takes to physically look at an object. With every impingement, the one eye-door mental process occurs and is followed by many mind-door processes, as described above. Merely glancing at a visible object involves a vast number of eye-door and mind-door mental processes.

Discerning Mentality by Discerning Base and Object

In the Buddha's dispensation, other than the Buddha, Venerable Sāriputta was the one possessed of the highest wisdom. The Buddha enumerated the qualities of Venerable Sāriputta in the Anupada Sutta.⁵² There the Venerable Sāriputta is described as being able to discern mentality one by one. However, this ability of his was not due to his superior wisdom. The commentary explains the real reason for his ability: '*vatthārammaṇānaṃ pariggahitatāya... therena hi vatthu ceva ārammaṇaṇca pariggahitaṃ, tenassa tesam dhammānaṃ uppādaṃ āvajjantassa uppādo pākaṭo hoti*'.⁵³ Venerable Sāriputta had the ability to discern mentality one by one not just because he possessed superior wisdom, but because he could discern object and base together. Every insight practitioner needs to do the same. When one pays attention to a visible object, it impinges on eye-sensitivity and the bhavaṅga. Eye-sensitivity is the base, while the visible object is of course the object; bhavaṅga or mind-door arises dependent on the heart-base which is heart materiality. If one can discern both base and object, *vatthu* and *ārammaṇa*, one is able to discern mentality.

One cannot discern both base and object if one has not discerned ultimate materiality. Everyone will agree that we see colour when we notice the blue of the sky or the green of grass and trees, but colour is also the colour of a group of kalāpas. Everyone will agree that we hear sound when a

⁵² MN.III.2.1 Anupadasuttaṃ (MN 111 The Discourse on One by One As They Occurred).

⁵³ Commentary to the above sutta.

bell is struck, but sound is also the sound produced by the hardness of rūpa kalāpas as they collide. One can see external colour and hear external sound, but just by doing so one does not penetrate ultimate truth; instead, one's mind remains at the level of perceiving conventional truth. One can know the causes of colour and sound only after analysing ultimate materiality. Unless one sees ultimate materiality, it is impossible to discern base and object.

These days, even in predominantly Buddhist countries, there are many learned Buddhist scholars who maintain that it is not possible to discern rūpa kalāpas and mental processes, and base and object. In saying so, they are not lying, in the sense that what they assert is true from their point of view. From their standpoint, such discernment is impossible. This view of theirs proliferates because they hold fast to well-known teachers and lineages that at some point have introduced the idea that concentration is not necessary for realising the Four Noble Truths. Teachers like these fail to encourage their disciples to develop concentration. Herein lies the fault. They go on to replace the First and Second Noble Truths with their own interpretations and so do not teach them as the Buddha taught them. In such circumstances, it is indeed impossible to discern ultimate truth.

In order to see the Four Noble Truths as they really are, one must heed the admonition of the Buddha: 'Bhikkhus, develop concentration. One who is concentrated knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are.' The First Noble Truth is ultimate mentality and ultimate materiality. Ultimate materiality is of twenty-eight kinds, eighteen of which are real and the objects of vipassanā.

Mentality takes the form of mental processes in which many mind moments are arising and perishing rapidly.

Venerable Sāriputta could discern mentality one by one because he could discern base and object together. Those who have no concentration themselves, and who therefore do not encourage others to develop concentration, have no capacity to discern the ultimate materiality that makes up the very small particles called *rūpa kalāpas*; neither can they discern object and base. It is therefore impossible for them to know the mental process. Hence, what they say is true from their standpoint, although it is not really true. We need to consider truth and untruth from their standpoint, and disregard their conclusions and their worldly degrees.

Scholars have intellectual understanding and learning, but they also have a lot of doubt. It is not their fault. The Buddha said that the Dhamma cannot be understood just by mere reasoning.⁵⁴ The Dhamma can be grasped only by those who have developed direct knowledge. No matter how much one learns and investigates and thinks and reasons, one cannot reach ultimate truth in these ways. Ultimate truth is beyond the naked eye. We cannot imagine something we have never seen, let alone think and reason

⁵⁴ MN.I.3.6 Pāsārāsīsuttam (MN 26 The Discourse on the Noble Search) and others:

‘Tassa mayham, bhikkhave, etadahosi — “adhigato kho myāyaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipūṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo.”’

‘Bhikkhus, I [the Buddha] considered: “This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.”’

about it. Such things are beyond the scope of the human intellect. Instead, realisation requires direct knowledge, and direct knowledge requires concentration. The concentrated mind produces a very powerful light, the light of wisdom, which illuminates the truths so that one can see them.

Therefore, we need to understand an individual's standpoint, and we need to be careful about whom we follow. We need to take care to follow the words of the Buddha and follow the way the Buddha taught. It is the only way for us to reach the goal.

In enumerating the qualities of the Venerable Sāriputta, the Buddha said:

‘Paṇḍito, bhikkhave, sāriputto; mahāpañño, bhikkhave, sāriputto; puthupañño, bhikkhave, sāriputto; hāsapañño, bhikkhave, sāriputto; javanapañño, bhikkhave, sāriputto; tikkhapañño, bhikkhave, sāriputto; nibbedhikapañño, bhikkhave, sāriputto.’

‘Bhikkhus, Sāriputta is wise (*paṇḍito*); Sāriputta has great wisdom (*mahāpañño*); Sāriputta has wide wisdom (*puthupañño*); Sāriputta has joyous wisdom (*hāsapañño*); Sāriputta has quick wisdom (*javanapañño*); Sāriputta has sharp wisdom (*tikkhapañño*); Sāriputta has penetrative wisdom (*nibbedhikapañño*).’

Venerable Sāriputta was able to discern ultimate mentality one by one not just because he was *mahāpañño*, not just because of *puthupañño*, and so forth; it was because he could discern base and object. It is explained in the commentary that we should not refer just to the great wisdom

of the Venerable Sāriputta, because he could discern ultimate mentality on account of his ability to discern both base and object, and not just on account of his wisdom.

The Importance of the Commentaries

We are able to teach meditators how to discern ultimate mentality because of explanations that appear in the commentary. These explanations are very important.

In Western countries, the commentary is not as a rule accepted. In Thailand also there are two groups; one accepts the commentary, and the other does not. The commentators knew the intentions of the Buddha, so they can explain His teachings very well. It is only because of their explanations that we know how to practise. Those who do not accept the commentaries teach their disciples that the commentaries are not the teaching of the Buddha.

To speak frankly, if you read the teachings of the Buddha that have been translated into English, you will not find detailed instructions about how to practise. Such brief instructions would be suitable for those who could actually meet with the Buddha, because the Buddha is the Omniscient One, so He knew what to teach, how to teach, and to what extent to teach His disciples. The Buddha knew to what extent He needed to teach them because of His Omniscient Knowledge.

But the commentators knew that later generations, such as the people of our times, would not understand properly what the Buddha had said, so they wrote the commentaries for later generations and not for their own times.

In the time of the Buddha, some who approached the Buddha and heard the Dhamma right from the Buddha did not understand it. Because the number of listeners was so great, those who did not understand could not ask the Buddha their questions, so they would go to see Venerable Sāriputta, Venerable Mahākassapa, and other mahātheras to ask about the meaning of the teachings. Then those venerable ones would explain things in more detail. Their explanations, as well as some of the Buddha's explanations that were not directly recorded in the Nikāyas, were handed down from one generation to the next. These form the basis for the commentaries, which were handed down as an oral tradition at first.

The commentaries, together with the Vinaya, Suttanta, and Abhidhamma, were recited at the First Saṅgha Council headed by Venerable Mahākassapa, with recitations by Venerable Ānanda and Venerable Upāli, in the presence of 497 other Arahant mahātheras. The Tipiṭaka and the commentaries were again recited at the Second and Third Saṅgha Councils. After the Third Saṅgha Council, the Tipiṭaka and the commentaries were taken to Sri Lanka by the Arahant Mahinda, still as an oral tradition. The oral commentaries were subsequently written down in Sri Lanka only when those who knew them saw that later generations did not have sufficient ability to memorise them. The commentaries were written down in Sinhalese. In the fifth century CE, Venerable Buddhaghosa compiled and consolidated the original commentaries and translated them into the Pāli language, the original language of Magadha used by the Buddha. This version of the commentaries as well as works by other commentators and

sub-commentators have been handed down from generation to generation up to the present day, thereby preserving the full body of knowledge of the True Teachings of the Buddha.

We know how to teach because of the explanations in the commentaries. To see ultimate mentality, we must know and see the mental process arising in a series of mind moments, with consciousness and all the associated mental factors present in each mind moment. The Anupada Sutta from the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha⁵⁵ mentions that the mental formations in the first jhāna – application, sustainment, joy, pleasure, and one-pointedness of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; and the desire, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention – these mental formations were discerned by the Venerable Sāriputta one by one as they occurred. Why could the Venerable Sāriputta analyse each of them? This is not explained in the Pāli canon; it is explained only in the commentary to this sutta. It was not just because the Venerable Sāriputta had great wisdom that he could discern each of these mentalities, but because he discerned the base and the object together that he could discern the mentalities one by one as they occurred.

Following the explanation in the commentary, we are also teaching meditators to first discern the base and the object together. In doing so, they can see the mental process arising in a series of mind moments, and they can also analyse

⁵⁵ MN.III.2.1 Anupadasuttam (MN 111 The Discourse on One by One As They Occurred).

consciousness and all the associated mental factors present in each mind moment.

Thus, the commentators were concerned that future generations would mistakenly think Venerable Sāriputta could discern ultimate mentality one by one because he had wisdom that was very great, sharp, quick, wide, and penetrative. We ourselves would come to such a conclusion if left to our own devices.

Venerable Sāriputta's attainment was indeed a lofty one – so lofty that one may feel it is beyond one's reach. Discerning kalāpas and base and object and the like may seem daunting and difficult, if not impossible. The truth is, only the initial stage of developing concentration takes time. After one has developed concentration, one can go one step after another to discern ultimate materiality and ultimate mentality. This is something the Buddha guarantees: 'One who is concentrated knows and sees the Dhamma as they really are.' With concentration, one has the capability to know and see the Dhamma as they really are. This concentration is very special.

Therefore, one is well advised to take the time to develop concentration patiently and diligently. After one has developed concentration, one becomes capable of profound discernment, and one can go one step after another under the guidance of a teacher. Without a teacher, one cannot discern; without a teacher, it is impossible. This is a very deep truth. The teacher needs to instruct the meditator one step after another.

One instance concerning the life nonad kalāpa (*jīvita navaka kalāpa*) illustrates how the commentary is essential

for understanding the Dhamma and teaching it. The life nonad kalāpa is one of the seven kinds of rūpa kalāpa in the eye. Many years ago, when the Pa-Auk Sayadaw first began teaching ultimate materiality, he taught only six kinds of rūpa kalāpa in the eye because he did not include the life nonad kalāpa among them. He did so because he could not locate the particular citation he had once read which stated that *jīvita navaka kalāpa* (life nonad kalāpa) exists throughout the whole body. The reference eluded him for years, during which time he refrained from teaching seven kinds of rūpa kalāpa in the eye and instead taught only six.

More recently, just several years ago, he finally came upon the citation with the help of disciple bhikkhus of his who are skilled with computers, which nowadays make searching the vast corpus of the Pāli texts, including the commentaries and sub-commentaries, relatively easy. Not so long ago, finding a specific reference might require many hours spent combing through a lot of books; but now it is possible to download the entire Tipiṭaka and commentary to computers, and searching the canon for a citation is little more than a matter of typing. Having found the long-sought reference, Sayadaw from then on was able to teach confidently that the life nonad kalāpa is present in every sense organ because it spreads throughout the body. This instance illustrates how valuable the commentary is, and how indispensable it is to refer to it.

As an aside, the short text that Sayadaw needed reads as follows: ‘*Sakala sarīre eva, daṭṭhabban’ti*’.⁵⁶ ‘*Sakala*’ means

⁵⁶ From Ledi Sayadaw’s *Paramattha Dīpanī*.

‘the whole’ and ‘*sarīre*’ means ‘in the body’. Thus, life nonad kalāpa is in the whole body and can help assimilate whatever one applies to any part of one’s body.⁵⁷ The life nonad kalāpa is what assimilates and digests things. The fact that it is present throughout the body is also implied in the Visuddhimagga.⁵⁸ Moreover, a meditator can practically discern that the nutritive essence (ojā) of kamma-born kalāpas (such as the eye decad kalāpa and so forth), with the support of ojā from nutriment-born kalāpas and the support of the fire element from life nonad kalāpas, will produce new nutriment-born materiality. This can be practically discerned in all six sense organs. Hence, life nonad kalāpa exist in all six sense organs.

⁵⁷ PoP Chapter 20, page 643, paragraph 37: ‘Also nutriment smeared on the body originates materiality.’

⁵⁸ In the Visuddhimagga, in the discussion on the discernment of materiality in the forty-two parts of the body (PoP Chapter 18, pages 610-611, paragraphs 5-6), it is mentioned that when the thirty-two body parts in which the earth and water elements are predominant become apparent, another ten aspects in which the fire element or the wind element respectively is predominant will also become apparent. The four aspects in which fire element is predominant (body temperature, fever, maturation or ageing, and digestive heat) spread throughout the body. For the six aspects in which the wind element is predominant, other than the in-and-out breath (in which there are only sound nonad kalāpas), the remaining five aspects (upward flowing wind, downward flowing wind, wind inside the intestines, wind outside the intestines in the abdomen, and wind in the limbs) are also present collectively throughout the body. With the exception of the in-and-out breath, all these nine aspects have thirty-three rūpa, including life nonad kalāpas. Therefore, life nonad kalāpas spread throughout the body and can be found in all six sense organs.

Mentalities in an Eye-Door Mental Process

Returning to the topic of mentality, those who have penetrated ultimate mentality and materiality by practising vipassanā can listen to a Dhamma talk and, after becoming concentrated, can discern the arising and perishing of their mentality in the form of *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit* following rapidly one after another many, many times as the voice of the speaker impinges on the ear-door. In the same way, as bhikkhus and yogis would listen to the Buddha expounding the Dhamma and the way of practice, some had the capability to follow and practise at the very time He was teaching. They were practising as they were listening to the Dhamma. In this way, while the Buddha was expounding the Dhamma, some could attain Path and Fruition Knowledge. They had the capability to do so because of their concentration and because they were able to discern base and object. If one nowadays has such attainments, one will be able to do so as well.

Such attainments will enable one to see for oneself that eye-consciousness arises based on eye-sensitivity. This happens in the second mind moment in an eye-door mental process. Prior to that, in the first mind moment, five-door advertent consciousness arises based on heart materiality. After the eye-consciousness mind moment, the third mind moment is receiving consciousness; the fourth one, investigating; the fifth, determining. Then seven impulsion mind moments arise, followed by two registration mind moments. Altogether there are twelve mind moments starting from the third mind moment until the two registration mind moments. In these twelve mind moments, the consciousnesses and their associated mental

factors arise based on the heart-base, which is heart materiality.

Life continuum also arises based on heart materiality. The consciousnesses in a mind-door mental process that follow the interruption of the life continuum likewise arise based on heart materiality – mind-door adverting consciousness, seven impulsion consciousnesses, and two registration consciousnesses. Altogether there are ten mind moments, and the respective consciousnesses arise based on heart materiality.

In a single eye-consciousness mind moment there are seven associated mental factors: *phassa* (contact), *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *cetanā* (volition), *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness), *jīvitindriya* (life faculty), and *manasikāra* (attention). These seven mental factors are universal mental factors; they are associated with every consciousness. Just as every rūpa kalāpa has at least eight kinds of ultimate materiality (the eight inseparable materialities), so every mind moment has one consciousness and at least these seven universal associated mental factors. It should be emphasised that this is a minimum; there are at least eight mentalities in every mind moment. Therefore, in the case of the wholesome eye-door mental process, there are eleven mentalities in the first mind moment (when five-door adverting consciousness arises), eight in the second mind moment (eye-consciousness), eleven in the third mind moment (receiving consciousness), eleven or twelve in the fourth mind moment (investigating consciousness), twelve in the fifth mind moment (determining consciousness), and thirty-two or thirty-three or thirty-four in the

javana impulsion mind moments. The number of mentalities in the registration mind moments may likewise vary. The Venerable Sāriputta discerned all these one by one because he could discern base and object. When one can discern base and object, one has the same capability to discern these things, one by one. One needs to discern all these things.

Such discernment is indeed very deep and profound, but it is possible for those who have concentration. Not a single one of the world's famous universities can teach such things, except for the 'University of Buddhism'. One day this world will be destroyed by fire, or by wind, or by water. From this time until the destruction of the world, it will be impossible for scientists to know these things, since no one can know them by depending on external instruments. Only with concentrated mind can one know them. One needs to learn them, and one can learn them from one's body. One can penetrate within.

One day we all must leave this body behind; one day we will die, and our beloved ones will not keep our bodies. They will get rid of our corpses as quickly as possible. This body itself is useless; it is a repulsive body. If we live the way most of the people in the world live, our own end will be just like this. However, we can also make use of this body. If one can dig the Dhamma out from this useless and repulsive body, one's body will prove very valuable. This is the only use one can make of this body.

Colour-Line Wholesome Mental Processes

		Eye-Door Process						Mind-Door Process			
Base	HB	EB	HB								
Consciousness	FDA	EC	Rc	In	Dt	Im 7x	Rg 2x	Life-Continuum	MDA	Im 7x	Rg 2x
Object	Colour Object						PL-NDO	Colour Object			
Total No. of Mentality	11	8	11	11/12	12	32/33/34	32/33/34 or 11/12	33/34	12	32/33/34	32/33/34 or 11/12
Associated Mental Factors	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U
	Ap		Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap
	St		St	St	St	St	St	St	St	St	St
	Dc		Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc
				J]	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef
						Ds	Ds	Ds	Ds	Ds	Ds
						19 BU	19 BU	19 BU	19 BU	19 BU	19 BU
						J]	J]	J]	J]	J]	J]
						[W]	[W]	[W]	[W]	[W]	[W]
							Or	Or	Or	Or	Or
						7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	
						Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	
						St	St	St	St	St	
						Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	
						J]	J]	J]	J]	J]	

HB: Heart-base (Heart Materiality); EB: Eye-base (Eye Sensitivity), FDA: Five-Door Adverting; EC: Eye Consciousness; Rc: Receiving; In: Investigating; Dt: Determining; Im: Impulsion; Rg: Registration; MDA: Mind-Door Adverting; PL-NDO: Previous Life's Near Death Object; 7 U: 7 Universals; Ap: Application; St: Sustainment; Dc: Decision; J: Joy; Ef: Effort; Ds: Desire; W: Wisdom; 19 BU: 19 Beautiful Universals.

[Those in brackets are variables]; Total No. of Mentality = 1 (Consciousness) + No. of Associated Mental Factors

Colour-Line Unwholesome (Greed with Wrong View) Mental Processes

	Eye-Door Process							Mind-Door Process				
Base	HB	EB	HB									
Consciousness	FDA	EC	Rc	In	Dt	Im 7x	Rg 2x	Life- Continuum	MDA	Im 7x	Rg 2x	
Object	Colour Object							PL-NDO	Colour Object			
Total No. of Mentality	11	8	11	11/12	12	19/20/21 /22	32/33/34 or 11/12	33/34	12	19/20/21 /22	32/33/34 or 11/12	
Associated Mental Factors	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	7 U	
	Ap		Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	Ap	
	St		St	St	St	St	St	St	St	St	St	
	Dc		Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	Dc	
				[J]	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	Ef	
						Ds	Ds	Ds	Ds	Ds	Ds	
						DI	19 BU	19 BU	DI	DI	19 BU	
						MS	[J]	[J]	MS	MS	[J]	
						MF	[W]	W	MF	MF	[W]	
						Rl	Or		Rl	Rl	Or	
						G			G	G		
						WV	7 U		WV	WV	7 U	
						[J]	IA		[J]	[J]	IA	
						([Sl])	SA		([Sl])	([Sl])	SA	
						[T])	Dc		[T])	[T])	Dc	
						[J]				[J]		

DI: Delusion; MS: Moral Shamelessness; MF: Moral Fearlessness; Rl: Restlessness; G: Greed; WV: Wrong View; Sl: Sloth; T: Torpor. [Those in brackets are variables]

The rest are as defined under the table of Colour-line Wholesome Mental Processes.

Other Sense-Door and Mind-Door Mental Processes

One can make use of the body by applying what is said above about the eye-door to the other sense doors of the body. When one hears a sound, one can discern that it impinges on the ear-door and on the bhavaṅga at the same time. Then ear-door mental process and many mind-door mental processes arise. From this point on the process is the same as what happens at the eye-door, except that ear-consciousness arises instead of eye-consciousness.

Similarly, when smell impinges on the nose-door and the mind-door simultaneously, nose-consciousness and its associated mental factors arise in a nose-door mental process, which is followed by many mind-door mental processes. When taste impinges on tongue-door and mind-door concurrently, tongue-consciousness and its associated mental factors arise in a tongue-door mental process, and thereafter mind-door mental process arises in the mind-door many times.

An analogy might help in understanding mental process. Suppose one is alone in a quiet room and someone knocks on the closed door of the room. When one hears the knock, one opens the door. Opening the door is like five-door advertent; one opens it because of hearing the sound of the knock. We can apply this analogy to the example of the eye-door mental process. When colour impinges on the eye-sensitivity and the bhavaṅga, five-door advertent consciousness arises. This is like opening the door on hearing the sound of the knock. After opening, you see some-

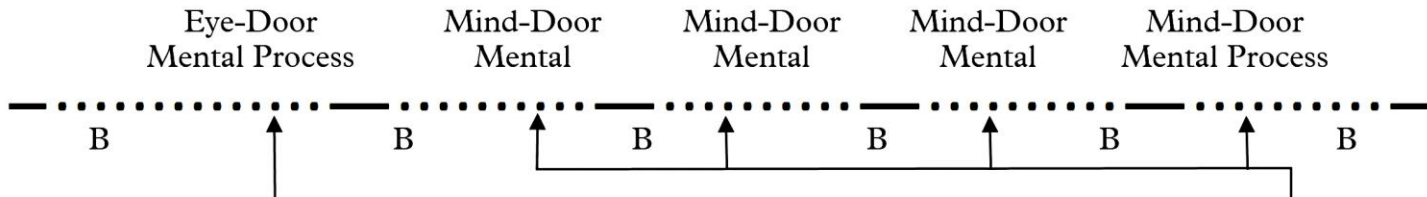
one. At that time eye-consciousness arises. Then one listens to or ‘receives’ what the person says; this is receiving mind moment. Next one investigates what it is said; this is investigating mind moment. After investigating, one can make a determination and say, ‘This is *this*.’ This is determining mind moment. After that, one invites the guest in and offers tea and coffee; these are javana mind moments. Finally there are two registration mind moments when one enjoys one’s final moments with the guests before saying goodbye. This is really happening with one’s mind moments. Open, see, receive, investigate, determine, enjoy, and then ‘bye bye!’ This is what is happening.

Afterwards, many mind-door mental processes follow. They arise and perish very rapidly. *Dit* – this arises, and then it perishes. The second mind moment arises – *dit* – and then perishes. After the second mind moment perishes, the third mind moment arises. Then that perishes and the fourth mind moment arises. All these mind moments arise and perish very, very rapidly. Whenever one sees any object, this process takes place. Whenever one hears a sound, this process takes place. Arising and perishing occur very rapidly. One can investigate in the area of the mind-door and notice *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...* When one sees something, one can notice *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...* When one smells something, *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...* When one tastes something, *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...* When one touches something, *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit ...* This observation does not apply only to the five physical senses. Suppose one sits down somewhere, closes one’s eyes, and thinks of someone far away whom one misses. At that time, there are no eye-door, ear-door, nose-door, tongue-door, or body-door mental processes; there is only

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mind-door mental process. Many repetitions of ten-mind-moment mind-door mental processes occur in that case. There are ten mind moments in mind-door mental process; so ten mind moments occur, then bhavaṅga interrupts, and then another ten moments, then bhavaṅga interrupts again – *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit* – the whole time one is thinking.

Discernment of Colour-Line Mental Processes by a Meditator



Eye-Door Mental Process Arises Only Once

dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit

B 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 B

1 : Five Door Adverting	5 : Determining
2 : Eye Consciousness	6 to 12 : Impulsion
3 : Receiving	13 to 14 : Registration
4 : Investigating	B : Bhavaṅga (Life Continuum)

Followed by Many Mind-Door Mental Processes

dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit

B 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 B

1 : Mind Door Adverting	9 to 10 : Registration
2 to 8 : Impulsion	B : Bhavaṅga (Life Continuum)

The Speed of the Mental Process

The speed of the mental process has implications in the realm of attention. When one listens to a Dhamma talk, for example, one sometimes looks at the speaker and sometimes at something else; sometimes one is listening and sometimes one's mind is wandering. In looking here or there, eye-door mental process and mind-door mental process arise. While listening, ear-door mental process and mind-door mental process are taking place. Sometimes one's mind alternates between these two – one is both looking and listening. All the while, eye-door mental process and mind-door mental process arise, as do ear-door mental process and mind-door mental process.

While practising meditation, it may happen that one can watch the breath for the most part but only against a background of discursive thoughts. In such a case, there is more than one process happening.

Taking thoughts as an object, mental process arises. It is mind-door mental process. Taking the in-and-out breath as an object, mind-door mental process arises. Both are mind-door mental process, but with different objects.

If one remembers one's past and one's past activities, mind-door mental process arises. Then one remembers to focus on the breath, so one shifts one's focus back to it. After a few breaths, one's attachment does not allow one to focus, so one ends up thinking about the past again. Then one returns once more to the breath.

The Speed of the Mental Process

One's attention alternates between the two objects, just as it does while listening to a Dhamma talk. In meditation, mind-door mental process with the in-and-out breath as an object arises, and mind-door mental process with the past as an object also arises.

A final example is that of lay people sitting in front of the television while eating and drinking. They hear the sounds from the television and see the images on the screen, but they are also eating. While watching the screen, eye-door and mind-door mental processes arise. They hear the sounds from the television, so ear-door and mind-door mental processes arise. As they are eating and drinking, tongue-door and mind-door mental processes arise. However, they do not all arise at the same time. At any point in time, only one mental process may arise. The mind can take only one object at any single moment. Therefore, in one single moment, one mental process occurs and takes one object. Soon after, it may be a different mental process taking another object. Then another one, and another, and so on. The mind is alternating not just between two objects, but among several, very rapidly. It occurs so rapidly that it seems to us that we are concurrently experiencing many objects.

From these ordinary experiences one should consider how quick mentality is and how quick mental processes are. This is the nature of mentality. When one knows and sees mental processes, one will understand just how quick they really are. Whenever the object is different, the corresponding mental process that arises is different as well; whenever the object changes, the mental process changes. This is the law of citta. Whenever a certain object impinges

on a certain door, specific mental processes will arise, followed by mind-door mental process. If one is not focusing on one of the five sense objects, and instead is thinking about the past or about what to do tomorrow, the mental process that is taking place is mind-door mental process.

Knowing and Seeing Materiality and Mentality As They Are

Being able to observe mental process is significant. Just as, in discerning materiality, one perceives one's whole body as nothing more than very small sub-atomic particles, so in discerning mentality one perceives only the arising and perishing of mental processes. Ultimate materiality is also arising and perishing rapidly all the time. One then sees neither men nor women; instead, one sees only ultimate mentality and materiality which are arising and perishing very, very rapidly all the time.

Knowing and seeing in this way, one can reduce one's attachment – to oneself first of all, and then to those whom one loves. All living and non-living things are just mentality and materiality arising and perishing rapidly all the time. If one discerns one's past life, one sees mentality and materiality arising and perishing. Internal and external things alike are all arising and perishing. Likewise, when one discerns the future, one also sees mentality and materiality arising and perishing.

In this way one's understanding will grow day by day. One's knowledge matures day by day. Finally, one acquires the strength to break free from suffering. The first

moment of freedom arrives when the Insight Knowledges mature, and the First Path and Fruition Knowledges arise. The First Path Knowledge removes three impurities, so that one becomes a Noble Person. After that it is impossible for one to fall into any of the four woeful states.

This attainment is possible only by seeing such truths; since everything is just arising and perishing, one wants to be free from this suffering. However, if one does not see these truths, one has no strong desire to be free from them. Knowing and seeing the truths is very important. The most important step is concentration. If one has developed concentration, one will know and see them. The Buddha has guaranteed it.

When one knows and sees ultimate mentality and materiality the way the Buddha taught, one can become concentrated and investigate *nāma* and *rūpa* from the standpoint of ultimate truth. One can close one's eyes and observe sound as it impinges on the ear-door and the mind-door simultaneously. While paying attention to the *bhavaṅga*, one can observe that the ear-door mental process and the mind-door mental process arise many times repeatedly – *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...* One can perceive one's whole body as just tiny particles arising and perishing rapidly all the time, and one can also perceive all these mind moments – *dit dit dit dit dit dit dit dit...* – arising and perishing rapidly all the time. One sees everyone else in the same way.

One can, if one likes, discern the *nāma* and *rūpa* of one minute ago, or five minutes ago, or one day ago, two days ago, a week ago, a month ago. One can discern them all; one has the capability to do so. More than that, one can

discern back to one's time in the womb, because even though the kamma we have done is finished and has perished, its potentiality or kammic force remains behind. Therefore one can discern back to the past. One will practically find that one can do so.

This discernment means one is able to discern the Second Noble Truth. The First Noble Truth is ultimate mentality and materiality; the Second Noble Truth is the cause of the First Noble Truth. The suffering of one's present life started in the womb at the *kalala* stage, when ultimate mentality and materiality first arose, at the beginning stage of this life. It is, for humans, the beginning stage of suffering, the starting point of suffering. Therefore, to know the cause of suffering, one needs to discern one's past. At the near-death moment, a certain kamma appeared; one must know and see it. Only then will one know and see the Second Noble Truth, because one will understand the Law of Kamma. One will understand that good begets good, and bad begets bad.

In this way, we teach meditators to discern not only one past life, but at least five past lives. Only then can they understand the results of good and bad kamma, because they see that they were animals or very rich or very poor in some of their previous existences. They see the ups and downs of life. Such knowledge and vision is available only to those who know and see ultimate mentality and materiality; it is out of reach for those who do not know and see. Therefore, one needs concentration.

Before one is able to know and see the Second Noble Truth, one needs to discern the First Noble Truth, which

is ultimate mentality and materiality, and one needs to discern it both internally and externally. How to discern internally has now been explained. External discernment is different, and is a necessary skill for discerning one's past.

Discerning External Materiality

As was said above, there are seven types of rūpa kalāpas in the eye-door, namely, eye decad kalāpa, body decad kalāpa, sex decad kalāpa, mind-born octad kalāpa, nutriment-born octad kalāpa, temperature-born octad kalāpa, and life nonad kalāpa. One needs to discern all seven externally. The same must be done for the ear-door, nose-door, tongue-door, body-door, and mind-door. One needs to repeat the process of discerning all of them internally and then discern them externally as well.

If one is a serenity-and-insight practitioner, one undertakes the process of internal and external discernment by developing ānāpāna concentration first and then practising four elements meditation. One will see one's whole body as just very tiny particles and no longer as a solid body. Whatever part of the body one looks at, whether the eye-door or any other part, one sees it as nothing more than very tiny particles. Since the Buddha has instructed us to discern *ajjhata-bahiddhā* (internally-externally),⁵⁹ one discerns all the different kinds of rūpa in one's own eye-door, and then in the eye-doors of those who are sitting nearby. When one discerns four elements in the people who are sitting nearby or far away, one sees all of them as

⁵⁹ See SN.III.1.6.7 Anattalakkhaṇasuttam (SN 22.59 The Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-Self), among others.

just small particles. Everything disappears, and all one sees is very tiny particles. If one discerns four elements in the surrounding space, one sees only small particles. If one discerns four elements in the floor, one sees nothing but small particles. Everyone and everything becomes the same.

One needs to begin one's discernment with what is nearby and proceed farther and farther away, until finally one discerns the whole world. Everywhere one looks, one sees just tiny particles, no matter what the place or thing. Everything becomes the same, whether living or non-living. This is knowing the truth. All the uncountable living and non-living things are nothing more than very small particles. When one sees this, one clearly knows that there is nothing other than particles arising and perishing rapidly.

No Beings, Only Rūpa

After one has completed rūpa meditation, one will be instructed to discern in the following way. After becoming concentrated and closing one's eyes, one sees one's whole body as nothing but extremely small particles which are arising and perishing rapidly all the time, whether one is walking, standing, lying down, or sitting. One sees this whether one looks inside or outside oneself. The Buddha said to reflect at that time and consider that there is no man, no woman, no deva, no brahmā, no permanent soul, and no permanent entity. There is only rūpa. One should contemplate thus: 'This is rūpa. This is rūpa. Rūpa dhamma. Rūpa dhamma.' Then one will agree with the Buddha that there is no such thing as a multiplicity of beings; instead, there is only ultimate materiality.

Nāma Meditation

Next, one needs to continue on to nāma meditation so as to know and to see ultimate mentality. After one has discerned all the ultimate materiality, both internally and externally, one discerns ultimate mentality by first attaining concentration and then discerning both object and base. One needs to discern eye-sensitivity and bhavaṅga in order to be able to discern eye-door mental process and mind-door mental process. Then one needs to pay attention to a visible object. In doing so, one is paying attention to the colour of a group of kalāpas. When the colour impinges on the eye-sensitivity and the bhavaṅga, eye-door mental process and mind-door mental process arise. Mind-door mental process arises many, many times.

Mentalities in Wholesome and Unwholesome Mental Processes

As was explained above, mental process is either wholesome or unwholesome. In our lives, there are many more unwholesome mental processes than wholesome mental processes. The difference between them is in the impulsion (javana) mind moments. The impulsion mind moments in a wholesome mental process comprise wholesome mentalities made up of consciousness and its associated mental factors. Conversely, the mental process is unwholesome if unwholesome mentalities arise in its javana mind moments.

In a wholesome mental process, if the seven javana mind moments occur with *pīti* and *ñāṇa* (knowledge), the mentalities may altogether number thirty-four.⁶⁰ If wholesome javana occurs either without *pīti* but with *ñāṇa*, or without *ñāṇa* but with *pīti*, there will be thirty-three mentalities. There are thirty-two mentalities if there is neither *pīti* nor *ñāṇa*. Javana mind moments such as these arise in daily life whenever one's mind is wholesome.

If one listens to a Dhamma talk and is happy about doing so and understands well what is being said, then thirty-four mentalities are arising, because both *pīti* and *ñāṇa* are present. Perhaps one is happy to be at a talk but does not understand well what is said; in that case, there is *pīti* but no *ñāṇa*, so the mentalities total thirty-three. Maybe one understands well but without pleasant feeling; then there will be thirty-three mentalities. It is possible that one neither understands well nor has a pleasant feeling, but since the subject is Dhamma, wholesome states of mind arise; then only thirty-two mentalities arise, because both *pīti* and *ñāṇa* are absent.

Such things are ordinary occurrences; one's mind functions like this whenever one experiences wholesome states of mind in one's daily life. When one does some action specifically because it is wholesome, one feels very happy and also displays an understanding of the Law of Kamma, so the action is associated with wisdom and joy, and there are thirty-four mentalities altogether. Should one do the same action with equanimity, there is *ñāṇa* but no *pīti*, and the mentalities will number thirty-three. There will also be

⁶⁰ Refer back to the chart showing colour-line wholesome mental processes above.

thirty-three if one does the wholesome action happily but without a belief in the Law of Kamma or a right understanding of it, in which case there is *pīti* but no wisdom. Finally, if the action, although wholesome, is done merely out of a sense of duty and no more, then there is neither *pīti* nor *ñāṇa*, and just thirty-two mentalities arise.

When one sees a very beautiful woman, or a very handsome gentleman, one thinks, ‘Oh, very, very attractive!’ Unwholesome mentality has arisen, because it is rooted in greed. When one eats delicious food, one thinks, ‘Very delicious, very good!’ Unwholesome mentality, rooted in greed, has arisen. When one listens to music and thinks, ‘How beautiful!’, unwholesome mentality, rooted in greed, has arisen. Conversely, when one sees a very ugly person, unwholesome mentality arises, rooted in *dosa*, hatred. The same happens if one eats food and does not like it; aversion arises. If one thinks, ‘My son is very good looking’, it is also unwholesome. ‘My monastery is very beautiful’ – unwholesome. ‘I have a lot of students’ – unwholesome. ‘What I am offering is better than what they are offering’ – unwholesome. These mentalities are unwholesome because they are rooted in greed.

In this way, unwholesome mental processes outnumber wholesome ones in our lives. However, when one knows and sees ultimate mentality and materiality and how they rapidly arise and perish all the time, one contemplates their impermanence. Since they are arising and perishing all the time, they are inherently suffering, and one contemplates them as suffering. After they arise, they perish. No one can tell them not to arise, nor can anyone tell them not to perish. They are not subject to anyone’s control.

They are non-self. Only when one contemplates in these ways does wholesome mentality arise.

Unwholesome mentalities can be grouped into three types: delusion-rooted, hatred-rooted, and greed-rooted. In each of these types of unwholesome mentalities, consciousness arises together with a specific set of associated mental factors, and these different compositions of mentalities act together to perform various unwholesome kamma. All three categories of unwholesome consciousnesses are always associated with the seven universal mental factors, as well as the four unwholesome universal mental factors.

The seven universal mental factors arise with all types of consciousness, whether wholesome, unwholesome, functional, or resultant. These universal mental factors are contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*cetanā*), one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*), life faculty (*jīvitindriya*), and attention (*manasikāra*).

The four unwholesome universal mental factors arise with all unwholesome consciousnesses, and consist of delusion (*moha*), moral shamelessness (*ahirī*), moral fearlessness (*anottappa*), and restlessness (*uddhacca*). These eleven mental factors are always present in all unwholesome mentalities.

In addition, there are six occasional mental factors which may or may not associate with a particular consciousness. They are application (*vitakka*), sustainment (*vicāra*), energy (*vīriya*), joy (*pīṭi*), decision (*adhimokkha*), and desire (*chanda*).

There are two types of unwholesome mentalities that are rooted in delusion. The first type is characterised by restlessness. It is associated with four of the occasional mental factors – application, sustainment, energy, and decision. It is not associated with the occasional mental factors of joy or desire. The second is characterised by doubt. It is associated with three of the occasional mental factors – application, sustainment, and energy. It is not associated with the occasional mental factors of joy, desire, or decision. Decision cannot be present because doubt is present. Therefore, including consciousness, there are always sixteen mentalities in any delusion-rooted unwholesome mentality.

The Mentalities at the Arising of Delusion-Rooted Consciousness	
CONSCIOUSNESS	1
MENTAL FACTORS	
7 Universals	7
The Occasionals: Application, Sustainment, and Energy	3
4 Unwholesome Universals	4
With either one of Decision or Doubt	1
Total No. of Mentalities	16

The other two types of unwholesome mentalities can be either prompted or unprompted. This requires a bit of explanation. An action that is done entirely of one's own volition and without the instigation or encouragement of anyone else is called 'unprompted'. Conversely, an action done at the urging of someone else but without oneself having any real interest in doing it is called 'prompted'. For example, one's friend insists that a certain film is very good and asks one to go along to see it and one does so, even though one has no interest in seeing it oneself. Such an action is not without prompt. It is prompted and therefore not as strong as unprompted. It is associated with the mental factors of *thīna* (sloth) and *middha* (torpor). These two factors are both present in every prompted unwholesome mentality, and are absent in unprompted unwholesome mentalities.

The unwholesome mentalities rooted in hatred can be either prompted or unprompted. In addition, there is a group of four hatred-rooted mental factors, namely hatred (*dosa*), jealousy (*issā*), possessiveness (*macchariya*), and remorse (*kukkucca*); of these four, hatred is always present, either on its own or together with one of the remaining three hatred-rooted mental factors. There is only hatred for a pure emotion of anger. When one is upset or angry because of another's success or achievement, both hatred and jealousy arise together. If one is resentful when others gain what one possesses – whether dwellings, support from families, material gains, praise, or the Dhamma⁶¹ – then

⁶¹ AN.V.3.2.5 Maccharinisuttam (AN 5.115 The Discourse on Miserliness).

Mentalities in Wholesome and Unwholesome Mental Processes

the mental factors of hatred and possessiveness arise together. If one feels remorse after doing a wrongful act, both the mental factors of hatred and remorse arise together. Hence, either hatred arises alone, or else hatred arises together with one of the other three mental factors. Furthermore, as hatred-rooted mentalities are associated only with unpleasant feeling, the mental factor of joy is always absent, and there remain only the five occasional mental factors associated with hatred-rooted mentalities.

The Mentalities at the Arising of Hatred-Rooted Consciousness	
CONSCIOUSNESS	1
MENTAL FACTORS	
7 Universals	7
6 Occasionals except for Joy	5
4 Unwholesome Universals	4
Hatred	1
With either one of Jealousy, Possessiveness, or Remorse or Without	1 or 0
With or Without 2 Prompted	2 or 0
Total No. of Mentalities	18 to 21

Therefore, the minimum number of mentalities arising together in an unwholesome hatred-rooted impulsion mind moment will be eighteen, comprising one consciousness, seven universals, five occasionals (without joy), four unwholesome universals, hatred arising on its own, and without sloth or torpor (since it is unprompted). The maximum then is twenty-one mentalities, with the above eighteen and an additional mental factor of either jealousy, possessiveness, or remorse arising together with hatred, as well as sloth and torpor arising together in a prompted situation. The variation in the association of the hatred-rooted group of unwholesome mental factors, depending on whether it is with or without prompt, gives rise to a possible range of between eighteen and twenty-one unwholesome hatred-rooted mentalities.

In the case of greed-rooted unwholesome mentalities, joy may or may not be present. For example, when one likes something very much and is very happy, it is unwholesome mentality rooted in greed arising with joy. Therefore, unwholesome happiness is quite possible. However, if one craves for something but has no pleasant feeling, there is no joy. Therefore, in a greed-rooted unwholesome mentality, all the six occasional mental factors arise when joy is present, but only five occasionals arise if joy is absent.

In all greed-rooted mentalities, the mental factor of greed (*lobha*) will always be present. It arises either on its own, or together with either wrong view (*diṭṭhi*) or conceit (*māna*). One may crave for something with pure greed, or under the influence of wrong views such as personality view (in which case, both the mental factors of greed and wrong view arise together), or with feelings of pride (in which

case both the mental factors of greed and conceit will be present).

In addition, a greed-rooted unwholesome action may be either prompted or unprompted. Therefore, an unprompted greed-rooted mental process always has at least eighteen mentalities (one consciousness, seven universals, four unwholesome universals, five occasionals without joy, and greed); there are nineteen if either joy, wrong view, or conceit is present; and there are twenty if joy is present along with either wrong view or conceit. With the addition of sloth and torpor, a prompted greed-rooted mental process always has at least twenty mentalities, twenty-one if

The Mentalities at the Arising of Greed-Rooted Consciousness	
CONSCIOUSNESS	1
MENTAL FACTORS	
7 Universals	7
6 Occasionals except for Joy	5
With or Without Joy	1 or 0
4 Unwholesome Universals	4
Greed	1
With either one of Wrong View or Conceit or Without	1 or 0
With or Without 2 Prompted	2 or 0
Total No. of Mentalities	18 to 22

either joy or wrong view or conceit is present, and twenty-two if joy is present along with either wrong view or conceit.

Notice that joy occurs only in greed-rooted unwholesome mental process, and even then it is not always present. Hatred-rooted mental process cannot have joy among its factors. It is not possible to be happily angry, or angrily happy, nor is one ever happy to feel jealous or possessive. Similarly, delusion-rooted mental process occurs without the factor of joy. In other words, happiness may co-exist with greediness, but it cannot co-exist with hatred, jealousy, possessiveness, remorse, or doubt.

How great is the Buddha! The Buddha points out to us that there is never any joy in anger, and that we feel no happiness when we are wracked with doubt. These are the sorts of truths that are explained in the Abhidhamma.

One can clearly see, then, that the Abhidhamma is not explaining things that have little or nothing to do with us. The Abhidhamma explains what is happening within us. For this reason, it is the most important thing to understand. Human beings want to understand many external things. Since our youth, we have studied many external things, but we do not know ourselves. If one wants to know oneself, one needs to study the Abhidhamma. It tells us who and what we are. Sometimes we do not know what is unwholesome and what is wholesome. We are ignorant on this point because we lack knowledge of the Abhidhamma.

52 Mental Factors (*Cetasika*)

13 General / Common to Others <i>Aññasamāna</i>	7 Universals <i>Sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact (<i>Phassa</i>) 2. Feeling (<i>Vedanā</i>) 3. Perception (<i>Saññā</i>) 4. Volition/Intention (<i>Cetanā</i>) 5. One-pointedness (<i>Ekaggatā</i>) 6. Life Faculty (<i>Āvitindriya</i>) 7. Attention (<i>Manasikāra</i>)
	6 Occasionals/Sundries <i>Pakīṇaka</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Application (<i>Vitakka</i>) 2. Sustainment (<i>Vicāra</i>) 3. Decision (<i>Adhimokkha</i>) 4. Effort/Energy (<i>Vīriya</i>) 5. Joy/Rapture (<i>Pīti</i>) 6. Desire (<i>Chanda</i>)
14 Unwholesome <i>Akūsala</i>	4 Unwholesome Universals <i>Sabbākusala-sādhāraṇa</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delusion (<i>Moha</i>) 2. Moral Shamelessness (<i>Ahīrika</i>) 3. Moral Fearlessness (<i>Anottappa</i>) 4. Restlessness (<i>Uddhacca</i>)
	3 Lobha Group <i>Lobha-mūla-tika</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greed (<i>Lobha</i>) 2. Wrong View (<i>Diṭṭhi</i>) 3. Conceit (<i>Māna</i>)
	4 Hatred Group <i>Dosa-mūla-catukka</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hatred (<i>Dosa</i>) 2. Jealousy (<i>Issā</i>) 3. Possessiveness/Stinginess (<i>Macchariya</i>) 4. Remorse (<i>Kukkucca</i>)
	2 Prompted Group <i>Sasaṅkhārika</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sloth (<i>Thīna</i>) 2. Torpor (<i>Middha</i>)
	1 Delusion-Rooted <i>Moha-mūla</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Doubt (<i>Vicikicchā</i>)
25 Beautiful <i>Sobhana</i>	19 Beautiful Universals <i>Sobhana-sādhāraṇa</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Faith (<i>Saddhā</i>) 2. Mindfulness (<i>Sati</i>) 3. Moral Shame (<i>Hiri</i>) 4. Moral Fear (<i>Ottappa</i>) 5. Non-Greed (<i>Alobha</i>) 6. Non-Hatred (<i>Adosa</i>) 7. Evenness of Mind (<i>Tatramajjhataṭā</i>) 8. Tranquility of Mental Factors (<i>Kāya-passaddhi</i>) 9. Tranquility of Consciousness (<i>Citta-passaddhi</i>) 10. Lightness of Mental Factors (<i>Kāya-lahutā</i>) 11. Lightness of Consciousness (<i>Citta-lahutā</i>) 12. Softness/Flexibility of Mental Factors (<i>Kāya-mudutā</i>) 13. Softness/Flexibility of Consciousness (<i>Citta-mudutā</i>) 14. Wieldiness of Mental Factors (<i>Kāya-kammaññatā</i>) 15. Wieldiness of Consciousness (<i>Citta-kammaññatā</i>) 16. Proficiency of Mental Factors (<i>Kāya-pāguññatā</i>) 17. Proficiency of Consciousness (<i>Citta-pāguññatā</i>) 18. Rectitude of Mental Factors (<i>Kāyujukatā</i>) 19. Rectitude of Consciousness (<i>Cittujukatā</i>)
	3 Abstinenances <i>Vīraṭi</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Right Speech (<i>Sammā-vācā</i>) 2. Right Action (<i>Sammā-kammanta</i>) 3. Right Livelihood (<i>Sammā-ājīva</i>)
	2 Immesurables/Ilimitables <i>Appamañña</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compassion (<i>Karuṇā</i>) 2. Appreciative Joy (<i>Muditā</i>)
	1 Non-Delusion <i>Amoha</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wisdom Faculty (<i>Paññindriya</i>)

An Analogy from Modern Computers

Everyone knows that computers comprise both hardware and software. They cannot function as just hardware; they require software to operate. Hardware is like the body, and software is like the mind. The software instructs the hardware in what to do. If one wants a computer's hardware to run well, one needs good software; in the same way, since the mind tells the body what to do, we need good mental software. People seek out good computer software but seldom if ever seek out good mental software. To understand one's mind, one needs to understand Abhidhamma. Only then can one write good mental software. The more one trains one's mind, the better one's mental software will become at guiding the body in doing right and not doing wrong.

Many people know a lot about computers – motherboard, processor, hard drive, and on and on. Those who learn computer technology need to learn a lot. They have to study software as well. In the Abhidhamma, the Buddha explains in great detail the composition of our hardware, the body, and the workings of our software, the mind. One should take more interest in the human system than in computer systems.

After developing concentration, one discerns ultimate materiality. After discerning ultimate materiality, one discerns ultimate mentality, which arises and perishes in the form of mental processes – eye-door mental process, mind-door mental process, ear-door mental process, mind-door mental process, and so on. These all can be either wholesome or unwholesome. One needs to discern

mentality internally first, and externally after that. Then one needs to expand one's discernment from near to far, until finally it extends to the whole world. Everywhere one looks, one sees just the arising and perishing of both wholesome and unwholesome mental processes. In this way, one sees the arising and perishing of ultimate mentality and materiality.

The Buddha instructs us next to stand somewhere, develop concentration, and then start walking with close eyes. Wherever one goes, there is sound. It impinges on one's ear-door and mind-door. Ear-door mental process and mind-door mental process arise. One's eyes are closed, but one sees one's whole body as just very small sub-atomic particles arising and perishing very rapidly. When the sound impinges on the ear and mind-doors, one sees the mental processes arising and perishing very rapidly. Then one does not see one's body; one sees only ultimate mentality and materiality arising and perishing very rapidly all the time. If one walks for an hour, one sees only this. If one pays attention to external persons, one sees nothing other than this. The Buddha instructs us to reflect at that time that there is no man, there is no woman, there is no deva, there is no brahmā, there is no permanent entity, there is no permanent soul, there is only ultimate mentality and materiality. One understands what the Buddha meant. One agrees with the Buddha that no such things exist. There is only ultimate mentality and materiality.

Discerning the Second Noble Truth

At this juncture one's penetration of First Noble Truth is sufficient for one to proceed to discern the Second Noble Truth. One is ready to discern one's past life.

To do this, one begins by becoming concentrated, closing one's eyes, and discerning ultimate mentality and materiality. Next, one discerns one's *nāma rūpa* of one minute ago, then ten minutes ago, then this evening's *nāma rūpa*, this afternoon's *nāma rūpa*, the *nāma rūpa* that arose during lunch, while going for alms, the *nāma rūpa* of this morning, yesterday's *nāma rūpa*, the day before yesterday's *nāma rūpa*, one week ago, one month ago, five months ago, one year ago, two years ago, three years ago, five years ago, ten years ago. If one is thirty, one discerns back in this way to thirty years ago. At this point one is very close to the time spent in the womb of one's mother.

Discerning back in this way, one sees younger and younger images of oneself. One should not remain on the image but must instead discern four elements in the image; then one sees just small particles and the *bhavaṅga*. One sees only *nāma* and *rūpa* arising and perishing rapidly together, and finds mostly unwholesome mentality. However, one understands clearly what is wholesome and unwholesome from the ultimate point of view, and that mentality is unwholesome most of the time. Then one feels a sense of urgency arise.

One still needs to gradually discern further back, even before the stage of a newborn baby, to the time in the womb.

Discerning the Second Noble Truth

Using the *nāma rūpa* method, one continues back gradually, all the way to the beginning stage, the *kalala* stage, where there are only three kinds of *rūpa kalāpas*, namely, body decad *kalāpa*, heart decad *kalāpa*, and sex decad *kalāpa*, which is male for men and female for women. In this manner one will see these three types of *rūpa kalāpas* begin in the womb of one's mother; one will see the moment of one's own conception.

Recall that the *kalala* stage is the size of a drop of oil placed on the tip of a thread made from three strands of wool. It would be impossible to see with the naked eye. However, if one looks at it with one's wisdom, one will see many, many tiny particles. It consists of just three kinds of *rūpa kalāpa*, but there are a great number of them.

At the *paṭisandhi* or rebirth-linking time, at the *kalala* stage, mentality arises along with the three kinds of materiality. This mentality is called *paṭisandhi citta*, rebirth-linking consciousness. It is indeed a living being. Therefore, our lives begin at the moment of conception.

Medical science tells us that the circulatory system starts to form and the heart begins to beat in the third week, but from the ultimate point of view mentality begins at the very moment of conception. Having been born as a human being, one's rebirth-linking consciousness must surely have been wholesome.

The rebirth-linking consciousness of some people is even associated with *pīti* and *ñāṇa*. Such people took rebirth with the three roots of non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*); this last is also known as the wisdom faculty (*paññīndriya*). They are called 'three-

rooted persons' and can attain jhāna absorption concentration and Path and Fruition Knowledge, if they try and if they spend enough time practising meditation. If one was born without wisdom, one is a two-rooted person and cannot attain jhāna absorption concentration, nor can one attain Path and Fruition Knowledge in this very life. In such a case, one's efforts in this life will be for the attainment of Path and Fruition Knowledge in a future life. Therefore, there is no wasted effort; every effort in meditation practice bears fruit.

If one was born with both pīti and ñāṇa, then, the mentalities number thirty-four altogether. They number thirty-three without pīti but with ñāṇa, thirty-three without ñāṇa but with pīti, and thirty-two with neither ñāṇa nor pīti.

There is no gap between the death consciousness of one's previous life and the *kalala* stage, even though it is past life and present life. If one discerns back far enough to reach this beginning stage, one is very close to one's past life. Then, so as to know the causes of the present-life nāma and rūpa, one needs to discern slowly back some more. One will go back before the death consciousness mind moment and reach the near-death moment. Sometimes one may go a little too far back; in any event, one needs to keep going backwards and forwards. For the most part, one will see one's corpse.

Meditators who see their own corpse are instructed to discern it. The dead body will change into very small particles, which are arising and perishing rapidly all the time. Then they are instructed to discern ultimate materiality in all five sense organs and the heart, but mainly the heart-base because bhavaṅga arises based on it. When they can

discern heart-base and the bhavaṅga mind-door, they are instructed to check to see what object appeared at the near-death moment, which is the object of the last mental process. This is the object with which one is born. In the case of all of us, who have been born as human beings, our near-death object was certainly wholesome. Even if one is not yet able to discern the kamma of the near-death moment of one's previous life, one can be sure that it was wholesome.

A Past-Life Recollection

One meditator who was instructed to discern her past life in this way saw the kamma that appeared in the bhavaṅga at her near-death moment. What she saw was a lady offering fruits to a bhikkhu. Of course, this is a wholesome near-death object. She saw two persons, a bhikkhu and a woman. She was not sure whether she had been the bhikkhu or the woman in her past life. This is an important point, and it cannot be resolved just by seeing the image; but it can be resolved by discerning ultimate mentality and materiality. Therefore, the meditator was instructed to discern the nāma rūpa of the bhikkhu and the nāma rūpa of the lady offering fruit.

When she discerned the nāma rūpa of the bhikkhu, she did not see any connection between the nāma rūpa of the bhikkhu and her own nāma rūpa. Just as one does not know the thoughts and feelings of other people, yet one knows one's own thoughts and feelings, and others know *their* own thoughts and feelings; even so one feels a connection in the mind-door to who one was in the past when one

encounters one's past *nāma rūpa* in the process of discernment.

When she failed to see any connection between the bhikkhu's *nāma rūpa* and her own *nāma rūpa*, she was instructed to discern the *nāma rūpa* of the lady making the offering. Then she saw the connection between the *nāma rūpa* of the lady and her own. Whatever the lady felt, she also felt in the mind-door. The lady felt happy, and she felt happy; the lady felt sorry, and she felt sorry. Only then could she definitely conclude that she was that lady in her past life.

Next, she was instructed to check who that lady was, and discovered that the lady was a very poor, uneducated village woman who was not very happy with her life. Then she was instructed to check what her aspiration was as she was offering fruit to that bhikkhu. She discerned that she had made the following aspiration: 'Because of this offering, may I be reborn as an educated city lady.' Many of us may have made similar aspirations.

Here it is necessary to understand five causes. From the ultimate point of view, there is no educated city lady; there is only ultimate mentality and materiality. To think that such things as cities and ladies and education truly exist is delusion and ignorance. Such thinking is rooted in greed; it is *lobha-dīṭṭhi nāma* (mentality rooted in greed and associated with wrong view). If such cognition occurs with *pīti*, there will be twenty mentalities in the javana mind moments; without *pīti*, there will be nineteen.

Craving (*taṇhā*) for the lifestyle of an educated city lady is also rooted in greed. In this case the number of mentalities

in the impulsion mind moments also total twenty with pīti and nineteen without it.

Craving is strong but not as intense as trying to find a way to get what one craves, in which case one is clinging and not just craving. Clinging is stronger and more intense than craving, and she was clinging to that life. With such clinging, the mentalities in the javana mind moments number twenty with pīti and nineteen without it. Ignorance, craving, and clinging comprise the round of the defilements. This is of course unwholesome kamma.

However, she had made an offering and so performed wholesome kamma. To be sure, she had made that offering at some prior time in her life and not at her near-death moment, but that wholesome kamma had already been done and was therefore finished. Leaving the force of kamma behind, it perished.

Indeed, whether one does wholesome or unwholesome things, they perish as soon as they are done, yet they leave behind the force of kamma. So long as one is not rid of craving and ignorance, one's wholesome and unwholesome actions always leave the force of kamma behind. In this way kamma can be strong enough to re-appear at the near-death moment. This kamma itself is wholesome and appears because of the force of kamma. The kamma and its kammic force comprise the round of kamma.

Therefore, we see here five causes: ignorance, craving, clinging, wholesome kamma, and kammic force. These are the causes of nāma rūpa in the womb. One needs to see this causal relationship.

This meditator's experience is an example of how we teach meditators to discern at least five of their past lives so as to understand the Law of Karma directly. Buddhists believe in the Law of Karma, but faith in the Law of Karma based on mere hearing is not strong. Only when one knows and sees karma and its results and how these relate to one's past existences does one come to know that good begets good and bad begets bad.

Discerning Dependent Origination

After this meditator had discerned her past aspiration, she needed to discern causality, namely: because of the arising of this, that arises. She needed to discern causality many times. What the practitioner discerns here is the causal relationship between karma and its result, lifetime after lifetime. Causality is dependent origination:

Iti imasmim sati idam hoti, imassuppādā idam uppajjati, yadidaṃ — avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā, saṅkhārapaccayā viññānaṃ, viññānapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ, nāmarūpaccayā saḷāyatanam...

When this is, that is; when this arises, that arises; that is to say: Because of the arising of ignorance, volitional formations come into being; because of the arising of volitional formations, consciousness come into being; because of the arising of consciousness, mentality and materiality come to be;

Discerning Dependent Origination

because of the arising of mentality and materiality,
the six sense bases come to be... ⁶²

One needs to discern this and not just recite it. The Buddha teaches the same factors of dependent origination in the opposite way:

Iti imasmim̐ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati, yadidaṃ — avijjānirodhā saṅkhāranirodho, saṅkhāranirodhā viññāṇanirodho, viññāṇanirodhā nāmarūpanirodho, nāmarūpanirodhā saḷāyatanaṇirodho...

When this is not, that is not; when this ceases, that ceases; that is to say: Because of the cessation of ignorance, volitional formations cease; because of the cessation of volitional formations, consciousness ceases; because of the cessation of consciousness, mentality and materiality cease; because of the cessation of mentality and materiality, the six sense bases cease...

This is cessation. One day *avijjā*, ignorance, is going to cease. *Taṇhā* is going to cease. Clinging is going to cease. Because of the cessation of ignorance, craving, and clinging, all kamma cease to function; they are no longer either wholesome or unwholesome. At that time one becomes an Arahant. One needs to discern the time one can attain the cessation of ignorance, the time one can make craving cease, and the time one can make clinging cease. This is related to one's future; it is necessary to discern one's future as well as one's past.

⁶² MN.I.4.8 Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhasuttam̐ (MN 38 The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving) and others.

The Objects of Vipassanā

One needs to be clear about what the objects of vipassanā are. According to the teachings of the Buddha, the objects of vipassanā are the First Noble Truth and the Second Noble Truth.⁶³ Without having broken through to the First Noble Truth and the Second Noble Truth, one has no objects to practise vipassanā with.

To be able to sit for final exams in school, one needs to prepare by memorising and studying a lot of things. The way many of us have practised vipassanā in the past is like sitting for an exam without having done any preparation. One enters the meditation hall, sits down, folds one's legs, keeps the body and head straight, closes one's eyes, and starts contemplating impermanence, suffering, and non-self – all without knowing or preparing anything beforehand. We do not really have any objects to contemplate.

To prepare for vipassanā, one needs to know the First Noble Truth, or ultimate mentality and materiality, which are arising and perishing rapidly all the time, and the Second Noble Truth, or causes and their effects, which are also arising and perishing rapidly all the time. Only with such

⁶³ Commentary to SN.V.1.1.8 Vibhaṅgasuttam (SN 45.8 The Discourse on Analysis) :

Tattha purimāni dve saccāni vaṭṭam, pacchimāni vivaṭṭam. Tesu bhikkhuno vaṭṭe kanmaṭṭhānābhiniṅveso hoti, vivaṭṭe natthi abhiniṅveso.

The First and Second Noble Truths are the cause of the round of rebirths. The Third and Fourth Noble Truths are the cause of the cessation of the round of rebirths. Vipassanā meditation must be done on the First and Second Noble Truths, not on the Third or Fourth.

knowledge can one sit for the ‘final exams’ of vipassanā. From today on, never just go and sit; prepare first.

However, after knowing the First and Second Noble Truths, one can undertake vipassanā. This is real vipassanā. It is the way the Buddha taught. The Buddha taught us to contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self; to see the arising and perishing of ultimate mentality, ultimate materiality, and their causes and effects; and to contemplate in eleven categories – past, future, present, internal, external, gross, subtle, inferior, superior, far, and near. Gross and subtle, inferior and superior, and far and near are all included in contemplating internally, externally, past, present, and future, so the most important thing is to discern these five categories for both wholesome and unwholesome mentality. If one has not discerned one’s past lives, one has no objects for contemplating the past; likewise, unless one has discerned external nāma and rūpa, one lacks objects for contemplating the external. Discerning in these ways is thus the necessary preparation for practising vipassanā.

The Sixteen Insight Knowledges

The purpose of vipassanā practice is to attain the sixteen Insight Knowledges. The first Insight Knowledge is *Nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*, Mentality-Materiality Definition Knowledge, more often translated as the Knowledge of Discerning Ultimate Mentality and Materiality. The second Insight Knowledge is *Paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*, the Cause-Apprehending Knowledge.

These first two Insight Knowledges relate to the first two Noble Truths. If one has successfully discerned ultimate mentality and materiality, one knows and sees the First Noble Truth and thereby attains the first Insight Knowledge. Without discerning ultimate mentality and materiality, one does not attain the first Insight Knowledge, and it is impossible to know and see the Second Noble Truth without knowing and seeing ultimate mentality and materiality. Unless one knows ultimate mentality and materiality, one will be unable to discern the *nāma* and *rūpa* of the past. In such a case, one cannot reach the beginning stage in the womb, or check who was doing a certain kamma in a past life, or determine the object that appeared at the near-death moment. In the same way, if one has discerned kamma and its result, which is the Second Noble Truth, one has attained the Knowledge of Discerning Cause and Effect, the second Insight Knowledge. With these two attainments, one is ready to start *vipassanā*.

The third Insight Knowledge is *Sammasana-ñāṇa*, Comprehension Knowledge. This means seeing the arising and perishing of ultimate mentality and materiality. To attain this Knowledge, one contemplates impermanence, suffering, and non-self over and over again in the five categories of internal, external, past, present, and future. For the discernment of ultimate mentality within these categories, one should contemplate both wholesome and unwholesome mental processes.

One begins with contemplating the arising and perishing of *rūpa* by discerning internally and externally, for each of

The Sixteen Insight Knowledges

the six sense-bases, past, present, and future. One observes that, since rūpa is arising and perishing, it is impermanent; since it is subject to arising and perishing all the time, it is suffering; and since it arises and perishes according to causes and conditions, so that no one can tell it to arise or not to arise, or to perish or not to perish, it is beyond anyone's control, and therefore it is non-self. This contemplation must be done repeatedly for each characteristic.

Then one moves on to contemplate the three characteristics in nāma in the same way, in the categories of internal, external, past, present, and future, for both wholesome and unwholesome, door by door.

One then needs to continue on and contemplate nāma and rūpa together. Every mind moment has its base and object; these two are rūpa. Every mind moment has citta and cetasika, or consciousness and associated mental factors; these two are nāma. In this way one can see both nāma and rūpa together. One observes them rapidly arising and perishing and so discerns impermanence, suffering, and non-self in both nāma and rūpa together in the five categories for both wholesome and unwholesome. There are many other objects for Comprehension Knowledge, but they are best explained when one practises under the guidance of a teacher.

The fourth Insight Knowledge is *Udayabbaya-ñāna*, the Knowledge of Arising and Perishing. First one emphasises the arising of phenomena, *udaya* – because this arises, that arises. Then one emphasises the perishing of phenomena, *vaya* – because this ceases, that ceases. Then comes *Udayabbaya*, both *udaya* and *vaya* together – because this arises,

that arises; because this ceases, that ceases. Then one needs to contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self in causes and their effects.

The fifth Insight Knowledge is *Bhaṅga-ñāṇa*, Dissolution Knowledge. One's emphasis here is mainly on the perishing, so one ignores the arising at that time, because one's insight knowledge is becoming more mature at this point. By focussing on just the perishing, one's insight knowledge will mature even more. One observes constant perishing of *nāma* and *rūpa* in the five categories for both wholesome and unwholesome, so that all *nāma* and *rūpa* appear the same at all times. With wise attention, one observes perishing in all four postures – sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. One's observation gives rise to the sixth Insight Knowledge, which is *Bhaya-ñāṇa*, Fearsome Knowledge. In seeing the constant perishing of all phenomena, one grows fearful, and the fear makes one's insight knowledge mature further. This fear is not the unwholesome fear rooted in *dosa* (aversion) but instead is similar to a sense of urgency; it arises out of understanding and is associated with wisdom.

One continues to contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self in the five categories for both wholesome and unwholesome. Eventually the seventh Insight Knowledge, *Ādinava-ñāṇa* or Danger Knowledge, will arise. The unremitting discernment of all phenomena incessantly arising and perishing causes one to see the danger in them. One's insight knowledge has matured even more. Continuing on in the same way, one attains *Nibbidā-ñāṇa*, Disenchantment Knowledge, which is the eighth Insight Knowledge. Then the ninth Insight Knowledge, *Muñcitu-kamyatā-ñāṇa*

The Sixteen Insight Knowledges

or Liberation-Longing Knowledge, will arise, because one begins to long deeply for liberation from the conditioned dhamma that are arising in one. One wants to be liberated at that time.

Without the support of all these Insight Knowledges, how can one be liberated? However, once one sees that all phenomena are constantly perishing, one then sees the danger inherent in them and feels fear as a consequence, until finally one wants to be liberated from them. One's mental power then becomes strong, and Dhamma drives one in the direction of liberation.

One continues practising in the aforementioned way until *Paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa* or Reflection Knowledge arises. Here different kinds of reflections may arise, such as, 'These phenomena are constantly perishing.' One comes to understand that, if there are dhamma that arise and perish in this way, or dhamma that are perishing all the time, there must be a state where there is no arising or perishing of conditioned phenomena. One wants to attain that state. Without seeing, one can neither imagine nor reflect that there is a state where there is no arising and perishing of conditioned phenomena. By seeing, however, one understands that, if there is arising and perishing, there will be a state where there is no arising and perishing. At this point one begins to make greater effort, until finally one attains the eleventh Insight Knowledge.

This is *Sanikhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*, Formations Equanimity Knowledge. Once this eleventh Insight Knowledge is attained, one has no fear, and one's mind is very sharp. One can accept everything as it is. Such knowledge is very powerful. To be able to reach it, one must proceed one step

after another. First, one sees the fault and danger of phenomena; then one fears them and does not want to see them; finally, one's mind becomes very strong and superior, because one attains equanimity towards formations. With this state of mind, one can stay with the object. This is very close to Path Knowledge.

Attainment of Path and Fruition Knowledges

Insight Knowledge matures as one continues on to attain the twelfth Insight Knowledge, namely, Conformity Knowledge (*Anuloma-ñāṇa*) Up to this point, one's object is concerned with conditioned dhamma (*saiṅkhata dhamma*) which are constantly arising and perishing. With the arising of the thirteenth Insight Knowledge, Change-of-Lineage Knowledge (*Gotrabhu-ñāṇa*), one takes Nibbāna as object for the first time. There is neither arising nor perishing; the experience is completely different from anything one has experienced previously. Change-of-Lineage Knowledge prepares the person for entry into the Noble Stream. It is followed immediately by Path Knowledge (*Magga-ñāṇa*). With the attainment of Path Knowledge, one changes from an ordinary person to a Noble Person. Path Knowledge arises only once, followed by Fruition Knowledge (*Phala-ñāṇa*). Both Path Knowledge and Fruition Knowledge also take Nibbāna as object.

The sixteenth Insight Knowledge is Reviewing Knowledge (*Paccavekkhaṇa-ñāṇa*). It does not arise for every practitioner. It consists of reviewing how many defilements have been removed and how many defilements remain. Whether Reviewing Knowledge arises or not depends on one's acquired knowledge; if one has no learning

knowledge, it may not arise. It does not matter. What matters is to attain Nibbāna, where there is no arising or perishing.

The Near Shore and the Far Shore

There are four ultimate truths – citta, cetasika, rūpa, and Nibbāna; or consciousness, mental factors, materiality, and Nibbāna. Among the four ultimate truths, Nibbāna is Unconditioned Dhamma (*asaṅkhata dhamma*). Citta, cetasika, and rūpa are conditioned dhamma (*saṅkhata dhamma*). If one wants to realise Nibbāna, one needs to thoroughly know the three conditioned ultimate realities. Unless one understands them and directly experiences them as rapidly arising and perishing, one cannot understand or experience Nibbāna. One will long to be liberated from conditioned phenomena only when one experiences their constant perishing. Only then will Liberation-Longing Knowledge follow. Without this Knowledge, one cannot realise Nibbāna.

Conditioned dhamma is this shore; Unconditioned Dhamma, Nibbāna, is the other shore. When one attains the Path and Fruition Knowledges, one straddles both shores. Whenever one wants to practise vipassanā, one remains on the near shore of conditioned dhamma; whenever one tires of seeing the constant perishing of phenomena and wants to rest, one can cross to the far shore of Nibbāna. One can experience Nibbāna at any time merely by inclining one's mind to experience it. This is very, very, very good!

Nibbāna

The enjoyment of sensual pleasure requires both money and effort. However, all sensual happiness is fleeting. It is not real. After enjoying it for a few minutes or a few hours, one gets bored with it. One's defilements demand something new and different. One then goes out and earns money to seek for some new sense pleasure. In this way, the pursuit of sensuality takes more and more money. By contrast, when one has attained the Path and Fruition Knowledges, one can experience Nibbāna anytime one wants – in a car, on a plane, under a tree, in a hut, in a cave, or in empty space. One can experience real happiness anytime one wants, without having to pay money for it. One cannot buy such happiness for any price. It is truly priceless. Indeed, it is very, very, very, very good!

Using conventional truth, the Buddha expounded the Dhamma. Using conventional terms, the Buddha explained to us how to understand ultimate truth.

Depending on conventional truth, may you practise so as to know and see ultimate truth!

After coming to know ultimate truth, may you attain Path Knowledge and Fruition Knowledge in this very life!

May you experience Nibbāna, wherever and whenever you want, in this very life!

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

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Questions Related to Death and Dying

Near-Death Experience, Coma, and Helping the Dying

Q: Ten years ago, I suffered a near-death experience, during which I was constrained by neither space nor time. I could clearly see others trying to revive and resuscitate me. I could go beyond the limit of space and time to see what was happening at different points in time. Afterwards, when I woke up, I lost all of my memory and my ability to talk and was like a dumb person. What caused the near-death experience? What was the function of my mind at that time? What caused the drastic change in my state after I woke up, and what was the function of my mind after I had awakened?

A: You did not really die, so you cannot say whether or not you were really at the near-death moment. The only thing we can be sure of is that your kamma was still active because your life span continued. Therefore, you did not die.

When people see that a person is not moving or reacting, they sometimes think that the person may be about to die. The person may very well be in bhavaṅga – the bhavaṅga mind moment arises many times, so someone in bhavaṅga has no awareness of or contact with present objects. People might see someone in a coma and think the comatose person is not aware of anything because they cannot observe any reactions.

From the ultimate point of view, as long as a person is not in the state of bhavaṅga (a state of sound sleep), mentality in the form of mental processes is arising and perishing all the time and taking different objects. A person who is in a coma may not always be in bhavaṅga; whenever the person is not in bhavaṅga, mental processes are constantly arising and perishing and taking different objects. When sound impinges on the ear-sensitivity of a coma patient, ear-door mental process may arise so that the coma patient knows what other people are saying but just cannot respond due to certain impairments of the body.

People who deal with a coma patient will find this knowledge very helpful. If a comatose person is Buddhist and has faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, one can surround him or her with chanting and words of Dhamma, even by means of recordings. Even though it may seem to us outside that coma patients are unaware or cannot hear or are about to die, the truth is that they are alive and aware and can hear. They simply cannot respond. As for the experience you describe, I cannot say whether you were in a coma. Maybe you were aware of your surroundings but could not say anything. It was not necessarily the near-death moment; it may have been a state in which you could not respond to others.

The mind and the physical body are mutually dependent, so that the functioning of one is influenced and affected by how well the other functions. When someone suffers a stroke, his or her body cannot function normally if even just one part of it is impaired by the stroke. As mentality arises based on materiality, the working of that person's mind will be affected by the malfunctioning of his or her

materiality. The mind will be impaired because the body is impaired. If the part of the body that is impaired recovers, then the mind will also recover, and the person will be able to function normally again, both physically and mentally.

A few years back, when I suffered from physical weakness, I experienced difficulty in breathing, and my speech was affected as well. That physical problem also affected my mind. Sometimes I wanted to speak but could not speak the way I wanted to or the way I could before. These impairments were due to the malfunctioning of my physical body. Our minds often cannot function normally when we are ill. Subsequently, when all the parts of the body are working well, our mental functions will also be normal again.

Q: Actually my experience then was that I was aware of what was happening. I knew that people were deciding to pull out the tube which sustained my life, and deciding whether to use a plane to send me home.

A: Those around the patient will not fully realise what the patient is experiencing unless they understand the actual workings of the mind from an ultimate point of view. Since our birth we have had eye-sensitivity, ear-sensitivity, nose-sensitivity, tongue-sensitivity, body-sensitivity, and heart-base materiality. Even when we are not taking any visible object, sound object, smell object, taste object, or tactile object, our mind is working all the time. Although the comatose person could not respond, sound could still impinge on the ear-sensitivity, which is the ear-door, resulting in the arising of ear-door mental process and mind-door mental process. Thus, the patient could still hear

what people were saying but just could not respond because of the condition of the body.

Therefore, do not misdirect your concern for people in such a condition. If they are Buddhists, arrange things if possible so they can listen to the Dhamma; if they take Dhamma as an object when they pass away, it will be good for them. Do not think from a conventional point of view that, since they do not respond and cannot do anything, they are also unable to hear anything. Do not mistakenly think that way. If you think like that, you will not have the opportunity to help them.

For the sake of the patient, bear in mind the patient's welfare and do not do any undesirable thing. It would not be suitable to engage in wrong speech because the patient might hear, and hearing wrong speech might cause an unwholesome state of mind to arise in the patient. It would be very regrettable if the patient were to die in this state of mind. One should be careful at such a time. It is especially important to remain quiet in the presence of those who are dying. One should not disturb them. Instead, one should find a way to help them, a way which is suitable for them and which one understands. Remind the patient of the wholesome kamma he or she has accumulated in his or her life. Whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, everyone has accumulated wholesome kamma. We should remind them of it. If they are Buddhist, we should make them mindful of the Dhamma and let them hear the Dhamma. This is how we should help them in their last moments. If we are crying and unhappy, it is a big problem.

Q: A few of my experiences during coma might be good to bring up here. Previously I thought I was a good Buddhist, but experiencing those stages made me realise I was not a good Buddhist at all, because I did not have very strong mindfulness. I could not focus on what I heard when the people around me were chanting or speaking to me. It took me a long, long time before I could understand what they were saying. I heard noise and sound, but what I heard had no meaning at all.

Several years after that event, I took to practising very sincerely and diligently, with the hope of preparing for any future experiences of the same sort. Unfortunately, I went through the same experience again a few years later. Because of my previous diligence in practice, my mindfulness was stronger this time. I could hear every single thing anyone said to me.

One thing I would like to highlight is that when the people around me became panicky or upset, I could experience what they felt through their voice as I was lying there. I could not see but I could hear. If they were panicky, their voices would not be stable. If they were sad, their tone would be muted. I could sense and understand all these things but could not react. This happened only when I had a certain degree of mindfulness.

One more thing: Chanting and reciting Dhamma or playing recordings of Dhamma talks and the like is good, but if the person is not very familiar with what he or she hears, it will take him or her some time to understand it. By contrast, the voices of our family and friends are familiar to us, they leave a strong imprint on our hearts. When we hear these familiar voices, even a single word draws our

attention very fast. They are different from other people's voices.

I had this experience when I was surrounded by many people. Some were very familiar to me; others were just normal friends. When many people spoke at the same time, my attention was drawn to the voices that were familiar to me, such as those of my family and my close friends.

A: It is as the Buddha said: '*Pamattassa ca nāma cattāro apāyā sakagehasadisā*' – 'For the heedless, the four woeful states are like their real and permanent home'.⁶⁴ Whatever support we try to provide, it is external support. If we are unmindful and have not trained our minds beforehand, we will sometimes be unable to help ourselves. We should work at helping ourselves. External help is not a sure thing.

Nevertheless, we should try our best to help others. If unresponsive patients know that it is Dhamma they are hearing, even though they may not understand what they hear, wholesome states of mind will arise in them. If their near-death mental process is wholesome, there will be a profoundly beneficial effect on the rebirth process which immediately follows. Therefore, we should try. We should also prepare beforehand. Otherwise, there is danger.

Q: I had a similar experience with my father when he was suffering from cancer. When he would get morphine injections to ease his pain, I would try to calm him with Paṭṭhāna chanting, with which he was familiar. I could see

⁶⁴ Commentary to Dhṃ. 1 Cakkhupālattheravattu (The Story of the Elder Cakkhupāla).

with my eyes and feel with my heart that it would calm him.

A: As she shared about her father, I want to share about my father too. I thought that I would not talk about this. Now I speak about this.

When I was three vassa in bhikkhu life, my father died. As I had chosen to live the ordained life, my father would visit me often at the Pa-Auk monastery. He was a very kind father. I encouraged him to come and meditate. He promised me he would come in December of that year. Instead of coming to meditate, his body was buried in Pa-Auk main centre on 19 December that very year. Did he know that he was going to die in the month he promised to come? He did not know. As the Buddha said:

‘Here will I live in the rainy season;
Here will I live in the cold season and the hot
season’,
So imagines the fool, not realising the danger (of
approaching death).⁶⁵

We plan where we will go, what we will do, how we might be happy, how we might enjoy things. However, we never think about when we will die, how we will die, where we will die, or from what disease we will die. Because my father was afraid of hot weather, he promised me he would come in December, when it would be cold in Pa-Auk. As it turned out, he came to Pa-Auk so we could bury his

⁶⁵ Dhp. 286:

*Idha vassaṃ vasissāmi, idha hemantaḡimhisu.
Iti bālo vicinteti, antarāyaṃ na bujjhati.*

body in the cemetery there. I will tell you how I helped my father before he passed away.

My father suffered a stroke on his left side. He was taken to hospital. My family members informed me. Then they came and took me to hospital to see my father. I have two sisters and six brothers, nine of us altogether, all adults. They have their families and work in different cities in different provinces. When they heard, they all came to see my father.

Whenever my brothers and sisters came and entered the room, they found my elder brother caring for my father. He took very good care of my father. Whoever came in, my elder brother would inform my father, 'Father, now your daughter So-and-so has come.' My father would open his eyes to look and then close them again. Then another brother would come. 'Father, now your son So-and-so has come to see you.' My father would open his eyes to look at him and then close them again. This was how he behaved. When I entered the room, my elder brother informed my father, 'Father, Bhante is here.' Immediately, he raised his right hand; he could not raise his left hand, though he tried very hard to do so. My elder brother helped him put his palms together in *añjali*⁶⁶ to pay respect to me. I saw the expectation in his eyes. The way ordained persons can help is different from the way laypeople can help. Then I sat beside him and chanted.

⁶⁶ A gesture of respect offered to others, especially to monks and nuns. It is made by holding the hands in front of the body with palms joined.

His condition worsened day by day. Finally, I noticed he could not respond. He could not open his eyes or speak. I decided that we would take our father back home where we would be free to make all the necessary arrangements to help him in his final moments. We quickly prepared everything. I told my sister to arrange a quiet, empty room at home for my father.

I told all the family, all my brothers and sisters, to go out and not stay inside. Only a nurse and two bhikkhus – another bhikkhu and myself – remained in the room. The bhikkhu who accompanied me was senior to me. At the hospital, he joined me in the chanting; but as my father was about to die, in the room with the nurse, he did not chant at all. Fortunately I could chant on my own. Loudly and sweetly, I chanted the Mahānamakkāra, the Mettā Sutta, the Maṅgala Sutta, and the Ratana Sutta. There was no response from my father, but I believe he could hear me. There was no other voice besides mine. As I was chanting the Ratana Sutta, he passed away. Before his death consciousness arose, he again raised his hands with palms joined in *añjali*, just as he had done at the hospital. Then he passed away.

I informed all my brothers and sisters. My eldest sister has two sons. She was very happy on hearing about the manner of our father's death. She said she wanted two of her sons to be bhikkhus. Why? Because she wanted them to be able to help her when she dies!

On the day my father suffered his stroke, he was taken to hospital. Seven days later, he passed away. I went to the hospital to chant for him every day. The last moment is very important. We need to know how to help at that time.

Our friends, our relatives, and our beloved ones who help need to know how to help. At that time, we should make the room quiet. We should not let the dying person hear undesirable things and instead arrange to have them hear only desirable things related to wholesome kamma. This is important.

Anyone who means to help should not speak with a sad voice. It is difficult not to feel sad and to speak without sadness, but the dying person can sense the sadness easily and will suffer from it. One needs to arrange everything. Do not let the family members be present. Only those who are able to help should be present. This is important.

In this very life, may you know how to help those who are about to die!

Near-Death Moment

Q: In Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is a practice of chanting the name of the Buddha. In Theravāda Buddhism there is also Buddhānussati, the recollection of the Buddha. How can we use the recollection of the Buddha, or chanting the Buddha's name, to help us at the time of our death?

Also, modern people always go to the hospital to have resuscitation and emergency treatment. Before they die, they are often either in a coma or under sedation from the sedatives that are used to ease their pain. I had a similar experience when I went for a colonoscopy: They had me inhale anaesthesia, and I lost consciousness for half an hour. In such a case, how can we recollect the qualities of the Buddha, or chant the Buddha's name, in order to bring up

Near-Death Moment

mindfulness and clear comprehension (*sati sampajañña*) at the time of death?

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is a practice of helping the person who is dying by chanting the name of the Buddha so that the dying person can be mindful. The last time I was sick, I would chant the name of a bodhisatta to reduce the sense of fear I had. So how can we use the six recollections – Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, Cāga, Sīla, and Deva – to help the sick and the dying have a wholesome mind?

A: The point is that, at the near-death moment, most patients are seriously ill. At that time, they suffer. They can't organise their minds. Even paying attention to a wholesome object is difficult for them. This is the point. For that reason, to be able to face our last moment with peace of mind, we need to train our mind beforehand by practising meditation such as Buddhānussati or ānāpānasati. The important thing is to be able to pay attention to the wholesome object at the near-death moment. If we can do so, it is fine. If we can't do so, it is a problem. For that reason, we need to practise beforehand. It is impossible to immediately focus on a wholesome object when we find ourselves suddenly face to face with severe sickness or death.

Q: For example, if I fall into a coma, what must I do beforehand to help myself raise mindfulness, so that when I get into a coma before death, I can help myself to have a wholesome object in my mind during the last mental process?

A: I think it is difficult for coma patients to do anything for themselves. Anyway, at the near-death moment of someone who is suffering from coma or any other kind of

disease, it will be good if those who understand the workings of mind do some chanting, and let the dying person hear wholesome Dhamma. Those who chant must be persons who believe in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha too.

Is a Sudden Death Good or Bad?

Q: If someone dies suddenly from a heart attack while exercising or eating, most would think he had a good death because he did not have to undergo prolonged suffering before dying. However, if he was not yet prepared to die in this instance, is it really a good death?

A: We cannot make any definite decision based only on the manner of death. Above, I recounted the story of the meditator who was tortured, suffered a cut on his head, was dropped into the water, and was short of breath as he died from drowning.⁶⁷ Such a death, in general, is very bad. One would be inclined to say that he would not be reborn in a good realm. Fortunately for him, the object of the last mental process, also known as the near-death mental process, was the act of offering fruit to a bhikkhu.

Such good fortune is unlikely but not impossible. The way we die does not necessarily indicate where we are going to be reborn; the decisive factor is the object that appears at the near-death moment. For example, dancing is not a wholesome activity. While someone is dancing, the state of mind that is arising is mostly emotional attachment, which is rooted in greed, and which can be the cause for

⁶⁷ See 'The Meditator with a Scar', above.

Is a Sudden Death Good or Bad?

falling into the four woeful states. Dancing is not wholesome. Exercising may not be wholesome either, if it is motivated by attachment to the body. One may exercise with the thought, 'I want to make my body strong; I want to make my body beautiful'. Someone who dies with this state of mind cannot be reborn in a good realm. Eating may likewise be accompanied by a greedy state of mind, by a mind attached to pleasure.

Fortunately, the mind is very quick; it can very quickly switch its focus from one object to another. The near-death object decides a person's future destination; as someone who is about to die may experience a number of different wholesome and unwholesome mind states, one cannot say for certain where he is going to be reborn purely on the basis of how he dies. His kamma will determine where he takes rebirth.

Therefore, one should regularly make great effort to accumulate wholesome habitual kamma. Many lay devotees in Buddhist countries have the habit of reciting 'Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha.' If something happens, they recite, 'Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha.' It becomes a reflex or habit, and they always resort to these three words. One could also recollect the qualities of the Buddha by reciting 'araḥam, araham'. Such kamma might then be strong enough to appear at the near-death moment, though even then it is not certain to do so.

Whatever one chooses, one should take every opportunity to engage in the practice of superior Dhamma, which is something one can really rely on. All other kamma are far less certain. One should strive earnestly to realise the

Dhamma in this very life. May you engage in practising so as to know and see the superior Dhamma in this very life!

Where Should One Aim to Go After Death?

Q: Regarding preparation for one's death, what sort of re-birth is the most desirable? One can still fall into hell from the deva realm when the five signs of decay appear. Liberation also seems difficult to attain even in the deva realm.

A: First of all, if one wants to choose where to be reborn, one needs to practise in order to become a Sotāpanna, the first Noble Person, because only then can one choose one's future existence. The future existence of all ordinary people is uncertain, and they are like leaves falling from the trees. When the wind blows strongly, the leaves fall, and no one can tell where they are going to land. The death of ordinary people is similarly uncertain.

One day the Buddha, while walking with many of His disciples, took up a little bit of soil on His fingernail and asked His disciples, 'Bhikkhus, which is more? The little bit of soil that I have taken up on my fingernail, or the great earth?' The Buddha's question is so clear that even a very young child could answer correctly. The bhikkhus answered, 'The little bit of soil the Buddha has taken up on His fingernail cannot compare with the great earth. The great earth is very, very large.' The Buddha continued, 'In the same way, when humans die, many fall to the woeful states, but few are reborn as humans and as celestial beings. When devas die, many fall to the woeful states, but very few are reborn as celestial beings or human beings.

Where Should One Aim to Go After Death?

When animals die, many fall to the woeful states again, but few are reborn as humans or celestial beings.⁶⁸

If we are ordinary worldlings, our lives are uncertain. Whatever kamma appears at the near-death moment will decide our future destination. We need to prepare to face our last moment. The main thing is to face it with peace of mind. When one is sick, one feels unhappy and cannot keep one's mind calm. One is dissatisfied with one's circumstances and struggles against them. We are quite familiar with this state of mind. We need to develop the state of mind that is the opposite of the one with which we are familiar.

Unless we train, we will be trapped in our familiar state of mind. We will participate in whatever undesirable thing occurs and consequently feel very miserable. We will feel happy if we experience desirable things. This is how we act in our lives, and how we react and respond to what we encounter.

We need to maintain peace of mind in all conditions. This means developing equanimity towards both desirable and undesirable objects. We need to take time to train in this way; it does not happen immediately.

⁶⁸ SN.V.12.11.1-6 *Manussacutinirayasuttam* (SN 56.102-107 The Discourse on Passing Away as Humans, and the following).

Death Consciousness and the Near-Death Moment

Q: As I understand it, the near-death object that arises determines where one is reborn; and this near-death object in the previous life's death consciousness is the object of this life's rebirth-linking consciousness, the bhavaṅga consciousness, and this life's death consciousness. In that case, if the same object appears in the death consciousness, it means that one will be reborn in the same place due to the same kamma. It would seem to continue endlessly in this way – one will forever be taking rebirth in the same place due to the same kamma, if the object is always the same at the last death consciousness.

A: Death consciousness (*cuti citta* in Pāli) is not the same thing as the consciousness of the near-death mental process. It is true that, in a given existence, the objects of paṭisandhi, bhavaṅga, and death consciousness are the same. Death consciousness is the consciousness that occurs at the last moment of a certain existence. Before death consciousness, there is a final mental process called the near-death mental process. The kamma that can give its results does not appear at the time of death consciousness. Only the kamma that appears at the near-death mental process of a certain existence determines the next existence.

**At Death, Does Mentality or Materiality
Cease First?**

Q: What is the process of death? When a person dies, do materiality and mentality both cease at the same time? Does the body cease when death consciousness arises? Or does the cessation of one precede the other?

A: When a person dies, mentality ceases. The mind no longer functions. When mentality ceases to function, one dies. Kamma-born materiality ceases; then nutriment-born materiality ceases because one cannot consume food anymore.

There are two views on the cessation of mind-born materiality. One is that mind-born materiality still arises when death consciousness arises. The other is that death consciousness and its associated mental factors are so weak that they cannot produce mind-born materiality.

One may determine for oneself whether mind-born materiality still arises when death consciousness arises when one is able to practise on that level. A dead body is made up of only temperature-born materiality. However, if one pays attention with one's insight to the four elements of the dead body and analyses them, one will see many translucent kalāpas. Temperature-born materialities are opaque kalāpas; many kamma-born materialities are translucent. If one investigates, one will see that the translucent kamma-born materialities come from the worms inside the corpse. They are eating. They are living things producing kamma-born materiality, which one can discern with one's insight.

The Cessation of Consciousness at Death

Q: As a person dies, do the six sense consciousnesses cease simultaneously or do they follow a certain order of cessation, one after another?

A: Sometimes beings die because their life span has expired; sometimes they die suddenly, perhaps in an accident. In the latter instance, clearly there is no ordered cessation of consciousnesses. When one dies, the body temperature gradually dissipates until finally there is no more heat and the body becomes cold. This is the condition of a person who is going to die. There is also no more mentality; the mind no longer functions. The bhavaṅga, the mind-door, stops working. At that time a person dies. We cannot say much about which sense consciousness or which sense-door ceases first. There are many causes of death, and the manner of death varies greatly – some die a very quick death in an accident, while others die after suffering for a long time. The conditions of death differ.

As the Buddha has instructed us, we teach recollection of death (*maraṇānussati*) by contemplating the cutting off of the life faculty. In the simplest terms, the cutting off of the life faculty is the stopping of the bhavaṅga. This is how we practise the recollection of death.

Questions Related to Kamma

Preparation for Death and Four Types of Kamma

Q: In the Theravāda tradition, what is the right practice for someone at the near-death moment? How is meditation possible for someone who is suffering from intense pain at the near-death moment?

A: Let me share the beauty of the teachings of the Buddha, which might be summed up in one sentence: ‘Even though you have physical pain, I will teach you not to have mental pain.’⁶⁹ This is one way of expressing the essence of the Buddha’s teaching. We all need to train up to that stage. Even though one has physical pain, it need not affect one’s mind. If physical pain affects the mind, one will encounter difficulties. There is no other way to deal effectively with pain; there is only the way the Buddha taught. After developing concentration, one needs to discern ultimate mentality and materiality. The mask of wrong perception can then be removed. Wrong view and the perception of self can be eliminated gradually, until they are finally removed completely. Only then can one separate mind and matter. With this ability, even though one feels physical pain, one does not participate in it. One can look on as if from the outside, as if it were happening to someone else. The pain

⁶⁹ See SN.III.1.1.1 Nakulapitusuttam (SN 22.1 The Discourse Concerning Nakulapitā).

cannot affect one's mind. One needs to train up to that stage; otherwise there is danger.

If one has attained First Path and Fruition Knowledges, then personality view (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*), doubt, and attachment to wrong practices have been removed completely and without remainder. This means that wrong views – such as regarding this body as ‘my body’, feeling as ‘my feeling’, perception as ‘my perception’, volitional formations as ‘my volitional formations’, consciousness as ‘my consciousness’, and so forth – have been completely eradicated. There is then no grasping at whatever happens in the body, no matter what feelings arise. One who has attained First Path and Fruition Knowledges has developed a state of mind that does not cause him any grave harm. Having removed personality view, he no longer commits any heavy unwholesome kamma, and it is therefore no longer possible for him to fall into any of the four woeful states. This is an important stage and an important attainment.

Those who have not attained Path and Fruition Knowledges need to consider: You are practising meditation and are healthy now or at least have sufficient physical energy to practise. At least you have mental energy at the present time, and you have mindfulness. Despite your health and physical strength and mental energy and mindfulness, it is still difficult to focus on your object during meditation. You do not know when or how you are going to die or what disease will bring about your death; yet you do know that one day you will quite likely fall seriously ill and grow very weak and find yourself on the verge of death. You may have neither physical nor mental strength or energy, and may instead be in physical pain and mental anguish. Mindfulness will then be very difficult to maintain – far

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more difficult than at the present time. It may not be possible to direct your attention to wholesome objects.

If you consider these matters carefully, you will understand that now is the right time to prepare yourself. Without preparing beforehand, you will be taking your chances. If you are fortunate enough that good kamma appears at your near-death moment, it will be good for you. If you are unfortunate and bad kamma appears, it will of course be bad for you. You will have no choice but to accept whatever befalls you at that time.

A dying person is like someone who is drowning – both seek desperately for someone to save them. If a rescuer appears, how happy they will be! Seized with panic, drowning people think only of saving themselves and will clutch eagerly not only at a piece of wood floating by but even at a human corpse or a dead dog in a desperate effort to save their lives. They will not make any distinction. In the same way, those who are dying and in the near-death moment have no strength to reject what is bad or pursue what is good; they grab at whatever appears in the mind. You therefore need to prepare beforehand. You need to consider what your fate will be if you fail to prepare yourself ahead of time.

There are four kinds of kamma which can appear at the near-death moment: *garuka kamma* (heavy kamma), *āciṅṇa kamma* (habitual kamma), *āsanna kamma* (near-death kamma), and *katattā kamma* (accomplished kamma).

Unwholesome heavy kamma comprises five things – patricide, matricide, killing an Arahant, shedding the blood of a Buddha with malicious intent, and creating a schism in

the Saṅgha. These five heavy kamma will surely give results at the near-death moment. Even the Buddha cannot save or protect someone who has done any one of them from falling into the great hell. It is an inescapable fate. If one does not wish to be reborn in the great hell, one should not commit any of these heavy kamma.

In addition to unwholesome heavy kamma, there is wholesome heavy kamma. One should accumulate wholesome heavy kamma as much as one can, because it is sure to give its results when one dies. For example, if one can practise ānāpāna so as to develop first jhāna, second jhāna, third jhāna, and fourth jhāna, and if one practises mastery of any one of them up to the moment of death, one will be reborn in the brahmā realm after one dies. This is wholesome heavy kamma. One must depend on one's effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

Habitual kamma is what one accumulates by habitually doing something frequently and even regularly. If one often recites the qualities of the Buddha, one accumulates very good and very powerful habitual kamma. In the absence of heavy kamma, habitual kamma can give its results because it has been habitually and consistently accumulated. One should strive to accumulate such wholesome habitual kamma in one's life.

Making offerings is another wholesome kamma which one should try to perform habitually. One may not think it is possible to make offerings every day, but if one knows the necessary conditions, one can also make this a daily habit. Four things are necessary to make an offering: something to offer, a receiver, the intention to offer, and a donor. If these four conditions are met, the practice of offering can

become one's habitual kamma. The Buddha, the Omniscient One, has explained the benefits of offering to the Saṅgha, to the Buddha, to Pacceka Buddhas, to Noble Ones, to those who are virtuous, to those who are not virtuous, and to animals.⁷⁰ One can even make offerings to the small creatures that wait for the crumbs and scraps that fall from one's plate when one washes it after eating. If one eats three times a day, one has the opportunity to make an offering three times a day. Be aware of this. Whenever one washes one's plate, generate the intention to offer food to the tiny creatures waiting below; then rinse and allow the water to flow down and carry the crumbs and scraps to them. One has to have the intention, and recall that the Buddha said, 'Even in such action, I say, there is benefit'⁷¹ and that the Buddha also said, 'If people knew as I know the benefits of offering, no one would eat without offering first.'⁷²

Among the devout Buddhists in countries like Myanmar, there is a traditional practice of offering food to the Buddha every day, according to the teachings received from

⁷⁰ MN.III.4.12 Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅgasuttam (MN 142 The Discourse on the Exposition of Offerings).

⁷¹ AN.III.2.6.7 Vacchagottasuttam (AN 3.57 The Discourse Concerning Vacchagotta):

'I say that one acquires merit even if one throws away dish-washing water in a refuse dump or cesspit with the thought: "May the living beings here sustain themselves with this!" How much more, then, [does one acquire merit] when one gives to human beings! However, I say that what is given to one of virtuous behavior is more fruitful than [what is given] to an immoral person. And [the most worthy recipient] is one who has abandoned five factors (five hindrances) and possesses five factors.'

⁷² Iti.I.3.6 Dānasuttam (Iti 26 The Discourse on Giving).

the bhikkhu Saṅgha and handed down from one generation to the next. In such places one hears these teachings from a very early age. Whenever devout housewives cook a meal, they prepare some of the food and offer it to the Buddha. They also offer water and candles and flowers. They do these things every day. The men do not take much interest in these things, however; that may explain why the female devas in the deva realms far outnumber the male devas.

Practising morality is another thing one can do every day. Every morning one can wake up and wash and then enter the shrine room and take the five precepts for lay devotees. It is excellent if one does this every day. Daily and consistent meditation practice is also habitual kamma. Meditation and taking the five precepts are superior to making offerings, and one does not need money to do them, nor does one need a receiver. All one needs is the good intention to benefit oneself. This is a better kamma, and one can make it habitually in one's daily life.

Morning and evening chanting and recitation are typical features of daily life in monasteries and retreat centres. One can also do them at home. Chanting and reciting are aids for one's realisation of the Dhamma, because they are a means of calling to mind the teachings of the Buddha, for example about life as an endless wandering in the round of rebirths, and about causes and effects and the workings of kamma, the subject of the utterance of the Buddha after His Full Enlightenment. The texts we chant recount how we can make an end of our many existences, and so achieve the end of suffering. They explain the way to Nibbāna. If one can put into practice what one chants

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every day, one can realise the Dhamma. This is a way of fulfilling pāramī. Make it a habit to recite. If one recites every day, and commits the texts to memory, one will not need to look at a book; one will know these profound teachings by heart. Make chanting part of your habitual kamma.

One needs to ensure one's own happiness; one cannot look to others to make one happy. The most dependable way of making oneself happy is by helping others. This means doing what one can, with a pure heart, and with the purpose of helping other beings, even animals. If one makes a point of helping others every day, it will become one's habitual kamma. It is something one can rely on confidently. If one accumulates such habitual kamma every day for the rest of one's life and does not accumulate any heavy kamma, one's wholesome habitual kamma will likely be strong enough to give its results at the near-death moment. One thus becomes a good person by accumulating wholesome habitual kamma.

Near-death kamma is the third type. In Buddhist countries, when someone is about to die, the bhikkhu Saṅgha is invited to perform chanting in order to help the person who is dying. The person on the death bed then hears no other sound except the Dhamma. If those who are dying can pay attention to the Dhamma at the near-death moment, they will be reborn in a good realm. It is therefore very important to maintain an atmosphere of calm and quiet during the process of someone's death. Family and friends should be careful not to cry and wail in the presence of the dying, and should instead take pains to arrange

something good for their beloved one. Even if one's parents are not Buddhists, they are sure to have accumulated some wholesome kamma in their lives, especially if they observed a particular religion, since there are no devout people of any religion who have never made offerings in their lives. So if they are about to die, one should remind them of the good things they have done, of their wholesome kamma. This is another way of helping those who are about to die.

The last one is *katattā kamma*, or accomplished kamma – the kamma one has done previously, either in this life or in a past life. When the three other types of kamma (heavy, habitual, and near-death) are either absent or fail to arise at the near-death moment, accomplished kamma appears and brings about rebirth. Sometimes it happens that, without preparing or expecting anything, one encounters someone in need of help, and one helps them as much as one can. One might attach greater value to such a happenstance deed than to a more deliberate action, because one does not always appreciate even a very significant gesture one makes, whereas an act of kindness done on the spur of the moment is done eagerly, sincerely, and happily. Moreover, due to our ordinary human mind, we often do good things to make people know about us and our good deeds, and so we do not act with a pure heart; but no one knows about the kamma we perform on an impromptu basis, and so it is done with simple sincerity and a very pure heart, even though we may have only done our best. Such kamma can give its results as well. At the very least, we need to accumulate every one of these four kinds of wholesome kamma, for our own benefit and the benefit of others.

Where Is Kammic Potential Stored?

Q: There are meditators who can recollect the nāmarūpa of their near past and beyond, all the way back to the moment of birth as well as back to their previous lives. Where in the universe is the storage place for such information as past kamma and kammic potential? In the field of computer science, all the data are converted into binary code and stored on the hard disk. Where is all the information about our kamma and nāmarūpa stored, and how is it stored?

A: A mango seed has the potentiality to sprout and grow. Within a mango seed is the potentiality for a mango tree with roots and a trunk and branches and mango fruits. No one can see these things in the mango seed, yet everyone knows that these things exist as potentiality within it. When the conditions are right – soil, water, warmth, sunlight – the mango seed sprouts and grows into a tree and bears fruit. Without the right conditions, none of these things appear, and the mango seed remains nothing more than a seed.

In the same way, kammic force lies hidden, nowhere to be seen. It exists as a potentiality. Without the right conditions, it remains neutral or inert, and nothing results from it. It does not exist in the arising phase, the static phase, or the perishing phase. It lies hidden and remains latent until the right conditions support its manifestation. We cannot point to any place where it exists, just as we cannot point out the trees and fruits inside the mango seed. Nonetheless, we understand there is a potentiality. It is the same

with us; even a certain kamma that we did a hundred thousand aeons ago follows by lying hidden in our mental continuum. If there are suitable conditions, that kamma will give its results even in this life at the near-death moment.

A familiar form of this phenomenon is the common experience of remembering something that has been absent from conscious thought and memory for a very long time. Under the right conditions, the long-forgotten memory can surface. Let me give an example.

When I was a young monk, a layman visited me as I was having lunch. After I had eaten, I poured myself a cup of water. That layman, sitting nearby and waiting for me, watched as I filled the cup with water and then drank. Afterwards I started to converse with him about his life experiences. He told me, among other things, that when I poured the cup of water and drank, it reminded him of how, long before, he used to drink alcohol out of the same sort of cup.

In this way, when the conditions are right, we remember. The memory is not stored anywhere; it is simply recalled under the right conditions, so that something we would otherwise never remember appears immediately. In the same way, if there are conditions related to a certain kamma, whether good or bad, it can appear at our near-death moment; so the more bad perceptions we have, the more danger we face as well.

Unwholesome Actions Are Never Beneficial

Q: I know someone who loves to keep pets and has a big monitor lizard. Every day the lizard needs to be fed live crickets. This person thinks that this is the natural order, the food chain, whereby the big eat the small. How might I teach him not to kill living beings? What kind of kamma is he committing?

A: In the Dhammapada, the Buddha says, ‘Never do what is unwholesome even with the intention of benefiting someone.’⁷³ In feeding one’s pet with small insects, one destroys the lives of other beings for the good of one’s own pet. This is unwholesome. This is killing. According to what the Buddha said, we should never do unwholesome things for the good of our sons or daughters or wives or husbands or any of our other relatives. Unwholesome kamma never gives good results.

Kamma is faithful; its results are completely reliable. If one wants to get good results in the future, one needs to accumulate good kamma. The more one accumulates wholesome kamma, the better it is for one. The more one does unwholesome things, the more one will suffer. I like to say

⁷³ Dhp. 84:

*Na attahetu na parassa hetu, na puttamicche na dhanam na rattham.
Na iccheyya adhammena samiddhimattano, sa silavā paññavā
dhammiko siyā.*

He is indeed virtuous, wise, and righteous who neither for his own sake nor for the sake of another (does any wrong),
Who does not crave for sons, wealth, or kingdom, and does not desire success by unjust means.

that suffering arises out of the desire not to suffer. One can reflect that in one's life there are many unwholesome things one has done out of one's desire not to suffer, and that these unwholesome things have not only failed to eliminate one's suffering but have actually caused one to suffer even more. May you never do that which is the cause of suffering out of your desire not to suffer!

Questions About the Workings of Kamma

Q: I know that kamma is like a shadow following us, and our loyal friend. I also know that kamma will not get mixed up, nor will it disappear automatically. Kamma will become bigger and bigger, like an avalanche or a snow ball. However, I am not clear about the following three points:

- (a) People say that if one gives birth to a devoted filial child, such a child has come to return a debt. On the other hand, if one gives birth to a rebellious child, such a child is coming to collect a debt. Are these things true?
- (b) I have heard that if a woman marries a husband who does not want to work and who beats his wife and children, the reason is that the woman owes him from her past life and now needs to repay her debt to him. Is this in accordance with the Law of Kamma taught by the Buddha?
- (c) In teaching the Law of Kamma, the Buddha taught us that we need to realise the truth for ourselves, and that we need to depend on ourselves and on the Dhamma. Is it true that, other than depending

Questions About the Workings of Kamma

on our own effort, sometimes we need to depend on other sources like divine intervention?

A: Nothing happens without causes. There is past cause and there is present cause. Similarly, in talking about kamma, we need to consider two types of kamma – past kamma and present kamma. If we see a certain result now, its main cause is in the past, which is past kamma. The supporting cause is present cause, or present kamma. We should have this general understanding.

According to the Buddha's teaching, the body has both painful feeling and pleasant feeling – in Pāli, *kāyika dukkha* and *kāyika sukha*. Both painful and pleasant bodily feeling are the result of past kamma. In fact, whatever is experienced through our five physical senses, whether desirable or undesirable, is due to past kamma.

For example, a certain person rarely sees undesirable scenes, or never sees undesirable scenes, and instead sees only desirable scenes. This is because of past kamma. Another person often sees undesirable scenes, and this is also because of past kamma. If someone is mistreated or tortured, he or she runs away to avoid painful bodily feelings. Sometimes he or she runs to someone else, and unfortunately encounters the same things again. Then he or she runs away again, and then encounters the same things again. In such an example, one can understand that this is all because of his or her past kamma.

We cannot change our past kamma, but we can and must change our present kamma. We need to consider effort (*virīya*) and wisdom (*paññā*); we should not simply leave it to our kamma to bear its fruits. We must have the desire

(*chanda*) to better ourselves, relying on our wisdom and effort. When we encounter hardship or difficulty, we shrug our shoulders and say, ‘That’s the way it goes. It’s just my kamma, and there’s nothing I can do about it.’ Such an attitude displays a lack of effort, wisdom, and desire; it is impossible to overcome difficulties without the wisdom and desire and effort needed to overcome them.

We must try to better our present circumstances by providing good supporting causes, through our present effort, wisdom, and strong wishes. If there is a will, there is a way. Never settle for just finding fault with your past kamma. We can change with our present effort and wisdom and *chanda*. Neither should we depend on divine intervention or the help of devas. Only when we depend on our effort, the purity of our *sīla*, and the maturing of our past good kamma will it be possible for us to receive help from the devas.

Abhidhamma

The Workings of Mentality

Q: In the Mahāyāna tradition, there is a famous quote: ‘The mind of the past, the mind of the present, and the mind of the future cannot be grasped.’⁷⁴ What is the meaning of the mind of the past, the mind of the present, and the mind of the future? More specifically, does mind here refer to *citta* or *cetasika*?

⁷⁴ In Chinese: 过去心不可得、现在心不可得、未来心不可得。

The Workings of Mentality

A: According to the Buddha's teaching, there are four kinds of ultimate truths. They are: citta, cetasika, rūpa, and Nibbāna. Citta is consciousness. Cetasika refers to the mental factors. Together they are ultimate mentality. Rūpa is ultimate materiality. Together with Nibbāna, these are the four ultimate realities.

In what we conventionally know as the mind, there are consciousness and its associated mental factors. When we listen to the Dhamma, wholesome mentality arises in us. If we have concentration, we can discern how many mentalities arise in us. In general, if mentality is associated with pleasant feeling and wisdom, there will be thirty-four mentalities altogether. Consciousness cannot arise alone. Consciousness and associated mental factors arise together; they take the same object, they perish together, and they arise depending on the same base. They work together. We need to have this understanding when talking about the mind.

Again, when we are listening to the Dhamma, thirty-four mentalities arise in our javana mind moments. One is consciousness. One knows what the speaker is saying because of consciousness.

An associated mental factor is contact – the speaker's voice contacts the ear-sensitivity. Hearing is not possible without contact. Cognition is not possible without contact. Contact enables consciousness to know.

If one is happy while listening, then another associated mental factor, pleasant feeling (*vedanā*), is working too.

Saññā, perception, marks what one hears and makes it possible to recall this in the future.

When one listens, one listens with intention; then *cetanā* (intention or volition) organises its associated mental factors in acting upon the object.

Another associated mental factor is *ekaggatā*, one-pointed mind focused on a single object; this is present when one is listening attentively.

Another is *adhimokkha*, decision, whereby one can make a decision or determine that this is this, and that is that. This is made by *adhimokkha*.

Saññā marks what a thing is. For example, *saññā* marks a paper towel as white. *Adhimokkha* makes a decision that it is white. *Saññā* just marks but cannot make a decision. *Adhimokkha* makes the decision. Without the help of *saññā*, it is impossible for *adhimokkha* to make a decision. As one makes an effort to listen, then *virīya*, effort, is arising. As one desires to listen, *chanda* is arising. The total number of mentalities then is thirty-four.

As for past, present, or future: If one understands these ultimate mentalities, one can discern past mentality, present mentality, future mentality, and external, internal, far, near, gross, subtle, inferior, and superior mentality. As the Buddha taught, ‘*atūtānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumaṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā*’.⁷⁵ The Buddha taught that eleven categories

⁷⁵ SN.III.1.6.7 Anattalakkhaṇasuttaṃ (SN 22.59 The Discourse on Non-Self), among others.

The Workings of Mentality

of mind and matter need to be analysed, not just past, present, and future mentality: *Atīta*: past; *anāgata*: future; *paccuppanna*: present; *ajjhatta*, internal; *bahiddhā*, external; *olārika*, gross; *sukhuma*, subtle; *hīna*, inferior; *pañña*, superior; *dūra*, far; and *santika*, near. Altogether eleven categories of ultimate mentality and materiality must be discerned, so as to see that each and every one of them is arising and perishing rapidly all the time.

The Buddha taught us to discern in these categories because we are attached to things whether they are past, present, future, internal, external, gross, subtle, inferior, superior, far, or near. If we see that all of them are arising and perishing, we can no longer be attached. When our Insight Knowledge then matures, we can remove our defilements, which are the cause of attachment and suffering.

The Function of Saññā and Its Relation to Memory

Q: Does the function of saññā as marking have to do with registering or some form of coding of experience into memory? Is adhimokkha by contrast some form of decoding? I would like to ask if this interpretation is correct. What is the role of saññā in the recollection of the past, especially of past lives?

A: The characteristic of saññā is noting the qualities of the object, and its function is just making a sign or marking the object. It marks this colour as black; it marks an object as such and such an object. It marks. This marking is just marking and not any other function. The decision is made by adhimokkha; it makes the decision that this is black; it

makes the decision that this is such and such an object. Depending on the decision of *adhimokkha*, *saññā* marks. *Saññā* has no function or capability to make a decision. Only *adhimokkha* can make a decision. *Saññā* can only mark. *Saññā* cannot feel or make any decisions.

There are many other associated mental factors which are working together. *Viriya* makes an effort to know what something is. Feeling feels. Perception marks. Consciousness knows. *Cetanā* stimulates all the associated mental factors to go towards the object. Except feeling, perception, and consciousness, all the other mental factors are called volitional formations, which will differ according to whether our intention is good or bad. *Saññā* is the perception aggregate, and its function is to mark. The perception aggregate is what enables us to remember. When we remember by means of the perception aggregate, feeling has feelings about it. We have the same feeling about something that we remember having in the past. Perception does not feel; feeling feels. They are not accumulating or waiting anywhere, saying, 'I am going to remember' or 'I am going to feel.'

As we are doing a certain action, all these four *nāmakkhandha* (mental aggregates) are working together and helping one another. When an action is finished, it perishes, but it leaves behind the force of *kamma*. Potentiality, the force of *kamma*, or *kammic* force, is left behind. The actions have perished and passed away, but not without leaving behind the force of *kamma*. It lies hidden as a latent tendency, as a potentiality. Due to the perception aggregate that lies hidden in that potentiality, we can remember many things we have done throughout our lives,

even though we may have done them many years ago. All the four mental aggregates are working together, but it is the perception aggregate that helps us to remember.

If we can discern ultimate mentality and materiality, we have the capability to know and see all our past actions because they have left behind a latent tendency, a potentiality. The strength or obviousness of this potentiality is relative to the actions we have done and the events we have experienced, and the workings of the four nāmakkhanda will differ according to the relative strength or obviousness of this potentiality. We do not remember much about something which is not very serious, or in which we have little interest, or which we have not done intentionally.

Still, when meditators discern the nāmarūpa of the recent or distant past, they surprisingly report that many objects appear again, and they remember things they thought they had forgotten. They feel very surprised. They discern things in the past that they could not have imagined in their present consciousness. They could see all the actions and all the mentality once more. There are also many events they cannot perceive. This is the workings of all four of the nāmakkhanda and not just of perception.

Knowing and seeing one's past life and past kamma occurs similarly. They have perished, leaving the force of kamma behind as a potentiality; yet it is possible to know and see them again, just as one remembers things one did many years ago.

The Nature of Matter from the Point of View of the Dhamma and of Science

Q: The Buddha teaches that all materiality is made up of four elements, or the eight inseparable rūpa. Scientists say that all matter is made up of atoms, and that atoms in turn are made up of protons, neutrons, and electrons. These two theories seem totally different and perhaps even contradictory. Could both be correct, or can the two be reconciled?

A: Long ago, the ancient Greeks conceived the idea of the atom as the smallest unit of matter which could not be further divided. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, scientists acquired the ability to split atoms into electrons, protons, and neutrons. These are called sub-atomic particles.

In the teaching of the Buddha, materiality arises in the form of very small particles, in each of which exist at least eight kinds of materiality. We assume that these particles are smaller than atoms, so we call them sub-atomic particles.

Scientists had to use elaborate instruments to split atoms into protons, neutrons, and electrons, and they succeeded in doing so only about a century ago. The Buddha expounded His teaching 2,600 years ago, and arrived at the truth without laboratory research or the use of any external instruments or powerful microscopes. The Buddha could distinguish things in greater detail by using His concentration. Scientists could theorise but they could not see di-

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rectly. Beyond the sub-atomic particles of protons, neutrons, and electrons, they see wave-forms or phenomena. In each of these small sub-atomic particles, known as rūpa kalāpas, the Buddha has distinguished eight ultimate materialities: earth element, water element, fire element, wind element, colour, odour, taste, and nutritive essence.

While scientists say that each water molecule is made up of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen – H₂O – the Buddha said that water is temperature-born materiality. If we analyse water, we will see that it is composed of many small sub-atomic particles, or rūpa kalāpas. We can further analyse each of these to find eight ultimate materialities. Scientists say that water has two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen; the Buddha says there are eight constituents in each of the sub-atomic particles that comprise water.

Scientists have not been able to reach the truth even with their sophisticated instruments and all the knowledge they have accumulated over the millennia. Long ago, the Buddha arrived at a deeper truth without the use of instruments. Science has still not been able to reach the depth of knowledge that was available to the Buddha's analysis. This is what I teach all the meditators who practise under my guidance. It is as if scientists are corroborating what the Buddha knew before them; but they still cannot reach the level the Buddha reached, no matter how much they try, because they are using external instruments. Concentration produces very powerful light. That light is called the light of wisdom. It is vastly more powerful than the most powerful microscope; microscopes cannot compare

with the light of wisdom. It will illuminate mind and matter so that the meditator can see all the way to ultimate truth. Scientists know conventional truth, not ultimate truth.

The Buddha said, ‘Blind is this world.’⁷⁶ People have good eyes to see, but they see only conventional truth; they are blind to ultimate truth. This is what the Buddha teaches us. He did not say that only He can know and see ultimate truth. He taught that we too can know and see, but we need concentration. One can realise these truths only after developing concentration. Then it is as if one has a powerful microscope; but while a powerful microscope cannot enable one to see ultimate truth, concentration can illuminate and enable one to see ultimate truth. Then one will no longer be blind.

Is the Nimitta Mind-Born Materiality?

Q: Does the light or nimitta come from the breath or the mind? Regarding the object for kasiṇa meditation, and the light that appears with ānāpāna meditation, and the objects for *asubha* meditation and marañānussati, are they all mind-born materiality?

A: No matter who it is that practises meditation, and no matter what object is used, the concentrated mind produces light if concentration has been developed.

⁷⁶ Dhp. 174.

Is the Nimitta Mind-Born Materiality?

The object of ānāpāna meditation is the in-breath and the out-breath. The in-breath and the out-breath are produced by the mind. One breathes because one has the desire to breathe. One can test this out by holding one's breath and seeing what happens – the desire to breathe arises. This is because of mind.

If one develops four elements meditation and pays attention to the air inside the nostrils – in other words, if one pays attention to one's breathing – one will see many small particles. These are mind-born octad kalāpas comprising the eight inseparable materialities. One will also see mind-born nonad kalāpas comprising sound in addition to the eight inseparable materialities. Hence, one will notice that whenever one is breathing, there is a breathing sound. With concentration one is able to see the colour of kalāpas, so one sees light when one sees a group of kalāpas.

There are mind-born materiality and temperature-born materiality inside the nostrils, with many temperature-born materiality outside the nostrils. When one sees the temperature-born materialities with their colour as a group, one sees a field of light. Outside the nostrils is temperature-born materiality; inside them is mind-born materiality and temperature-born materiality. Mind-born materiality cannot spread outside, but temperature-born materiality can. Finally, there is fire element in the mind-born materiality and temperature-born materiality inside the nostrils, and the fire element can produce temperature-born materiality. These have colour also and as a group produce the same field of light. Inside the nostrils, there is not only mind-born materiality but also temperature-born materiality.

The Round of Rebirths and Anatta

Q: The Buddha talked about the round of rebirths, and He also talked about anatta, non-self. If there is no self, who then is going through the round of rebirths?

A: The question has two parts. One is related to conventional truth, and the other is related to ultimate truth.

Conventionally, we are wandering in the round of rebirths; ultimately, no one is wandering in the round of rebirths. From the conventional point of view, there are beings taking rebirth again and again.

From the ultimate point of view, it is all just cause and effect – *iti imasmim sati, idam hoti...* if there is this, there will be that. This means that all beings are conditioned things; they are *anatta*, or non-self, and not *atta*, or self. This is apparent only to those who have realised the Dhamma. Those who have not penetrated directly still have doubt. Without realisation, one feels a strong sense of self, and even a sense of pride. It would even be better to say that we are proud because we have pride, but pride is related to *atta*. Those who have very strong *atta* are very proud of themselves. Pride is not as strong in those who have less *atta*.

Stroke and Watching Our Food *(The Enzyme Factor)*

Q: The function of body-sensitivity is to enable us to feel the sensation of touch. Since I suffered a stroke, the right

side of my body has no sensations other than pain. I constantly feel sensations like being pricked with needles or bitten by ants. Why is it that the body sensitivities on the left side of my body and the right side of my body function so differently? Is it possible to change this?

Also, I have no ability to differentiate between cold and heat, and I cannot feel it when others touch me, although sometimes I can because it causes more intense pain. In addition, the stroke damaged many other nerves – my vision, for example. When people are walking or sitting, I see them in a slanted way even though they are not. It has taken me a lot of time to learn to interpret what I see correctly. Is this related to eye-sensitivity? Before the stroke, I could speak many different languages and I knew how to swim, but now I have lost these abilities. Why is this so?

A: We need to understand the function of our body from two points of view. One is the conventional point of view, the other is the ultimate point of view. What I have explained before is the ultimate materialities and the function of each of them. Eye-sensitivity can receive the impingement from visible objects; ear-sensitivity can receive the impingement of sound; nose-sensitivity, the impingement of smell; tongue-sensitivity, that of taste; and body-sensitivity, that of tangible objects or touch. Our bodies are made up of all these materialities.

From the scientists' point of view, or from the conventional point of view, walking happens because the brain sends a signal through the nerves to the muscles in the legs and so produces motion. From the ultimate point of view, we walk because of desire, which produces mind-born ma-

teriality, which spreads throughout the body. Wind element, the predominant element in these mind-born materialities, has the characteristic of pushing, and so it moves the whole body forward. Medical experts and scientists have a different explanation. One must distinguish between the conventional point of view and the ultimate point of view. It is impossible to make an end of suffering unless one understands the ultimate point of view. This understanding differs from the conventional point of view. This difference is an important point.

One enjoys good health when all the parts of the body are working together harmoniously. This is the conventional point of view. If all the parts of the body are not working together harmoniously -- for example, if a certain part of the body has been damaged -- one becomes unhealthy.

Many illnesses people suffer from are the result of degeneration. Sometimes one hears older people complain that the fruit we eat nowadays is not as sweet as the fruit they used to eat when they were younger. However, the fruit nowadays is actually very sweet, so the fault does not lie in the fruit. The fault lies in older people's sensitivity. As we age, body sensitivities lessen in number, so that our sense of taste is not as acute as when we were young. In the same way, when we suffer from a certain disease that is due to degeneration, our body-sensitivity will not be as acute as before. It may be greatly decreased in some parts. Certain kinds of illness may change the-sensitivity of the entire body.

When I suffered from serious osteoarthritis, I went to see a bone specialist, who prescribed glucosamine. I asked the doctor how long I would need to take glucosamine, and he

told me I would have to take it for the rest of my life. Then he taught me some Dhamma and said, 'Bhante, with old age, sickness will follow. Please accept it.'

I took the glucosamine for only seven months, because from that time on I began to take an interest in how one can help oneself, and how one can maintain one's own physical health. I came to know how to solve one's own problems. I started to drink vegetable juice and fruit juice and to eat natural food instead of processed food, because processed food has no enzymes, so one suffers a lack of enzymes no matter how much processed food one eats. I encourage you to read the book, *The Enzyme Factor*, written by a specialist from America who has discovered a new approach to maintaining one's health. Maybe you will be much healthier if you follow his advice.

I had encountered degeneration when I was still young, an age when I should not be suffering in that way. Despite my condition, I could improve my health by changing my way of eating. This is why I have talked about nutriment-born materiality; it is very important, along with mind-born materiality. We suffer from different kinds of diseases because of the food we eat. If you want to maintain or improve your physical health, you need to change the way you eat and the food you eat. Almost all of this is explained in *The Enzyme Factor*.

I stopped taking glucosamine because of its side effects and because it could not effect a complete cure. It did help me get my daily work done, but still not like before. I became a very old person. I could not move very quickly and needed to go slowly. I needed to be very careful when I went up and down stairs. Such carefulness is very different

from what we can do when we are healthy, so I decided to find a natural way.

We need to depend on the knowledge we have gained, and we have to solve the underlying problems. Sometimes we can fight the symptoms directly, but for the most part we need to solve the underlying problems. The difficulties outlined in this question are due to underlying problems. If the questioner when healthy had had right knowledge on how to maintain that health, such difficulties would not have occurred. We will suffer a lot if we are careless about what and how we eat. The book will explain what we are doing wrong; it is like a revolution. If one reads it, one will see that much of our previous knowledge is wrong. Because of it, I have changed my habits completely.

Meditation in General

Momentary Concentration, Access Concentration, Absorption Concentration

Q: What are the differences among the three types of concentration – access concentration, absorption concentration, and momentary concentration? Which type is most suitable for vipassanā?

A: The Buddha taught forty kinds of samatha meditation objects for the second training, the training of concentration. Thirty of them lead to absorption concentration, while the remaining ten lead only up to access concentration. Among those that lead to absorption concentration

Momentary Concentration, Access Concentration,
Absorption Concentration

are mindfulness of breathing, the ten *kaṣiṇas*, the ten kinds of foulness, and the four sublime abidings.

When one practises mindfulness of breathing meditation, one will attain access concentration before one attains absorption concentration. Access concentration is very close to absorption concentration.

If one practises four elements meditation, which is one of the ten which lead only up to access concentration, one will attain access concentration but not absorption concentration. Access concentration is not as strong as absorption concentration. The stronger the concentration, the better the penetration, so meditators are encouraged to develop absorption concentration. Only when they cannot develop absorption concentration do we consider teaching them to take up those meditation objects which can develop only up to access concentration.

Those who are serenity and insight practitioners (*samathayānika*) first develop absorption concentration. Then they proceed to do insight meditation. To do so, they enter the first *jhāna*. On emerging from the first *jhāna*, and seeing the arising and perishing of first *jhāna* dhamma, they contemplate impermanence, suffering and non-self repeatedly many times. Be aware that the meditator has entered and emerged from the first *jhāna*, so there is no absorption concentration, nor is there access concentration. Instead, there is *khaṇika samādhi*, momentary concentration. This is explained in the *Visuddhimagga*.⁷⁷ It is very

⁷⁷ Vsm.I.8 *Ānāpānassatikathā* (PoP Chapter 8, Mindfulness of Breathing, page 282):

strong, and not at all like the momentary concentration taught by teachers nowadays, who apply the term to the calm state of mind that occurs after focusing on the breath for fifteen or twenty minutes. This is not how it is explained in the Visuddhimagga; this is the way they interpret things according to their preferences.

Pure insight practitioners (*suddha-vipassanā-yānika*) do not develop absorption concentration. They start insight practice with four elements meditation. The Buddha taught four elements meditation as one of the forty kinds of samatha concentration. He also taught four elements meditation as the beginning of insight practice, in which one attains access concentration and then breaks materiality down into very small particles. One must analyse the ultimate materiality existing in these particles. When one is ready, one needs to continue with insight meditation by seeing the arising and perishing of paramattha rūpa so as to contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self. At that time, one is not in access concentration; one is in momentary concentration. It is very strong.

Samādahaṃ cittanti paṭhamajjhānādivasena ārammaṇe cittaṃ samaṃ ādahanto samaṃ thapento. Tāni vā pana jhānāni samāpajjitvā vuṭṭhāya jhānasampayuttaṃ cittaṃ khayato vāyato sampassato vipassanākkhane lakkhaṇapaṭivedhena uppajjati khaṇikacittekaggatā.

Concentrating (*samādahaṃ*) the [manner of] consciousness: evenly (*samaṃ*) placing (*ādahanto*) the mind, evenly putting it on its object by means of the first jhāna and so on. Or alternatively, when, having entered upon those jhānas and emerged from them, he comprehends with insight the consciousness associated with the jhāna as liable to destruction and to fall, then at the actual time of insight momentary unification of the mind arises through the penetration of the characteristics [of impermanence and so on].

Five Jhāna Factors and Masteries in Access Concentration

Q: For those who are practising four elements meditation, are there also the five jhāna factors and the need to practise five masteries in access concentration, just as in absorption concentration?

A: Access concentration also has the five jhāna factors. One may discern them if one likes, but there is no need to practise mastery of it. Meditators are instructed to practise the five masteries only with respect to jhāna concentration. For those who are practising four elements meditation, the most important thing is to practise and master that.

Walking Meditation

Q: How should one do walking meditation?

A: Those who are developing concentration need to emphasise their meditation object in every posture. Whether walking, standing, lying down, or sitting, they should emphasise focusing on their meditation object. If one is practising ānāpāna, one needs to develop one-pointedness of mind on one object, which is the in-and-out breath. In other words, one needs to focus on the breath while walking, sitting, standing, and lying down. Only in this way can one develop one-pointed mind on a single object. One will become more familiar with the object and more skilful in focusing on it.

Those who are practising four elements meditation should focus on the characteristics of the four elements when they do walking. However, it is not easy to discern all the characteristics while walking, so they should discern as much as they can. When one has developed concentration and is able to discern ultimate mentality, ultimate materiality, and their causes and effects, one will be ready to proceed to insight meditation. Then one will have a different object during walking meditation, and one will see the perpetual and rapid arising and perishing of ultimate mentality and materiality and their causes and effects. Seeing these things enables one to contemplate impermanence, suffering, and non-self.

Are External Rūpa Kalāpas Seen with Open or Closed Eyes?

Q: Are one's eyes open or closed when one discerns the bodies of others and breaks them down into kalāpas? Is the resulting image a purely mental one, produced by mind consciousness only, and not a visual image produced by ordinary eye consciousness? How can discerning be done if the eyes are open?

A: Discerning is the work of wisdom, not of the eyes. Discernment cannot be done with the physical eyes.

After developing concentration, one next needs to practise four elements meditation successfully and discern the characteristics of the four elements in the body. When concentration improves, one will break the body down into very small particles. One then needs to analyse the ultimate reality that exists in different kinds of rūpa

Are External Rūpa Kalāpas Seen with Open or Closed Eyes?

kalāpas, for each of the five physical sense organs and the heart.

When one can discern thoroughly all the different types of rūpa kalāpas in each organ, one is ready to discern externally in those who are sitting in front of you or behind you. The Buddha taught ordinary disciples to discern externally in general and not on a specific person; then wherever one looks while paying attention to the four elements, one sees just tiny particles. This is because of one's concentration and because one has practised systematically according to the teaching of the Buddha. It is not something one can see with one's eyes.

In practising systematically, meditators practise samatha meditation, then rūpa meditation, then nāma meditation, then dependent origination, and finally vipassanā. When their insight knowledge matures, they can see the arising and perishing of rūpa kalāpas even with their eyes open. They see rūpa kalāpas with their wisdom eyes, not with their physical eyes. Seeing rūpa kalāpas is a result of concentration; if meditators look intently at them with wide-open eyes, the rūpa kalāpas disappear because they are objects of the mind, not of the eyes.

Can One See the Foetus in One's Own Womb?

Q: If we have enough concentration, we can see our own internal organs and can even see the heart beating. Can a pregnant woman use her concentration like an ultrasound to watch the development of the foetus in her womb?

A: As the Buddha says, ‘One who is concentrated knows and sees the Dhamma as they really are.’ After meditators develop ānāpāna fourth jhāna, we next teach them to discern the thirty-two parts of the body. What meditators can see differs according to their concentration. Those with very deep concentration and very bright and powerful light see all the parts of the body very clearly. Those whose concentration is not as strong may not see as clearly. A pregnant woman must have very deep concentration to be able to see inside her own womb. If her concentration is very strong, she will be able to do so.

Emphasis on Practice

Learning and Practice

Q: It seems that it will take several years to learn Abhidhamma and put it into practice. I would like to ask for a few words about how learning relates to practice and how one might support the other.

A: I have a lot of experience in teaching and have been teaching foreigners for nearly fourteen years now. They usually have very little knowledge of the Abhidhamma, but they can often develop concentration because of their pāramī. As the Buddha said, ‘One who has developed concentration knows and sees the Dhamma as they really are.’ Learning and practising go together. That is the best way.

If one has time to study beforehand, one should do so; but as my students are developing concentration, I am also teaching them what they need to know. They come for

daily interviews, which consist of explaining and learning how to focus and how to maintain one's mind and so forth. This is learning. Students then apply what they learn practically when they then go off to practise meditation. Once they have developed concentration, I teach them how to penetrate ultimate materiality. I must first explain how it is done. This also is learning. Then one must go and practise on the basis of one's concentration so as to attain direct knowledge. Penetrating ultimate mentality comes next.

All my disciples train this way and arrive at an understanding that is deeper than a scholar's because a scholar has no direct knowledge. The practitioner has direct knowledge. Then when one reads, one's understanding goes deeper still. Scholars have doubts about whether it is truly possible to know and see ultimate materiality and mentality. Dependent origination, which is knowing and seeing the Second Noble Truth, is explained in great depth in the teachings of the Buddha, but scholars will feel doubt even about dependent origination. The practitioner removes these doubts. We teach students practically, explaining how to penetrate the teaching directly. Thus, it is best when both teaching and practice go together. Still, if one has time to study before going somewhere to practise, it is also fine.

Asking Something from the Buddha

Q: Since the Buddha has entered into Parinibbāna, if we request something from the Buddha or ask Him for help, does it mean that our requests will go unanswered?

A: Do not ask anything from the Buddha. He will not give it to you. The Buddha is not a saviour. The Buddha says:

*Tumhehi kiccaṃ ātappaṃ, akkhātāro Tathāgatā.
Paṭipannā pamokkhanti, jhāyino mārabandhanā.*⁷⁸

You yourselves must strive ardently; the
Tathāgatas only point the way.
Those meditators who tread the Path are re-
leased from the bonds of Māra.

Never ask anything from the Buddha. From the basic foundation to the superior attainments, He has given us guidance in how to live, how to die, and how to make an end of suffering.

We take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha: ‘*Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*’ – ‘I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dhamma; I take refuge in the Saṅgha’. We do not take refuge because we want the Buddha to save us. The Buddha is not a saviour. Taking refuge in the Buddha means we will follow and practise the way the Buddha taught. Taking refuge in the Dhamma means we will follow and practise the Dhamma taught by the Buddha. Taking refuge in the Saṅgha means we will follow and practise what the Saṅgha teaches us.

It is very difficult to get good guidance. After getting good guidance, one must depend on oneself. If one fails to do what one has been taught or to practise according to what one knows, no one else can help. One makes an aspiration,

⁷⁸ Dhp. 276.

which means setting a destination, a goal. The bodhisatta made an aspiration to be a Buddha. However, even though He had made an aspiration, He could not become a Buddha without fulfilling all the necessary requirements. Making an aspiration is necessary and important, but it must be followed by actions. Without action, nothing can happen. Once one has heard the Dhamma, one may be very happy with it and want to realise it; but if one just sits idle, it will not be possible for one to realise it.

Delaying One's Practice Until One is Reborn in a Celestial Realm

Q: Someone told me that he does not want to practise now. He wants to wait until he is reborn in the celestial realm and then practise meditation there.

A: Such a thing is not possible for those who go to the celestial realm with the support of making offerings or practising morality. Generosity and morality are the reasons they take birth in the celestial realm, not meditation practice. They did not practise meditation in this life, so neither can they practise meditation there. The minds of such celestial beings do not incline towards the practice of meditation; they unfortunately incline instead towards the enjoyment of celestial sensual pleasure. They become very heedless. After they die, they may fall to the four woeful states again. Be careful!

However, suppose there are some who practised meditation in the human realm, and after seeing the arising and perishing of ultimate mentality and materiality, and discerning their causes and their effects, they contemplated

impermanence, suffering, and non-self, and had the arising and perishing of ultimate reality as the near-death object; those who are born in the celestial realm with the support of such kamma will surely be heedful, and will meet with Dhamma friends in the celestial realm, and their Dhamma friends will remind them, 'Friend, do not forget that you have practised meditation.' They will continue with their meditation practice there again.

After practising serenity and insight meditation as a human, if one intends to be reborn in either the celestial realm or the brahmā realm, then it is fine. I encourage all of you to do so. However, if one is reborn in the celestial realm after just making offerings and practising morality, it will not be so easy to practise there because celestial sensuality is so very superior that one will forget about practising and become quite heedless.

Applying Dhamma in Daily Life

Dealing with People Who Criticise Us

Q: What should I do when I am misunderstood and criticised and scolded by the people around me, and they find fault with what I do?

A: What do you think? Should you stay with someone who is always complaining about you and blaming you and finding fault with you? Should you associate with such a person? Do we benefit others by constantly complaining about them and blaming them and pointing out their faults? It is impossible to do them any good in this way.

The Buddha acted for the good of many by teaching the Dhamma, which is good at the beginning, good at the middle, and good at the end. Even in sharing such good Dhamma with others, He never failed to teach them respectfully. When the Buddha admonished someone, He did even that respectfully, not disrespectfully.

If you want to act for the good of others, even though they are doing something very bad, never point out their faults or blame them. You should wait for the right time to speak and choose the right words, ones that will make them happy to listen. Otherwise, we will destroy them if they lack wisdom and wise attention.

I have never encountered anyone who enjoyed being blamed. Even though we want to point out their weaknesses and faults, we should not do so by blaming them, but by explaining things in a reasonable way. Then they are inclined to change. If someone is behaving badly and acting harmfully, I will suggest that he stop acting that way, so as not to destroy himself and others. If one is not wise enough, one harms others and one harms oneself.

I need to balance this suggestion with another from a different point of view, so that you can gain a little more maturity of your own. We cannot expect to meet only with wise people who know how to give suggestions and how to benefit others all the time. There are winners and there are losers in the world. The way losers act is completely different from the way winners act. Many people behave like losers and not like winners. We will therefore come across people who are not wise and who have no skill in acting for the good of themselves and others. We will experience

more blame than praise in life. So how should we deal with praise and blame?

We must know how to learn from both winners and losers. The winner teaches us what to do, and the loser teaches us what not to do. If we do not know how to learn, we will encounter difficulty when dealing with the loser. Winners do what they should, not what they want; they speak as they should, not as they want. Complaining and blaming are things we want to do in our lives; this is the way our mind inclines. If we do so, we will never be a winner; we will never be a person who is successful in life. We must do what winners and successful people do. We should not speak and act according to our own desires but according to the principles of Right Speech and Right Action. Practising in this way is important for living happier lives.

We should be aware that sometimes what the wise want to do and what they should do are the same. What they want to do is also what they should do. In such an instance, they can do both what they want to do and what they should do. The two agree. When what they want is not suitable, they do only what they should do. This is important. This is the only way to train ourselves and to help other people. Then what we want to do becomes the same as what we should do. As much as possible, our emphasis should be on doing what we should do; then we ourselves at least will be without fault.

Before becoming a Buddha, for four incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons, the bodhisatta fulfilled pāramī by doing what was suitable for him to do and not what he wanted to do. After becoming an Omniscient Buddha, He could do what He wanted to do, for the good of many,

because what He wanted to do and what was suitable for Him to do had become the same. The Buddha's example teaches us that what we want to do is the least important consideration; instead, we need to do what we should do.

We like praise; we dislike blame. This is our nature, whether we are old or young. No one delights in being blamed, but everyone delights in being praised. We must consider what approach we will adopt if someone complains against us, or if someone blames us. Otherwise we cannot overcome the many problems we encounter in dealing with the fools we meet in our lives. It is also true that sometimes we ourselves are also foolish. Even though we naturally are delighted when someone praises us, being praised cannot help us grow and mature. We grow and mature by giving up our resentment when someone blames and criticises us. We should even welcome criticism and blame. This is something we can apply in our lives. In this way we feel grateful for both those who praise us and those who blame us. As we are marching towards our goal, which is Nibbāna, we need to fulfil pāramī all along the way. One such pāramī is *khanti*, patience. If no one complains against us, if no one blames us, and if no one finds fault with us, we do not get the opportunity to practise patience. It is our critics and detractors who give us the opportunity to practise patience.

When blamed and criticised, we need to reflect whether we might deserve other's criticism, whether we are doing something bad, and whether we are right or wrong. When we are blamed, we can take the opportunity to examine ourselves. If we are in the wrong, we must become more careful. If we see that we have done nothing wrong, we do

not need to give much consideration to someone's complaints. If those who criticise us are right-minded, we need not worry that they will treat us harshly all the time, because right-minded people are circumspect with their criticism and slow to find fault with others.

Someone who is constantly finding fault with others and criticising others is perhaps someone we should avoid. By contrast, people who wait for the right time to speak and point out our faults respectfully are people with whom we should associate. Pointing out someone's faults respectfully is very good. We should associate with people like that, but not with people who blame and complain and find fault without reason. Such people are just indulging in what they want to do. This is a dangerous thing to do. May you know how to learn from both the good and the bad! May you know how to accomplish your own good and the good of others from today on!

How to Do One's Work in the Right Way

Q: When one is going about one's daily duties, the mind can become scattered. How can one maintain mindfulness and develop concentration in the midst of one's work and while carrying out one's duties? How might one prevent defilements from surfacing in the mind and maintain one's meditation practice in these circumstances?

A: If one is not mindful in the midst of one's daily work and activities, unwholesome states of mind will arise. This can happen even while serving others who are on a meditation retreat. In the latter case, act mindfully and undertake the work with the intention to fulfil pāramī, and bear

How to Do One's Work in the Right Way

in mind that being of service to others in their practice is a rare opportunity.

Whatever one is doing, if one has the right conditions and can focus on the breath, one should be mindful of the breath. The mind cannot know two things at the same time or two objects at once, so one can train the mind to be mindful of a certain object. One should train it to focus on wholesome objects. Similarly, one can do only a single thing at any given moment, and it is always a choice between just two things – what one should do, and what one should not do. All of us have only these two options. We all need to train ourselves to do only what we should do.

A practice that can help us do that is to recall the nine qualities of the Buddha. Even recalling just the first quality is enough. The Buddha is *Araham*, One who has no defilements. Consider how admirable the Buddha is for having no defilements. We do what we should not do on account of our defilements, and they cause us to suffer. Our defilements are the reason behind our every unwholesome thought, word, and action. Constantly think 'araham'. If you are cooking – 'araham'. If you are sweeping – 'araham'. This is very good. If your friends ask you, 'Hey, what are you doing?' you just answer, 'I am cooking' and then go on with araham. All of us should train in this way.

Mettā

Radiating Mettā to Someone Who Has Died

Q: The Visuddhimagga recounts how a certain bhikkhu radiated mettā towards his teacher for a long time but was unable to attain jhāna, and only later learned that his teacher had already passed away. Why is it that our mettā bhāvanā is not successful if the object of our mettā has already passed away? What happens with our mettā in such an instance?

A: In teaching mettā meditation, the Buddha instructed us to take care to radiate mettā towards a person who is alive, not towards a dead person. He also instructed us to radiate mettā based on jhāna absorption concentration. After meditators attain ānāpāna fourth jhāna, we teach them white kasiṇa up to fourth jhāna. Only after that do we teach meditators to practise the four sublime abidings. To do so, they first need to radiate mettā towards themselves for a few minutes. Then they need to pay attention to someone they respect. Men must bring to mind a respected male person; women, a respected female person. In both cases it must be someone who is alive, not someone who has passed away. Only then can one attain jhāna absorption concentration.

Mettā that is like the mettā of the Buddha is very powerful, so it affects the person who receives it. The effectiveness of the mettā of other people depends on how strong their mettā is and how strong their concentration is. However,

Radiating Mettā to Someone Who Has Died

even if ordinary meditators radiate mettā towards someone who is an enemy of theirs or who dislikes them, and if they really develop this mettā, the hostile person will change day by day. The change occurs not so much because of the mettā itself but because the hostile person perceives a change in the person who is radiating the mettā; noticing that the one sending mettā is changing, the hostile person also changes.

The effects are due to one's mental cultivation. We cannot say for sure whether our mettā actually reaches the person to whom we send it, but what is sure is that our cultivation of mettā meditation enables us to attain jhāna absorption concentration and gives us the opportunity to develop wholesome kamma. It is better if we radiate mettā without expecting much or concerning ourselves with whether or not the person will receive it. If the object of our metta were to say, 'I did not receive anything', one will feel dukkha. Do your part, and do not think about the other party. Sending them mettā is your affair, not theirs.

My own approach – and you may or may not agree with me – is that, if we want to send mettā to people but are unsure whether they are still alive, we should bring to mind the time they were alive. We might pay attention to images of them doing their activities with smiling faces. It is fine to radiate mettā towards them in this way; we are not paying attention to present conditions. Unable to know for sure where they are, in this life or another, we pay attention to previous images we remember. It is possible to attain jhāna absorption concentration in this way; if someone fails to attain jhāna absorption concentration

by means of this mettā, it is due to other reasons. However, if we are aware that a person has died, we should not radiate mettā to him or her as we cannot attain absorption concentration if we know that the person has passed away.

Regarding the Buddha's instructions not to radiate mettā towards a dead person, consider that He also taught us to radiate mettā by wishing, 'May all beings be free from harm and danger. May all beings be free from mental suffering. May all beings be free from physical suffering. May all beings be well and happy.' We can apply our mettā to a particular person by slightly changing the wording: 'May he be free from harm and danger....' If someone has passed from this life, it is not possible to wish that he or she be free from danger and mental and physical pain and be well and happy.

Concerning Livelihood

Is the Stock Market a Form of Gambling?

Q: Is dealing with shares and buying and selling on the stock market considered a form of gambling? Is it Right Livelihood?

A: It is very similar to selling things. People can practise right livelihood by selling. In selling, there will also be buying. Buying and selling are what shop owners do. There are different kinds of shops. Buyers and sellers want profits. They expect profits. They make their living by selling and expect a profit from what they do. There is nothing

Is the Stock Market a Form of Gambling?

wrong with making a living by selling and expecting profits. Certainly no one sells something without setting the price above what they first paid for it.

The Buddha did not say that one should not increase the selling price. If one did not do so, there would be no benefit in selling. The price increase should not be extreme; otherwise it is not right livelihood. It would be *visamalobha*, extreme greed. The price must be fair. Customers are actually a seller's benefactors. They benefit the seller. The seller should have *mettā* towards the customer and so must set a fair price. This is *Sammā Ājiva*, Right Livelihood. If one earns a living with extreme greed, a danger lies hidden in this.

Nevertheless, trading in the stock market is not exactly the same as buying and selling things in a shop. Profiting from the stock market depends on one's ability to predict. One needs to apply one's understanding and skill and reasoning so as to be clever in prediction. If one is stupid, one is going to be very poor, I think. I am not familiar with the stock market. I am only hearing about it now. People are very interested in doing such trading. I hear some become very rich by engaging in it. I do not really know how they go about it. Only today have I come to know something about it.

It is difficult to say that trading on the stock market is gambling. It involves many factors. One's intention must be taken into consideration to decide whether or not it is gambling. One's standpoint is the most important consideration no matter what business one is going to do. The business itself cannot in general be regarded as gambling or not gambling. It depends on one's standpoint – what

one's intention is, and how one considers and thinks about one's business. If one is extremely greedy, one will be harmed. This sort of prediction requires a lot of energy, experience, intelligence, and cleverness. It is related to one's experience in this field. I think one will be fine if one is fair minded. If one has extreme greed, one will suffer harm. Even if one's business seems to be Right Livelihood, it will involve harm and danger if one cannot manage one's intention, and if one cannot organise one's business. Therefore, it is a little difficult to say whether it is gambling or not.

One other consideration occurs to me, although I have no practical experience in any of this. Stock traders buy when the price of the stock is low, and they sell when the price is high. This is how they make their profits. If it is so, it is related to one's kamma. Such business depends very much on one's kamma. One will be rich if there is the support of past kamma; if one has obstructive kamma, one is going to be poor. In the latter case, even though the price is predicted to be high, it will actually be low. While profiting by such business is dependent on one's kamma, one is not intentionally raising or lowering the prices and values. One waits to see what is going to happen according to time and conditions. If it is so, it is not gambling. Again, however, one's intention needs to be taken into account. As the Buddha said, '*Cetanāham, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vādāmi*' – 'It is intention that I declare to be kamma'.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ AN.VI.2.6.9 Nibbedhikasuttaṃ (AN 6.63 The Discourse on Penetration).

Is the Stock Market a Form of Gambling?

This is an important point. Sharing the Dhamma is the highest form of generosity, and the gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts;⁸⁰ but if a bhikkhu expounds the Dhamma for the sake of fame and gain, it is wrong livelihood. What seems to be good is not necessarily always so; it can depend on one's intention. Therefore, I do not want to make a final judgement on this question. So much depends on the intention.

Wholesome Acts Supported by Gain from Wrong Livelihood

Q: Earning a living by raising livestock is prohibited by the Buddha. If the income from wrong livelihood of any sort is used to perform a wholesome act such as dāna, does this good act bring benefits to the person who does it?

A: If the Omniscient Buddha had not appeared in the world, we would make different judgements. This would be very dangerous. We on our own cannot see beyond what is visible to the naked eye; only the Buddha sees very clearly and deeply all the way through. There is nothing which His Omniscient Knowledge cannot penetrate.

⁸⁰ Dhp. 354:

*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jīnāti, sabbarasaṃ dhammaraso jīnāti.
Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jīnāti, taṇhakkhayo sabbadukkhaṃ jīnāti.*

The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts; the taste of the Dhamma excels all tastes;

The delight in Dhamma excels all delights. The Craving-Freed vanquishes all suffering.

Whatever He wants to know, He can know.⁸¹ The Buddha speaks about the acquisition and use of wealth in His discourses.⁸²

Suppose a certain person makes a living by means of wrong livelihood and then never does any wholesome kamma. He does only unwholesome kamma in addition to engaging in wrong livelihood. He uses his profits and income in the wrong way. He pursues sensuality and enjoys sense pleasure. He does not know how to act for his own good. Now, another person similarly makes his living through wrong livelihood and gets a lot of income, but he also makes many offerings with that income. While his wrong livelihood is unwholesome kamma, he nonetheless accumulates wholesome kamma because of his many acts of dāna. His unwholesome kamma will give unwholesome results, but his wholesome kamma will give wholesome results.

The first person is not at all worthy of praise or commendation; he is blameworthy on account of his wrong livelihood and failure to do any meritorious deeds. While the second person is blameworthy on account of his wrong livelihood, he is praiseworthy on account of his dāna. If the mind of the second person inclines to make an end of

⁸¹ Commentary to MN.II.3.1 Tevijjavacchasuttam (MN 71 The Discourse to Vacchagotta on the Threefold True Knowledge): *sabbaññūtaññāṇena hi āvajjītvā pajānāti*.

⁸² AN.X.2.5.1 Kāmabhogīsuttam (AN10.91 The Discourse on One Who Enjoys Sensual Pleasures); also in SN.IV.8.12 Rāsiyasuttam (SN 42.12 The Discourse Concerning Rāsiya).

suffering while making an offering, the wholesome act of offering will be a supporting cause for his liberation.

Giving is the cause of prosperity. Even though people practise wrong livelihood and thereby accumulate bad kamma, they become rich because of their past good kamma. The good result they experience is due to the maturing of their past wholesome kamma. Nevertheless, success in what we do, be it wrong livelihood or right livelihood, also depends on our present kamma, proficiency, and effort. Without the support of these three, success will not come into being.

The Tālapuṭa Sutta

Q: Is it allowable to earn one's living by being a dancer, a singer, or an actor?

A: There is an answer in the teachings of the Buddha, in the Tālapuṭa Sutta:⁸³

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Rājagaha in the Bamboo Grove, the Squirrel Sanctuary. Then Tālapuṭa the headman of the actors approached the Blessed One, paid homage to Him, sat down to one side, and said to Him: ‘Venerable Sir, I have heard it said among actors of old in the lineage of teachers: “If an actor, in the theatre or the arena, entertains and amuses people by truth and lies, then with the break-up of the body, after

⁸³ SN.IV.8.2 Tālapuṭasuttaṃ (SN 42.2 The Discourse Concerning Tālapuṭa).

death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas.” What does the Blessed One say about that?’

The Buddha replied, ‘Enough, headman, let it be! Don’t ask me that!’

Tālapuṭa the headman of the actors repeated his question a second time and a third. The sutta continues with the Buddha’s answer:

‘Surely, headman, I have told you not to ask. But still, I will answer you. In the theatre or arena, among beings who are not yet free from lust, who are bound by the bondage of lust, an actor entertains them with titillating things that excite them even more strongly to lust.

‘In the theatre or arena, among beings who are not yet free from hatred, who are bound by the bondage of hatred, an actor entertains them with infuriating things that excite them even more strongly to hatred.

‘In the theatre or arena, among beings who are not yet free from delusion, who are bound by the bondage of delusion, an actor entertains them with bewildering things that excite them even more strongly to delusion.

‘Thus, being intoxicated and negligent himself, and having made others intoxicated and negligent, with the break-up of the body, after death, he is reborn in the ‘Hell of Laughter.’ But should he hold such a view as this: ‘If an actor,

The Tālapuṭa Sutta

in the theatre or the arena, entertains and amuses people by truth and lies, then with the break-up of the body, after death, he is reborn in the company of the laughing devas’ – that is a wrong view on his part. For a person with wrong view, I say, there is one of two destinations: either hell or the animal realm.’

When this was said, Tālapuṭa the headman of the actors cried out and burst into tears. So the Blessed One said: ‘Headman, I told you not to ask me.’

And then Tālapuṭa the headman said, ‘I am not crying, Venerable Sir, because of what the Blessed One said to me, but because I have been tricked, cheated, and deceived for a long time by those actors of old in the lineage of teachers who said it is going to be like this: “You are going to be reborn in the company of the laughing devas after this.”’

So Tālapuṭa the headman said, ‘Magnificent, Venerable Sir! Wonderful, Venerable Sir! The Dhamma has been made clear in many ways by the Blessed One, as though He were turning upright what had been turned upside down, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go for refuge to the Blessed One, and to the Dhamma, and to the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. May I receive the going forth under the Blessed One, Venerable Sir; may I receive the higher ordination!’

Then Tālapuṭa the headman of actors received the going forth under the Blessed One, he received the

higher ordination. And soon, not long after his higher ordination, dwelling alone, withdrawn, diligent, ardent, and resolute, the Venerable Tālapuṭa, by realising it for himself with direct knowledge, in this very life entered and dwelt in that unsurpassed goal of the holy life for the sake of which clansmen rightly go forth from the household life into homelessness. He directly knew, ‘Destroyed is birth, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more for this state of being.’ And the Venerable Tālapuṭa became one of the Arahants.

We should forsake the illusions of entertainers and performers and instead follow Tālapuṭa’s example by striving to become Arahants ourselves.

Related to Definite Prophecy

Why a Sammāsambuddha Can Teach Whereas a Pacceka Buddha Cannot

Q: What is it about the practice of a Sammāsambuddha that enables Him to express ultimate truth in terms of conventional truth while a Pacceka Buddha cannot do so?

A: There are three kinds of Sammāsambuddha: *viriyadhika*, *saddhadhika*, and *paññādhika*. According to their respective aspiration and inclination, each fulfils pāramī for a different length of time. A viriyadhika Sammāsambuddha needs to fulfil pāramī for sixteen incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons. A saddhadhika needs to do so

Why a Sammāsambuddha Can Teach
Whereas a Pacceka Buddha Cannot

for eight incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons. A paññādhika needs to fulfil pāramī for the shortest duration, four incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons. Our Buddha is a paññādhika. A Pacceka Buddha fulfils pāramī for two incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons. The duration differs according to the aspiration of each type of Buddha.

Even though both Sammāsambuddhas and Pacceka Buddhas are Self-Enlightened Buddhas, an Omniscient Buddha's attainment is associated with Omniscient Knowledge, whereas the attainment of a Pacceka Buddha is not. Just as the length of time they fulfil pāramī is different, even so their subsequent attainment, understanding, and knowledge differ greatly.

Every bodhisatta who is to become a Sammāsambuddha must be endowed with eight factors in order to receive definite prophecy, whereas a future Pacceka Buddha does not need to receive a definite prophecy. Both types are sure to become Buddhas after fulfilling pāramī for the lengths of time specified above. When a Sammāsambuddha attains Buddhahood, His fourth Path Knowledge arises associated with Omniscient Knowledge. It is not so in the case of a Pacceka Buddha. Because a Sammāsambuddha has Omniscient Knowledge, He is able to explain the Dhamma in words. The Pacceka Buddha, lacking Omniscient Knowledge, has no such capability.

Why Women Cannot Receive Definite Prophecy

Q: Why can a Buddha give definite prophecy only to a male person? Are women unable to receive a definite prophecy because they have heavier unwholesome kamma?

A: There are eight factors required for receiving a definite prophecy.⁸⁴

- (1) Being a human being.
- (2) Being a true male person.
- (3) Having fulfilled all conditions necessary for the realisation of Arahantship.

(When our bodhisatta, as the hermit Sumedha, met with the Dīpaṅkāra Buddha, he could have attained Arahantship after hearing the Dhamma in brief had he wanted to do so; however, he renounced this attainment at that time. Although he had fulfilled all the conditions for the attainment of Arahantship, he renounced it for our sake. Therefore, please make use of this opportunity.)

- (4) Meeting with a living Buddha.
- (5) Being an ascetic who believes in the Law of Kamma.
- (6) Having acquired the attainment of jhāna and supernatural powers.

⁸⁴ The Great Chronicle of the Buddhas, Chapter V: The Utterance of the Prophecy (Singapore Edition, page 36).

- (7) Being prepared to lay down one's life for the well-being of a Buddha.

(Sumedha prostrated himself so as to make his body a bridge for the Dīpaṅkāra Buddha and all His disciples to walk on. Four hundred thousand Arahants were following the Buddha. Had they all crossed over the body of the hermit Sumedha, he would not have survived. He knew that, but he was ready to lay down his life for the welfare of the Buddha. Knowing this full well, the hermit Sumedha nevertheless did not hesitate, and courageously prepared himself to render service to the Buddha. If one aspires to become a Buddha, one must be ready to do likewise.)

- (8) Having an intense, wholesome aspiration for Buddhahood.

(Even if the whole universe were filled with glowing red-hot coals and sharp-pointed spears, one would not hesitate to pass through them for the attainment of Buddhahood.)

Knowing that the hermit Sumedha was endowed with these eight qualities, the Dīpaṅkāra Buddha went towards him and stood at the head of his prostrate body. The Buddha practised the supernatural power of seeing into the future, to determine if this hermit Sumedha would become a Buddha in the future. The Dīpaṅkāra Buddha saw that the hermit Sumedha was going to be a Buddha after fulfilling pāramī for four incalculable and one hundred thousand aeons. He therefore gave definite prophecy on that day.

Anyone who wants to be a bodhisatta must fulfil all eight of these conditions and must meet with a living Buddha.

If one wants to be a bodhisatta who is going to be a future Buddha, one must be a male to receive definite prophecy from a living Buddha. However, this is just one of the eight requirements. There are seven other points, and they are all more important than being a male. If one is not yet a male, one should not expect definite prophecy. One must try to be a male first; then one must fulfil all the other seven qualities. Only then will a Buddha look into the future with His supernatural power which can predict the future to determine if one is destined to be a Buddha. If He sees that this person is going to be a Buddha, He will give the appropriate definite prophecy. He does this not according to His wish, but according to the qualities of that person.

Whatever I know of the teachings of the Buddha, it cannot compare with what the Omniscient Buddha knows; so I am not the one to ask. The Omniscient Buddha says it must be a male person. There is no one to whom one can appeal to change this.

Sharing Merits

Benefit of Sharing Merit

Q: According to Theravāda teaching, when people die, they are reborn in their next life the moment the paṭisandhi citta arises. When we share merits with someone who has died, does it have any effect or benefit other than comforting the relatives who are still alive?

A: First of all, in order to benefit from the sharing of merits by another, one has to know that a wholesome act has been performed and rejoice in it.

After death consciousness, rebirth linking consciousness arises immediately. There is no gap in between. This is what the Buddha teaches. This is also something one may one day see for oneself by discerning one's past lives to know and see the Law of Kamma, which is the central teaching of the Buddha. One will then know for oneself that rebirth linking consciousness arises immediately after death consciousness, with no gap between them.

The Buddha taught that there is no *antarābhava*, no intermediate life. When people are born in the human realm after they have passed away and we share merits with them, they cannot rejoice because they are already in the womb. They cannot rejoice because they do not know we are sharing merits with them. If they have been reborn in the celestial realm, where they enjoy all kinds of celestial sensuality according to their kamma and forget about us, then they cannot rejoice in our sharing of merits either. Rejoicing is impossible for those who are born in the animal realm or the hell realm, where they suffer due to their bad kamma. Those who are born in the brahmā realm due to their mastery of absorption jhāna cannot rejoice in our sharing of merits.

Hence, those who are reborn in any of the realms mentioned above will not be aware of the wholesome acts their living relatives have performed, much less will they be able to rejoice in those acts. Without rejoicing, they will not be able to derive any benefit when their relatives share merits

with them. Even if they happen to be aware of those meritorious deeds and rejoice in them, they benefit only by way of accumulating wholesome kamma, and not more than this. These are *not* the realms in which beings who rejoice in the sharing of merits done by others can experience significant improvements in their lives, even to the extent of being reborn into a better realm of existence.

However, according to the Buddha's teaching, when some of our beloved ones and relatives pass away, the near-death object that arises is an unwholesome one that causes them to take rebirth in the ghost realm as a *paradattūpaṇḍitī peta*, a type of ghost that lives on what is given by others. In that case, they are waiting to rejoice in our sharing of merits with them. When they can rejoice in this way, the condition of their *peta* life can be improved, and they may even be able to advance to a higher realm of existence. Since their family members cannot be sure where they have been born, it is the family members' duty to share merits with them.

The question remains: If our beloved ones have not been reborn in that particular ghost realm, what is the benefit of sharing merits? We should bear in mind that the Buddha taught that a beginning of *saṃsāra* is unknown and unknowable.⁸⁵ Even if our relatives from this life are not

⁸⁵ SN.II.4.1.1 *Tiṇakaṭṭhasuttaṃ* (SN15.1 The Discourse on Grass and Wood) ; also in SN.II.4.1.9 *Daṇḍasuttaṃ* (SN 15.9 The Discourse on the Stick) and SN.III.1.10.7 *Gaddulabaddhasuttaṃ* (SN 22.99 The Discourse on the Leash-Bound):

'Anamataggoyam bhikkhave, saṃsāro. Pubbā koṭi na paññāyati avijjānīvaraṇānaṃ sattānaṃ taṇhāsaṃyojanānaṃ sandhāvataṃ saṃsāra-taṃ.'

there, nonetheless our old relatives from previous lives may be waiting there for us to share merits with them.⁸⁶ One benefits by sharing merits even if one has no relatives there at all, because one gets the opportunity to do wholesome kamma.⁸⁷ Therefore, it is good to share merits with those who have died.

There are ten kinds or grounds of wholesome kamma (*dasapuññakiriyavatthu*), one of which is sharing merits. Another is rejoicing when others share merits. Even though we ourselves can make offerings, there are still many others who cannot. If we share merits, others nearby who understand the merits of the offering can also partake in our wholesome kamma by rejoicing and saying, ‘Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!’ Although they cannot make an offering themselves, they get the opportunity to perform wholesome kamma by rejoicing in someone else’s good kamma when they hear of it. Sharing merits is one kind of wholesome kamma, and rejoicing in someone else’s good kamma is another.

It is like a number of people all holding candles in a dark place, but only one of them is holding a candle that is lit. That single candle illumines the darkness, bright and luminous. This is like someone with the means to make offerings. The others with unlighted candles are like people

‘Bhikkhus, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving.’

⁸⁶ AN.X.4.2.11 Jāṇussoṇisuttaṃ (AN 10.177 The Discourse Concerning Jāṇussoṇī).

⁸⁷ Mil.V.3.4 Pubbapetādisapañho (The Questions of King Milinda, Book IV, Question 74, page 151).

Selected Questions and Answers

without such means. They approach the one with the lighted candle and say, 'Friend, let us light our candles in the flame of your candle.' They are like those who rejoice in the good kamma of others. As they come and light their candles, the light in that place becomes even brighter and more luminous, yet the first candle does not lose any of its own light. This is the way we can accumulate wholesome kamma together. How good it is!

Aspirations and Sharing of Merits

We have accumulated a lot of wholesome kamma – through dāna, sīla, and bhāvanā. There is no result which compares with the realisation of Nibbāna. Therefore, all the good actions you have accumulated in this retreat should be for the realisation of Nibbāna. Other attainments and other achievements are not as important. You may not be able to make an end of suffering as you are making your way in search of the Dhamma, because your accumulated pāramī is not yet sufficient; but you will be reborn in a good realm if you make an aspiration to attain Nibbāna. Then you will have the intention to make an end of suffering in every existence, so that you will heedfully make an effort one life after another. Therefore, making an aspiration to make an end of suffering is the supreme aspiration of our lives. So now we will make aspirations and share merits:

*Idaṃ me puññaṃ āsavakkhayāvahaṃ hotu.
Idaṃ me puññaṃ nibbānassa paccayo hotu.
Mama puññabhāgaṃ sabbasattānaṃ bhājemi;
Te sabbe me samaṃ puññabhāgaṃ labhantu.*

May this merit of mine
lead to the destruction of the taints.
May this merit of mine
be a condition for the realisation of Nibbāna.
I share these merits of mine with all sentient beings.
May all sentient beings
receive an equal share of my merits.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Abbreviations

About the Footnote Citations

Footnotes cite the Pāli sources first, from the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka, followed by the most common citation format for the English translations.

Abbreviations for Sources Cited

- AN Aṅguttara Nikāya
 (Collection of Numerical Discourses)
- CMA A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma⁸⁸
- Dhp Dhammapada
 (The Verses of Dhamma)
- DN Dīgha Nikāya
 (Collection of Long Discourses)
- Iti Itivuttaka
 (As It Was Said)
- Jā Jātaka
 (Birth Stories)
- Khp Khuddakapāṭha
 (Minor Sayings)
- Mil Milindapañha
 (The Questions of King Milinda)⁸⁹

⁸⁸ English translation of the Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha with explanatory guide; Bhikkhu Bodhi, general editor (BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000). Also available as an e-book version in PDF (2012).

⁸⁹ Citations for the English translation refer to that by T.W. Rhys Davids (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1890).

- MN Majjhima Nikāya
(Collection of Middle Length Discourses)
- PoP The Path of Purification
(English translation of Vsm)⁹⁰
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya
(Collection of Connected Discourses)
- Sn Suttanipāta
(Group of Discourses)
- Vsm Visuddhimagga
(Path of Purification)

Note: Dhp, Iti, Jā, Khp, Mil, and Sn are collections within the Khuddaka Nikāya (Collection of Minor Discourses).

⁹⁰ Chapter, page, and paragraph numbers refer to the translation by Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli (Buddhist Publication Society, fourth edition, 2010).

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Buddhavandanā

Paying Respect to The Buddha

*Buddho Bodhāya deseti, danto yo damathāya ca;
Samathāya santo dhammaṃ, tiṇṇo'va taraṇaya ca;
Nibbuto nibbānatthāya, taṃ lokasaraṇaṃ name*

The Buddha, the Enlightened One, the refuge of the three worlds, the arahant (Nāga), having known the Four Noble Truths by Himself and wishing to enlighten others that deserve to be enlightened like Himself; having tamed Himself with respect to the six faculties, and wishing to tame others that are fit to be tamed like Himself; having attained peace Himself, and wishing others that are worthy might attain peace like Himself; having crossed over to the other side of the ocean of samsāra, and wishing others that are worthy might cross over to the other shore like Himself; having extinguished the fire of defilement at the four stages, and wishing others that are worthy might extinguish the fire of defilement like Himself; out of compassion, he expounded the glorious Dhamma to devas and humans for forty-five years. To Him, The Buddha, the Nāga, the refuge of the three worlds, I pay homage physically, verbally and mentally in all humility with joined palms raised.

May the Noble Wishes of all beings be fulfilled.

May all be well and happy.

*Hitvā kāme pabbajjimsu
Santo gambhiracintakā
Te tumēpya anusikkhāvo
Pabbajitā supesalā*

Good people in the ancient days in both the present and past world cycles, destined to be omniscient Buddhas, private Buddhas, and Noble Ones, had reflected deeply on the true nature of life and unhesitatingly gave up all their living and non-living possessions, which are objects of sensual craving for the vast majority of people and are prone to various harms and dangers. Seeing the inherent faults in those possessions, they chose to renounce the world and to live ordained lives in seclusion in order to undertake the training and practice of morality, concentration, and insight meditation, diligently and ardently.

May good people of the present days who have come into existence and are imbued with the perfection of renunciation, emulate the great people of those ancient days and unhesitatingly renounce the world with hearts founded upon moral purity. May these good people live ordained lives in seclusion and be able to undertake the training and practice of morality, concentration, and insight meditation, diligently and ardently.

May all know and see the Dhamma in this very life.

May all be free from suffering.

About Bhikkhu Revata

Bhikkhu Revata was born in 1971 in Mawlamyine, Myanmar. He received his bachelor's degree from Yangon University in 1994 and independently taught computer technology for five years. He was ordained as a Theravāda bhikkhu at Pa-Auk Tawya in 1999, with the Most Venerable U Āciṇṇa, the Pa-Auk Sayadaw, as his preceptor. He has studied the Pāli scriptures and commentaries and speaks Burmese, English, and Thai.

After practising meditation under the guidance of the Most Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw, Sayadaw U Cittara, and Sayadaw U Sīla, in 2002 he began teaching meditation to local and foreign yogis, both ordained and lay, and is currently an assistant teacher of the Pa-Auk Sayadaw. He is responsible for teaching local and foreign yogis and for training successful practitioners to teach meditation themselves.

A distinguished meditator and teacher, he has taught extensively both in Myanmar and abroad. He has conducted meditation retreats in China, Indonesia, Latvia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, United States of America, and Vietnam.

He has written four books in his native language, three of them in collaboration with the Most Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Bhikkhu Revata's English-language titles include *Awaken, O World!* (2006), *The Disciple Within* (2008), *Bearers of the Burden* (2011), *Expectation Derived from One's Own Point of View* (2015), and *A Journey of Self-Discovery* (2015). His talks have been translated into Korean, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

Other teachings from Bhikkhu Revata in e-book, audio, and video formats can be found on the Internet at www.revata-bhikkhu.org.