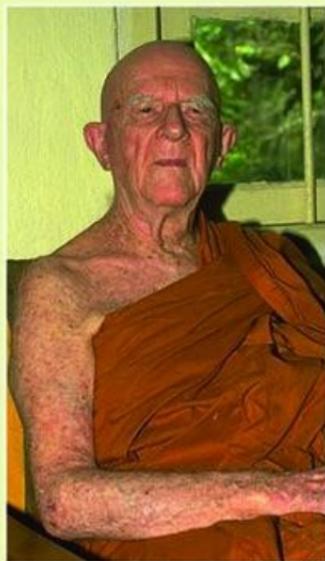


# *Kamma & Rebirth*

*Nyanaponika Thera*





## Nyanaponika Thera

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## KAMMA AND REBIRTH

When beholding this world and thinking about the destinies of beings, it will appear to most people as if everything in nature was unjust. Why, they will say, is one person rich and powerful, but another person poor and distressed? Why is one person all his life well and healthy, but another person from his very birth sickly or infirm? Why is one person endowed with attractive appearance, intelligence and perfect senses, while another person is repulsive and ugly, an idiot, blind, or deaf and dumb? Why is one child born amid utter misery and among wretched people, and brought up as a criminal, while another child is born in the midst of plenty and comfort, of noble-minded parents, and enjoys all the advantages of kindly treatment and the best mental and moral education, and sees nothing but good things all around? Why does one person, often without the slightest effort, succeed in all his enterprises, while to another person all his plans fail? Why do some live in luxury, while others have to live in poverty and distress? Why is one person happy, but another person unhappy? Why does one person enjoy long life, while

another person in the prime of life is carried away by death? Why is this so? Why do such differences exist in nature?

Of all those circumstances and conditions constituting the destiny of a being, none, according to the Buddha's Teaching, can come into existence without a previous cause and the presence of a number of necessary conditions. Just as, for example, from a rotten mango seed a healthy mango tree with healthy and sweet fruits never will come, just so the evil volitional actions, or evil kamma, produced in former births, are the seeds, or root-causes, of an evil destiny in a later birth. It is a necessary postulate of thinking that the good and bad destiny of a being, as well as its latent character, cannot be the product of mere chance, but must of necessity have its causes in a previous birth.

According to Buddhism, no organic entity, physical or psychical, can come into existence without a previous cause, i.e. without a preceding congenial state out of which it has developed. Also, no living organic entity can ever be produced by something altogether outside of it. It can originate only out of itself, i.e. it must have already existed in the bud, or germ, as it were. To be sure, besides this cause, or root-condition, or seed, there are

still many minor conditions required for its actual arising and its development, just as the mango tree besides its main cause, the seed, requires for its germinating, growth and development such further conditions as earth, water, light, heat, etc. Thus the true cause of the birth of a being, together with its character and destiny, goes back to the kamma-volitions produced in a former birth.

According to Buddhism, there are three factors necessary for the rebirth of a human being, that is, for the formation of the embryo in the mother's womb. They are: the female ovum, the male sperm, and the karma-energy (*kamma-vega*), which in the Suttas is metaphorically called "*gandhabba*," i.e. "ghost," or "soul." This karma-energy is sent forth by a dying individual at the moment of his death. The father and mother only provide the necessary physical material for the formation of the embryonic body. With regard to the characteristic features, the tendencies and faculties lying latent in the embryo, the Buddha's teaching may be explained in the following way: The dying individual, with his whole being convulsively clinging to life, at the very moment of his death sends forth kammic energies which, like a flash of lightning, hit at a new mother's

womb ready for conception. Thus, through the impinging of the kamma-energies on ovum and sperm, there appears just as a precipitate the so-called primary cell.

This process may be compared with the functioning of the air-vibrations produced through speech, which, by impinging on the acoustic organ of another man, produce a sound, which is a purely subjective sensation. On this occasion no transmigration of a sound-sensation takes place, but simply a transference of energy, called the air vibrations. In a similar way, the kamma-energies, sent out by the dying individual, produce from the material furnished by the parents the new embryonic being. But no transmigration of a real being, or a soul-entity, takes place on that occasion, but simply the transmission of kamma-energy.

Hence we may say that the present life-process (*upapatti-bhava*) is the objectification of the corresponding pre-natal kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*), and that the future life-process is the objectification of the corresponding present kamma-process. Thus nothing transmigrates from one life to the next. And what we call our ego is in reality only this process of continual change, of continual arising and passing away. Thus follows

moment after moment, day after day, year after year, life after life. Just as the wave that apparently hastens over the surface of the pond is in reality nothing but a continuous rising and falling of ever new masses of water, each time called forth through the transmission of energy, even so, closely considered, in the ultimate sense there is no permanent ego-entity that passes through the ocean of *saṃsāra*, but merely a process of physical and psychical phenomena takes place, ever and again being whipped up by the impulse and will for life.

It is undoubtedly true that the mental condition of the parents at the moment of conception has a considerable influence upon the character of the embryonic being, and that the nature of the mother may make a deep impression on the character of the child she bears in her womb. The indivisible unity of the psychic individuality of the child, however, can in no way be produced by the parents. One must here never confound the actual cause—the preceding state out of which the later state arises—with the influences and conditions from without. If it were really the case that the new individual, as an inseparable whole, was begotten by its parents, twins could never exhibit totally opposite tendencies. In such a case,

children, especially twins, would, with positively no exception, always be found to possess the same character as the parents.

At all times, and in probably all the countries on earth, the belief in rebirth has been held by many people; and this belief seems to be due to an intuitional instinct that lies dormant in all beings. At all times many great thinkers too have taught a continuation of life after death. Already from time immemorial there was taught some form of metempsychosis, i.e. “transformation of soul,” or metamorphosis, i.e. “transformation of body,” etc., thus by the esoteric doctrines of old Egypt, by Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato, Plotinus, Pindaros, Vergil, also by some African tribes. Many modern thinkers too teach a continuation of the life-process after death.

The great German scientist Edgar Dacque, in his book *The Primaeval World, Saga and Mankind*, speaking about the widespread belief shared by all peoples of the world in a transmigration after death, gives the following warning:

Peoples with culture and acquaintance with science, such as the old Egyptians and wise Indians, acted and lived in accordance with this belief. They lost this belief only after the rise of the naively realistic and rationalistic

Hellenism and Judaism. For this reason it would be better, concerning this problem, not to assume the bloodless attitude of modern sham-civilization, but rather adopt a reverential attitude in trying to solve this problem and grasp it in its profundity.

This law of rebirth can be made comprehensible only by the subconscious life-stream (in Pali, *bhavaṅga-sota*), which is mentioned in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka and further explained in the commentaries, especially the *Visuddhimagga*. The fundamental import of *bhavaṅga-sota*, or the subconscious life-stream, as a working hypothesis for the explanation of the various Buddhist doctrines, such as rebirth, kamma, remembrance of former births, etc., has up to now not yet sufficiently been recognised, or understood, by Western scholars. The term *bhavaṅga-sota*, is identical with what the modern psychologists, such as Jung, etc., call the soul, or the unconscious, thereby not meaning, of course, the eternal soul-entity of Christian teaching but an ever-changing subconscious process. This subconscious life-stream is the necessary condition of all life. In it, all impressions and experiences are stored up, or better said, appear as a multiple process of past images, or memory pictures, which however, as such, are

hidden to full consciousness, but which, especially in dreams, cross the threshold of consciousness and make themselves fully conscious.

Professor James (whose words I here retranslate from the German version) says: "Many achievements of genius have here their beginning. In conversion, mystical experience, and as prayer, it co-operates with religious life. It contains all momentarily inactive reminiscences and sources of all our dimly motivated passions, impulses, intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions; in short, all our non-rational operations result therefrom. It is the source of dreams, etc." Jung, in his *Soul Problems of the Present Day*, says: "From the living source of instinct springs forth everything creative." And in another place: "Whatever has been created by the human mind, results from contents which were really unconscious (or subconscious) germs." And: "The term 'instinct' is of course nothing but a collective term for all possible organic and psychic factors, whose nature is for the greater part unknown to us."

The existence of the subconscious life-stream, or *bhavāṅga-sota*, is a necessary postulate of our thinking. If whatever we have seen, heard, felt, perceived, thought, experienced and done were not, without exception, registered somewhere and in

some way, either in the extremely complex nervous system (comparable to a phonograph record or photographic plate) or in the subconscious or unconscious, we would not even be able to remember what we were thinking at the preceding moment; we would not know anything of the existence of other beings and things; we would not know our parents, teachers, friends, and so on; we would not even be able to think at all, as thinking is conditioned by the remembrance of former experiences; and our mind would be a complete *tabula rasa* and emptier than the actual mind of an infant just born, nay even of the embryo in the mother's womb.

Thus this subconscious life-stream, or *bhav-aṅga-sota*, can be called the precipitate of all our former actions and experiences, which must have been going on since time immemorial and must continue for still immeasurable periods of time to come. Therefore what constitutes the true and innermost nature of man, or any other being, is this subconscious life-stream, of which we do not know whence it came and whither it will go. As Heraclitus says: "We never enter the same stream. We are identical with it, and we are not." Just so it is said in the *Milindapañha*: "*na ca so, na ca añño*; neither is it the same, nor is it another (that is reborn)." All life, be it corporeal, conscious or subconscious, is a

flowing, a continual process of becoming, change and transformation. No persistent element is there to be discovered in this process. Hence there is no permanent ego, or personality, to be found, but merely these transitory phenomena.

About this unreality of the ego, the Hungarian psychologist Volgyesi in his *Message to the Nervous World* says:

Under the influence of the newest knowledge the psychologists already begin to realise the truth about the delusive nature of the ego-entity, the mere relative value of the ego-feeling, the great dependency of this tiny man on the inexhaustible and complex working factors of the whole world ... The idea of an independent ego, and of a self-reliant free will: these ideas we should give up and reconcile ourselves to the truth that there does not exist any real ego at all. What we take for our ego-feeling, is in reality nothing but one of the most wonderful *fata-morgana* plays of nature.

In the ultimate sense, there do not even exist such things as mental states, i.e. stationary things. Feeling, perception, consciousness, etc., are in reality mere passing processes of feeling, perceiving, becoming conscious, etc., within which

and outside of which no separate or permanent entity lies hidden.

Thus a real understanding of the Buddha's doctrine of kamma and rebirth is possible only to one who has caught a glimpse of the egoless nature, or *anattatā*, and of the conditionality, or *idappaccayatā*, of all phenomena of existence. Therefore it is said in the *Visuddhimagga* (Chap. XIX):

Everywhere, in all the realms of existence, the noble disciple sees only mental and corporeal phenomena kept going through the concatenation of causes and effects. No producer of the volitional act or kamma does he see apart from the kamma, no recipient of the kamma-result apart from the result. And he is well aware that wise men are using merely conventional language, when, with regard to a kammical act, they speak of a doer, or with regard to a kamma-result, they speak of the recipient of the result.

*No doer of the deeds is found,  
No one who ever reaps their fruits;  
Empty phenomena roll on:  
This only is the correct view.*

*And while the deeds and their results  
Roll on and on, conditioned all,*

*There is no first beginning found,  
Just as it is with seed and tree...*

*No god, no Brahma, can be called  
The maker of this wheel of life:  
Empty phenomena roll on,  
Dependent on conditions all.*

In the *Milindapañha* the King asks Nāgasena:

“What is it, Venerable Sir, that will be reborn?”

“A psycho-physical combination (*nāma-rūpa*),  
O King.”

“But how, Venerable Sir? Is it the same psycho-physical combination as this present one?”

“No, O King. But the present psycho-physical combination produces kammically wholesome and unwholesome volitional activities, and through such kamma a new psycho-physical combination will be born.”

As in the ultimate sense (*paramatthavasena*) there is no such thing as a real ego-entity, or personality, one cannot properly speak of the rebirth of such a one. What we are here concerned with is this psycho-physical process, which is cut off at death, in order to continue immediately thereafter somewhere else.

Similarly we read in the *Milindapañha*:

“Does, Venerable Sir, rebirth take place without transmigration?”

“Yes, O King.”

“But how, Venerable Sir, can rebirth take place without the passing over of anything? Please, illustrate this matter for me.”

“If, O King, a man should light a lamp with the help of another lamp, does the light of the one lamp pass over to the other lamp?”

“No, Venerable Sir.”

“Just so, O King, does rebirth take place without transmigration.”

Further, in the *Visuddhimagga* (Chap. XVII) it is said:

Whosoever has no clear idea about death and does not know that death consists in the dissolution of the five groups of existence (i.e. corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness), he thinks that it is a person, or being, that dies and transmigrates to a new body, etc. And whosoever has no clear idea about rebirth, and does not know that rebirth consists in the arising of the five groups of existence, he thinks that it is a person, or being, that is reborn, or that the person reappears in a new body. And whosoever has no clear idea about saṃsāra, the round of

rebirths, he thinks that a real person wanders from this world to another world, comes from that world to this world, etc. And whosoever has no clear idea about the phenomena of existence, he thinks that the phenomena are his ego or something appertaining to the ego, or something permanent, joyful, or pleasant. And whosoever has no clear idea about the conditional arising of the phenomena of existence, and about the arising of kammic volitions conditioned through ignorance, he thinks that it is the ego that understands or fails to understand, that acts or causes to act, that enters into a new existence at rebirth. Or he thinks that the atoms or the Creator, etc., with the help of the embryonic process, shape the body, provide it with various faculties; that it is the ego that receives the sensuous impression, that feels, that desires, that becomes attached, that enters into existence again in another world. Or he thinks that all beings come to life through fate or chance.

*A mere phenomenon it is, a thing conditioned,  
That rises in the following existence.  
But not from a previous life does it transmigrate there,  
And yet it cannot rise without a previous cause.*

When this conditionally arisen bodily-mental phenomenon (the foetus) arises, one says that it has entered into (the next) existence. However, no being (*satta*), or life-principle (*jīva*), has transmigrated from the previous existence into this existence, and yet this embryo could not have come into existence without a previous cause.

This fact may be compared with the reflection of one's face in the mirror, or with the calling forth of an echo by one's voice. Now, just as the image in the mirror or the echo are produced by one's face or voice without any passing over of face or voice, just so it is with the arising of rebirth-consciousness. Should there exist a full identity or sameness between the earlier and the later birth, in that case milk could never turn into curd; and should there exist an entire otherness, curd could never be conditioned through milk. Therefore one should admit neither a full identity, nor an entire otherness of the different stages of existence. Hence *na ca so, na ca añño*: "neither is it the same, nor is it another one." As already said above: all life, be it corporeal, conscious or subconscious, is a flowing, a continual process of becoming, change and transformation.

To sum up the foregoing, we may say: There are in the ultimate sense no real beings or things, neither creators nor created; there is but this process of corporeal and mental phenomena. This whole process of existence has an active side and a passive side. The active or causal side of existence consists of the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*), i.e. of wholesome and unwholesome kamma-activity, while the passive or caused side consists of kamma-results, or *vipāka*, the so-called rebirth-process (*upapatti-bhava*), i.e. the arising, growing, decaying and passing away of all these kammically neutral phenomena of existence.

Thus, in the absolute sense, there exists no real being that wanders through this round of rebirths, but merely this ever-changing twofold process of kamma-activities and kamma-results takes place. The present life is, as it were, the reflection of the past one, and the future life the reflection of the present one. The present life is the result of the past kammic activity, and the future life the result of the present kammic activity. Therefore, nowhere is there to be found an ego-entity that could be the performer of the kammic activity or the recipient of the kamma-result. Hence Buddhism does not teach any real transmigration, as in the highest sense there is no

such thing as a being, or ego-entity, much less the transmigration of such a one.

In every person, as already mentioned, there seems to lie dormant the dim instinctive feeling that death cannot be the end of all things, but that somehow continuation must follow. In which way this may be, however, is not immediately clear.

It is perhaps quite true that a direct proof for rebirth cannot be given. We have, however, the authentic reports about children in Burma and elsewhere, who sometimes are able to remember quite distinctly (probably in dreams) events of their previous life. By the way, what we see in dreams are mostly distorted reflexes of real things and happenings experienced in this or a previous life. And how could we ever explain the birth of such prodigies as Jeremy Bentham, who already in his fourth year could read and write Latin and Greek; or John Stuart Mill, who at the age of three read Greek and at the age of six wrote a history of Rome; or Babington Macaulay, who in his sixth year wrote a compendium of world history; or Beethoven, who gave public concerts when he was seven; or Mozart, who already before his sixth year had written musical compositions; or Voltaire, who read the fables of Lafontaine when he was three years old. Should all these prodigies and geniuses, who

for the most part came from illiterate parents, not already in previous births have laid the foundations to their extraordinary faculties? "*Natura non facit saltus*: nature makes no leaps."

We may rightly state that the Buddhist doctrine of kamma and rebirth offers the only plausible explanation for all the variations and dissimilarities in nature. From the apple seed only an apple tree may come, no mango tree; from a mango seed only a mango tree, no apple tree. Just so, all animate things, as man, animal, etc., probably even plants, nay even crystals, must of necessity be manifestations or objectifications of some specific kind of subconscious impulse or will for life. Buddhism says nothing on the last-mentioned points; it simply states that all vegetable life belongs to the germinal order, or *bija-niyāma*.

Buddhism teaches that if in previous births the bodily, verbal and mental kamma, or volitional activities, have been evil and low and thus have unfavourably influenced the subconscious life-stream (*bhavaṅga-sotā*), then also the results, manifested in the present life, must be disagreeable and evil; and so must be the character and the new actions induced or conditioned through the evil pictures and images of the subconscious life-stream. If the beings, however, have in former

lives sown good seeds, then they will reap good fruits in the present life.

In Majjhima Nikāya 135 a brahman raises the problem:

There are found people who are short-lived, and those that are long-lived; there are found people who are very sick, and those that are healthy; there are found people who are hideous, and those that are beautiful; there are found people who are powerless, and those that are powerful; there are found people who are poor, and those that are rich; there are found people who are of low family, and those that are of high family; there are found people who are stupid, and those that are intelligent. What then, Master Gotama, is the reason that among human beings such inferiority and superiority are found?

The Blessed One gave the reply:

Beings are owners of their kamma, heirs of their kamma; kamma is the womb from which they have sprung, kamma is their friend and refuge. Thus kamma divides beings into the high and low.

In *Āṅguttara Nikāya* III, 40 it is said: “Killing, stealing, adultery, lying, backbiting, harsh speech and empty prattling, practised, cultivated and frequently engaged in, will lead to hell, the animal world or the realm of ghosts.” Further: “Whoso kills and is cruel, will either go to hell, or if reborn as a human, will be short-lived. Whoso tortures other beings, will be afflicted with disease. The hater will be hideous, the envious will be without influence, the stubborn will be of low rank, the indolent will be ignorant.” In the reverse case, a person will be reborn in a heavenly world; or, if reborn as a human being, will be endowed with health, beauty, influence, riches, noble rank and intelligence.

George Grimm, in his book *The Doctrine of the Buddha*, tries to show how the law of affinity may at the moment of death regulate the grasping of the new germ. He says:

Whoso, devoid of compassion can kill men, or even animals, carries deep within himself the inclination to shorten life. He finds satisfaction, or even pleasure, in the short-livedness of other creatures. Short-lived germs have therefore some affinity for him, an affinity which makes itself known after his death in the grasping of another germ, which then takes place to his own detriment.

Even so, germs bearing within themselves the power of developing into a deformed body, have an affinity for one who finds pleasure in ill-treating and disfiguring other.

Any angry person begets within himself an affinity for ugly bodies and their respective germs, since it is the characteristic mark of anger to disfigure the face.

Whoever is jealous, niggardly, haughty, carries within himself the tendency to grudge everything to others, and to despise them. Accordingly, germs that are destined to develop in poor outward circumstances, possess affinity for him.

Here I should like to rectify several wrong applications of the term “kamma” prevailing in the West, and to state once for all: Pali *kamma*, comes from the root *kar*, to do, to make, to act, and thus means “deed, action,” etc. As a Buddhist technical term, kamma is a name for wholesome and unwholesome volition or will (*kusala-* and *akusala-cetanā*) and the consciousness and mental factors associated therewith, manifested as bodily, verbal or mere mental action. Already in the Suttas it is said: “Volition (*cetanā*), monks, do I call kamma. Through volition one does the kamma

by means of body, speech or mind”: *cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi; cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*. Thus kamma is volitional action, nothing more, nothing less.

From this fact result the following three statements:

1. The term “kamma” never comprises the result of action, as most people in the West, misled by Theosophy, wish this term to be understood. Kamma is wholesome or unwholesome volitional action and *kamma-vipāka* is the result of action.

2. There are some who consider every happening, even our new wholesome and unwholesome actions, as the result of our prenatal kamma. In other words, they believe that the results again become the causes of new results, and so *ad infinitum*. Thus they are stamping Buddhism as fatalism; and they will have to come to the conclusion that, in this case, our destiny can never be influenced or changed, and no deliverance ever be attained.

3. There is a third wrong application of the term “kamma,” being an amplification of the first view, i.e. that the term “kamma” comprises also the result of action. It is the assumption of a so-called joint kamma, mass-kamma, or group-kamma, or collective kamma. According to this

view, a group of people, e.g. a nation, should be responsible for the bad deeds formerly done by this so-called “same” people. In reality, however, this present people may not consist at all of the same individuals who did these bad deeds. According to Buddhism it is of course quite true that anybody who suffers bodily, suffers for his past or present bad deeds. Thus also each of those individuals born within that suffering nation must, if actually suffering bodily, have done evil somewhere, here or in one of the innumerable spheres of existence, but he may not have had anything to do with the bad deeds of the so-called nation. We might say that through his evil kamma he was attracted to the hellish condition befitting him. In short, the term “kamma” applies, in each instance, only to wholesome and unwholesome volitional activity of the single individual. Kamma thus forms the cause, or seed, from which the results will accrue to the individual, be it in this life or hereafter.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Here I should add that the Pali term *vipāka*, which I generally translate by “effect,” or “result,” is not really identical with these two English terms. According to the *Kathāvatthu*, it refers only to the kamma-produced “mental” results, such as pleasurable and painful bodily feeling and all other primary mental phenomena, while all the corporeal phenomena, such as the five physical sense-organs, etc., are not called *vipāka*, but *kammaja* or *kamma-samuṭṭhāna*, i.e. “kamma-born” or “kamma-produced.”

Hence man has it in his power to shape his future destiny by means of his will and actions. It depends on his actions, or kamma, whether his destiny will lead him up or down, either to happiness or to misery. Moreover, kamma is the cause and seed not only for the continuation of the life-process after death, i.e. for the so-called rebirth, but already in this present life-process our actions, or kamma, may produce good and bad results, and exercise a decisive influence on our present character and destiny. Thus, for instance, if day by day we are practising kindness towards all living beings, humans as well as animals, we will grow in goodness, while hatred, and all evil actions done through hatred, as well as all the evil and agonising mental states produced thereby, will not so easily rise again in us; and our nature and character will become firm, happy, peaceful and calm.

If we practise unselfishness and liberality, greed and avarice will become less. If we practise love and kindness, anger and hatred will vanish. If we develop wisdom and knowledge, ignorance and delusion will more and more disappear. The less greed, hatred and ignorance (*lobha, dosa, moha*) dwell in our hearts, the less will we commit evil and unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. For all evil things, and all evil destiny, are

really rooted in greed, hate and ignorance; and of these three things ignorance or delusion (*moha*, *avijjā*) is the chief root and the primary cause of all evil and misery in the world. If there is no more ignorance, there will be no more greed and hatred, no more rebirth, no more suffering.

This goal, however, in the ultimate sense, will be realised only by the Holy Ones (Arahants), i.e. by those who, forever and all time, are freed from these three roots; and this is accomplished through the penetrating insight, or *vipassanā*, into the impermanency, unsatisfactoriness and egolessness of this whole life-process, and through the detachment from all forms of existence resulting therefrom. As soon as greed, hate and ignorance have become fully and forever extinguished, and thereby the will for life, convulsively clinging to existence, and the thirsting for life have come to an end, then there will be no more rebirth, and there will have been realised the goal shown by the Enlightened One, namely: extinction of all rebirth and suffering. Thus, the Arahant performs no more kamma, i.e. no more kammically wholesome or unwholesome volitional actions. He is freed from this life-affirming will expressed in bodily actions, words or thoughts, freed from this seed, or cause, of all existence and life.

Now what is called character is in reality the sum of these subconscious tendencies produced partly by the prenatal, partly by the present volitional activity, or kamma. And these tendencies may, during life, become an inducement to wholesome or unwholesome volitional activity by body, speech or mind. If, however, this thirst for life rooted in ignorance is fully extinguished, then there will be no new entering again into existence. Once the root of a coconut tree has been fully destroyed, the tree will die off. In exactly the same way, there will be no entering again into a new existence once the life-affirming three evil roots—greed, hate and ignorance—have been forever destroyed. Here one should not forget that all such personal expressions as “I,” “He,” “Holy One,” etc., are merely conventional names for this really impersonal life-process.

In this connection I have to state that, according to Buddhism, it is merely the last kammical volition just before death, the so-called death-proximate kamma, which decides the immediately following rebirth. In Buddhist countries it is therefore the custom to recall to the dying man’s memory the good actions performed by him, in order to rouse in him a happy and pure kammical state of mind, as a preparation for a favourable rebirth. Or his

relations let him see beautiful things which they, for his good and benefit, wish to offer to the Buddha, saying: "This, my dear, we shall offer to the Buddha for your good and welfare." Or they let him hear a religious sermon, or let him smell the odour of flowers, or give him sweets to taste, or let him touch precious cloth, saying: "This we shall offer to the Buddha for your own good and welfare."

In the *Visuddhimagga* (Chap. XVII) it is said that, at the moment before death, as a rule, there will appear to the memory of the evil-doer the mental image of any evil deed, *kamma*, formerly done; or that there will appear before his mental eyes an attendant circumstance, or object, called *kamma-nimitta*, connected with that bad deed, such as blood or a blood-stained dagger, etc.; or he may see before his mind an indication of his imminent miserable rebirth, *gati-nimitta*, such as fiery flames, etc. To another dying man there may appear before his mind the image of a voluptuous object inciting his sensual lust.

To a good man there may appear before his mind any noble deed, *kamma*, formerly done by him; or an object that was present at that time, the so-called *kamma-nimitta*; or he may see in his mind an indication of his imminent rebirth, *gati-nimitta*, such as heavenly palaces, etc.

Already in the Suttas there are distinguished three kinds of kamma, or volitional actions, with regard to the time of their bearing fruit, namely: (1) kamma bearing fruit in this life-time (*ditṭhadhamma-vedaniya-kamma*); (2) kamma bearing fruit in the next life (*upapajja-vedaniya-kamma*); (3) kamma bearing fruit in later lives (*aparāpariya-vedaniya-kamma*). The explanations of this subject are somewhat too technical for the general reader. They imply the following: The kamma-volitional stage of the process in mind consists of a number of impulsive thought moments, or *javana-citta*, which flash up, one after the other, in rapid succession. Now, of these impulsive moments, the first one will bear fruit in this life-time, the last one in the next birth, and those between these two moments will bear fruit in later lives. The two kinds of kamma bearing fruit in this life-time and in the next birth may sometimes become ineffective (*abosi-kamma*). Kamma, however, that bears fruit in later lives will, whenever and wherever there is an opportunity, be productive of kamma-result; and as long as this life-process continues, this kamma will never become ineffective.

The *Visuddhimagga* divides kamma, according to its functions, into four kinds: generative kamma, supportive kamma, counteractive kamma and destructive kamma, which all may be either

wholesome or unwholesome.

Amongst these four kinds, the “generative” (*janaka-kamma*) generates at rebirth, and during the succeeding life-continuity, corporeal and neutral mental phenomena, such as the five kinds of sense-consciousness and the mental factors associated therewith, such as feeling, perception, sense-impression, etc.

The “supportive” (*upatthambhaka-kamma*), however, does not generate any kamma-result; but as soon as any other kamma-volition has effected rebirth and a kamma-result been produced, then it *supports*, according to its nature, the agreeable or disagreeable phenomena and keeps them going.

The “counteractive” (*upapīlaka-kamma*) also does not generate any kamma-result; but as soon as any other kamma-volition has effected rebirth and a kamma-result been produced, then it *counteracts*, according to its nature, the agreeable or disagreeable phenomena and does not allow them to keep going on.

Again, the “destructive” (*upaghātaka-kamma*) does not generate any kamma-result; but as soon as any other kamma-volition has effected rebirth and a kamma-result been produced, then it destroys the weaker kamma and admits only its own agreeable or disagreeable kamma-results.

In the Commentary to Majjhima Nikāya 135, generative kamma is compared with a farmer sowing the seeds; supportive kamma, with irrigating, manuring, and watching the field, etc.; counteractive kamma, with the drought that causes a poor harvest; destructive kamma, with a fire that destroys the whole harvest. Another illustration is this: The rebirth of Devadatta in a royal family was due to his good generative kamma. His becoming a monk and attaining high spiritual powers was a good supportive kamma. His intention of killing the Buddha was a counteractive kamma, while his causing a split in the Order of monks was destructive kamma, owing to which he was born in a world of misery. It lies outside the scope of this short exposition to give detailed descriptions of all the manifold divisions of kamma found in the Commentaries. What I chiefly wanted to make clear by this lecture is: that the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth has nothing to do with the transmigration of any soul or ego-entity, as in the ultimate sense there does not exist any such ego or I, but merely a continually changing process of psychic and corporeal phenomena. And further I wanted to point out that the kamma-process and rebirth-process may both be made comprehensible only by the assumption of a subconscious stream of life underlying everything in living nature.