



Only when you understand  
the four Noble Truths penetratively,  
will you gain liberation from  
suffering eternally.

# The Noble Liberation and The Noble Truths

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# The Noble Liberation and The Noble Truths

- The Noble Truths are Universal Truths that lead to Liberation from suffering.
- The best understanding in life is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.
- The eternal Liberation from suffering is the best and highest attainment in life.
- To understand the Noble Truths means to understand every aspect of existence truly.
- This understanding will give you the leading light to live happily and beneficially right now!



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## CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	...	6
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	...	11
The Buddha	...	11
The Dhamma	...	11
The Cause for being Drifted in Samsāra	...	12
The Supreme Enlightenment	...	12
The World is enchanted with Pleasure	...	13
The First Sermon	...	13
The Two Extremes	...	14
The Middle Path	...	15
<b>THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH - THE NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING</b>		
What is Suffering?	...	17
What is Birth ( <i>jāti</i> ) ?	...	17
What is Ageing ( <i>jarā</i> ) ?	...	18
What is Death ( <i>marana</i> ) ?	...	18
What is Worry or Sorrow ( <i>Soka</i> ) ?	...	18
What is Lamentation ( <i>parideva</i> ) ?	...	18
What is Bodily Pain ( <i>dukkha</i> ) ?	...	19

## Contents

What is Grief ( <i>domanassa</i> ) ?	... 19
What is Despair ( <i>upāyāsa</i> ) ?	... 19
What is the Suffering of Association with the Undesirable and the Unloved ?	... 19
What is the Suffering of Separation from the Desirable and the Loved?	... 20
What is the Suffering of not getting what one desires?	... 20
How, in brief, are the five Aggregates of Attachment suffering?	... 21
Comment and Argument	... 21
The profound Meaning of Dukkha	... 23
Three Kinds of Dukkha	... 23
What Sense Enjoyment really is	... 26
The Delightfulness of Sensuality	... 27
The evil Consequences of Sensuality	... 28
The Freedom or Liberation from Sensuality...	29
Illustration of the Three Aspects of Sensuality	... 29
Examples of Vipariṇāma Dukkha	... 30
Saṅkhāra Dukkha is most important	... 33
Is Buddhism Pessimism or Realism?	... 35
Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of Suffering	... 36

## **THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH – THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING**

The Origin of Suffering	... 39
Where does Craving arise and take root?	... 40
Craving as the Main Cause of Suffering	... 41
Attachment is the Cause of Suffering	... 44
Craving is the Origin of Rebirth	... 47
The Beginningless and Endless Round of Misery	... 55
The Craving that takes Delight in the new Existence	... 57
Defilements are the Causes of Suffering	... 59
Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering	... 60

## **THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH – THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE EXTINCTION OF SUFFERING**

What is the Cessation of Suffering?	... 62
The Cessation of Suffering and Nibbāna	... 63
The Two Aspects of Nibbāna	... 67
Three Modes of Expressing Nibbāna	... 68
The Summum Bonum of Buddhism	... 69
Various Descriptions of Nibbāna	... 73
Nibbāna is not 'Nothingness'	... 77
Verification of Nibbāna	... 80

Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering	... 87
<b>THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH – THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE PATH LEADING TO THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING</b>	
What is the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering?	... 89
The Explanation of the Path Factors	... 91
(1) The Right Understanding ( <i>Sammādit̥hi</i> )	... 91
(2) The Right Thought ( <i>Sammāsaṅkappa</i> )	... 96
(3) The Right Speech ( <i>Sammāvācā</i> )	... 98
(4) The Right Action ( <i>Sammākammanta</i> )	... 101
(5) The Right Livelihood ( <i>Sammā-ājīva</i> )	... 104
(6) The Right Effort ( <i>Sammāvāyāma</i> )	... 105
(7) The Right Mindfulness ( <i>Sammāsati</i> )	... 107
(8) The Right Concentration ( <i>Sammāsamādhi</i> )	... 110
The Noble Threefold Training	... 114
Practical Training	... 115
Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering	... 123
Enlightenment not yet Claimed	... 124
Enlightenment Claimed	... 125
Venerable Koṇḍañña realized the Truth	... 125
The joyful Exclamation of Celestial Beings	... 126

## PREFACE

Although you are a free citizen, are you really free from the bondage of various kinds?

There is the bondage called the fetter of attachment (*tanhā*) to your wife or husband, sons and daughters, wealth and property, sensuous objects and sensuality. This bondage ties you to your beloved persons and cherished things so that you cannot be free.

There is another bondge called the fetter of ill-will (anger) that burns or tortures you because you are not satisfied as you do not get what you want or you get what you don't want or someone ill treats you.

Again there is another bondage called the fetter of wrong view (*diṭṭhi*) that makes you regard yourself as 'person, being, I', let you attach to 'I' and constantly attend to 'I' so as to make you feel well and happy.



Another bondage called the fetter of pride (*māna*) also binds you by making you very proud of the knowledge, the wealth, the official position and the prestige that you have acquired. It keeps you intoxicated with your pride and makes you very arrogant so that you cannot tolerate even a slight disagreement.

Another very subtle yet very wicked bondage called the fetter of ignorance (*avijjā*) keeps you in delusion and in the dark by making you ignorant of the realities and the Noble Truths and drift endlessly and blindly in the round of rebirth named Samsāra.

Are you aware that you are being bound by these strong fetters?

Besides there are ten defilements (*kilesas*) that always torture you and influence you to be troubled, confused, angry, wicked, worried and miserable. They are ignorance (*avijjā*) that deludes and intoxicates you to be ignorant of the realities and the Noble Truths; craving (*taṇhā*) that influences you to be never contented and always hungry and thirsty for sensual pleasure; anger (*dosa*) which causes you to be always worried, sad, depressed, lamenting and despairing; the wrong view (*ditṭhi*) that clings to the notion that person, being, I, soul and self really exist and causes you to behave selfishly only for the welfare of yourself and to

be reborn in woeful abodes repeatedly; the pride (*māna*) which makes one to be disgustingly arrogant, to be intoxicated with pride, and to be born in a low or wicked existence; the sceptical doubt about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha and meritorious deeds (*vicikicchā*); the restlessness of the mind (*uddhacca*); sloth (*thina*) that makes the mind morbid and gloomy; moral shamelessness (*ahirika*) that urges one to perform immoral actions without shame; and moral fearlessness (*anottappa*) which urges one to perform immoral actions without dread.

The ten strong ropes or fetters bind you firmly to the wheel of Existence so that you cannot escape from the round of misery life after life. The ten defilements also constantly overwhelm you to be wicked and bad and torture you to be painful and miserable. So you are not really free but a prisoner under the bondage and influence of defilements and fetters which bind each individual to the wheel of existence.

The liberation from the entanglement of defilements and fetters is the noblest liberation. How can one achieve this noblest liberation? One can totally liberate oneself only when one can uproot and destroy all the fetters and defilements by the fourfold knowledge of the Path.

How can one achieve the fourfold knowledge of the Path? The knowledge of the Path is the knowledge which fully understands the four Noble Truths. So one must undertake the Eightfold Noble Practice to understand the four Noble Truths fully.

The four Noble Truths are the most important universal truths for the full understanding of these truths will enlighten anyone to a noble person (*ariya*) who will never be reborn in woeful abodes and who can enjoy the supreme bliss of Nibbāna for ever.

It's much better to be a noble person rather than to be a universal monarch or a celestial king who are not exempt from being cast down to woeful states.

The Buddha became fully enlightened only after discovering and fully understanding the four Noble Truths. He expounded these Noble Truths to the world in his first sermon as the message of liberation from universal suffering and the enjoyment of eternal peace and happiness. These truths are the essence of his teachings as well as the heart and core of Buddhism.

As to escape from woeful states and from universal suffering is the most important and urgent task for us to do, we must strive to understand the four Noble Truths first in theory and then in practice by undertaking insight meditation.

Since the four Noble Truths constitute an important subject of many lectures and many books, I have also delivered them several times in my dhamma lectures in Myanmar, Malaysia, Japan and the United States of America. I now present them in a concise and comprehensible form so that the readers can easily understand them well and will find satisfactory answers to such questions as:

What is suffering?

What is the origin of suffering?

Isn't sensual pleasure enjoyable?

Is there a way out of this suffering?

Is Buddhism pessimism or realism?

What is Nibbāna?

Can we enjoy the supreme bliss of Nibbana in this very life?

What is the Noble Path that can bring about the Noble Liberation?

The enjoyment of Dhamma excels all enjoyments.

May the Dhamma be with you!

Dr. Mehm Tin Mon

## **INTRODUCTION**

**Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa**

Homage to Him, the Blessed One,  
the Holy One, the Fully Enlightened One,  
perfectly enlightened by Himself.

### **The Buddha**

A unique being, an extraordinary man arises in this world for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of celestial and human beings.

Who is this unique being? He is the Tathāgata, the Exalted and Fully Enlightened One.

(Aṅguttara Nikāya, 1.22)

### **The Dhamma**

Well expounded is the Dhamma by the Exalted One, to be self-realized, with immediate fruit, inviting investigation, worthy of being borne in mind and body,

to be comprehended by the wise (ariya), each for himself.

(Majjhima Nikāya, 1.37)

### **• The Cause for being Drifted in Saṃsāra**

Thus has it been said by the Buddha, the Enlightened One:-

"It is through not understanding, not realizing four things, that I, bhikkhus, as well as you, had to wander so long through this round of rebirths. And what are these four things? They are:

- 1 The Noble Truth of Suffering (Dukkha);
- 2 The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (Dukkha-samudaya);
- 3 The Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering (Dukkha-nirodha);
- 4 The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Extinction of Suffering (Dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-patipada).

(D.16)

### **The Supreme Enlightenment**

"As long as the absolutely true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths was not quite clear in me, so long was I not sure that I had won the supreme Enlightenment which is unsurpassed in all the world with its heavenly beings, evil spirits and gods, amongst all the hosts of ascetics and priests, heavenly beings and men.

"But as soon as the absolute true knowledge and insight as regards these four Noble Truths had become perfectly clear in me, there arose in me the assurance that I had won that supreme Enlightenment unsurpassed."

(S.LVI.11)

### **The World is enchanted with Pleasure**

The Buddha made this remark about the world:—

"And I discovered that profound Truth to be so difficult to perceive, difficult to understand, peaceful, sacred and sublime. It is not to be gained by mere reasoning, and is only visible to the wise.

"The world, however, is given to pleasure, delighted with pleasure, enchanted with pleasure. Truly, such beings will hardly understand the law of conditionality, the Dependent Arising (Paticcasamuppāda) of everything; incomprehensible to them will also be the end of all formations, the forsaking of every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving, detachment, extinction, Nibbāna.

"Yet there are beings whose wisdom eyes are only a little covered with dust; they will understand the Truth."

(M.26)

### **The First Sermon**

Two months after his full enlightenment, in the cool evening of the full-moon day of July, at the time

when the sun was just setting in the west and the moon was just rising in the east, the Buddha delivered his first discourse to the Five Ascetics known as *Pañcavaggīs* in the Deer Park (Migadāya Forest) near Vārānaśī, India.

This first sermon is known as "*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*", meaning "the Discourse on Turning the Wheel of Dhamma." In this discourse the Buddha presented the Essence of his Teachings and laid down the Foundation of all his later Teachings. That Foundation is the most important Universal Truths known as the "Four Noble Truths."

*"Dve' me bhikkhave antāpabbajitena na sevitabbā"*

"These two extremes, bhikkhus, should not be followed by one who has gone forth from worldly life."

So did the Buddha begin his sermon. Therein, his voice spread all over ten thousand world systems. Knowing that the Buddha had started preaching the Dhamma, millions of devas and brahmins from ten thousand worlds came to listen to this first discourse.

### **The Two Extremes**

What are the two extremes? One extreme is indulgence in desirable sense pleasure, which is low, vulgar, unprofitable, practised by worldlings but not by noble persons. The other extreme is self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble and unprofitable.



The Bodhisatta had enjoyed the best sensual pleasure as a prince until he renounced the world at the age of 29. And he knew that indulgence in sense pleasure was low, vulgar, practised by many, and that it would never lead to higher knowledge.

He also practised the severest form of self mortification called "*Dukkaracariya*" for six long years. Again he discovered that this practice was just painful, ignoble, unprofitable and that it would not lead to higher knowledge.

### **The Middle Path**

"O bhikkhus, avoiding both these extremes, the Tathāgata (Buddha) has realized the Middle Path. It produces vision, produces knowledge, leads to calm, to higher knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

"And what is that Middle Path, O bhikkhus, that the Tathāgata has realized? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely: Right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration."

By avoiding the two extremes and following the Middle Path, the Buddha gained vision and special knowledge; he could eradicate all defilements; he could understand the four Noble Truths penetratively;

he attained Arahatta Fruition and supreme Omniscience and became a Fully Enlightened Buddha.

(Patisambhidāmagga, Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta)



## **THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH THE NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING**

### **What is Suffering?**

"This, O bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkha*): Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the unloved or unpleasant condition is suffering; separation from the beloved or pleasant condition is suffering; not to get what one desires is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering."

### **What is Birth (*ĵātī*)?**

The genesis of mental and physical entities in a new existence is called birth. The continuous arising of mental and physical entities inside the mother's womb or in an egg shell, the gradual development of organs

and sense bases, being conceived and confined tightly in a narrow space and being delivered from the womb with great pain are also designated as birth.

### **What is Ageing (*jarā*)?**

The decay of beings; their becoming aged, frail, grey, wrinkled; the falling of their vital force and physical strength; the wearing out of the senses – this is called ageing.

### **What is Death (*marana*)?**

The departing and vanishing of beings; their destruction, the completion of their life-span, the cutting off of the vital force, the cutting off of mental and physical entities, the dissolution of the groups of existence, the discarding of the body – this is called death.

### **What is Worry or Sorrow (*soka*)?**

It is the worry or sorrow that arises from the concern for the safety of one's life, shelter and property or for the safety and comfort of one's wife, children and beloved ones. One worries that one's property, wealth, position, authority, beloved ones, etc., may be lost.

### **What is Lamentation (*paridava*)?**

When one's cherished property, wealth, position, authority and beloved ones are lost, one is stricken by

grief and one wails and laments. Wailing and the act of wailing; the state of woe and lamentation – this is called lamentation.

### **What is Bodily Pain (*dukkha*)?**

The bodily pain and the unpleasantness of the body such as stiffness, aches, soreness, feeling hot or cold, the painful and unpleasant feeling produced by bodily impression – this is called bodily pain.

### **What is Grief (*domanassa*)?**

The mental pain and mental unpleasantness such as dislike, depression, hate and fear, the painful and unpleasant feeling produced by mental impression – this is called grief.

### **What is Despair (*upāyāsa*)?**

When one encounters great loss or misfortune (*byasana*) such as loss of relatives, loss of property, loss of health, loss of morality and loss of right view, distress and despair arise in one's mind. This distressfulness or desperation produced by excessive mental agony is called despair.

### **What is the Suffering of Association with the Undesirable and the Unloved?**

In this world when one comes into contact, meet, associate and mix with the unloved and undesirable

visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily contacts and mind objects, and also when one comes into contact, meet, associate and mix with persons who desires for one's ruin, downfall, pain and danger, one experiences suffering. This is called the suffering of association with the undesirable and the unloved.

### **What is the Suffering of Separation from the Desirable and the Loved?**

In this world when one fails to come into contact, meet, associate and mix with the loved and desirable visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily contacts and mind objects, and also when one is separated from one's parents, brothers, sisters, friends and relatives who wish one to gain benefits, to be prosperous, to be free from pain and danger, one experiences suffering. This is called the suffering of separation from the desirable and the loved.

### **What is the Suffering of not getting what one desires?**

To beings subject to birth there comes the desire: "How nice will it be if we were not subject to birth, and birth were not before us!" In spite of this desire, we cannot stop birth from coming to us. This is the suffering of not getting what one desires.

Similarly to beings subject to ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair,

there comes the desire: "How nice will it be if we were not subject to these things and these things were not before us!" But this cannot be got by mere desiring. This is the suffering of not getting what one desires.

Not to get the things that we want daily and to see that our wishes are not fulfilled are also suffering.

### **How, in brief, are the five Aggregates of Attachment suffering?**

The five aggregates of attachment are the corporeality group, the feeling group, the perception group, the group of mental formations and the group of consciousness that are attached by craving (*taṇhā*) and the wrong view (*ditṭhi*).

Each being is made up of these five groups of attachment. All that really exist in the thirty-one planes of existence are just these five aggregates of attachment. These five aggregates arise dependent on conditions and dissolve very rapidly and incessantly. Since these five aggregates are impermanent, arising and dissolving very rapidly, they are really suffering.

(Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pāli; Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta)

### **Comment and Argument**

All living beings are subject to birth, ageing and death. No one can escape from the suffering of birth, ageing and death.

While they are alive, they encounter occasionally or frequently worry or sorrow, lamentation, bodily pain, mental pain or grief and despair. They also have to associate with the unloved and the undesirable and to separate from the loved and the desirable. There are also many occasions when their desires and wishes are not fulfilled. So it is undeniable that they are also subject to these types of suffering.

Now the mental and physical entities that make up the five aggregates of attachment which in turn represent a being are arising and dissolving at every moment. These phenomena can be observed by the well concentrated mind in insight meditation. Thus to be tortured constantly by the rapid dissolution of the cherished aggregates of attachment really amounts to suffering.

So we cannot deny the twelve types of suffering enumerated by the Buddha. But, while we are alive, we also have the chances to separate from the unloved and the undesirable, to associate with the loved and the desirable, to get what we desire, and to enjoy sensual pleasure. Aren't these enjoyments pleasant and joyful? Shouldn't they be designated as happiness (*sukha*) instead of suffering (*dukkha*)?



### The profound Meaning of Dukkha

The meaning of the Pāli word '*dukkha*' is profound. It cannot be translated adequately into an English word or into an equivalent word of any other language. In Sanskrit, it is called '*du-kha*' meaning literally 'hard to bear'.

In ordinary usage '*dukkha*' means 'suffering, pain, sorrow, grief, misery'. These are the opposites of the meanings such as 'happiness, pleasantness, pleasure, ease, comfort' for '*sukha*'.

The word '*dukkha*' as it appears in the first Noble Truth represents a broader meaning than 'suffering' as it describes broadly the Buddha's perspective of life and the world. In addition to the meaning 'suffering', it also includes such meanings as 'unsatisfactoriness, impermanence, imperfection, emptiness, lack of essence, and insubstantiality'.

(Dr. Rewala Dhamma: The First Discourse of the Buddha, 56)

### Three Kinds of Dukkha

When the Buddha preached a sermon, he always examined the state of perfection, the aptitude for understanding his discourse and the inclination of his listeners. In expounding the *Dhammacakka Sutta* to the Five Ascetics (*Pañca Vagga*), the Buddha described

the four Noble Truths just briefly, because the listeners were quite advanced in fulfilling the ten perfections.

Later on, he reexpounded the four Noble Truths in many occasions. In *Sutta Patheyya* and other *Suttas*, he elaborated *dukkha* into three kinds.

1 **Dukkha dukkha** – The obvious type of ordinary suffering.

The eleven types of suffering, starting from the suffering of birth to the suffering of not getting what one desires, expounded in *Dhammacakka Sutta*, are all the obvious types of suffering known as *dukkha dukkha*.

All forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering, belong to *dukkha dukkha*.

2 **Vipariṇāma dukkha** – the suffering due to change.

A happy feeling, a happy condition in life, is not permanent, not everlasting. It changes sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain and suffering.

What people think to be happiness generated from association with the beloved and the desirable, separation from the unbeloved and the undesirable, getting what one desires and

enjoying sensual pleasure does not last long. It turns to mental suffering as soon as conditions change. So it belongs to *viparināma dukkha*.

### 3. **Sāṅkhārā dukkha** – the suffering due to conditioning

It is the type of suffering associated with constant effort to relieve discomfort, pain, sickness, hunger, thirst, sense desires, etc. We have to take care and exert constant effort to protect ourselves from heat and cold, from insect bites, etc.

Hunger and thirst are the greatest diseases that can never be cured throughout our life.

*Sabbe sāṅkhārā dukkhā*

*"All conditioned things are suffering."*

All conditioned things are nothing but physical and mental entities. They constitute the five aggregates of attachment, being attached by craving and wrong view. These five aggregates arise and dissolve constantly. Conditions or causes condition the five aggregates to arise. The five aggregates exist only while the causes exist. They cease to exist when the causes dissolve. To be constantly conditioned by causes is suffering. The dissolution of aggregates is also suffer-

ing. Having to be alive with the impermanent five aggregates is very worrisome and dreadful like living in a collapsing old building.

### **What Sense Enjoyment really is**

Worldlings are very much fond of and attached to sense enjoyment, thinking that such enjoyment gives them real happiness. All animate and inanimate sense objects, if we look at them analytically, are by nature disgusting and loathsome.

However, the ignorance (*avijjā* – a mental factor) blinds over vision not to see their true nature and deceives us to think they are persons, objects, beautiful and desirable. *Ditthi* (wrong view – another mental factor) takes these to be true and believes that they really exist and are desirable. So craving (*taṇhā* or *lobha* – another mental factor) likes them and craves for them.

When we come into contact with these sense objects, pleasant feeling arises and we enjoy this feeling with joy (*pīti*), attachment (*lobha*), wrong vision (*moha*) and wrong view (*ditthi*) because we make the unwise reflection that the sense objects are beautiful and desirable. If we make wise reflection that the sense objects are in reality not beautiful and not permanent, unwholesome mental states (*moha*, *ditthi*, *lobha*) will not arise.

Again the pleasant sensation, joy and enjoyment last just for a short moment. Then they dissolve and disappear. Since we become attached to them and crave for them, we exert constant effort to enjoy them again and again.

Now to exert constant effort to enjoy sensual pleasure again and again is suffering; the dissolution of the pleasant sensation and joy is suffering; to be burnt with the fire of greed (*lobha*) and the fire of ignorance (*moha*) while we enjoy the sensual pleasure is suffering; to be burnt with the fire of anger (*dosa*) and the fire of ignorance (*moha*) when our sense desires are not gratified inspite of our constant effort is also suffering.

Therefore, if we reflect carefully with the knowledge of the Dhamma, sense enjoyment is really suffering.

### **The Delightfulness of Sensuality**

The Buddha looked at everything realistically and objectively. He said in *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa*) with regard to enjoying the senses in daily life, that we should clearly understand three things:

- 1 the delightfulness of sensuality or sense enjoyment (*assāda*),

- 2 the evil consequences of sensuality (*ādhava*),
- 3 the freedom or liberation from sensuality (*nissarana*).

Sensuality refers to the five senses—visible object, sound, smell, taste and tangible object. The pleasant sensation, joy and happiness that arise from contact with these sense objects represent the delightfulness of sensuality.

### **The evil Consequences of Sensuality**

To enjoy sense pleasure, money is needed. To get money, one has to acquire an education or skill and has to work or find ways and means to earn money. In spite of his effort, if he fails to realize his expectation or fails to get enough wealth and property, he is stricken with sorrow, grief, fatigue, and suffering.

If, because of his effort and hard work, he acquires some wealth and property, he has to be concerned with their safety and has to guard them against five enemies – viz. water, fire, ruler, thief and unbeloved ones. This gives rise to fatigue and suffering. If, in spite of his effort, his property is lost, he experiences great sorrow, lamentation, despair and suffering.

Again on account of sensuality, one has to argue and quarrel with others; some resort to stealing and robbing; some even wage wars causing many to die.

And after death, many are cast into woeful abodes because of sensuality.

This mass of the present suffering and the suffering after death are the evil consequences of sensuality that arise on account of sensuality.

### **The Freedom or Liberation from Sensuality**

If one can abandon the desire for sensuality and eradicate that desire, one shall gain liberation from sensuality. To eradicate craving completely, we must walk along the Middle Path and undertake insight meditation.

The freedom from the entanglement of craving – *tanhā* means the freedom from all suffering and the enjoyment of peace and happiness.

### **Illustration of the three Aspects of Sensuality**

When a handsome young man meets a beautiful maiden, they like each other and they make the effort to see each other again and again. When they fall in love to each other, they think that the world is a very splendid thing. This is the delightfulness of sensuality.

But the worldly conditions are not stable. Because of a change in conditions, if they cannot meet each other again, they will be very sad and stricken with grief. If they cannot control their minds, they might commit grievous actions.

In a play written by William Shakespeare, the world-famous play-writer, Romeo and Juliet met and fell in love with each other. They thought that their lives were very pleasant and joyful when they were together. But their parents separated them and they were stricken with grief and lamentation. As they could not stand against the vicissitudes of life, both of them committed suicide.

If they had understood about the evil consequences of sensuality and the vicissitudes of life and tried to suppress the craving for and attachment to each other by doing some beneficial work while waiting for a favourable condition, they could have relieved their grief and misery. That would be a temporary escape from sensuality and the entanglement of craving.

### **Examples of Viparibhāma Dukkha**

**Alexander the Great**, the Greek king of Macedon and one of the greatest generals of all time, conquered many lands and established a great empire in 324 B.C. But he died of a fever the next year at the young age of 33.

**Julius Caesar**, one of the most renowned military commanders in world history and Roman Statesman, while exercising dictatorial powers, was murdered in 44 B.C. by a conspiracy group.



Marc Antony, a Roman political leader and general, won the love of Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen and one of the most beautiful women in the world and ruled from Alexandria in great luxury. But, not long after, his army was defeated by the Roman army led by Octavian, and both he and Cleopatra committed suicide in 30 B.C.

Thus dominion over the whole world will not produce happiness lasting for long. Death may strike at any moment. Thus Shakespeare is correct when he says: "The head that wears the crown is uneasy."

Three puppies were playing and wrestling joyfully in front of our apartment building. A speeding car soon ran over them, killing them tragically.

A grandfather and a grandson were walking home from school along the platform of Prome Road in front of the Medical Institute where I worked. A speeding saloon car got out of control, ran over the platform and killed the grandfather and the grandson on the spot.

While I was on duty at the International Buddha Sāsana Meditation Centre at Thanlyin, Yangon, a counsellor from American Embassy and his wife came to the centre. The counsellor went to the Dhamma Hall to meditate while his beautiful wife sat waiting for him at the office parlour, smoking a cigarette.

"Madam, while you are here, won't you like to meditate?" I tried to persuade her.

"Oh, only people with trouble need meditation. I have everything I want and, indeed, I'm very happy. I don't think I need meditation. My son is also attending the New York University happily," said the lady eloquently.

Just at that moment, the telephone rang. I went to answer the phone. Then I came back to her with a sad face and said:

"Madam, I'm sorry to tell you. The American Embassy has just informed us that your son had a car collision in New York and he was seriously hurt. He was now in the hospital. The Embassy will ring us again as soon as they get further informatipn."

Before I finished speaking, the lady broke down and was very much shaken. She suddenly asked me, "What did you say? What happened to my son... Is he unconscious? Oh, it's miserable... I have to tell his father..."

Then I tried to be cheerful and said solemnly, "I beg your pardon, Madam. What I said was not true. I just said what can happen at any time. If you have undertaken meditation, when a frightening incident like the one I mentioned arises, you can handle it calmly and correctly."

"All right. I'll do meditation next time."

"I am glad, Madam."

Family happiness can be enjoyed only while favourable conditions exist; it turns to grief and despair when the conditions change to the worst.

### **Saṅkhāra Dukkha is most important**

Though *saṅkhāra dukkha* is hard to see and hard to understand, if we examine it analytically, we shall see that *saṅkhāra dukkha* is the most important key factor of the first Noble Truth.

According to the Buddha's philosophy, a being or a man is a combination of five aggregates. The five aggregates are made up of ultimate physical and mental entities. These ultimate physical and mental entities arise incessantly dependent on the corresponding conditions and dissolve incessantly. These physical and mental entities are both conditioned and conditioning.

Because the physical and mental entities have to be conditioned constantly by the corresponding causes, they are called '*saṅkhāra*'. As '*saṅkhāra*' arises and dissolves incessantly, the five aggregates also arise and dissolve incessantly. None of them are self-existing. There is nothing which does not dissolve. As these aggregates incessantly arise and dissolve and keep

changing, there is none to be designated as 'person, being, I'.

The absence of 'person, being, I', the absence of any substantial entity to be called 'atta or soul', the incessant arising and dissolving in conformity with their intrinsic nature without complying to one's wishes or commands, and the nature of not being controlled by anyone constitute the very important philosophical aspect called 'anatta or non-self'.

*"Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā."*

"All physical and mental entities are not permanent."

*"Yadaniccam taṃpidukkhāṃ" (Sam.Nikāya 2.22)*

"Whatever is impermanent is suffering." So

*"Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā"*

"All physical and mental entities are suffering."

Therefore, the Buddha described the first Noble Truth in *Dhammacakka Sutta* as

*"Saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā."*

"In brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering."

This is equivalent to saying that all forms of existences whatsoever are nothing but suffering.

### **Is Buddhism Pessimism or Realism?**

Because of the statement "all existences are nothing but suffering", some people would like to designate Buddhism as 'Pessimism'. Pessimism is the practice of not looking on the bright and good side but on the dark and bad side of things. It expects misfortune or the worst outcome in any circumstance. It is the belief that the evil in life outweighs the good and that evil will always triumph over good.

Buddhism is neither 'Pessimism' nor 'Optimism'. It is 'Realism' for it takes a realistic view of life and of the world. It looks at all things objectively. It does not falsely lull you into living in a fool's paradise, nor does it frighten and torture you with all kinds of imaginary fears and sins. It tells you exactly and correctly what you are and what the world around you is. Then it shows you the way to perfect freedom, tranquility, peace and happiness.

In diagnosing the illness of a patient, one physician exaggerates it to be very serious and gives the impression that there is no hope for curing it. Another physician, being ignorant of the illness, says: "There is no illness, no medical treatment is required." So he deceives the patient with false consolation. The first physician may be called a pessimist and the second physician, an optimist. But both of them are ignorant.

The third physician diagnoses the symptom of the disease correctly and tells the truth about the disease and its cause. Then he prescribes the right medicine and the patient is cured and happy. The Buddha is like the third physician. He knows the universal disease of the world together with its cause. He is a wise and scientific doctor (*bhisakka*) for the ills of the world. He is truly benevolent and compassionate, and he really wants beings to be free from suffering.

The Buddhists, who understand the true nature of life and of the world, accept the real worst condition of life and, therefore, they are not frightened and shaken by the normal vicissitudes of life. They can serenely and calmly solve the problems of life and live happily without any worry and anxiety.

Just as a man, who has been drifted in the wide-ocean for more than thirty days without food and water, can calmly face any situation of life calmly, so too Buddhists can confront bad situations in life serenely. The noble persons who have fully understood the four Noble Truths are the happiest persons in the world.

### **Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of Suffering**

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of suffering. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of

suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various forms of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of suffering which should be fully understood. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various forms of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of Suffering which has been fully understood. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various forms of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of suffering."

(Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta)

The three aspects of wisdom mentioned above are called *saccañāna*, *kiccañāna* and *katañāna*, respectively.

It is very important to understand the First Noble Truth clearly, because "he who sees dukkha sees also the origin of dukkha, sees also the cessation of dukkha, and sees also the path leading to the cessation of dukkha." (SV, 457) In fact, the Buddha says that he who sees any one of the four Noble Truths sees the other three as well. These four Noble Truths are interrelated.

○



## **THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING**

### **The Origin of Suffering**

"This, O bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. It is craving (*taṇhā*) which gives rise to fresh rebirth together with pleasure and attachment. It finds great delight in this and that objects of the new existence. That craving is of three kinds:

- 1 Craving for sense pleasure (*kāmatanhā*),
- 2 Craving for existence or becoming (*bhava-tanhā*),
- 3 Craving for nonexistence or self-annihilation (*vibhavatanhā*)."

Craving for sense desire is the desire for the enjoyment of five kinds of sense objects: visible object, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Craving for existence is the desire for continuous existence or eternal life, referring in particular to the life

in those higher Brahma worlds called fine material existences and immaterial existences. It is closely connected with so-called "belief in eternalism" (*Sassata-ditthi*).

Craving for non-existence is closely connected with the "belief in annihilation" (*Uccheda-ditthi*). This is the delusive, materialistic notion of the existence of an 'Ego' which is annihilated at death.

### **Where does Craving arise and take root?**

When this craving (*tanhā*) arises, where does it arise? When it takes root, where does it take root?

Wherever in this world, there are delightful and pleasurable things, there this craving arises and takes root. The eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind, through which we know delightful and pleasurable things: there this craving arises and takes root.

In this world visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily impressions, and mind objects are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving arises and takes root.

In this world the consciousness which is aware of the sense object, the contact between the consciousness and the sense object, the feeling born of the contact or sense impression, the perception which perceives the sense object, the volition that acts on its concomitants to

get the sense object, the sense desire that craves for the sense object, the *vitakka* that thinks about the object, and the *vicāra* that reflects on the object are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving arises and takes root.

(Dīgha Nikāya. Mahāvagga, Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta)

### **Craving as the Main Cause of Suffering**

In Buddhism there is no arbitrary creator who controls human destinies. Suffering and the cause of suffering are not attributable to any external agency. They can be explained by the process of life itself.

According to the Noble Truth of Suffering, life is suffering and suffering is life. Here 'life' means the 'five aggregates of attachment' and refers to a 'being'.

According to the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering, craving (*taṇhā*) is taken as the main cause of suffering. *Taṇhā* and *rāga* refers to the mental factor 'lobha'. *Lobha* has characteristics: 'craving' and 'attachment'. As an ultimate reality, it never relinquishes these characteristics.

Craving (*taṇhā*) craves for and attaches to gold, money, wealth, property, luxury, official position, authority, sense objects, mind objects, ideology, etc. So it urges people to struggle in many ways to possess these things. Such struggle means suffering. If, in spite

of hard struggle, people fail to get them, they are stricken with sorrow and grief. If they succeed in acquiring them, they have to worry for the safety of these things and guard them. This is also suffering. If, inspite of their effort to guard their possessions, these things are lost, they are in great despair.

The desire of greed (*lohba*) or craving (*tanhā*) can never be satisfied. The more it gets, the more it wants. It is like drinking salty sea water: the more we drink, the more thirsty we feel. As the flame grows bigger when we put more fuel into it, so too the sense desire grows stronger as we enjoy more sense pleasure. To be always hungry and thirsty for sensuality is real suffering.

The Bodhisatta, in the existence of the universal monarch Mandhātu, had the ability to rain down gold coins and silver coins for poor people. But he noticed that he could never satisfy the desires of the people. So he remarked: "Even the whole wealth on earth cannot satisfy a man's greed."

"The world is enough for everyone's need, but not enough for one man's greed," said Mahatama Gandhi.

I once read an interesting story in "Readers' Digest". A wearied traveller was crossing a desert under the scorching noon sun. He lost all tracks because of

sand storms and he was so tired that he could hardly lift his legs.

At that moment two guardian angels passed over him. One angel took pity on this wearied traveller and would like to help him. The other angel cautioned him, saying: "This short-eared human being will never be satisfied however much you may help him."

Anyway, the good-natured angel created an oasis with green grass and a pond full of clear water with date palms surrounding the pond.

On seeing the oasis the traveller was overjoyed. He drank water and ate the dates to his heart's content. Then he lied down on the green grass, enjoying great bliss as if he was in heaven. But he thought: "I have travelled on this desert several times. I have never seen an oasis. This oasis must have been created by an angel. I'll ask for one more thing from this good-natured angel."

So he called out: "My dear friend angel, I thank you heartily for creating this oasis for me. But now I feel that I need one more thing. Will you please send me a female angel to be my companion?"

Thereupon, the second angel reminded his friend, "Didn't I say that these short-eared human beings are never satisfied however much they get?"

"You are right," said the first angel and revoked his power. The oasis disappeared and the traveller had to walk wearily again on the desert under the scorching sun.

Thus worldlings are never satisfied however much they have as they are under the influence of craving. Philosophers agree that a dissatisfied person can never be truly happy.

Because of dissatisfaction and selfish desire, people commit theft, robbery, rape, quarrel and even wage world wars to cause many unpleasant things in the world. Thus greed or craving causes much suffering in the present life.

### **Attachment is the Cause of Suffering**

The second characteristic of greed or craving (*lobha*), that is attachment, also causes a lot of suffering. The nature of attachment of greed is described in Abhidhamma with the example of the monkey-catching glue or birdlime.

A hunter wanted to catch a monkey which lived on a tall tree. He heated several types of gum together to make a very sticky glue. He applied the glue on tree trunks with a stick. When the sun rises and the sun rays fall on the gum, multicolours are radiated from the gum.

The very inquisitive monkey came down from the tall tree and touched the gum. One hand of the monkey got stuck to the gum. The monkey pushed with the other hand and that hand also got stuck. The monkey kicked with its two legs in struggling to get loose and the legs also got stuck. Then the hunter came and caught the monkey easily.

People are firmly attached to their wives, husbands, sons and daughters, houses and cars, etc., with craving. So they are bound to these things with the ropes or fetters of craving. They cannot escape from this bondage. Because of this strong bondage, they cannot go to meditation centres to meditate for a long time. So they cannot escape from the round of rebirth and have to drift along in *samsāra*.

When one of our beloved ones falls seriously ill or suffers great pain, we also feel very worried and sad. If that person dies, we inconsolably weep, lament and grieve over the death of that person. This great suffering obviously arises out of attachment to that person for we feel indifferent when we hear the illness and death of unknown people.

**Visākhā** of Sāvatti, who was a stream winner (*sotāpanna*), had 20 sons and daughters, 4000 grand children and 8000 great grand children. One day she

came to the Buddha at noon with her hair and clothes wet with water. She said that she came back from the cemetery for the funeral of one of her beloved grand children and that she could not console herself for the great loss.

When the Buddha asked her if she knew the reason for her great despair, she admitted that she did not know. The Buddha pointed out that it was due to the attachment to her dead grand child.

Then the Buddha asked Visākhā if she would like to have more beloved grand children, as much as the population of Sāvatti; she replied "Yes".

Again the Buddha asked: "How many people die daily in Sāvatti?" Visākhā replied that many died every day.

"If your grand children died as many as that daily, will you have the chance to stop crying?" asked the Buddha.

Now Visākhā understood that she wouldn't have the chance to stop weeping. So she said that she would not take any more grand children. Craving or greed is as terrible as that.

While I was studying at high school, I learned a poem with the title "The forsaken merman." It describes a man who fell in love with a mermaid and



who was waiting for her return with great expectation. He had been waiting for so long that days and months had passed and the winter had started to set in. All the leaves had fallen from trees; all the grass had withered, and no birds sang any more. The cold winter wind kept him trembling. The mermaid did not return, yet the man could not depart from that place. He was certainly going to die because of his strong attachment to the mermaid.

In the world many heart-broken lovers are laid in bed without any appetite to eat or drink. Some commit suicide. Some people who are financially ruined also commit suicide. How great is the suffering caused by the attachment due to greed or craving in this very life!

*From craving springs grief; from craving springs fear;*

*For him who is wholly free from craving,  
there is no grief, much less fear.*

*(Dhammapada 216)*

### **Craving is the Origin of Rebirth**

Craving and attachment (*taṇhā*) is the most powerful force causing not only various forms of suffering in this very life, but also the continuation of existence. It builds and rebuilds new existences over and over again. Life depends on the desire and craving for life.

It is easy to understand how craving (*taṇhā*) causes various forms of suffering in the present life. But it is not so easy to understand how craving conditions a new existence to arise. Only when it is explained by means of the **Doctrine of Dependent Arising** (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*) can it be understood reasonably and rationally.

In the famous Doctrine of Dependent Arising, the Buddha describes eleven cause-effect relations to explain the round of rebirth process of all beings in the universe.

**According to the Doctrine of Dependent Arising:**

Dependent on ignorance arise kamma formations;

Dependent on kamma formations arises resultant consciousness;

Dependent on resultant consciousness arise mind-and-matter';

Dependent on mind-and-matter arise six internal bases;

Dependent on six internal bases arises contact with six kinds of sense objects;

Dependent on contact (*phassa*) arises feeling (*vedanā*);

Dependent on feeling (*vedanā*) arises craving (*taṇhā*);

Dependent on craving (*taṇhā*) arises clinging (*upādāna*);

Dependent on clinging, arise kamma formations and rebirth process;

Dependent on kamma formations arises birth (in future existence);

Dependent on birth arise ageing-and-death, worry, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

Thus arises the whole mass of suffering.

*Avijjā* is the mental factor '*moha*' which shields the mind so that we do not know the true nature of life and of the world. It also covers the ultimate realities which are the most basic natural entities that really exist in nature. It also makes us ignorant of the nature of impermanence (*anicca*), the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), the nature of non-self (*anatta*) and the nature of loathsomeness (*asubha*) of the ultimate realities. It also shields the causal relations of Dependent Arising and the Law of Kamma and its effect.

*Avijjā* not only shields the mind to be ignorant of the true nature of life and of the world but also deceives the mind to have the wrong vision. It deceives the mind to see 'non-self' (*anatta*) as 'self, person, I' (*atta*); to look at impermanence (*anicca*) as permanence (*nicca*); to regard suffering (*dukkha*) as happiness (*sukkhā*); and to see what is disgusting (*asubha*) to be beautiful (*subha*).

As *avijjā* deceives the mind in this way, greed (*taṇhā*) craves for sensuous objects and continuous existence. The mental factor '*ditṭhi*' (wrong view)

regards this combination of physical and mental entities as 'I', 'you', 'person'. The mental factor '*māna*' (conceit) looks on this self-person as 'I'm the best, I know most, I'm the prettiest'. The mental factor '*ahirika*' (moral shamelessness) urges a person not to be ashamed of committing immoral actions, and the mental factor '*anottappa*' (moral fearlessness) urges one not to be afraid of committing immoral actions. So ignorance (*moha*) is the leader of immoral mental factors.

In the past existence, living beings perform both wholesome deeds and unwholesome deeds under the influence of ignorance (*avijjā*). When wholesome deeds are performed, wholesome minds arise by many billions and when they dissolve, they leave behind billions of wholesome kamma in the mental stream. When unwholesome deeds are performed, unwholesome minds arise by many billions and when they dissolve, they leave behind billions of unwholesome kamma in the mental stream. Thus dependent on ignorance (*avijjā*), billions of kamma called *saṅkhāra* arise.

When a person dies in the past existence, of the many kammās called *saṅkhāra*, one wholesome kamma or unwholesome kamma has the chance to bear results. So it gives rise to resultant consciousness (the result of

kamma). The first resultant consciousness initiates the rebirth process and consequently it is called rebirth consciousness. The successive resultant consciousnesses perform the life continuum process, and so they are known as life continuum (*bhavaṅga cittas*). This process explains how kamma formations produce resultant consciousness.

**Table 1: Causal Relations between three successive Existences**

Period	12 Factors	20 Models, 4 Abridgements
Past Existence	1 Avijjā (ignorance) 2 Saṅkhāra (Kamma-formations) (wholesome+unwholesome kmmas)	Kammabhava (Kamma process) 5 Past Causes: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10
Present Existence	3 Viññāna (Resultant consciousness) 4 Nāmarūpa (mind-and-matter) 5 Saḥāyatana (six internal sense bases) 6 Phassa (contact) 7 Vedanā (Feeling)	Upapattibhava (Rebirth process) 5 Present Effects: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
	8 Taṇhā (craving) 9 Upādāna (Clinging: lobha + ditṭhi) 10 Kammabhava (kamma-formations)	Kammabhava (Kamma process) 5 Present Causes: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10
Future Existence	11 Jāti (Rebirth) 12 Jarāmāraṇa (Ageing-Death)	Upapattibhava (Rebirth process) 5 Future Effects 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

When resultant consciousness arises, the mental factors (*nāma* or mental entities) that associate with the consciousness and kamma-born corporeality (*kammaja rūpa*) also arise simultaneously. Since the Buddha described one effect arising from one cause in the Doctrine of Dependent Arising, he expounded that dependent on *saṅkhāra* (kamma), resultant consciousness arises; and dependent on resultant consciousness, mind-and-matter (*nāma-rūpa*) arises.

When all mental and physical entities arise, the six sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) also arise. This cause-effect relation is described as "mind-and-matter causes six internal bases to arise."

Now when the six sense bases, also known as the six sense-doors, arise, the six sense objects, which always exist externally, will strike and appear in the corresponding sense doors. Then eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness arise together with the contact (*phassa*) between the mind and the sense object, and the feeling (*vedanā*) that arises on account of the contact. Thus the Buddha describes: "Dependent on six internal bases arises contact" and "Dependent on contact arises feeling."

When a pleasant sense object strikes a sense door, pleasant feeling arises and craving (*taṇhā*) takes delight in it. When an unpleasant sense object strikes a sense door, unpleasant feeling arises and again craving longs for pleasant feeling. So the Buddha said, "Dependent on feeling arises craving."

When one experiences the pleasant feeling again and again, one develops clinging (*upādāna*) to the pleasant feeling. In order to enjoy that pleasant feeling more and more, one performs new actions developing kamma formations which will again condition rebirth process to arise in the future.

When rebirth process takes place, it begins with birth (*jāti*). When birth arises, ageing (*jāra*), death (*māraṇa*), worry (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), bodily pain (*dukkha*), grief (*domanassa*), and despair (*upāyāsa*) follow suit. Thus arises the whole mass of suffering:

Although the Buddha described by eleven cause-effect relations the relationship of only three successive existences – namely, the immediate past existence, the present existence and the future existence, the relationship can be extended to infinity both forward and backward. Therefore, we can understand that all beings are drifting life after life in *samsāra* from time immemorial to an indefinite time in the future. The



beginning of each being cannot be known, neither can the end of each being be foreseen.

Craving (*taṇhā*) forms an important link among the causal relations of the Doctrine of Dependent Arising which conditions the arising of new existence and the mass of suffering repeatedly. Dependent on craving, arises clinging (*upādānā*); dependent on clinging arises kamma formations which condition the new existence and the mass of suffering to arise again. Therefore, the Buddha's statement that craving gives rise to fresh rebirth and the mass of suffering is correct.

As the causal relations of the Doctrine of Dependent Arising explain in detail the repeated arising of the new existence together with the mass of suffering, they can be also regarded as a detailed explanation of the Second Noble Truth.

### **The Beginningless and Endless Round of Misery**

Inconceivable is the beginning of this *samsāra*; not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings, who obstructed by ignorance, and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

(S.XV.3)

There will come a time when the mighty ocean will dry up, vanish, and be no more. There will come a time

when the mighty earth will be devoured by fire, perish, and be no more. But yet there will be no end to the suffering of beings, who, obstructed by ignorance, and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths. (S.XXII.99)

Which do you think is more: the flood of tears, which weeping and wailing you have shed upon this long way – hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths, united with the undesired, separated from the desired – this, or the waters of the four oceans?

Long have you suffered the death of father and mother, of sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters. And whilst you were thus suffering, you have indeed shed more tears upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

Which do you think is more: the streams of blood that, through your being beheaded, have flowed upon this long way, these, or the waters of the four oceans?

Long have you been caught as robbers, or highway men or adulterers; and through your being beheaded, verily more blood has flowed upon this long way than there is water in the four oceans.

But how is this possible?

Inconceivable is the beginning of this *samsāra*; not to be discovered is any first beginning of beings,

who, obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving, are hurrying and hastening through this round of rebirths.

(S. XV.13)

And thus have you long undergone suffering, undergone torment, undergone misfortune, and filled the graveyards full; truly, long enough to be dissatisfied with all the forms of existence, long enough to turn away and free yourself from them all. (S.XV.1)

### **The Craving that takes Delight in the new Existence**

Craving builds a new existence again and again and whatever existence it has built, whether the existence of an animal or the existence of a human or celestial being, it always takes delight in it. Because craving takes delight in the new existence and in sense objects, new existences are formed continuously.

Once King Assaka ruled Patali City in Kāsi country. His chief queen, Upari Devi, was very beautiful, and so she was very much loved and adored by the king. However, she was ill and she died while still young. As the king loved and adored her very much, he had her corpse immersed in oil in a glass coffin and gazed at the corpse constantly.

A hermit who possessed supernormal power arrived at the royal garden of the king. He asked the gardener to inform the king that he could tell where the

dead queen was reborn. The king went to the garden with his entourage.

The hermit told the king that his dead chief queen was reborn as a cow-dung beetle in that garden. The king would not believe it, saying that his intelligent queen must have been reborn in a celestial abode.

The hermit, by his supernormal power, asked the beetle to come out of the big stone-slab where the king and his former chief queen had sat together on several occasions. The female beetle came out following a male beetle.

The female beetle said that she was the chief queen of king Assaka in her past existence; but now she had died from that existence and become a female beetle; so she and the king were in different existences and they did not belong to each other any more. She added that she was very happy to be with her new husband, the male beetle, and that, as she loved and adored him so much that, if possible, she would like to feed the blood from king Assaka's throat to her new beloved husband.

The king was convinced that the female beetle was indeed the new existence of his dead chief queen. He was also very angry at the female beetle's words and so he gave order to burn the queen's corpse immediately. On his return to the palace, he chose a new chief queen and lived happily.

Thus craving gives rise to fresh rebirth, and bound up with pleasure and lust, now here, now there, finds ever fresh delight.

### Defilements are the Causes of Suffering

Again craving (*tanhā*) or greed (*lobha*) is a defilement (*kilesa*) and it works in unison with other defilements. A defilement is an immoral mental factor which defiles, debases, inflicts and burns the mind. There are ten defilements.

*Lobha (tanhā, rāga)* - desire, craving, attachment

*Dosa (paṭigha)* - anger, hatred, ill will

*Moha (Avijjā)* - ignorance of the ultimate realities, delusion

*Māna* - pride; conceit

*Ditthi* - wrong view

*Vicikicchā* - sceptical doubt

*Thina* - sloth

*Uddhacca* - restlessness of the mind

*Ahiraika* - moral shamelessness

*Anottapa* - moral fearlessness

The Buddha also referred to these defilements as the cause of suffering.

*Lobhā*, *dosa* and *moha* are the worst worldly fires. *Lobha* is called '*tanhā*' in the sense of desire or

attachment and 'rāga' in the sense of craving or taint or defilement. The Buddha said:

**"Natthi rāga samo aggi"**

"There is no fire as hot as rāga."

Craving is indeed the hottest fire that is burning all worldlings.

### **Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering**

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the origin of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the origin of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the origin of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the origin of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the origin of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, which should be abandoned. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the origin of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the origin of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the origin of suffering, the insight

that penetratively sees the truth of the origin of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the origin of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, which has been abandoned. Thus concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the origin of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the origin of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the origin of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the origin of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the origin of suffering."

(Patisambhidāmagga Pāli, Dhammacakkapavattana Vāra)



## **THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE EXTINCTION OF SUFFERING**

### **What is the Cessation of Suffering?**

"This, O bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Extinction of Suffering. It is the complete fading away and extinction of this craving, forsaking and abandoning craving, liberation and detachment from craving."

But where may this craving be abandoned, where may it become extinct? Wherever in the world there are delightful and pleasurable things, there this craving should be abandoned, there it will become extinct.

In this world visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily impressions, and mind objects are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving should be abandoned, there it will become extinct.

In this world the consciousness which is aware of the sense object, the contact between the consciousness



and the sense object, the feeling born of the contact or sense impression, the perception which perceives the sense object, the volition that acts on its concomitants to get the sense object, the *vitakka* that thinks about the object, and the *vicāra* that reflects on the object are delightful and pleasurable: there this craving should be abandoned, there it will become extinct.

(Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga, Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta)

Be it in the past, present, or future, whosoever of the monks or priests regards the delightful and pleasurable things in the world as impermanent (*anicca*), miserable (*dukkha*), and without a self (*anatta*), as diseases and dangers, it is he who abandons craving.

(S. XII. 66, Sammasana Sutta)

### **The Cessation of Suffering and Nibbāna**

According to the third Noble Truth there really is the cessation of *dukkha* or suffering. So there really is the emancipation and liberation from the round of suffering.

For *dukkha* or suffering to cease completely, the main cause or root of suffering must be cut off. The main cause or root of suffering is craving (*lobha*). So craving must be uprooted and cut off.

When craving, the cause of suffering is uprooted and destroyed, the effect of the cause, that is suffering,

will cease completely. This cessation of suffering means the emancipation and liberation from suffering.

When the main cause of suffering, that is craving, is totally eliminated, all defilements that inflict, torture, burn and aggravate the mind are also totally eliminated. Therefore, the mental stream is free from all taints, defilements, inflictions and suffering and it will be serene, peaceful and blissful. . . These serenity (*sāṇi*), peace (*santi*) and bliss (*sukha*) describe the nature of Nibbāna. Nibbāna has the characteristic of eternal peace and bliss called '*Santisukha*.'

"O monks, the whole world is in flames," says the Buddha. "The eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind are in flames. The visible object, the sound, the smell, the taste, the touch and the thought are in flames. The eye-consciousness, the ear-consciousness, the nose-consciousness, the tongue-consciousness, the body-consciousness, the mind-consciousness and the associated contacts and feelings are in flames.

"By what fire are they kindled? By the fire of lust (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*); by the fire of birth (*jāti*), old age (*jarā*), death (*marāṇa*), sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*parideva*), pain (*dukkha*), grief (*domanassa*), and despair (*upāyāsa*) are they kindled."

(Saṃyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana Vagga, Āditta Sutta)

Since the extinction of these flames means the extinction of suffering, and the cessation of suffering is called Nibbāna, one may infer that the extinction of these flames is Nibbāna. It is said so in Saṃyutta Nikāya:

*"The extinction of greed (lobha), the extinction of hatred (dosa) and the extinction of delusion (moha); this is called Nibbāna."*

*(Saṃyutta Nikāya 38.1)*

However, 'the end goal' that one aims for should be differentiated from the 'means' that is employed. Here the extinction of the flames is the 'means', and Nibbāna is the 'end goal'. One must not thereby infer that Nibbāna is nothing but the extinction of the flames of greed, anger and delusion.

Nibbāna is also referred to by such terms as the extinction of thirst (*taṇhākkhaya*), the unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*), the extinction of lust (*virāga*), the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), etc.

*"O bhikkhus, what is the Asaṅkhata (unconditioned)? It is, O bhikkhus, the extinction of lust (rāgakkhaya), the extinction of hatred (dosaṅkhaya), the extinction of illusion (mohaṅkhaya). This, O bhikkhus, is called the Asaṅkhata."* (S. IV, 359)

"O Rādha, the extinction of thirst (taṇhākkhayo) is called Nibbāna." (S.III, 190)

"O bhikkhus, whatever there may be things conditioned or unconditioned, among them detachment (virāga) is the highest. That is to say, freedom from conceit, destruction of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of continuity, the extinction of thirst (taṇhā), detachment from it and its cessation, Nibbāna, is the noblest." (A'II, 34)

In Sanskrit, Nibbāna is called 'Nirvāna' which is composed of 'nir' and 'vāna'. 'Nir' implies to be 'free from' and 'vāna' means 'tailor, sewing or weaving.' Just as a tailor sews pieces of cloth together, so too craving acts as a cord to connect a series of lives of an individual in the course of wanderings in *Samsāra*— the eternal cycle of birth and death.

As long as one is entangled by craving, one accumulates fresh *kammās* which will give rise to new birth and death repeatedly. When all forms of craving are annihilated by the fourfold knowledge of the Path, reproductive kammic forces cease to operate and one escapes from the cycle of birth and death. Then one is said to attain Nibbāna.

The Buddhist concept of 'Deliverance or Liberation' is this escape from the ever recurring cycle of birth and death and all the misery associated with them.

### **The Two Aspects of Nibbāna**

In Buddhas and Arahants, all defilements including craving have been totally annihilated by the fourfold Path Wisdom. So their mental stream is free from suffering and is endowed with the unique peace and happiness constantly. This element of Nibbāna which is enjoyed while they are alive although the kamma-born corporeality and resultant mental aggregates are still remaining is called '*Sa-upādisesa Nibbāna.*'

After the Buddhas and Arahants have passed away, all kamma-born corporeality and resultant mental aggregates cease to exist. But the element of Nibbāna that they have enjoyed continues to exist for ever. This element of Nibbāna which continues to exist for ever without any kamma-born corporeality and resultant mental aggregates is called '*Anupādisesa Nibbāna.*'

*Sa-upādisesa Nibbāna = Kilesa Parinibbāna, i.e. the Nibbāna that is attained by the annihilation of defilements.*

*Anupādisesa Nibbāna = Khandha Parinibbāna, i.e. the Nibbāna that is attained by the annihilation of kamma-born corporeality and mental aggregates.*

### Three Modes of Expressing Nibbāna

#### 1 Suññata Nibbāna

Nibbāna is devoid of lust, hatred and ignorance; it is also devoid of corporeal group and mental groups. Since defilements as well as corporeal group and mental groups do not exist in Nibbāna or they are zero (suññata) in Nibbāna, Nibbāna is called '*Suññata Nibbāna.*'

#### 2 Animitta Nibbāna

Material objects which are composed of subatomic particles called *rūpa kalāpas* have forms and shapes. Mental groups which are composed of consciousness and mental factors may be assumed to have some kind of form and shape for they can be seen by certain persons who possess the supernormal power called *cetopariya abhiññāna*. Nibbāna, however, has no such form and shape (*nimitta*). Thus it has the name *Animitta Nibbāna.*'

#### 3 Appaṇihita Nibbāna

Nibbāna should not be desired by lust. There are neither mental and physical entities nor form and shape to be craved for by lust or craving (*taṇhā*). Neither is

there any lust or craving in Nibbāna. Nibbāna is absolutely free from lust as well as from the hankerings of lust. So it acquires the name '*Appanīhita Nibbāna*'.

### **The Summum Bonum of Buddhism**

According to the Third Noble Truth, when the origin of suffering 'craving' is totally eradicated, suffering also totally ceases to arise in the mental stream. Then the mental stream is totally free from suffering and only the unique peace and happiness exist in the mental stream. This unique peace and happiness is known as Nibbāna.

Nibbāna has the characteristic of '*santisukha*'—*eternal peace and happiness*.

Nibbāna is the ultimate and noblest goal of Buddhism. In almost all other religions the summum bonum can be attained and enjoyed only after death. The summum bonum of Buddhism can be realized and enjoyed in this very life.

If the practical training for the systematic eradication of defilements including craving — that is known as the Noble Eightfold Path — is correctly undertaken and practised strenuously, Nibbāna can be realized sooner or later and the Nibbāna bliss can be enjoyed in this very life. The Buddha's teaching is the teaching that can be practically tested and verified by one's own experience.

There are four stages of realizing and enjoying the bliss of Nibbāna. Any person who undertakes the Eightfold Noble Practice must first maintain pure morality and then develop concentration by tranquility meditation. When he attains the right concentration, he can proceed to insight meditation known as Vipassanā to know the true nature of the ultimate physical and mental entities that make up mind and body. When he attains the first Path Wisdom, this wisdom uproots and destroys two defilements known as personality belief (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*) and sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*). This wisdom also destroys the gross qualities of other defilements that can condition rebirth in woeful abodes. So future rebirth in woeful abodes is totally prevented.

The person who attains the first Path Wisdom and its Fruition Wisdom becomes a '*stream enterer*' which is the first stage of Sainthood known as Sotāpanna. He can enjoy the Nibbāna bliss as much as he likes with his Sotāpaṭṭi Fruition Wisdom. He will not be reborn more than seven times in the sense sphere. He will never be reverted to a worldling again. He will proceed to Nibbāna.

If the stream enterer undertakes insight meditation again, he will become a 'once returner' called *sakadāgāmi* when he attains the second stage of Path



Wisdom called *Sakadāgāmi Maggañāna* and its Fruition called *Sakadāgāmi Phalañāna*. Compared to a stream enterer, the once-returner has less defilements, and so he is nobler. He can enjoy the Nibbāna bliss as much as he likes with his *Sakadāgāmi Fruition Wisdom*. He will not be reborn more than once in the sense sphere. So he is known as a *Sakadāgāmi*, literally meaning 'once-returner'.

If the once returner undertakes insight meditation again, he will become a 'non-returner' called *anāgāmi* when he attains the third stage of Path Wisdom called *Anāgāmi Maggañāna* and its Fruition known as *Anāgāmi Phalañāna*. The *Anāgāmi Maggañāna* eliminates the anger defilement (*dosa-kilesa*) and the two fetters – sense desire and ill will. So the non-returner will no longer experience anger, hatred, worry, grief, lamentation, fear, alarm, and unpleasant mental feeling; neither will he enjoy sense pleasures.

He can enjoy the Nibbāna bliss as much as he likes with his *Anāgāmi Fruition Wisdom*. If he does not become an Arahant in the present existence, he will be reborn in a Brahma realm after death. He will attain Parinibbāna from the Brahma realm. He is called a non-returner (*Anāgāmi*) because he will not be reborn in the sense sphere.

If the non-returner undertakes insight meditation again, he will become an 'Arahant', the fourth stage Noble Person, when he attains Arahatta Maggañāna. This fourth stage Path Wisdom eliminates all remaining defilements and fetters. So all the fires of defilements are extinguished in him. Unwholesome minds and all mental pain will not arise in him. He does not regard anything as his own and so he is not attached to anything. As he is not attached to anything, he does not have any worry whatsoever. Only eternal peace and happiness – *Santisukha* – will exist in his mind.

Since an Arahant's mind is completely pure, he is one of the noblest persons. He is a true Saint worthy of respect by men and gods (*devas*) and worthy of alms which are brought from afar or which are specially prepared for guests or which are offered to him with the intention of enjoying the benefits in future existences.

An Arahant, literally meaning a worthy one, does not perform fresh kammic activities, and he is not subject to new rebirth because all reproductive forces have been completely destroyed in him. He now stands on heights higher than celestial, far removed from uncontrolled passions and the defilements of the world. He will attain Parinibbāna at the end of the present existence.

Thus the noble practice that can lead to the noblest life and to the attainment of the matchless Nibbāna bliss in this very life exists in Buddhism. If one strenuously undertakes this noble practice, one will penetratively understand well the Noble Truths which are the noblest universal truths and really achieve the noblest life and enjoy the matchless Nibbāna bliss.

### **Various Descriptions of Nibbāna**

The Buddha defined Nibbāna in both positive and negative terms. But Nibbāna is neither positive like mental and physical entities nor negative, for the idea of positive and negative are relative and dualistic whereas Nibbāna is an absolute reality and beyond duality and reality.

A well-known synonym for 'Nibbāna' or '*Nirvāna*' is 'Freedom' (Pāli: *Mutti* or *Vimutti*). '*Nirvāna*', '*Mutti*', '*Vimutti*' or 'Absolute Freedom' is freedom from all evil, freedom from craving, hatred and ignorance, freedom from all terms of duality, relativity, time and space. Nobody would say that 'freedom' is negative.

We still have the chance to get some understanding about what Nibbāna is from the positive and negative terms used to define Nibbāna. In his first sermon 'Dhammacakka discourse', the Buddha described

Nibbāna by the word "cessation of suffering" (*dukkha nirodha*).

Some positive terms used to define Nibbāna are 'peace' (*santi*), 'peacefulness' (*sīti*), 'sublimity' (*pañña*), 'purity' (*visuddhi*), 'liberation' (*vimutti*), 'security' (*khema*), 'excellent happiness' (*paramasukha*), 'the noblest dhamma' (*anuttaram*), 'the permanent' (*dhuva*), 'the island' (*dīpa*), 'the shelter' (*tāna*), 'the refuge' (*lena*).

Some negative terms used to define Nibbāna are 'the deathless' (*amatam*), 'beyond death' (*accutam*), 'the unconditioned' (*asankhata*), 'extinction of craving' (*tanhakkhaya*), 'extinction of hatred' (*dosakkhaya*), 'extinction of delusion' (*mohakkhaya*), 'cessation of suffering' (*dukkha nirodha*), 'supramundane dhamma' (*lokuttara dhamma*), 'the other shore' (*pāra*), 'without calamity' (*anītika*), and 'without suffering' (*avyāpajjha*).

(S.IV, 360-372)

These terms cannot fully express the true meaning of Nibbāna which cannot be experienced by the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body as we enjoy the five senses. For those who delight in sensual pleasures it is difficult to imagine what the matchless bliss of Nibbāna is which is much superior than sensual pleasures. Nibbāna remains elusive to those who would only seek to comprehend it by thinking and

reasoning (atakkavācaro). There is no term in the human vocabulary to express Nibbāna exactly.

A well-known fable about a fish, who was acquainted only with water, arguing with a turtle should be mentioned here.

"Once upon a time there lived a fish in a lake. As it had lived all its life in water, it knew nothing about land. One day it met a turtle of its acquaintance who had just returned from a little excursion on the land."

"Good day, Mr. Turtle!" said the fish. "I've not seen you for a long time. Where have you been?"

"Oh, I have just been on dry land for a trip," said the turtle.

"On dry land!" exclaimed the fish. "What do you mean by that? There is no dry land. I had never seen such a thing."

"Well," said the turtle amusingly. "If you think so, of course you may. But that's where I've been, all the same."

"Oh, come," said the fish. "Try to talk sense. Just tell me now what is this land of yours like? Is it all wet?"

"No, it is not wet," said the turtle.

"Is it fresh and cool?" asked the fish.

"No, it is not fresh and cool," replied the turtle.

"Is it clear so that light can come through it?"

"No, it is not clear. Light cannot pass through it."

"Is it soft and yielding so that I can move my fins in it?"

"No, it is not soft and yielding. You cannot swim in it."

"Does it move or flow in streams?"

"No, it neither moves nor flows in streams."

"Does it ever rise up into waves with white foams?" asked the fish impatiently.

"No! It never rises up into waves," replied the turtle truthfully.

"Well then, your dry land is nothing. It does not really exist," exclaimed the fish triumphantly.

"Well, well," said the turtle. "You may think as you like for you have never seen dry land. But any one who knows what is water and what is land would say that you are just a silly fish, for you think that anything you have never known is nothing just because you haven't known it."

"And with that the turtle turned away and, leaving the fish behind in the lake, set out on another excursion over dry land."

This amusing story shows that neither can the turtle, who is acquainted with both land and water, explain to the fish the real nature of land, nor can the fish

understand the land since it is acquainted only with water.

Similarly Arahants, who are acquainted with both the mundane and the supramundane, cannot explain to a worldling what exactly Nibbāna is in mundane terms, nor can a worldling understand Nibbāna with his mundane knowledge.

### **Nibbāna is not 'Nothingness'**

Nibbāna does not have any form or shape or mass to be perceived by the five sense faculties. Neither does Nibbāna have any physical entities or mental entities. Besides Nibbāna cannot be comprehended by purely intellectual reasoning because it is not a matter to be arrived at by logical reasoning. It is beyond the field of reasoning (*atakkavācāro*). Also when an Arahant passes away, no existence is formed as the reproductive kammic force ceases to operate. On account of these facts, some come to the conclusion that Nibbāna is "nothingness".

Now to say that Nibbāna is 'nothingness' simply because we cannot perceive it with the five senses is as illogical as to say that light does not exist simply because the blind do not see it. On the full-moon night, the moon must be in the sky. Just because it is shielded by thick layers of clouds and invisible to us, we cannot

say that the moon does not exist. If the layers of clouds are blown away by the wind, we can surely see the moon.

In the same way, we cannot see Nibbāna because our mind is shielded with defilements. When all defilements are eradicated by the fourfold Path wisdom, Nibbāna becomes as distinct as the full moon.

Nibbāna is a supramundane dhamma with the characteristic of eternal peace and supreme bliss (*santisukha*). It is an objective reality (*vatthu dhamma*) that can be realized by noble persons (*Ariyas*). It can be observed clearly by the knowledge of the four Paths and the four Fruitions.

When scientists say that there are millions of bacteria in a drop of blood of a malaria patient, we cannot see the bacteria if we look at the blood drop with naked eyes. We cannot say that the bacteria do not exist just because we cannot see them. If we look at them through a microscope, we can see them clearly. Similarly Nibbāna should be observed, not by naked eyes, but by wisdom eye which has the power to see Nibbāna.

In Buddhist cosmology the Buddha described thirty-one planes of existence, including a "Realm of



Nothingness" (*Akiñcaññāyatana bhūmi*). But he did not say that Nibbāna is a realm of nothingness.

In Udāna Pāli the Buddha describes Nibbāna as follows:

"There is, O bhikkhus, Nibbāna, the unborn (*ajāta*), unoriginated (*abhūta*), unmade (*akata*) and unconditioned (*asañkhata*). If, O bhikkhus, there were not this Nibbāna, the unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned, an emancipation from the five aggregates, the born, originated, made and conditioned, would not be possible. As there is Nibbāna, the unborn, unoriginated, unmade, and unconditioned, an emancipation from the five aggregates, the born, originated, made and conditioned, is possible.

(Third Nibbāna Paṭisamyutta Sutta)

Because Nibbāna is expressed in negative terms, some think that it is negative and it means self annihilation. Nibbāna is not self-annihilation, because there is no self to be annihilated. Rather, Nibbāna is the annihilation of craving (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*) and the false perception of 'self or ego' (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). Nibbāna does not signify nothingness. Nibbāna is an Ultimate Absolute Truth or Reality, incomprehensible to worldlings. It is the domain of

noble persons only, and is realized by the wisdom of their own experience (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*).

### Verification of Nibbāna

The Buddha himself has declared that the Dhamma that he expounded is endowed with six unique attributes which are open to investigation by any interested person.

The Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One (*svakkhāto bhagavatā dhammo*) because:

- it can be seen and realized by oneself (*sanditthiko*);
- it yields immediate results to those who practise it (*Akaliko*);
- it is worthy of inviting others to come and see it (*Ehipassiko*);
- it is worthy of being perpetually practised and borne in mind (*Opañeyyiko*);
- it can be directly experienced by the wise, who have seen the Dhamma, each one for himself (*Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*).

The Dhamma is well expounded and well proclaimed by the Buddha because it is natural, logical and delightful, and because it can eradicate completely the causes of suffering such as lust, anger and delusion, and consequently liberates one from suffering to enjoy the

supreme bliss of Nibbāna eternally starting from this very life.

The Dhamma is well proclaimed because it produces a course of practice which conforms to Nibbāna, and Nibbāna which conforms to the practice. In accordance to this statement the Sakka said:

"Well declared by the Exalted One to his disciples is the way leading to Nibbāna. He unites Nibbāna with the Way. Just as Ganges water unites with, flows with, Yamuna water, so is the way, leading to Nibbāna well declared by the Blessed One to the disciples. He unites Nibbāna with the Way." (M.i, 492)

The Dhamma can be seen and realized clearly by an ardent person if he undertakes strenuously the noble Practice leading to Nibbāna. As he walks along the noble Path, he can see vividly with his powerful concentrated mind-eye the ultimate realities (*nāma-rūpa*) which make up mind and body. As he understands the nature of these ultimate realities, he will develop insight knowledge step by step until he attains the Path Wisdom and the Fruition Wisdom which will enable him to understand fully the four Noble Truths and realize Nibbāna vividly.

When one has successfully completed the Noble Practice, one can see the whole Path vividly as one has

trodden the Path up to Nibbāna. So the Noble Path is visible here and now since it can be seen by a noble person himself when he has done away with greed, anger, delusion, etc., in himself. So the Noble Path is *Sanditthika* – that is, it can be seen and realized by oneself.

In accordance with the above statement, the Buddha said:

"Brahman, when a man is lustful, overcome by lust, and his mind is obsessed by greed, then he thinks for his own affliction, he thinks for other's affliction, he thinks for the affliction of both, and he experiences mental suffering and grief.

"When greed has been abandoned, he neither thinks for his own affliction, nor thinks for other's affliction, nor thinks for the affliction of both, and he does not experience mental suffering and grief. This, Brahman, is also how the Dhamma is visible by oneself here and now." (A.i. 156)

Moreover, the most supreme ninefold Supramundane Dhamma consisting of Fourfold Path-wisdom, Fourfold Fruition-wisdom and Nibbāna can be seen and realized vividly by oneself, since anyone who has attained it can see and realize it vividly with his

reviewing wisdom (*paccavekkhanañāna*) without his having to rely on faith in another.

The Dhamma yields immediate results to those who practise the Dhamma; the Fruition-wisdom follows the Path-wisdom immediately without delay. So the Dhamma is *Akālīka* – that is, yielding immediate results without delay.

The Dhamma is so distinct, pure and delightful that it is worthy of inviting others to come and see it. So it is *Ehipassika*.

The Dhamma is so serene and blissful that it is worthy of perpetually borne in mind. So it is *Opaneyyika*.

"The nine Supramundane Dhamma is so serene, peaceful and blissful that it should be borne in mind perpetually. This Dhamma is worth developing in one's mind subjectively by undertaking the Noble Practice without any question of whether or not one's clothing or one's head is on fire."  
(A.iv, 320)

The ninefold Supramundane Dhamma can be directly experienced by all the wise who have penetratively seen and understood the Dhamma. So the Dhamma is '*Paccattam vedītabbo viññūhi*' – that is, it can be directly experienced by noble persons, each one for himself.

The noble persons can directly experience the Dhamma, each in himself, thus: "The Path has been developed, Fruition attained, and cessation which is Nibbāna realized, by me."

What is meant here is that the persons who have not eradicated defilements cannot realize the Nibbāna realized by noble persons. The Supramundane Dhamma is not visible in the way that an ornament on another's head is, but rather it is visible only in one's own mind. Therefore, the Supramundane Dhamma is not the province of foolish worldlings.

(Visuddhimagga, translated by Nāṇamoli, pp.230-235)

As the Buddha has declared boldly, the Dhamma has been verified by countless noble persons by their direct knowledge and their experience throughout the ages. Thus any upright person, who wants to know the true characteristics and bliss of Nibbāna, should undertake the Noble Practice without further questioning and without delay. By undertaking this Noble Practice, one has nothing to lose but will enjoy peace and happiness from the very beginning up till the end, because it is the noble, blameless and praise-worthy way of living.

Isn't the attainment of real, lasting happiness right here in this very life the final goal of all beings? The Buddha has given us his guarantee and assurance in

many ways that we shall surely attain the highest goal by ardently following the Noble Practice.

We should put away the questions which queries what is beyond Nibbāna because there is nothing beyond Nibbāna as Nibbāna is the ultimate Absolute Reality. What we need to do now is to strive for the realization of Nibbāna and then experience it and examine it whether it is satisfactory or not. We can abandon it if we find it to be dissatisfactory. Indeed, there is no one so far who has abandoned it after realizing it.

With regard to the true nature of Nibbāna, we have an amusing story in Myanmar. The Myanmar king Bagyi Daw (1819-37 A.D.) was a learned person. One day he asked his learned minister Paw Oo about Nibbāna, saying: "Paw Oo, I've read a lot of Buddhist scriptures, yet I do not understand what Nibbāna really is. So you go through the Buddhist Canons thoroughly and explain to me the true nature of Nibbāna exactly."

Minister Paw Oo replied respectfully: "Your Majesty, I have already searched for the true meaning of Nibbāna in the Buddhist Canons when I was a monk. But I too could not understand what Nibbāna really is. I then relinquished my monkhood and returned home. I visited my old acquaintants, the two sisters by the names of Tha Hlout and Jarout, early that night. When

I approached their house, the lights were off, but I could hear the two sisters chatting quietly among themselves. The elder sister asked: 'My younger sister, since you've been married once, could you tell me how enjoyable it is to be married?'

"The younger sister replied: 'My elder sister, I cannot tell you exactly what it is like to be married. If you want to know it very much, why don't you get married yourself?' At that moment, I understood what Nibbāna is, your Majesty."

"Well, Paw Oo, what has the marriage of the two sisters to do with Nibbāna?' enquired the king.

"What the young sister said was correct, your Majesty. As we can know the taste of marriage only when we are married, so too can we know exactly the true nature of Nibbāna only when we undertake the Noble Practice steadfastly to realize Nibbāna by our direct knowledge."

"Well, you gave a very logical answer to my question', remarked the king."

Thus, if we want to know the true nature of Nibbāna, we should take the advice of Minister Paw Oo. From the above discussion of the causes and effects about Nibbāna, we should sincerely believe that the bliss of Nibbāna, which can be experienced in this very



life, is the matchless, best and noblest bliss. Therefore, we should gladly and earnestly undertake without delay the Eightfold Noble Practice that leads to Nibbāna and that can be incorporated in our daily routine.

### **Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering**

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the cessation of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the cessation of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the cessation of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, which should be realized. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the cessation of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the cessation of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the

darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the cessation of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, which has been realized. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the cessation of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the cessation of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the cessation of suffering."

(Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāli, Dhammacakkapavattana Vāra)



**THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH  
THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE PATH LEADING TO  
THE EXTINCTION OF SUFFERING**

**What is the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering?**

"This, O bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering. It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path consisting of the right understanding, the right thought, the right speech, the right action, the right livelihood, the right effort, the right mindfulness, and the right concentration."

This Noble Path is also known as 'the Middle Path', because it avoids the two extremes of

- 1 giving oneself up to indulgence in sensual pleasure, which is base and practised by villagers and worldlings but not by noble persons, and which is unholy and unprofitable, and

- 2 giving oneself up to self-mortification, which is painful, unholy and unprofitable."

"Bhikkhus, the Middle Path, discovered by the Buddha after he had avoided the two extremes, produces vision, produces knowledge, eliminates defilements, leads to higher knowledge, to enlightenment and to Nibbāna."

The Middle Path is essentially the "Path of Purification," that is, purifying the mind from the taints of defilements (*kilesas*). 'Liberation' in Buddhism means freedom from all kinds of mental impurities and freedom from the bondage of greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). In order to achieve liberation, we must develop the Noble Eightfold Path.

This Path is made up of eight factors which are mental factors that associate with wholesome minds (*kusala cittas*). They can be developed together by undertaking the Noble Threefold Training of morality, concentration and wisdom in conformity with the Noble Path. When they are fully developed, they produce the Path wisdom and its Fruition wisdom which realizes Nibbāna. In the Path consciousness, the mental factors which represent the eight factors of the Path are well developed and they successfully form a Path that leads to Nibbāna.

Therefore, there should be no doubt about the ability of the Noble Eightfold Path to lead to Nibbāna.

### **The Explanation of the Path Factors**

#### **1 The Right Understanding (*Sammāditthi*)**

What, O bhikkhus, is the right understanding?

To understand suffering, to understand the origin of suffering, to understand the extinction of suffering: this is called right understanding. (*Dīgha Nikaya, 2.312*)

So the right understanding means the understanding of the four Noble Truths. We should strive to acquire some knowledge of the four Noble Truths, at least as much as they are described in this book. Only then shall we understand our true situation and the true nature of our existence, and we can develop the sense of religious urgency to walk along the Noble Path without delay. We should also learn some practical aspects of the Noble Path so that we can incorporate the noble practice in our daily routine.

According to the Commentaries (*Āṅguttara* and *Uparipannāsa Atthakathās*), The right understanding consists of six kinds:

- (i) Right understanding of kamma and its effect (*kammassakata sammāditthi*).

- (ii) Right understanding of meditative absorptions (*jhāna sammāditthi*),
- (iii) Right understanding of the true nature of conditioned things (*vipassanā sammāditthi*),
- (iv) Right understanding of the Path and the four Noble Truths (*Magga sammāditthi*),
- (v) Right understanding of the Fruition of the Path wisdom (*Phala sammāditthi*), and
- (vi) Right understanding of reobservation of the Path and its Fruition (*Paccavekkhanā sammāditthi*).

Thus, first of all, we must understand kamma and its effect. Kamma is volitional action which comprises bodily action, verbal action and mental action. Those actions which cause harm to oneself or to others are ignoble, blameworthy and likely to produce bad effects. These actions are designated as unwholesome actions (*akusala kamma*). Killing sentient beings, stealing others' property, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, speaking harshly, speaking frivolously, covetousness, ill will and false view are unwholesome actions. They represent "unwholesome course of action" (*akusalakammamārga*) and will condition re-birth in woeful abodes.

Restraining oneself not to commit these ten evil actions leads to ten wholesome actions (*kusala kamma*) which are noble, blameless and likely to produce good effects. They represent "wholesome course of action" (*kusalakammapatha*) and will condition rebirth in blissful abodes such as human realm and celestial realms.

There are also ten bases of meritorious actions (*puñña-kiriya vatthu*) which produce good effect and which should be done by all means. Of these ten kinds of meritorious deeds, giving alms, sharing one's merit with others and rejoicing in other's merit are designated as the *Dāna* group. Observing five moral precepts or sabbath precepts, reverence to elders and holy persons, and service in wholesome deeds are designated as the *Sīla* group. Listening to Dhamma discourses or learning the Dhamma, expounding or teaching the Dhamma, tranquility and insight meditation and keeping right view belong to the *Bhāvanā* group. We should always strive to perform these meritorious actions as much as possible.

Undertaking tranquility meditation and insight meditation makes one mindful of meritorious deeds and concentrate one's mind on wholesome objects, developing wholesome consciousness repeatedly. So

it is a very beneficial and blissful way of living. If one reflects repeatedly on a tranquility-meditation subject as taught by the Buddha, one can develop access absorption (*upacāra jhāna*) or meditative absorption called *rūpāvacara jhāna*. This *jhāna* focusses the mind firmly on the meditation subject and purifies the mind to be free from all defilements such as greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). So the mind is very calm, tranquil, peaceful and blissful. The mind becomes very powerful and radiates very bright and penetrative light.

The *jhāna* consciousness penetrates the veil of darkness caused by *moha* (*avijjā*) and enables the meditator to penetrate through the body to see the internal organs such as liver, lungs, heart, intestines, etc. When he penetrates these organs further to observe the characteristics of the four major elements, namely, the element of extension (*pathavī*), the element of cohesion (*āpo*), the element of heat (*tejo*) and the element of motion (*vāyo*), the organs break into billions of tiny particles called *rūpakalāpa*. With the guidance of the teacher, the meditator can investigate the ultimate physical entities that make up the tiny particles. He can also investigate his mental stream and the mental factors (*cetasikas*) that make up each mind. So he will



possess the special power to know the ultimate physical and mental entities as they really exist.

The right understanding of meditative absorptions (*jhānas*) is called *jhāna sammādit̥ṭhi* and the right understanding of the true nature of the ultimate mental and physical entities is known as *vipassanā sammādit̥ṭhi*.

After discerning the ultimate physical and mental entities, the meditator investigates the causes which produce these entities. Then he reflects on the three characteristics, namely, impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*), of the ultimate physical and mental entities. After developing the ten stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāna*), the Path wisdom (*Magga-ñāna*) arises, discerning the four Noble Truths penetratively. Then, without any lapse of time, the Fruition consciousness arises, taking Nibbāna as its object. After that, the reviewing consciousness which reviews the Path, its Fruition and Nibbāna arises. Therefore, the right understanding of the Path (*Magga sammādit̥ṭhi*), the right understanding of the Fruition of the Path (*Phala sammādit̥ṭhi*), and the right understanding of re-observation of the path and its Fruition arise step by step.

## 2 The Right Thought (*Sammāsankappa*)

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right thought?

The thought free from sensuous desire  
(*nekkhamma-sankappa*),

the thought free from ill will (*abyāpāda sankappa*),

and the thought free from cruelty (*avihimsa  
sankappa*):

this is called the right thought."

(*Dīgha Nikāya* 2.312)

Whenever we think of performing a meritorious deed, or while we are mindful of performing a meritorious deed, our thoughts are free from sensuous desire, ill will and cruelty. So we have the right thought. That is the reason why the Buddha advises his disciples not to be forgetful but to perform meritorious deeds until they can complete the important task of purifying their minds.

Our thought actually represents the mental factor called *vitakka* whose function is to apply the mind to various sense objects. If it applies the mind to a movie, we shall think about that movie with sensuous desire to enjoy it. If it applies the mind to an enemy, we shall develop unwholesome thoughts towards that enemy. To whatever sense object *vitakka* applies our mind, it will initiate a thought process thinking about that

sense object. So *vitakka* is said to have the nature of initiating a thought process.

In undertaking moral training we restrain our bodily actions and verbal actions from committing immoral deeds and prevent covetousness (*abijjhā*) and ill-will (*byāpāda*) from arising in our minds. So we keep our minds pure and focussed on meritorious actions.

When we undertake tranquility meditation such as recollecting the attributes of the Buddha or radiating loving-kindness to all living beings so that they are free from enmity and suffering, we exert the effort to apply our minds to the meditation subject again and again so that we can focus our minds on it and are mindful and aware of it continuously. By so doing, we keep our minds to be free from evil thoughts.

In insight meditation (*vipassanā*), we exert strenuous effort to keep our minds focussed on the ultimate physical and mental entities and to let *vitakka* apply the mind repeatedly to those ultimate entities. Only when *vitakka* applies the mind continuously to the ultimate physical and mental entities, can the wisdom (*paññā*) investigate and understand their true nature and their common characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*).

### 3 The Right Speech (*Sammāvācā*)

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right speech?

It is the avoidance of telling lies, the avoidance of slandering, the avoidance of harsh speech, and the avoidance of frivolous talk. Bhikkhus, the avoidance of these four unwholesome speeches is called the right speech."  
(Dīgha Nikāya 2.312)

The abstinence from unwholesome speeches which may harm any living being is the essence of right speech. When an occasion arises for one to speak falsely, to slander, to use abusive language, or to chatter uselessly, if we restrain ourselves from doing so, we are establishing the practice of speaking rightly.

Indeed, to develop the right speech, we should strive to speak only what is true and to speak it gently and politely. Sweet and gentle words win the friendship of all. We should say only what is beneficial to ourselves and to others and which will promote harmony among all beings. The objective of speaking rightly is to lay the foundation of the Noble Practice firmly.

When people keep their promises and speak rightly, vegetables and grains are in abundance and full of taste and nutrition. Even trees, creepers, leaves and herbs bear medicinal properties.

In ancient days a king by the name of **Brahmadatta** ruled his country righteously. He disguised himself as an ordinary citizen and went around to enquire about the true situation of his country. He found his country to be peaceful and prosperous.

When he came to a hermit's monastery, the hermit entertained him with some banyan fruits. Finding the fruits to be large, tasty and nutritious, the king asked the hermit for the reasons.

"When the king and the citizens live righteously, fruits and grains are well developed, tasty and nutritious. When they do not live righteously, fruits and grains are poor in quality, tasteless and devoid of nutrition."

The king wanted to test the hermit's remark. He stopped ruling his country in accordance with the ten precepts incumbent on a king. Then, as described by the Buddha in **Adhammika Sutta**, because the king did not abide by good conduct, his ministers and officials did not also abide by good conduct. Because the ministers and officials lost good conduct and lived unrighteously, all the citizens also abandoned good conduct and lived unrighteously.

When the king and the citizens lived unrighteously, the climate and the weather became irregular and there

was no rain in the rainy season. Because of the severe drought, food became scarce and the calamity of famine set in. Because of severe malnutrition, people fell ill and died. Weak people were possessed by ogres, demons and ghosts and they fought one another with swords, spears and other weapons. So many citizens died on account of the three catastrophes, namely, famine, epidemic diseases and war.

The king disguised himself as a hunter and went to the hermit's monastery which was outside the city. The hermit could entertain the king with only a few tiny, stunted banyan fruits. The fruits tasted acrid, bitter and awful. When the king asked for the reasons, the hermit replied: "The king and the citizens lived unrighteously."

Having seen the results of unrighteous living, the king again ruled his country righteously and his country again became peaceful and prosperous.

An elder Arahant Theri coughed and unintentionally spat out some saliva with phlegm onto the platform of a pagoda. The bhikkhunī Ambapālī stepped on it and carelessly remarked: "Which prostitute has spat out this saliva?" As she had committed a serious wrong against an Arahant, she had to suffer in hell in her next existence and had to serve as a prostitute for ten thousand existences.

People speak unbeneficial and vain talk usually with the intention of passing the time joyfully. So only unwholesome consciousness arises during the talk, giving rise to numerous unwholesome kammās. Speaking vainly wastes one's precious time as well as others' precious time. It also causes us to forget our duty to perform meritorious deeds.

Therefore, "The person who speaks the fruitless and flavourless frivolous talk many times will be reborn in hell or the realm of animals or woeful ghosts after his death. Even the lightest and smallest frivolous talk will bring the bad effect of causing others to dislike his talk," said the Buddha in *Ducarita vipāka* discourse.

#### 4 The Right Action (*Sammākamanta*)

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right action?"

It is the avoidance of killing, the avoidance of stealing, and the avoidance of the misuse of the senses. O bhikkhus, the avoidance of these three bodily evil actions is called the right action." (*Dīgha Nikāya* 2.312)

The abstinence from unwholesome actions which may harm any living being is the essence of the right action. When an occasion arises for one to kill any sentient being or to steal or take illegally others' property or to misuse the senses such as committing

sexual misconduct, if one restrains oneself from doing so, one is establishing the practice of doing the right action.

Bodily actions and verbal actions are based on mental volition or intention (*cetanā*) which acts on its concomitants (consciousness and mental factors) to bring about the actions. When the intention is good, the action is wholesome; when the intention is bad, the action is unwholesome. Unwholesome bodily actions and evil speeches are usually performed by immoral consciousness which is obsessed by the defilements – greed, anger and delusion. So we should be careful to prevent such evil mental states from arising in our minds.

On the other hand, we must develop loving-kindness, compassion and consideration for others to avoid killing, stealing and the misuse of the senses. Reciprocally, by being mindful to avoid these unwholesome actions, we can develop these good qualities to grow in our minds and keep our minds free from coarse, vulgar and violent defilements.

An Arahant bhikkhunī, **Dhamma Dinnā**, told her co-residents that in one of her previous existences she killed a young goat raised in her home and cooked its meat for her husband and a special guest. The reason



why she dared to kill the goat mercilessly was that her religious belief taught her that animals were created by the Creator for human consumption and that it was not wrong to kill them. That teaching was not correct for she was cast down to hell at death and then she was reborn as animals as many times as there were hairs on the body of the young goat she had killed. In all these animal existences, she was killed by being cut at the throat.

A girl by the name of Ma Htay was born with two fleshy lumps on her head like the two horns of a calf in Inbin village, Tatkone township, Middle Myanmar. Ma Htay could tell correctly her two past existences – her immediate past existence of a female buffalo and her second past existence of Daw Mya. So Dr. Ian Stevenson from Virginia University, U.S.A., came to Myanmar to interview Ma Htay.

In the existence of Daw Mya, she hired some workers to cultivate a plot of land on a hill-side. When she gave them wages, she paid Ma Thein Tin, a thirteen-year old girl, only half the wage, because the girl was young. Ma Thein Tin's mother pleaded with Daw Mya to give a full wage to her daughter as her daughter had worked as much as she did. But Daw Mya refused to give the wage that Ma Thein Tin deserved to get.

After that, Ma Thein Tin grew up and got married. When Daw Mya died, she became a buffalo in Ma Thein Tin's farm. The buffalo gave birth to four calves and then died. On the night when the buffalo died, Ma Thein Tin dreamed that the buffalo came to her and gave her its flesh. She became pregnant and, in due course, gave birth to Ma Htay. To be born as a buffalo and to serve the person whom one had cheated by holding back half her wage was a pathetic case indeed.

The kammic results of immoral actions are very terrible indeed. Therefore, the person who knows kamma and its effect should abstain from committing evil actions. The objective of avoiding immoral actions is to lead a blameless and noble life and to establish firmly the moral foundation of the Noble Path.

### 5 The Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*)

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right livelihood?"

O bhikkhus, in this teaching, the disciple who is a noble person avoids a wrong way of living connected with three bodily evil actions and four evil speeches and makes his livelihood by a right way of living. This is called the right livelihood." (Dīgha Nikāya 2.312)

When one's means of earning a living is based on committing any one of the three bodily evil actions and

the four evil speeches, that way of earning a living is called a wrong livelihood. If one avoids unwholesome bodily actions and evil speeches for one's means of living, it is called a right livelihood.

In Majjhima Nikāya (No.117), it is said: "To practice deceit, teachery, soothsaying, trickery, usury: this is wrong livelihood."

And in Ānguttara Nikāya (V.177), it is said: "Five trades should be avoided by a disciple:- trading in arms, in living beings, in flesh, in intoxicating drinks, and in poison."

Essentially a wrong livelihood means earning one's living through unlawful or unwholesome means, such as killing, stealing, cheating or hurting some living beings. A right livelihood means earning one's living through lawful, wholesome and blameless means which cause no harm to any living beings.

The objective of establishing a right livelihood is to lead a blameless and noble life and to lay the moral foundation of the Noble Path firmly.

## 6 The Right Effort (*Sammāvāyāma*).

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right effort?"

Here, in this teaching, a bhikkhu develops his wish, exerts his effort, strives strenuously, and rouses

his mind to discard evil, unwholesome things which have already arisen, to prevent evil, unwholesome things not yet arisen from arising,

to bring about the arising of wholesome things which have not yet arisen, and

to maintain wholesome things already arisen and not to let them disappear but to bring them to growth, to maturity and to the full perfection of development.

O bhikkhus, this is called the right effort.

(Dīgha Nikāya 2.312)

The well-exerted, right effort is called the Supreme Effort (*Sammappadāna*). There are four types of Supreme Effort and their essential element is *virīya cetasika* present in 21 wholesome moral minds (*kusala cittas*).

The four supreme efforts are as follows.

- 1 The effort to dispel unwholesome things that have arisen in our minds

The unwholesome things that have arisen in our minds are the unwholesome mental factors such as greed, anger, delusion, pride and wrong view, and immoral actions. We must exert the effort to dispel these unwholesome things quickly.

- 2 The effort to prevent unarisen unwholesome things from arising

We must be always mindful to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome things such as greed, anger, pride and wrong view. We must also exert the effort not to perform the ten evil actions known as bad conduct (*ducarita*).

### 3 The effort to bring about the arising of unarisen wholesome things

We must exert constant effort to develop in our minds the powers and the faculties such as faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom and also other enlightenment factors (*Bodhipakkhiya*). We must fulfil generosity or alms-giving, morality or virtue and meditation till they are complete. We must also strive strenuously to develop the supramundane Path consciousness which has never arisen in our minds in the long *samsāra* (round of rebirths).

### 4 The effort to maintain, strengthen and develop wholesome things which have already arisen

We must strive on to maintain, strengthen and develop the Powers (*Balas*), the Controlling Faculties (*Indriyas*), the Path Factors which constitute morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), and the constituents of Enlightenment (*Bojjhaṅgas*).

### 7 The Right Mindfulness (*Sammāsati*)

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right mindfulness?"

Here, in this Teaching, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the nature of corporeality in the material aggregate ardently, clearly comprehending, and mindfully, removing covetousness and grief in the world; he dwells contemplating the nature of feeling in the feeling aggregate; he dwells contemplating the nature of consciousness in the consciousness aggregate; he dwells contemplating the mental objects in the perception aggregate and the aggregate of mental formations, ardently, clearly comprehending, and mindful, removing covetousness and grief in the world (of the five aggregates).

This is called the right mindfulness.

(Dīgha Nikāya 2.312)

In insight meditation, we have to investigate and contemplate all the physical and mental ultimate realities that make up the five aggregates which constitute mind and body. In practice, they are divided into four groups – the material group (*rūpakkhandha*), the feeling group (*vedanakkhandha*), the consciousness group (*viññānakkhandha*), and the group of mental objects which comprise the perception group (*sannakkhandha*) and the group of mental formations (*sankhārakkhandha*). The contemplation of these four groups is known as the "four Foundations of Mindfulness."

The four Foundations of Mindfulness represent tranquility meditation and insight meditation. Mindfulness stands for "*sati*" cetasika (mental factor). The function of "*sati*" is to be mindful of the meditation subject and to be aware of it constantly. By concentrating the mind on the meditation subject, '*sati*' helps to build up concentration to the level of 'right concentration.'

When the mind is concentrated to the level of the right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*), the mind becomes very powerful and radiates very bright and penetrative light. With the help of this light, the well-concentrated meditating mind can penetratively observe ultimate physical entities and mental entities and contemplate on them with respect to their characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*), one after another. After ten stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā-nāna*) have arisen, the Path consciousness and its Fruition consciousness arise, taking Nibbāna as their object. After the arising of the first-stage Path consciousness, that is, Sotāpatti Path consciousness and its Fruition consciousness, the meditator becomes a noble person (Ariya) who can enjoy the matchless bliss of Nibbāna as much as he likes.

When a meditator can develop four stages of Path consciousness by undertaking insight meditation repeatedly, all defilements together with their latent roots are totally eradicated by the Path consciousness. So his mental stream becomes totally pure and he becomes an Arahant, one of the noblest persons in the world.

Thus the Blessed one declared in **Mahāsati-paṭṭhāna Sutta**: *"The only way that leads to the attainment of the purity of mind, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right Path and to the realization of Nibbāna is the four Foundations of Mindfulness or, in other words, the Noble Eightfold Path."*

### 8 The Right Concentration (*Sammāsamādhi*)

"What, O bhikkhus, is the right concentration?

"Here, in this Teaching, the bhikkhu, being detached from all sensual objects, detached from other unwholesome things, enters into the first stage of absorption (*jhāna*), which is accompanied by initial application (*vitakka*) and sustained application (*vicāra*), is filled with rapture (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*), born of detachment from hindrances (*nīvaranas*).

"After the subsiding of initial application and sustained application (*vitakka* and *vicāra*), he enters the second stage of absorption (*jhāna*), which has the



ability to clarify the mind and strengthen concentration, which is free from *vitakka* and *vicāra* and filled with rapture and happiness, born of concentration.

"After the fading away of rapture (*pīti*), he dwells in equanimity, attentiveness and contemplation. He also experiences pleasant feeling (*sukha*) in his person. He is now in the third stage of absorption (*jhāna*). Because of this third stage of absorption, he is praised by noble persons as "a man who dwells in equanimity, attentiveness and happiness."

"After the abandonment of pleasure and pain, and through the earlier disappearance of gladness and grief, he enters the fourth stage of absorption (*jhāna*), which is beyond pleasure and pain and which is accompanied by pure mindfulness born of equanimity.

"This concentration which associates with the four *rūpāvacara jhānas*, O bhikkhus, is called the right concentration '*Sammāsamādhi*'."

(Dīgha Nikāya 2.312)

Herein mental absorption or '*jhāna*' means the concentrated state of the mind which remains alert and fixed on a single sense object. It is the ability of the mind to observe a single object attentively for a long time.

Jhāna is described as that which burns out all negative forces or the hindrances (*nīvaranas*) which hinder or obstruct wholesome minds from arising.

In undertaking tranquility meditation the mind is completely pure, being free from all hindrances, when the first jhāna is attained. So the mind is calm, peaceful and very blissful. It is concentrated and very powerful.

Jhāna can also be regarded as the combination of mental factors known as jhāna factors.

The first *rūpāvacara jhāna* is a combination of the initial application of the mind to the meditation object (*vitakka*), the repeated application of the mind to the meditation object (*vicāra*), appreciation of the sense object or gladness (*pīti*), pleasant sensation and enjoyment of the sensation (*sukha*), and one-pointedness of the mind (*ekaggatā*). As these mental factors are well developed and strong in the first *jhāna*, they can keep the mind fixed on the meditation object.

By eliminating the two lower jhāna factors, that is, *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and by developing further the remaining *jhāna* factors, the second *rūpāvacara jhāna* is attained. This second *jhāna* has only three *jhāna* factors – *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā*. It is more peaceful, more subtle and more blissful than the first *jhāna*.

Again when *pīti*, which is close to *vitakka* and *vicāra* and is a form of mental excitement, is elimi-

nated and *sukha* and *ekaggatā* are further developed by progressive meditation, the third *rūpāvacara jhāna* arises. This *jhāna* has only two *jhāna* factors – *sukha* and *ekaggatā*. As *sukha* is the strongest in this *jhāna*, the third *jhāna* happiness is regarded as the best mundane happiness.

The *jhāna* factor 'sukha' in the third *jhāna* is less calm and less subtle in comparison to the *jhāna* factor 'upekkhā' (equanimity) present in the fourth *jhāna*. Therefore, the third *jhāna* is less calm and less subtle than the fourth *jhāna*. So, when the tranquility meditation such as mindfulness of breathing (*Ānāpānassati*) is carried out further to eliminate 'sukha' and to develop 'upekkhā', the fourth *jhāna* arises. This *jhāna* contains only *upekkhā* and *ekaggatā* as *jhāna* factors.

This *jhāna* is extremely calm and subtle, and the meditator stops breathing when he is in the fourth *jhāna* attainment. This *jhāna* is accompanied by very strong concentration and very bright and penetrative light. Thus when a meditator, using the fourth *jhāna* concentration as the foundation, undertakes insight meditation (*vipassanā*), he can meditate for hours at a stretch comfortably and easily without experiencing any pain and weariness.

The most important point is that the meditator,

Besides we also avoid three evil bodily actions and four false speeches with respect to making a living, and we avoid any livelihood that causes harm to others. Thus we also fulfil the Path factor called *sammā-ājīva* (the right livelihood). Therefore, we accomplish the "Training of Morality" (*Sīla-sikkhā*).

When we undertake meditation in a meditation centre, we observe eight or nine moral precepts. So it is more beneficial. As for monks, they have to abide by the fourfold *Catupārisuddhi sīla* and maintain their morality to be pure in all respects. When lay-persons and monks keep their respective morality well, they are endowed with "The purity of morality" (*Sīlavissuddhi*).

Observing moral precepts means keeping our bodily actions and verbal actions blameless and pure. It also means preventing gross and violent defilements such as greed, anger and delusion from arising. Therefore, the mind is pure, calm and blissful. It is also a blameless and noble way of living. A person of pure morality will be respected by men and gods. He will enjoy a good name and prosperity. All his wishes will be fulfilled because his mind is pure. He will die peacefully without delusion and will be reborn in a blissful abode.

If all the people in the world keep the five moral precepts always, they will enjoy eternal world peace and a happy life.

After maintaining pure morality, one must undertake tranquility meditation to develop concentration and to purify the mind. In other words, one must undertake the **Training of Concentration**. The Buddha has described forty meditation subjects for undertaking tranquility meditation. Whichever meditation subject one may choose, if one meditates strenuously and correctly, one will at least attain the neighbourhood concentration and the mind will become pure. If one undertakes mindfulness of breathing (*Ānāpānassati*) attentively and ardently, one can attain the fourth *rūpāvacara jhāna*.

The *jhāna* concentration is stronger and more stable than the neighbourhood concentration; it makes the mind more powerful and radiate brighter and more penetrative meditation light. The *jhāna* bliss is much superior than sensual pleasure; it is the best mundane bliss. The *jhāna* can prevent the arising of defilements in the mind for a long time.

If a meditator attains the neighbourhood concentration or the *jhāna* concentration well, he is said to attain the right concentration and his mind is free from

hindrances (*nīvaranas*) and other defilements (*kilesas*). So he has achieved the "purity of mind" (*cittavisuddhi*).

After accomplishing the Training in Concentration, the meditator should undertake the Training in Wisdom. To do this, he must practise insight meditation (*vipassanā*). In order to carry out *vipassanā*, he must first investigate to know the ultimate physical entities and the ultimate mental entities that make up body and mind as they really are. The mind associated with the right concentration has the ability to do this investigation.

The meditator, with the help of the extremely bright and penetrative meditation light, can penetratively see the flesh, the veins and arteries, the bones, the liver, the lungs, the heart, etc., in his body as well as in other bodies. When he observes penetratively in these organs to see the characteristics of hardness and softness of *Pathavi* (the element of extension), the characteristics of cohesiveness and fluidity of *Āpo* (the element of cohesion), the characteristics of hot and cold of *Tejo* (the element of heat), and the characteristics of pushing and supporting of *Vāyo* (the element of motion), the organs break down into tiny particles called *rūpakalāpas*. The meditator can investigate each of these particles further with the guidance of the teacher to see

the ultimate physical entities such as *pathavi*, *āpo*, *tejo*, *vāyo*, *vanna* (form), *gandha* (smell), *rasa* (taste), *ojā* (nutriment), etc., that make up the particle. By investigating in this way, he comes to understand the ultimate physical entities (*paramattha rūpas*) that make up the body.

Then the meditator studies his mind. In a person there are six doors through which sense objects enter the body. These sense doors are the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. When a visible object appears in the eye, a series of consciousness arises and dissolves to cognize that sense object. When a sound strikes the ear, again a series of consciousness arises and dissolves to cognize that sound. Similarly when a smell, a taste, a touch and a thought strike the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind respectively, a series of consciousness arises and dissolves to cognize each sense object. After observing these various series of consciousness, the meditator also investigates further to find out the mental factors which associate with each consciousness. Thus he comes to know exactly the ultimate mental entities, that is, the consciousness and mental factors (*citta* and *cetasikas*).

After discerning clearly the ultimate physical entities, consciousness and mental factors that really exist in a person, he realizes convincingly that only the

five aggregates consisting of the material group, the feeling group, the perception group, the group of mental formations and the group of consciousness really exist, and that, as these aggregates are incessantly arising and dissolving, a 'person', 'being', 'I' or a permanent entity such as 'atta', 'jīva', 'soul', etc., does not exist.

The knowledge which discerns clearly each of the ultimate material entities and each of the mental entities is called "*Nāmarūpa-pariccheda Ñāna*". With this knowledge, the meditator can see vividly that only the five aggregates or material and mental entities which are arising and dissolving incessantly really exist and that no person, being, I, soul (*jīva*) or ego (*atta*) exist. So he attains the "**Purity of View**" (*Diṭṭhi Visuddhi*), that is the purity of knowledge which is free from the basic universal wrong view called "*Personality Belief*", thinking that 'I' really exists.

Then the meditator investigates the causes which produce material entities and mental entities. He can discover by direct knowledge by following the instructions of a good teacher that there are four causes – kamma, consciousness, heat and nutriment – which produce material entities. He also finds out that the contact between the six sense doors and the six types of



sense objects produces consciousness and mental factors. He can also observe vividly the causal relations between material entities and mental entities according to the world-famous Discourse on Dependent Arising (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) to give rise to one existence after another.

When he can observe these cause-effect relations vividly, he can discard all sceptical doubt concerning the questions: "Have I been in the past? Have I not been in the past? What have I been and how have I been from one existence to another in the past? From which existence did I come to the present existence? After this existence what new existence shall I be?" Then he arrives at the fourth stage of purity called "*Kaṅkhā-vitarāṇa Visuddhi*" – the Purity of Knowledge by transcending Doubt.

The knowledge which can discern the causes for the arising of material and mental entities is called "*Paccaya-pariggaha Ñāṇa*."

After that the meditator can undertake insight meditation as directed in *Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāḷi* (51-52), *Samyutta Pāḷi* (2, 258), *Visuddhimagga* (2, 266-7), reflecting on the nature of impermanence (*anicca*), the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), the nature of non-self (*anatta*) and the disgusting nature (*asubha*) in turn,

of the ultimate realities which constitute internal aggregates, external aggregates, and causes and effects. After developing ten stages of insight knowledge from *Sammasana Nāna* to *Anuloma Nāna*, he will realize *Nibbāna* with the Path wisdom and its Fruition wisdom.

Immediately after gaining *Magga* and *Phala* (the Path and its Fruition), the meditator becomes a noble person called Stream Enterer (*Sotāpanna*). He is now superior to the Universal Monarch and the celestial king Sakka. For him, the doors of woeful abodes are closed for ever, and he can enjoy the *Nibbāna* bliss as much as he likes. He has entered the stream of *Nibbāna* and he will go on to *Nibbāna*, without turning back. He can enjoy a series of existences starting from the lowest blissful plane to the highest blissful plane and then pass on to *Nibbāna*. Or, he can undertake *vipassanā* again and again to attain the higher stages of the Path wisdom and its Fruition wisdom, and become an *Arahant*, a perfect One. An *Arahant's* mind is totally pure and there is no cause for mental suffering. So an *Arahant* can enjoy the bliss of *Nibbāna* throughout the present existence as well as for ever after his passing away.

### **Threefold Wisdom on the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering**

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering.

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering, which should be developed. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the

darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering."

"O bhikkhus, this is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering which has been developed. Thus, concerning the Noble Truths not heard before, there arose in me the vision that sees the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the knowledge that knows the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the wisdom that clearly discerns the various aspects of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering, the insight that penetratively sees the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the light of wisdom which destroys the darkness of ignorance shielding the truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering."

(Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāli, Dhammacakkapavattana Vāra)

### **Enlightenment Not Yet Claimed**

"O bhikkhus, as long as my vision of true knowledge was not fully clear in these three aspects and in these twelve ways regarding the Four Noble Truths, I did not claim to have realized the perfect enlightenment that is supreme in the celestial world with its devas, māras and brahmās, in this human world with its recluses, brahmanas, kings and men.

### **Enlightenment Claimed**

"But when, O bhikkhus, my vision of true knowledge was fully clear in these three aspects and in these twelve ways regarding the Four Noble Truths, then I did claim to have realized the perfect enlightenment that is supreme in the celestial world with its devas, māras and brahmās, and in this human world with its recluses, brahmanas, kings and men.

"Indeed, a vision of true knowledge arose in me thus: 'My total deliverance from defilements is unassailable. This is my last birth. Now there is no more becoming.'"

### **Venerable Koṇḍañña Realized the Truth**

Thus the Buddha spoke. The group of five bhikkhus was glad and acclaimed his words. While this Dhammacakka Discourse was being expounded, there arose in Venerable Koṇḍañña the pure, immaculate vision of the truth and he realized: "*Whatever is subject to causation is also subject to cessation.*"

Venerable Koṇḍañña was enlightened to the first stage of noble person. One hundred and eighty million brahmās were also enlightened by the First Path Wisdom to become Stream Enterers.

### **The Joyful Exclamation of Celestial Beings**

When the Buddha expounded the first discourse, thus turning the wheel of the Dhamma, the devas of the earth exclaimed: "This excellent wheel of Dhamma, which could not be expounded by any ascetic, brahmana, deva, māra or brahmā in this world, has been put into motion by the Blessed One at the Deer Park in Isipatana near Vārānaśī."

Hearing this exclamation, the devas of Catumahārājika, Tāvātimsā, Yāmā, Tusitā, Nimmānarati, Paranimitavasavati, and the brahmas of brahma realms also raised the same joyous cry.

Thus, at that very moment, at that very instant, this joyous cry extended as far as the Akanittha brahma realm. These ten thousand world systems quaked, tottered, and trembled violently. A radiant light, surpassing the radiance of the devas and the brahmās, appeared in the world.

(Paṭisambhidāmagga, Dhammacakkapavattana Vāra)

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**Religious Publication Permission No. 557/2003 (8)**

**Cover Design Permission No. 580/2003 (10)**

**Publication** 2003 November

First Printing

**Impression** 500 Copies

**Publisher** Mehm Tay Zar Mon

Yadanar Min Literature (3455)

15/19, U Wisara Qr., Dagon,

Yangon.

**Printer** U Tin Maung Win

(Cover + Contents) Thin Lai Win Press (05946)

No.1, Bo Yar Nyunt Street

Yaw Min Gyi Quarter

Dagon, Yangon.

400 Kyats