

# Mango Tree Wisdom

Talks with Pemasiri Thera



David Young



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*by*

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*Respect and gratitude are due,  
and gladly given,  
to Kidagammulla Pemasiri Thera*

# Foreword

*In the Mahāvamsa, The Great Chronicle of Ceylon, Wilhem Geiger, Ph.D. says the arahat Mahinda met King Devampiyatissa at Mihintale Mountain in Sri Lanka roughly in the year 246 B.C.E. The arahat Mahinda asked the king a subtle question to test whether the king was wise enough to grasp the Dhamma.*



*Arahat Mahinda pointed to a mango tree and asked: “What name does this tree bear, O king?”*

*King Devampiyatissa: “This tree is called a mango.”*

*Arahat Mahinda: “Is there yet another mango besides this?”*

*King Devampiyatissa: “There are many mango trees.”*

*Arahat Mahinda: “And are there yet other trees besides this mango and the other mangoes?”*

*King Devampiyatissa: “There are many trees sir; but those are trees that are not mangoes.”*

*Arahat Mahinda: “And are there, besides the other mangoes and those trees which are not mangoes, yet other trees?”*

*King Devampiyatissa: “There is this mango tree sir.”*

*Arahat Mahinda: “Thou hast a shrewd wit, O ruler of men.”*



*Then, when the brahmin student Jotipāla had washed his head, the potter Ghaṭikāra seized him by the hair and said, ‘My dear Jotipāla, there is the monastery of the Blessed One Kassapa, accomplished and fully enlightened, quite nearby. Let us go and see the Blessed One Kassapa, accomplished and fully enlightened. I hold that it is good to see that Blessed One, accomplished and fully enlightened.’*

Ghaṭikāra the Potter Sutta<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Kalyāṇamitta's Early Days

**David:** *Has meditation shaped you?*

**Pemasiri Thera:** Views of my self change over time. A great deal came through meditation, as I have been meditating since I was a child.

*You treat everyone fairly and equally. What's more, a young bhikkhu told me you are interested in learning about his meditation practice. You're a senior teacher who can be taught.*

My mother and father taught me many things, how to be generous, how to speak to people, and ways of thinking. There is also book knowledge.

*Did members of your family teach you meditation?*

My brother did to a degree and father was a yogi. However, I didn't ask father for meditation instruction because he used an old style of meditation that was different from the Burmese tradition I was following at the time. I thought the way he was

going was wrong. He lived like an Indian sadhu—grew his beard very long, put his hair up in a topknot, and always wore white clothes. Bathing was a ritual. Normally in the villages everyone bathes at the wells. Not father. He went to the river because he wanted to bathe in running water and to perform rituals, such as patting his head. He maintained silence on his way to and from the river. Father became an adherent to the teachings of Krishnamurti, following the layman Dr. E. W. Adikaram.<sup>2</sup>

*Was your father's lifestyle a problem for your mother?*

No. There were no problems between my mother and father because they didn't talk to each other. Father stopped talking to mother when I was about twelve years old and they never spoke to each other for the following thirty years. No talking. No fighting. No anger. Father lived in a shack in our backyard.

*That's a novel way to solve marital problems. Did she still cook his meals?*

Yes. She provided one meal a day and either my sister or I carried it out to him. We also took him some drinking water. He didn't like to get the water in a jug because the jug had to be returned to the house. He preferred to get water in an old tin he could throw away. Occasionally, father came into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. He never went into any other part of the house. Many people thought my father was a fool. Father was no fool. He knew the suttas, had a vast knowledge of the dhamma, and was a skillful dhamma teacher. There were no bhikkhus who could debate with him because his knowledge of the Tipiṭaka was far more extensive than their knowledge; even a learned professor of Buddhism found it a challenge to debate the Buddha's teachings with my father. Though father valued the Buddha's teachings found in the Tipiṭaka, he disapproved of many bhikkhus. Something must have happened late in father's

life because he stopped supporting them. He condemned Burmese meditation methods as all...

*Hogwash?*

Yes. He disapproved of teachers like Goenka and my teacher who both came from the Burmese tradition, as he considered these as new methods of meditation. Despite strong views about bhikkhus, father did help one bhikkhu set up a hermitage in caves in the Gampaha District, and for many years father climbed a steep hill to visit him. My father took meals to him on a daily basis. Along with three other people, father went so far as to carry the bhikkhu around in a specially built chair. If I had ordained with that bhikkhu, father would have approved. My father had nothing against the dhamma. He was just against organized religion, which is why he didn't want me to become a bhikkhu. He was really quite opposed to organized religion, even though he had helped set up hermitages earlier in his life.

When I was twenty, I talked with my father about meditation. I wanted him to study at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre. Father objected, "I don't want to go there because the toilets are dirty." When I mentioned Kanduboda a second time, he said, "The food is bad." When I mentioned it a third time, he said, "I have been meditating since I was your age and I don't need any more teaching. You try and develop yourself, and don't try to teach me." That was the last time I talked with father about meditation. At the time, I didn't know father had a nimitta from ānāpānasati. Since he had this clear image obtained from his meditation practice, he considered other teachings to be insignificant. People who train on their own and have strong results generally have some conceit. Father was strongly established in his own practice. There was no way he was about to go to the Kanduboda Meditation Centre and accept the teachings of a bhikkhu.

Towards the end of my father's life, my brother pulled down



father's old shack in the backyard and father was forced to move inside our house. He had no choice in the matter. Life changed. My father started speaking again with my mother and the rest of us. It was good for me to talk with father as we had been at odds and hadn't spoken much for thirty years. He acknowledged that I was on the right path and he gave me his books; even so, I let him keep his strong views.

A few years later, my mother died. And a week after she died, we invited relatives, friends, neighbours, and the workers of our family business into our home to listen to a bhikkhu give a talk. This is a traditional practice for the transference of merit. Father did not attend and instead remained out in the backyard. One of the mason workers, who enjoyed discussing the dhamma with father, was in attendance. Out of consideration for the bhikkhu, we specifically instructed the mason not to visit father during the bhikkhu's talk. But the mason went into the backyard and asked father how old he was. "I am the age I am now," said father. "I am just one moment of mentality and materiality." Citing Abhidhamma teachings, father then delivered a lengthy and detailed discourse on the nature of human experience, and because father spoke so loud during his discourse, everyone inside the house heard him. At first, just a couple of people went out to the backyard to investigate. Regrettably, they came back inside the house and told everyone else father was more interesting than the bhikkhu and eventually no one except the immediate family members were inside the house listening to the bhikkhu. We were quite annoyed with the mason!

Then my father died. He had told us that he wanted his death to be trouble free. It was. One day without warning, he simply said, "I will be dead by 6 a.m. tomorrow morning." Our family didn't believe him, "The old fool." That evening, he smoked what he said were his last cigarettes, and added, "There's no need for me to eat supper because I will soon be dead." He then shaved and cleaned himself. However, in the middle of the

night, he got hungry and ate something. Still, no one took him seriously, “That crazy old man.” The next morning, he sat down to breakfast with us and died while eating. His death was indeed simple and easy—no trouble at all. We lived right next door to a cemetery.

*Your father was an interesting character. What were your grandparents like?*

My grandparents on my mother’s side were self-indulgent. They drank and partied. One time, my grandmother found my grandfather in bed with another woman. “Oh,” said my grandfather, “here comes my sister.” To which my grandmother said, “I am not his sister!” My grandmother ate plenty of meat and eggs. And she was always drunk—drinking a bottle and a half every day. How many eggs do you think she ate?

*Half a dozen?*

25 eggs per day.

*She must’ve had a lot of chickens. With this diet, did she have a long life?*

She died at the age of 65, while I was still in school. I returned home from class one day and she was laid out in a coffin. Later, whenever I visited her old home, I saw that her family still thought of her. They visualized her as being alive and still sitting in her armchair. They could hear her talking. When a stranger entered the house, he thought my grandmother was still alive because of this visualization of her form. My mother’s aunt lived to be 108 years of age. She was a good woman. For 100 years of her life she was a Catholic. The last 8 years of her life she practised the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. On her deathbed, she said, “It isn’t good for me to die in my bedroom. I want to die in the living room.” Members of the family helped her to the living room where she took the five precepts. Just a few minutes later, she died with equanimity, whilst listening to father chant the

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. My drunken grandmother was a lifetime Buddhist. My great aunt practised the teachings of Christ for more than 100 years and the teachings of the Buddha for eight years.

## Ordination

*And what about you? Why did you ordain as a bhikkhu?*

Despite knowing the benefits of ordination, I had no intention of ordaining when I was a young man. I didn't ordain to meditate because I could meditate either at home or at a meditation centre. You don't have to be a bhikkhu to meditate. In my early teens, I worked in the family business and whenever I was free I meditated at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre where I received instructions from the abbot, Sumathipāla Na Himi. My family had various activities on the go—carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical, manufacturing fireworks, Sinhala and Pali classes. I worked primarily in the construction end of things. The construction crew wasn't working well together and I was getting fed up. So, since I liked what Sumathipāla Na Himi was teaching me, I began spending more time at Kanduboda and less time at home working with the crew. At one point, I was travelling almost daily from my home in the village of Kidagamulla to the Kanduboda Meditation Centre. In those early days, Kanduboda had 100 acres of land and there were lots of wild rabbits running around, which the dogs liked to chase. To escape the dogs, the rabbits hid under Sumathipāla Na Himi's robes and stayed there until the dogs gave up the chase and went away. Even leeches left Sumathipāla Na Himi alone. If a leech were placed on him, it didn't bite! I became a bhikkhu mainly because of Sumathipāla Na Himi. He was a fine person.

*Did you have other good teachers of meditation?*

I believe I had the best possible teachers. These Sri Lankan meditation teachers were the equals of any teachers in the world, and I am not referring to teachers of the Tipiṭaka. No. I mean teachers of meditation. These teachers selflessly and honestly taught meditation to lots of people, and their only needs were one meal a day, a set of three robes, and a bowl. These meditation teachers were of a much higher quality than the meditation teachers currently living in Sri Lanka. They dedicated their whole lives to teaching others without any concern for themselves. They taught meditation whatever the time of the day, whether it was raining, or whether it was hot or cold. And they never bothered if the meditators were rich or poor, or were of this or that nationality. Most of their time was spent supporting others. They were concerned that the needs of meditators were met, needs such as getting good meals.

Since I could see the high quality of these teachers, I associated as closely as I could with them. I was only a teenager when I first met them and as a rule teenagers never associate closely with senior meditation teachers. Certainly, I was very fortunate to have a close association with senior teachers and I developed a strong confidence in them. With Sumathipāla Na Himi, for example, I interacted on a friendly and personal basis, and occasionally he even gave me a portion of his own meal. He was the embodiment of equanimity. Never disturbed. Once while working on the top of a cabinet, I dropped a can onto Sumathipāla Na Himi's head, badly cutting him. Even though blood flowed and the cut must have been painful, he didn't react. He remained calm.

At that time, the Kanduboda Meditation Centre wasn't prosperous and Sumathipāla Na Himi had to work very hard—he cleaned the grounds, washed gunny rugs that were used as doormats, and wove coconut fronds for the septic pit cover. He

was in his sixties and he was the abbot. I didn't think he should have to work so hard. To help him and give him some free time, I considered ordaining for a year. Up until then, I had been going to the centre only to meditate. Knowing my construction skills to be useful, I reasoned, "Why not stay here and help my teacher? I can meditate in my free time." Though my family approved of me going to Kanduboda just to meditate, they disapproved of me ordaining as a bhikkhu. So from eighteen to twenty years of age, I stopped going to Kanduboda and lived with a group of beggars to test whether I had the capacity to be a bhikkhu. Could I live in the way beggars live? Of course, my parents objected to me begging. So as an alternative, I used the money I brought from home to buy bread from a shop, which I shared it with the beggars. I didn't beg. I ate what the beggars ate and slept where they slept, in a crude shelter or under a tree.

They were good beggars, who lived pure brahmachariya lives. They ate only one meal a day, never asked for anything more, and were always satisfied with what they got. They were genuine. When making tea, the beggars boiled the water, milk, sugar, and tea leaves all together in one pot, and then strained the brew with a dirty old cloth. Very tasty! The owner of a bus company and a university professor also lived with this group of beggars. They too wanted to experience the life of beggars and to test themselves. When the professor finally returned home, his wife had left him. He wrote a book about his experiences as a beggar. My mother realized I was better off as a bhikkhu at Kanduboda than as a beggar on the street, and gave me permission to ordain under Sumathipāla Na Himi for a period of one year. At least as a bhikkhu, she knew my whereabouts. Staying full-time at Kanduboda, I arranged for eight construction workers from the family business to work at Kanduboda. They built and repaired many buildings, some of which still exist. This work was done free of charge and sometimes the workers had their meals out of the centre.

*How old were you?*

Twenty. My father stopped talking to me after I ordained.

*Was this a problem for you?*

No. No problem. Though my father was a well-learned dhamma teacher, he never paid respects to bhikkhus. At the end of my first year at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre, I went home and asked my mother if I could continue for another year. She said yes. Likewise for the next two years, either I went home to gain permission from my mother or my mother came out to Kanduboda and told me, “Wait for another year before disrobing.” Since I was not a permanent resident at Kanduboda, I had no hut of my own and slept wherever I could, sometimes under a tree if nothing else was available. One hut that was often available had an asbestos roof, which made it very hot inside. At the beginning, I worked on construction projects at the centre and then meditated in my free time. Before long, I began integrating my construction work with my meditation practice. There came a time when the construction work and the meditation practice became one. That was my way of living.

To support my practice, I asked Sumathipāla Na Himi if I could bottle up all thirty-two parts of the body and display the bottles. Many people objected as they thought displaying body parts was unsuitable for children and for some adults. Always agreeing with the majority, Sumathipāla Na Himi forbade me from bottling up body parts. I too soon realized there was no benefit in bottling up body parts as it didn’t support my practice. I did, however, think that two human skeletons would support my practice. So I went to a local cemetery and acquired some bones. Then after assembling the bones, I sat the skeletons down on chairs in my hut. A couple of days later, a human scream shook the curtains with its force. The scream seemed to come from one of the skeletons—the one seated right beside me. The doors and windows of the hut were closed. If the scream didn’t

come from one of the skeletons, where did it come from? I searched all around, and could not see anything. I asked the bhikkhu in the next hut if he had heard anything. “No,” said the bhikkhu. “Apart from the sound of a snail being crushed by my foot while I was in the toilet, I didn’t hear anything.”

A few days later, it happened a second time—a loud, human scream. This time I asked a meditator in the centre if he had heard screams. “Yes. I heard someone scream. It came from the street.” I asked a woman on the street; she said, “I too heard someone scream. It came from your meditation centre.” There you have it—three different views from three different people. When the screams happened the third time, I concluded the skeletons weren’t compatible, that they weren’t happy with each other. We buried one skeleton and moved the other into an adjacent hut. Soon afterwards, we hung this skeleton up in a glass-fronted closet at the end of a meditation walking path. It is there to this day. And curiously enough, though the door to the closet is locked, the skeleton sometimes faces the side of the closet and sometimes it faces the front!

*Seems you’re saying that human life remains active even after death.*

Don’t be too concerned. It’s just a story.

## Arahats

After three years at Kanduboda, I lived for the following twelve years in various forest hermitages. And though I never went home and had no visits from family members, I did keep my mother informed of my whereabouts through a third party. Boys in their twenties usually chase girls—I chased enlightenment. I

undertook training in meditation practices, that over the years slowly pushed down my defilements, my kilesas. I clearly saw the defilements receding from my system; they gradually wore away. Eventually, my defilements didn't arise at all and many people thought I had attained arahatship. I too thought I had possibly attained something. But just because a person's defilements aren't arising, you can't say that he or she is an arahat. Yes, it could be that I had actually destroyed my defilements and had attained, or it could be that my training had only suppressed my defilements without any attainment.

Then while walking along a forest path one day, I caught a glimpse of a snake and a touch of fear arose, just the slightest of shimmers ran through my body. No one would normally notice such a slight shimmer. However, the fact that it was possible to be afraid of something made me realize that I hadn't destroyed all of my defilements and that I definitely was not an arahat. And it wasn't even a snake that brought up the fear; it was only a piece of a coconut frond! Nonetheless, aside from that one brief moment of fear that arose, because my practice was strong, through the sheer force of suppression, no other defilements were seen to be arising, not at that time. I chose to stop that particular practice and within two to three years my defilements were back again to normal levels. A few years were spent to suppress the defilements down deep below the surface and a few years for them to come back up to the surface. It takes time for the defilements to come back up to their normal levels of arising.

*If you were back to where you started, what was the point of living in the forest and doing all this hard training in meditation practices?*

Much of what I now teach about dhamma and about renunciation is based upon my experiences in the forest. I learned a great deal there. We must be open-minded and honest



about these things. Many strong meditators are fooling themselves, making a big deal about suppressing their defilements and then jumping to false conclusions, “I am a great meditator.” or “I have attained arahatship.” They aren’t fooling themselves about their defilements not arising. No. Defilements are not to be seen—that is real and true. Many of them can give nice descriptions of dhamma, speak eloquently, and create a wonderful picture of nibbāna. These talks make for quite nice listening. In spite of this, when they don’t admit that their defilements are only suppressed, not destroyed, that there have been no real gains, they are giving in to a pettiness of mind; they are giving in to a conceit, which is foolish and dangerous. We all need to have an open mind about the results of our practices. We must be honest at least with ourselves.

*In our hearts, we know when something is true. We can lie to everyone else!*

Yes, that saññā of honesty has to be there. We need to face the nature of things, “Okay, if it’s over, let it be. If the attainment of arahatship happens, I’ll face it.” When you have an open mind like that, your practice will lead to the real goal. We aren’t fooling ourselves when we admit that our meditation practices are only suppressing our defilements. Fine. No problem. Maybe if I had forced myself to continue the training, I would have eventually destroyed my defilements and attained arahatship. Difficult to know for sure. Even when a meditator’s practice is highly developed, still if he or she wants, the meditator can hold back attainment. We make our choices. I left the forest and, when I did finally return home, my mother had aged considerably.

*She must have thought that you had aged a bit too.*

Yes, she did indeed. In due course, I took my higher ordination with Sumathipāla Na Himi at Kanduboda. And though father didn’t want anything to do with bhikkhus, he did attend the ceremony. It was the one and only time father met Sumathipāla

Na Himi. Father didn't bother to pay respects to any of the  
bhikkhus and he acted up a bit. Sumathipāla Na Himi asked me,  
“Who will tame your father?”



*Then the brahmin student Jotipāla thought: “It is wonderful, it is marvelous that this potter Ghaṭikāra, who is of a different birth, should presume to seize me by the hair when we have washed our heads! Surely, this can be no simple matter.” And he said to the potter Ghaṭikāra: “You go as far as this, my dear Ghaṭikāra?” — “I go as far as this, my dear Jotipāla; for so much do I hold that it is good to see the Blessed One Kassapa, accomplished and fully enlightened!” — “Then, my dear Ghaṭikāra, let go of me. Let us visit him.”*

Ghaṭikāra the Potter Sutta<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Establishing Kindness and Compassion

**Pemasiri Thera:** Did you have your tea?

*David: I’ve had enough tea!... Why do I get so angry with so many people? And sometimes I feel that I really hate you, especially when you lose your temper and shout at people. What’s happening?*

Hate is too strong a word to use, as hate is connected with wanting to kill someone, and I don’t think that you want to kill me. No, you don’t hate me. You’re more like a young high school student who is mad at his principal. The student wants to change the principal and the principal wants to change the student. No, you’re just angry, which is the nature of being human. A precursor to ill-will, anger arises when craving and clinging conflict with life’s experience. Apparently, you want your dealings with people to always be satisfactory and pleasant. You are clinging to that view and, when people fail to

meet your cravings, you get angry with them. Anger can also arise out of fear, and for fear to arise, there must be aversion or danger. Then, we use anger to strengthen and protect ourselves. While you have come close to hitting people, others kill. People see a snake, and instantly fear arises. They know the snake is venomous and it might attack, and so danger is perceived. People use anger to kill the snake.

*Are you saying that anger is useful?*

No, anger isn't a state that is generally useful, or worth cultivating. I'm only pointing out that anger exists, simply an aspect being human. There is a giant centipede in Burma that, although its bite is deadly poisonous, is also considered a delicious food. So when a man finds this centipede, he uses anger to try and kill it. Then the giant centipede fights back and the man is afraid of being killed. In this situation, anger and fear arise together.

*Does anger cause sadness?*

Even though sadness can arise out of anger, it's generally mixed up with our cravings and clinging. If insects eat my texts, I am sad because my property is damaged. I am not angry with the insects. We are also sad when a friend falls sick. Again, there is no anger in our sadness. We might fear that our friend will die, but that fear is based on our clinging to our friend. Fear and sadness arise to the same level as the clinging. And when friends intentionally hurt us, we are only sad and not angry.

*If a friend intentionally hurts me, I certainly get angry, and not just sad. You must be more advanced than me. Is this love that you're talking about?*

We need to realize it's in the nature of people to be critical and that we can't always understand the minds of others. Anger is part of a process that develops in recognizable stages:

- Dislike
- Annoyance
- ANGER
- Ill-will
- Hate
- Cruelty
- Revenge

Dislike, annoyance, and anger are spontaneous, lasting for a few seconds, minutes, hours, or maybe even a day or two. They are not necessarily bad or dangerous stages. Yes, I admit that sometimes I do get angry and occasionally even shout at someone. Then after a short period of time, I forget all about being angry. And when that person comes by again for a visit, maybe hours or days or months later, we carry on without harbouring any anger towards each other. Our anger only lasted for a short period of time. If anger goes on for a long period, it develops into ill-will and then eventually into hate, which is a bad and dangerous stage because hate is the source for cruel actions. Hate is intentional, always includes the element of cruelty and leads to everyone's destruction. The other person is your enemy and you want to destroy him. Not going so far as murder, you devise ways of destroying the other person's wealth, livelihood, and reputation. In universities and offices, hate takes the form of backbiting and character assassination. There is more hate in Sri Lanka today than fifty years ago. And then there is revenge, which is an extremely bad and dangerous stage where you retaliate and possibly kill someone.

Seed of Hate

Anger is a seed that is in each and every one of us. When suitable conditions exist, this bad seed develops into ill-will, hate, cruelty, and revenge. We are forever cultivating the suitable conditions to develop our anger into hate. In a previous birth before attaining enlightenment, the future Buddha lived as the ascetic Khantivadi. He lived a free and peaceful life, wandering here and there. One day, Khantivadi wandered into a park where a king was having a wonderful time with a group of beautiful women. The ascetic didn't join the king and his group. Instead, he found a quiet place to meditate. After the king enjoyed himself, he was tired and lay down for a nap. The women weren't tired and went to see Khantivadi. The ascetic talked with them about patience, kindness, and restraint.

When the king woke up and found all his beautiful playmates to be with the ascetic Khantivadi, he was jealous and angry. The king didn't waste any time listening to Khantivadi's words about the benefits of patience and the importance of restraint, even if one is beaten and abused. No. Instead, the king confronted Khantivadi, drew out his sword and cut off the the ascetic's ears. The king yelled, "Do you still have patience? Where is your kindness now?" Khantivadi said, "Yes, of course." With his anger fired up into hate, the king cut off Khantivadi's hands and demanded, "And now? Do you still have patience and restraint?" To which the hermit replied, "Yes." The king then hacked off Khantivadi's legs. "And now? Where is your kindness?" Wracked in pain, Khantivadi could only gesture towards his heart. The king was delirious with hate and kicked the noble ascetic to death. The ascetic Khantivadi died peacefully without any angry thoughts. The king died horribly and took birth in a hell.

*That's a good story. I'll remember it.*

Through meditation, we prevent anger, the seed of hate, from developing into full-blown hate and then into cruelty. We aren't

eliminating anger, as anger is a natural part of being human. Instead, we are trying to eliminate the views that develop our anger into hate and cruelty. Even though anger arises, we don't respond with hate and cruelty. Let's say three businessmen have a heated argument over the funding of a project. Over the next few days, the first businessman remains very angry with his colleagues. He mulls over the argument at great length and depth, which develops his anger into hate. The second businessman is also very angry with his colleagues, but he doesn't mull over the argument in his mind and thus his anger doesn't develop into hate. The third businessman isn't angry at all. He stands back from the argument and isn't affected. His response is neutral. Though the second businessman is more affected by the argument than the third, is still angry with his colleagues, he doesn't let his anger develop into hate. After the argument is over, the second businessman can work with his colleagues. This is a valuable quality.

We must differentiate between anger and hate: while anger is spontaneous and unintentional, hate is premeditated and intentional; and while anger isn't necessarily dangerous, hate is definitely dangerous. Hate is linked to cruelty. Anger is the lesser of two evils and can be dropped more easily than hate. We have to be aware of what we are doing. A few days ago, four soldiers visited me. All four were blind and two were missing limbs. I asked them, "What do you feel towards the LTTE<sup>4</sup> soldiers? Do you want revenge?" One soldier said, "No, we don't want revenge and we don't even hate the LTTE. In fact, we don't want them or anyone else to be blind. It's terrible." I think the soldier answered honestly. "Why did you enlist?" I asked. "I enlisted because it was my duty to serve my country," said the soldier. "It was a call. Later, soldiering became my profession and I went into battle. I wasn't thinking of killing anyone or being killed. Going into battle was like going into a fistfight." With that energy, these soldiers fought and suffered painful

consequences. Even so, they are wise enough to have compassion for the LTTE soldiers. At least, they don't hate them.

Acts of anger cannot be considered in the same light as acts of hate and cruelty. Acts of anger are spontaneous, starting and finishing quickly without any ulterior motives or thoughts of destruction. Acts of hate and cruelty, on the other hand, are premeditated, "I will do this." or "I will say that." When a mother scolds a child, a certain amount of anger is directed at the child. But generally there isn't any hate or cruelty directed at the child. It is the same for teachers and their students.

When I was a young novice at the original Kanduboda Meditation Centre, there were lots of banana plants on the property. I remember one day when the bananas on one plant were being harvested. Although harvesting is a job for workers, not for novices, one fellow novice was very involved in giving instructions to the workers on just how to go about cutting down one particularly big and beautiful bunch of bananas. The novice was telling the workers how each and every cut should be made. A senior bhikkhu saw the novice and said, "Look, milk is going to drip from the stem and you are going to get it on your robes. It will be difficult to wash out. Cutting down bananas is none of your business. Stand aside and let the man do his work." Despite the warning, the novice was too interested in the act of cutting down the bananas and continued to instruct the workers. The bhikkhu got very angry, "If words are not enough, action is necessary." He then took a lime tree branch—and lime tree branches are full of thorns—and he was determined to give the novice a good whipping. He headed for the novice. Then he relented, threw the branch to the ground in disgust and walked away from the novice and the situation. Although anger was present in the bhikkhu, hate wasn't. He had no desire to destroy the novice.

It's helpful to note the difference between anger and hate. If,



for example, we know someone's behaviour is based on anger and not on hate, it's much easier to live with him or her. We know the anger will pass and that he or she isn't out to destroy us. In a teacher-student relationship, a student often does things that make the teacher angry. But if the student knows the teacher's anger is based on compassion and not on hate, the student will continue to have a healthy relationship with his teacher. I witnessed the whipping of a small, young novice who had committed a serious offence. Feeling no other punishment to be suitable, his teacher whipped and whipped and whipped. He whipped continuously until the novice was crying and his skin was cut and bleeding. When the teacher had finished with the whipping, a bhikkhu who was watching was moved by the unpleasant incident, and he took the novice aside and applied medicinal oil to the novice's wounds. He held and comforted the crying novice. Seeing the bhikkhu comforting the novice, the teacher who had just delivered the whipping also began to cry. So, both the teacher and the novice were crying. When the novice saw his teacher crying, he realized his teacher still had compassion for him, despite the whipping.

Of course, many students as well as children don't see the compassion in their teachers' or in their parents' anger. In an intense outburst, a teacher might yell or throw something to the floor, yet still have a lot of compassion for the student. Experiencing too much pain, the student sees only hate and may even stop studying if his teacher's anger is too intense. This may make the teacher even angrier and his anger might then develop into hate and cruelty. Cruelty won't correct a student's behaviour and, if cruelty is the only form of contact a student has with his teacher, the student will reject his teacher. A teacher tries to teach according to the student's mental state. This can't, however, be sustained indefinitely, all day and every day. Teachers are in a difficult situation. It's not easy. So sometimes the teacher falls short and the student thinks the teacher doesn't have any

compassion. There are always misunderstandings between teachers and students. And so, a student who can appreciate the challenges that his teacher faces—then this is good.

*What are the costs of hate and cruelty?*

The cost is suffering here and now, and in the future. A cruel person takes a downward birth. We must avoid hate—leave it all at just anger.

*How?*

Since loving-kindness and compassion are the direct opposite of anger, we use them to prevent our anger from developing into hate and cruelty.

## Kindness and Compassion

When I am angry with you, I practise loving-kindness, mettā. I speak words of kindness, asking, “Would you like a cup of tea?” “What’s bothering you?” and “Can I help in any way?” I ask you these questions, and I try hard to be genuine as I say these things.

*Suppose you just avoid me?*

No, that makes matters worse. I must go out of my way to be kind and helpful, even when you’re not present. Going out of my way is the practice of meditation. Last week, you left your laptop computer in the kitchen and it was brought to me. It is an expensive piece of equipment and you don’t want to lose it. Even though I was angry with you, I looked after your property so that it wouldn’t be stolen. I didn’t say, “Oh, that laptop belongs to the Canadian meditator. Whatever happens, happens. Do what you like with it.” No, I cared for your property in the

same way I want my own property to be cared for. This is mettā. I learned about mettā from my mother, not from a bhikkhu. My mother was very kind and even though I regularly upset her, she never hit me or spoke harshly. Instead, she explained the effects of my actions. When my mother was told that I'd been seen fighting with other children, she said, "I worry when you get into these fights. It's me who suffers, not you." When she spoke in this way, I thought, "It's enough. I'll try not to fight with anyone." She didn't have to yell or resort to any physical means of punishment, such as whipping.

*Should I practise mettā for those who are angry with me?*

Yes, we practise metta, especially towards people who are full of anger and hate. This isn't easy because people have defilements, which makes them suspicious, "Why is Pemasiri being kind?" or "What does he want?" Even though the person would benefit from my help and I'm not expecting anything in return, he or she rejects it. Some people even think that I am just plain foolish to go out of my way and help others. Mettā is often misunderstood.

*It is easier to be angry, and hit the person.*

Yes. A good hard hit is how society usually responds to anger. Perhaps in Canada, you can settle your disputes with a brief fistfight and your anger ends when the fight ends. That is not the case in Sri Lanka. Anger does not end when the fight ends. The person's anger goes on and on, develops into hate, and is carried around possibly for generations. This has happened many times to me, an endless number of times.

*Does metta stop anger?*

The practice of mettā is the direct opposite to anger and hate. It is the most effective way of dealing with anger and hate. Meditators who develop mettā up to the jhāna level bear no anger towards anyone. "Spread mettā to all beings," said the Buddha. A person who has mettā has no enemies, has no anger

towards anything. To be completely free from anger, however, we have to attain the stage of anāgāmī. We also overcome anger with compassion, karunā in Pali. The practice of karunā is also often misunderstood. In its basic application, we notice that someone needs help and we help them. In a more advanced application of karunā, we help anyone, good or bad. Perhaps they have no pañca-sīla, such as murderers, thieves, adulterers, liars, and drunkards. We help the man who murdered his mother; we help people like Prabhakaran, the former leader of the LTTE; and we help the arahats. When we help the murderer and help the Prabhakarans of this world, many people will disapprove; some will definitely think we're crazy. The man who murdered his mother is in one way worse off than Prabhakaran—at least Prabhakaran didn't murder his mother.

*It seems to me that this process of meditation also arrives at kindness and compassion, and so perhaps it is both a ground from which we begin and a state to which we aspire? This is so parallel to the teachings of Jesus Christ! Wisdom is wisdom.*

Do you remember Devadatta's assassination attempts on the Buddha? He hurled a stone at the Buddha and slightly injured him. The Buddha suffered physically and Devadatta suffered mentally. Both the Buddha and Devadatta suffered. If we lived at that time and helped both the Buddha and Devadatta, we would have been practising karunā. Many wealthy people take great pleasure in spoiling a child from their own social class. Yet, they find it impossible to touch a beggar's child. This isn't karunā. And there are lots of mangy dogs on our streets, full of sores with their skin peeling off. People chase these dogs away because they don't want to even see them. But the dogs that are beautiful, that look like powder puffs, people pet them and keep them on their laps and might even let these dogs sleep in their beds. Nothing is too good for a powder puff dog. Again, this is not karunā. Karunā means we care for all children and all dogs

in the same way.

*When I see a mangy dog, I feel pain and want to help. Is this karuna?*

That state of mind is karunā.

*I want to relieve my own pain.*

You can practise karunā to relieve your own pain. And you can practise karunā to relieve the dog's pain, without thinking of yourself. Either way is karunā; either way is compassion.

*Do I practise karuna for myself?*

Yes. When you have karunā for the dog, you arouse karunā within yourself. And when you cared for lepers in India, you aroused karunā. Your actions were performed with karunā. You weren't thinking in terms of race or religion. Say I only help the Sinhalese war refugees and don't help the Tamil refugees—that is not karunā, as karunā is universal. If you're practising karunā, you don't measure one person to be Sinhalese and another person to be Tamil. When I was in Sydney, Australia, a Tamil girl came to our centre and everyone helped her. Well, it turned out she was LTTE and she left Sydney to go and help them. That was her business. She did what she wanted to do. Her actions, however, didn't make any difference to our karunā. We showed her karunā because she was a human being in need of help. How she reacted to our karunā was her business. We will have very few chances to cultivate karunā if we are forever measuring whether or not a person is sincere and deserving. And if karunā isn't cultivated, if it doesn't have a chance to arise, there will come a time when it will be difficult to feel any karunā, even when we need to feel compassion. The person who expects karunā, expects compassion, does not understand compassion. It could be that he wants our money, by fair means or foul. That doesn't matter. We still practise and cultivate karunā.

*I love these teachings!*

When I was a teenager, my brother had a garment shop and he often gave me new sarongs. If a beggar saw me wearing the new sarong, he'd ask for it, and I'd always give it to him. Upon discovering what I was doing, my brother refused to give me any more sarongs. He also told the other shop owners in our area not to give me a sarong. Even if I went into a shop to buy one, the owner wouldn't sell it to me. For a long time, nobody gave or sold me sarongs. Eventually I got a chance to buy a nice red-checked silk sarong, and my mother, keeping a close eye on my clothes, said, "Well now, you have a new sarong. Remember not to give it away." Sure enough, a beggar soon came along and he wanted my new red-checked sarong. To avoid getting into trouble with my mother, I gave the beggar an old white sarong. "No," said the beggar, "I don't want your old white sarong. I want your new red-checked one." I then gave the beggar the red-checked sarong and told my mother that I had given my new sarong to the laundry. The following week the beggar came to our house and he was wearing the red-checked sarong. "Well," said my mother, "the laundry has arrived!"

Another time, I joined a group of pilgrims to climb Sri Pāda Peak. On our way back down from the peak, we met a beggar who was wearing an old tattered sarong and without delay I swapped the new sarong I was wearing for his old one. The beggar was very happy. The pilgrims, however, were very unhappy. They strongly disagreed with my actions and scolded me all the way home. That's society. People don't understand karunā. We must help others as much as we can, within our limitations, and we must know our limitations. There are certain things we cannot do for others. When we foolishly go beyond our limitations, we will find ourselves in difficulty. We have to know how to help.

A young man asked for my help when I was at the original

Kanduboda. He was poor and had only one leg. The man said, "I have no place to live and I want to get married." We gave him what he wanted—money, an artificial leg, household items, a house, and a job. A few months later, he returned to Kanduboda, "I lost the things you gave me and the house is in need of repairs. Could you give me more help?" We gave him more help. We made the necessary repairs to the house, which was falling to pieces, and we found him another job. "Don't give that man any more help," said a friend. "He is a liar and a fraud." This indeed was the case. The man was spending all the donations on simply enjoying himself, leaving his wife and child to live in extremely bad conditions. I also learned he lied to the soldiers manning the nearby checkpoint. Just recently the man showed up again, "I was a soldier and lost my leg while fighting in Jaffna. Could you help me?" I immediately chased him away. At that moment I had no mettā or karunā in my mind. None. In a month or two, he will surely come again with another story. It wasn't right that I chased him away. That action was wrong but natural because his lies really hurt our efforts to help many people in the Kanduboda area. If I had just told him to go away without being angry, it would have been all right.

*Right on. Are you angry with him now?*

No, not at all. There will always be people who will take advantage of mettā and karunā. This man lied to us and he gained a few items. When his lies were exposed, we cut off our association. There is nothing wrong in simply staying away from him, without being angry. When we help someone with karunā, there are no expectations and hence no anger when things don't work out. You had a pet snake when you were a child. Despite feeding and caring for it, you still knew it was a snake and that at any time it could turn on you and bite. I help people if they need help. Otherwise, I leave them alone.

*What about reforming people?*

I tried that a few years ago. One of the workers at Kanduboda had a bad habit of stealing everything he could lay his hands on, and we had to let him go. A year later, the man returned and asked if he could have his old job back. He was full of repentance and wanted a second chance. Thinking I could reform him, I gave him a job. Members of Kanduboda's committee condemned my decision. They didn't believe the man could change. "Please," said one of the members, "don't allow this man to work at our centre." I wouldn't change my decision and for over a year the man was unbelievably good, doing no harm, not even to an ant. Everybody was very happy with him until one day he again stole everything he could lay his hands on. It was a big problem. And once again, the members condemned me.

I used to believe that I could measure a person's character, "This man is exceptionally good; this woman is 50% good; this girl is about 60% good; and this man, well, he is 100% bad!" When asked, I gave an exceptionally good man or woman a recommendation for employment. Then sometimes, the man I had measured as good turned out to be bad and his employer blamed me, "We hired this man on your recommendation and he cheated us. It is your fault." And then there were times when I had measured people as bad and they turned out to be remarkably good. I am now more cautious about measuring people. When asked about a person's character, I say, "Well, she was good when she worked with us. I don't know how she is now." or "He was bad when I knew him, but he may have improved." Because people have deceived me too many times, I no longer contemplate the wonderful qualities of people. It's perfectly peaceful to contemplate trees and flowers. But people? I invariably remember their bad qualities. So these days, I contemplate the qualities of the Buddha and the arahats—that contemplation gives me lots of joy. "Follow the example of the arahats," said the Buddha.

*I find it difficult to associate with people who criticize*



*everyone.*

People who are without defilement can associate with anyone. We can't help it if others measure us in various ways.

*What to do when people yell at me?*

We look at difficult situations with clear comprehension and then act with wisdom, which means using lots of mettā and karunā. What we learn from these dhamma discussions must be applied in our daily lives. It's quite useless if we just discuss a problem and stop there. Pointless. The dhamma is a path of training. When we are happy, we make others happy. I can't be with a long face.

## Little Things

The little things we do can help people a lot. An elderly woman who begs at our centre once told me, "People are cruel. They always chase me away." I said to her, "Elder sister, you are welcome here and I will go begging with you." She was very happy to think that we would go begging together. It brought her a great deal of joy. "You are crazy," said one man. "Don't tell her that you'll go begging with her." But I wanted to make her happy. That's all. With few exceptions, I never chase beggars away and always find the time to talk with them.

Just the other day, two young girls raced up the path to see me. They were excited and happy because they had just completed their "ordinary-level" examinations. Rejoicing with them, I gave them pieces of toffee and I expressed my joy at their success. If I hadn't rejoiced with them, the two girls would have been hurt. A bhikkhu recently told me of a five-year-old girl who lives near his aranya and, whenever he goes for alms, he always

lets her know that he is going for alms. One day, he forgot to tell her and she cried all day. She was so sad the bhikkhu had forgotten her. When the bhikkhu heard that the little girl was sad, he immediately went to her house and spoke with her, and then she was happy again. It often doesn't take too much to make people happy. Even animals are happy when we are kind to them. Many animals just want to have a conversation.

There are countless stories of bhikkhus living in harmony with animals in the forest. I knew a bhikkhu who was on very friendly terms with monkeys and deer and elephants. When he went down to the river to fetch some water, many monkeys went with him, and one of the monkeys would help him carry the water back to his hut. The bhikkhu held one side of the bucket, the monkey held the other side, and together they walked along. Many of these same monkeys came for the bhikkhu's evening chanting. When he had finished chanting, the bhikkhu had to tell them to leave; otherwise, the monkeys stayed all night. Even the deer joined him on his walks down to the river. And at the same time most every day, there was an elephant that arrived at the bhikkhu's hut. If the elephant was late in arriving, the bhikkhu asked, "Why are you so late?" And it made squeaky sounds. This elephant slept just a few metres away from the bhikkhu's hut. Sometimes, it slept right in the middle of the path leading to the toilet and the bhikkhu had to ask the elephant to move out of the way. Even in those times when the bhikkhu had to rush past the elephant, the elephant remained calm. No reaction. The elephant wouldn't harm the bhikkhu. Never! This bhikkhu and elephant could be friends because the bhikkhu was always kind to the elephant and his robes smelled of the forest. After the age of eighty, the bhikkhu moved away from the aranya and returned to the Kanduboda Meditation Centre. He used to sleep in his coffin! When village people arrived at the bhikkhu's former aranya, their smells of perfume and soap upset the elephant. The village people then killed the elephant.

Animals normally attack people because they sense danger. Yet Samita, a Western bhikkhu who lived in the forest for seven years, was never attacked or harmed in any way by animals. Often out exploring, he once lost his way and found himself in the middle of a herd of elephants. The lead elephant picked Samita up with its trunk and walked towards the road. Seeing Samita in the elephant's grip, the villagers thought it was going to kill him. The elephant had no intention to kill. When the elephant reached the road, it set Samita down—unharmd. A long time later, when Samita did eventually die, the newspapers reported that an elephant had killed him. That's false. Samita always lived in harmony with elephants and other wild animals. He died of starvation. I knew the police officer who gave Samita his last meal.

*I heard that Bhikkhu Samita died from a drug overdose, that he committed suicide.*

A number of things likely came together in Bhikkhu Samita's death. Doctors said Samita could have overdosed on the medicine he was taking for various conditions. Like Samita, I also lived in forest aranyas with various animals. At one aranya, a female leopard used to visit my hut, sometimes leaving her cubs with me while she went off searching for food. In another aranya, wild boars regularly payed us visits because we received curd and they wanted some of it. I shared a third aranya with a herd of elephants where a baby elephant, still a large animal, once took hold of a bhikkhu, held him by his robe and wouldn't let it go. The baby elephant's mother came by and pulled her baby away from the bhikkhu. Another time I heard loud crashing sounds and upon investigation I discovered an elephant cheerfully trampling a large pile of bricks. "Elephant!" I said. "These bricks are for a bhikkhu's hut. The bhikkhus who live in these huts practise mettā towards you. They practise karunā. Please don't trample the bricks." The elephant lifted its

head, looked at me, and walked away.



*And then Venerable Ānanda approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and said to him, “It is wonderful, Venerable sir! It is amazing Venerable sir! This dependent origination is so deep and so deep in implications, yet to me it seems as clear as clear can be.”*

*Not so, Ānanda! Not so, Ānanda! This dependent origination is deep and deep in implications. It is because of not understanding and not penetrating this Dhamma, Ānanda, that this generation has become like a tangled skein, like a knotted ball of thread, like matted reeds and rushes, and does not pass beyond the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world, saṃsāra.*

The Buddha—Causation Sutta<sup>5</sup>

### 3. The Process of Dependent Origination

**David:** *I’d alike to know about the Buddha’s teachings on the process of dependent origination. The law of causality.*

**Pemasiri Thera:** Why do you care about dependent origination?

*I’ve been meditating for twenty years, spent years, many years with you, studying the four noble truths and the eightfold path, but I don’t see any real gains. I’m hoping that understanding dependent origination will lead to some of these real gains. I want to ease my suffering, improve my life—this is why I care about dependent origination.*

To very intelligent people, the Buddha only needed to teach the four noble truths and the eightfold path; nothing more was needed for their attainment to sotāpatti and beyond. To less

intelligent people, he also had to teach the process of dependent origination. You have enough wisdom to at least look in the right direction.

The process of dependent origination, paṭiccasamuppāda, explains the process of conditional arising of all material and non-material phenomena, with the exception of nibbāna, in all the worlds of birth. The basic formula is clear-cut, as the Buddha states in many suttas in the Nidāna Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya:<sup>6</sup> “When there is this, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When there isn’t this, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that also ceases.” Causes and effects. The Buddha directly addresses dependent origination in about forty suttas and he implies it in every sutta. Take a look at the Origination Sutta;<sup>7</sup> that’s an interesting sutta. Upon concluding a teaching, the Buddha reminded his listeners to be constantly aware of dependent origination because, when a man or a woman understands dependent origination, he or she turns towards nibbāna. It is that simple and that important. When causes and effects are clearly seen, we see the release from causes and effects. “One who sees dependent origination,” said Venerable Sāriputta, “sees the dhamma, and one who sees the dhamma sees dependent origination.”<sup>8</sup> The whole of the Buddha-Dhamma is a dhamma of dependent origination.

*I’m interested in the twelve factors of dependent origination.*

Not only those twelve factors that you’re familiar with, the four noble truths, every verse of the Dhammapada, the eightfold path, and the seven factors of enlightenment—all of these teachings act in accordance with the process of dependent origination. For example, the four noble truths are generally taught in one standard order: suffering is placed first; craving is second; the end of suffering third; and the eightfold path fourth. This is how the four noble truths are taught. The four noble truths are

understood, however, in a different order: craving is placed first; suffering follows second; the eightfold path is third; and the end of suffering fourth.

- When we crave, we suffer
- When we follow the eightfold path, we end our suffering

In the very first verse of the Dhammapada, the Buddha states, “Mind is forerunner. If we act in a harmful way, with bad intention, then just as the cart wheel rolls behind the foot of the ox, suffering follows.” In the second verse, he says, “If we act in a beneficial way, that’s with good intention, then as our shadow is cast wherever we go, happiness follows.” In these two verses, the Buddha covers all four of the four noble truths: craving, suffering, eightfold path, and the end of suffering. Now look at the eightfold path, as it too acts in accordance with the process of dependent origination: <sup>9</sup>

- When we have the right understanding, right thoughts and intentions arise
- When we have right thoughts, right speech arises
- When we practise right speech, right actions arise
- When we perform right actions, a right way of living arises
- When we live in a right way, right effort arises
- When we strive with the right effort, right mindfulness arises
- And when we attend to objects with right mindfulness, right concentration arises

And no matter where we are walking, whether it’s along the

eightfold path or along the seven factors of enlightenment path, each step we take depends upon our preceding step. The seven factors of enlightenment, the *bojjhaṅga*:<sup>10</sup>

- When we are in one of the four foundations of mindfulness—mindful contemplation of body, feeling, states of mind, and mind-objects—our mindfulness is established and the enlightenment factor of mindfulness, *sati-sambojjhaṅga*, arises
- When we abide fully mindful, we see what is beneficial, as well as see what is harmful, and the enlightenment factor of the investigation into the nature of things, *dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga*, arises
- When we abide fully mindful, we see what is beneficial, as well as see what is harmful, and the enlightenment factor of the investigation into the nature of things, *dhamma-vicaya-sambojjhaṅga*, arises
- When the nature of things is fully investigated, the enlightenment factor of effort, *virīya-sambojjhaṅga*, arises
- When our effort is firm, we restrain and abandon the harmful, as well as develop and maintain the beneficial. The enlightenment factor of rapture, *pīti-sambojjhaṅga*, then arises
- When we are rapturous, our bodies are light and our minds are composed, which leads to the arising of the enlightenment factor of serenity, *passaddhi-sambojjhaṅga*
- When we are serene and entirely linked to the beneficial, the enlightenment factor of concentration, *samādhi-sambojjhaṅga*, arises
- And when our minds are fully settled down in the state of *samādhi*, we see the corelessness of what is called feeling: it is either pleasant or painful. And with the arising of this realization, the enlightenment factor of



equanimity, *upekkhā-sambojjhaṅga*, arises

The Buddha said, “Let the factors of enlightenment grow as a series of causes and effects.” To bring the factors of enlightenment to mind, to develop them, you have to make some effort, *viriya*. And though not explicitly stated, the enlightenment factor of *vāyāma* is understood to work in partnership with *viriya*. *Vāyāma* is primarily physical, body effort; whereas *viriya* is mental effort. We must include *vāyāma* when we discuss *viriya*. When our entire physical and mental efforts are, in a completely wholesome and beneficial way, directed towards breaking free from *saṃsāra*, we are working with *ātāpī-sampajañña*. *Ātāpī* is physical and mental enthusiasm; while *sampajañña* is clear comprehension. Thus with diligence—and I mean the collection of *viriya*, *sati*, and *pañña*—the enlightenment factor of rapture arises.

## Applied Dependent Origination

The practice of *bhāvanā* only starts when you start developing the *bojjhaṅgas*. With mindfulness, with *sati*, you know when an enlightenment factor is present, when it’s absent, how to make it arise, and how to fulfill it. If you aren’t developing the enlightenment factors, you aren’t meditating. You’re doing something else. Before meditators attain stream-entry, they are practising the factors of enlightenment as *vipassanā* rather than truly as factors of enlightenment. They are just seeing their defilements, without seeing the causes that lead to the arising of defilements. Since the link between causes and effects, *hetu-phala*, isn’t seen, there’s no possibility for the destruction of defilements, *kilesas*.

*I'm not following. Could what you're saying be seen as an, "If this happens, then that happens," connection?*

Yes, seeing causes and effects. In the Bojjhaṅga Suttas, Kassapa and Moggallāna use reflection on the seven factors of enlightenment to cure their sicknesses. You too can reflect on them. The Buddha regularly brought these factors to mind. However, the factors of enlightenment can only be practised as factors of enlightenment after the attainment of stream-entry. Once meditators attain to sotāpatti, stream-entry, they have both sati and paññā. They see causes and effects, and destroy defilements. The sotāpanna can see the subha in the asubha, see the asubha in the subha, and can choose to be in equanimity. For clarification, see the Kindness Sutta in the Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta.<sup>11</sup> And though still doing some measuring, the sotāpanna sees his or her own measuring and in that insight there is an underlying base of compassion.

*Are you using the word measuring to mean comparing and judging?*

I mean measuring in the sense of giving marks or scores to people and views and other things. For example, after taking many meditation courses, a meditator may indulge in measuring—I am better than this meditator; I am equal to that meditator; I'm not as good as this other meditator; this is good and that's bad; I'm right and they're wrong. The veteran of many meditation courses often has lots of likes and dislikes. However, if the meditator is going to make any progress in his or her practice, the meditator must see that he or she is measuring and then offset the measuring by seeing the asubha in the subha—the problem in the pleasure. This is crucial. Only by seeing and then taking steps to eliminate measuring can a meditator improve his or her perception. If measuring isn't even seen, the meditator is lost. Take care not to measure.

*What's asubha?*

Subha is usually defined as the pleasure we take from objects. Whereas, asubha means seeing the reality of pleasurable objects. If you love an object too much, it eventually causes you some problems. Take the boy who is attracted to the hair of a young girl. Some day the girl's hair will turn grey and it won't be very attractive. Perhaps the young girl gets cancer and has to undergo chemotherapy, which causes her hair to fall out. In both cases, the girl and the boy suffer. The cancer is painful for the girl as well as the boy. But the meditator who has sati, mindfulness, sees the girl and the boy and the suffering that arises. The meditator sees the pain that arises out of clinging. I am not saying we see the beautiful as ugly. No. If a meditator looks at beautiful objects and says these objects are repulsive, he or she is just creating aversion. It's foolish to look at a beautiful woman and say she's ugly. Not true. She isn't ugly. She's beautiful. You get some pleasure when you see her. But in the longer perspective, she won't be so beautiful, as all conditioned objects are subject to decay, and destruction.

*Is non-useful a better translation for asubha?*

It's only fair. A better translation for asubha would be, "*leads to a problem.*" Some people use the word repulsive. That is too strong. Subha means auspicious in Sinhalese, but again not a good translation. With useful as the translation for subha, asubha would mean non-useful. We tend to think of our bodies at the same time as useful and pleasurable. What do you think? Is your body useful?

*Sure, it carries my mind around.*

I thought you would say that. Don't think about the mind.

*Well, let's say this: there's no life without a body.*

You can't get anything useful or positive from your body. Not

from the long perspective. Nothing permanently good comes from it. The body ages and life becomes unpleasant. This is the definition of asubha. Read the story of Sirimā.<sup>12</sup> While alive, she was the most desired and expensive prostitute in her city. A few days after her death, the Buddha, a group of bhikkhus, and some lay people went to see her. Only the Buddha knew that she had died. One of the bhikkhus in the group had always found her very attractive and was looking forward to visiting her. When they saw Sirimā, however, she was no longer beautiful. A few days in the tropical heat had turned the most beautiful woman in the city into a heap of black and boiling putrid flesh. The Buddha asked, “Now, who will pay 1,000 coins to spend a night with Sirimā?” No one takes up the offer. “Who will pay 500 coins?” And so on. He carries on to a fraction of a coin and then states, “She’s free! No charge!” It seems the Buddha had a sense of humor. Not surprisingly, no one takes up his offer because, once a person is dead, the value is gone. There is such a fine line between a living body and a dead body.

*Should I see the asubha of my own body or other people’s bodies?*

It doesn’t matter. You can practise asubha on yourself or on others. It’s all the four primary elements—earth, water, fire, and air. There is no me or mine or them, just hair, nails, teeth... same, same, same. Be practical. Remember greed, aversion, and delusion lead to dukkha; and asubha, mettā and paññā lead to liberation. The body isn’t, in this essential sense, useful. It only leads to problems. If you practise asubha, you have an undistorted perception; you’ll include in your perception the unpleasant and unsatisfactory aspects of the body and will not focus your attention solely on its pleasant aspects. And as your wisdom develops, your painful mental feelings will gradually diminish. An undistorted perception also means seeing the subha in the asubha.

*And how would I see the pleasant in what is unpleasant and problematic?*

Seeing the subha in the asubha means seeing the non-loathsome in what is normally seen as loathsome and disgusting, say a rotting corpse. It's not that you see the pleasant in a rotting corpse. That's also a distortion. When practising properly, there is simply no intellectualization of the object, just the way things are. You have a neutral and balanced response, and it happens automatically. When a young and attractive woman drops by, for example, you immediately see the aging and decay aspects too, and know that this young woman will be an old woman someday. Does the young man who marries a twenty-year-old woman also think of her turning eighty and living in a nursing home? No, his perception is distorted. We need to develop a more balanced view. Is this material too difficult for you?

*You're pushing my intellectual limits! Though it's okay, a pleasure to listen to someone who understands the dhamma so well. Where do these painful mental feelings, say my fears, come from?*

Fear, which is related to doubt, sadness, remorse, depression, and anger, is part of everyone's life. Fear arises out of craving for objects of experience. Again, it's the process of dependent origination: to whatever level your craving for an object arises, your fear of losing the object will arise to the same level. If the object you crave is common and you can easily replace it with something similar, your level of craving and fear are low. The mat I'm sitting on is falling apart; yet, I'm not too worried about losing it because almost for certain someone will eventually offer a similar mat. If the object you crave is irreplaceable, your level of craving and fear are high. You have lots of fear of losing your father. All this craving and fear arise out of vitakka, applied thought. I could waste my time worrying, "Will someone ever offer me a new mat?" or "Maybe the mat they will offer won't be

quite as good as I want it to be.” And when the new mat arrives, it could be a better and nicer mat than the one I’d hoped for. Since children don’t have applied thoughts, they are fearless, which is why they get burned from playing with fire. Applied thoughts lead to disturbances in our equanimity, not just fear but also jealousy and ill-will. Read the Honeyball Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya.<sup>13</sup>

*Good examples. Thanks.*

## Traditional Teaching

*I’d like to talk about the traditional teaching on dependent origination, the one about the twelve factors.*

We have been talking about dependent origination in a universal way. Remember, dependent on one thing, another thing arises. Causes, conditions, and effects. In the specific teaching that you’re talking about, the Buddha proposes that twelve factors, twelve chief causes and effects, perpetuate our experience in saṃsāra, the cycle of rebirth. This is found in the Nidāna Saṃyutta.<sup>14</sup> And true to the ways of dependent origination, each of its twelve factors depends upon the arising of each immediately preceding factor:

1. Dependent on ignorance, formations arise; *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*
2. Dependent on formations, consciousness arises; *saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ*
3. Dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality arises; *viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*

4. Dependent on mentality-materiality, the six sense bases arise; *nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*
5. Dependent on the six sense bases, contact arises; *saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso*
6. Dependent on contact, feeling arises; *phassa-paccayā vedanā*
7. Dependent on feeling, craving arises; *vedanā-paccayā tañhā*
8. Dependent on craving, clinging arises; *tañhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*
9. Dependent on clinging, bhava arises; *upādāna-paccayā bhavo*
10. Dependent on bhava, birth arises; *bhava-paccayā jāti*
11. Dependent on birth, decay and aging and death arise; *jāti-paccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ*

*Where is the twelfth factor?*

Decay and aging and death is the twelfth factor. The twelve factors are conditionally linked to each other in a chain of only eleven propositions, not twelve propositions. Twelve factors, eleven linked propositions. And though these twelve factors are linked in eleven propositions, the process is not logically circular. Still, if decay and aging and death is not present as the twelfth factor, there is no ignorance. And if there is no ignorance, there will be no decay and aging and death. We can consider the process in that way. Any one of the twelve factors, however, can be the condition for the arising of any one of the other twelve. We are entangled in saṃsāra by more than these twelve factors. The Buddha used these twelve factors and then listed them sequentially, linking them together in eleven propositions, to help us understand our entanglement.

*Do I stop the cycle at craving?*

A good meditator clearly sees all twelve factors—contact, feeling, and the rest. Where you manage to stop the cycle depends upon your character. Some meditators do stop it at craving. Some stop it at feeling and some at clinging. I cannot say where you can stop the cycle. You must discover that through your practice of meditation, through vipassanā. With the exception of the arahat, an enlightened one, the process of dependent origination goes up to clinging. Many teachers state craving is the place where meditators must work, but it's difficult to say that because there is no beginning to the cycle. The cycle starts at any point, at any one of the twelve factors, and all twelve factors are interrelated. There is no real beginning and no real end.

*Could I say craving for sensuality is the weakest of the twelve factors in the cycle?*

No. None of the twelve factors are weak. You cannot consider craving, tañhā, to be weak. “Tañhā creates beings,” said the Buddha. Tañhā creates man and tañhā creates woman. It creates us as human beings. So, tañhā is not weak. On the contrary, since tañhā is extremely powerful, leading into repeated births, it needs to be thoroughly understood and handled carefully. For example, when craving leads you into performing many beneficial actions, you might have a future in a relatively happy course of birth, a sugati birth. You live as a being in one of the better and higher worlds—maybe as a deva, a brahma, or again as a human. On the other hand, when craving leads you into performing many harmful actions, you would likely take a lower birth, perhaps as a snake or a dog? Someone who is fascinated with trees could take a birth, not as a tree but perhaps as a worm on the tree!

*Yes, we can joke and laugh about it. Seriously though, what if I die while thinking about a woman's body?*



I'm not joking. You could be something, maybe a bug, that lives on a woman's body. You wouldn't necessarily take birth on the same woman you were craving, but on some woman. Maybe you'd take birth as a cat that follows a lady around. No joke! We simply can't say for sure what our next birth will be.



*Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Exalted One was dwelling at Anathapindika's monastery, in Jeta's Grove, near Savatthi. Now when the night was far spent, a certain deity whose surpassing splendor illuminated the entire Jeta Grove, came to the presence of the Exalted One and, drawing near, respectfully saluted him and stood at one side. Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse:*

*"Many deities and men, yearning after good, have pondered on blessings. Pray, tell me the greatest blessing!"*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>15</sup>

## 4. Dependent Origination and Supportive Conditions

**Pemasiri Thera:** At the time of the Buddha, wise people believed in kamma-vipāka, which means they believed that their good actions led to good results and that their bad actions led to bad results. Since they already believed in kamma-vipāka and weren't engaging in many bad and akusala actions, the Buddha didn't need to teach these wise people about kamma and results of kamma. Even jhāna is a manifestation of kamma. Having this belief in kamma-vipāka is a prerequisite to understanding the process of dependent origination. If you don't believe that there is any relationship between your actions and the results of your actions, then you can't possibly ever see the reality of causes and effects, hetu-phala, let alone ever realize the process of dependent origination. It's impossible. And when we say seeing causes and effects, hetu-phala—that is seeing path-knowledge.

**David:** *Didn't you just tell me that the teaching on dependent*

*origination is by definition the connection between causes and their effects? Actions and results? This is confusing.*

No, we're okay. In fact, if you believe that there is a clear-cut causal relationship between your actions and the results of your actions, kamma-vipāka, then you're on the right track to understanding causes and effects, hetu-phala. We are trying to go beyond a crude type of thinking, believing in one gross action leads to one gross result, and try out a more mature type of thinking, which means examining the role played by supportive conditions. The teaching on dependent origination is about causes, supportive conditions, and effects. It's not crude and simplistic. Supportive conditions must be taken into account. Dependent origination is a complicated process with various supportive conditions impacting on our actions—the causes—in every which way imaginable. Read the Conch Blower Sutta;<sup>16</sup> the Buddha looks at the wrong views in the teachings on kamma-vipāka.

Continuing, dependent upon various causes and conditions, effects come into being. For example, supportive conditions must exist for a mango seed to evolve into a tree that bears mangoes. The soil, water, and nutrients are neither causes nor effects; they are conditions. Dependent upon these supportive conditions, the seed develops and eventually becomes a tree that bears fruit. The seed is the original cause; the soil, water, and nutrients are supportive conditions; and the mango fruit is the effect. The mango fruit exists in dependence upon all these conditions coming together in the right way. And as you might well notice, soil, water, and nutrients are also effects in their own right, effects that came into being through the means of other causes and other conditions.

*Since the seed is the cause, why isn't the tree the effect?*

The tree isn't the effect because it evolved out of the seed. The

tree is just a change in the characteristics of the seed; so it is still part of the cause. The mango is the effect because it breaks off the tree. The happening of any state or the arising of any phenomenon is not an effect until it separates from the cause that gave rise to it. We see the mango in the tree and mistake it for the effect. It is not the effect. As long as the mango stays on the tree, it is not an effect. Effects arise between two causes. While the mango is in the air falling from the tree to the ground, it is a full effect. Once settled on the ground, the mango is no longer an effect. It's a new cause, a cause which may give rise to another tree that bears more mangoes.

The developing stage of an effect is different from the fully developed stage. In its developing stage, the effect is not yet fully operational. It's in the midst of a process that leads to a result. There is only the potential to produce an effect. Neither a mango blossom nor an unripe mango is a mango. For a mango to arise as an effect, it has to ripen, mature, and then fall off the tree. When we say effects, we mean fully developed and operational effects. They are on their own. Milk for example can be made into curd. But just because we pour milk into a container, it doesn't automatically turn to curd. No. We have to add suitable bacteria. Milk is the original cause; the container and bacteria are supportive conditions; the milk gradually curdles; and eventually we have our tasty curd. Effects always come about gradually. All of us were conceived in our mother's womb. Is our mother a cause or a condition?

*The womb is a condition with the egg and sperm as causes.*

You are partly right. The rebirth consciousness, paṭisandhi-viññāṇa, arising in the womb of the mother is the first cause for the birth of a child. The womb of the mother, the egg of the mother, and the sperm of the father—these are all supportive conditions. It is incorrect to say conception takes place just because a woman and a man have sexual intercourse. That is not

a cause. Intercourse is only a supportive condition. The child, as all effects, gradually develops from embryo and then after three months to foetus. Neither the embryo nor the foetus is a child because both are still within the womb, still connected to the original cause. When the entity in the womb is fully developed, the child is born.

*Okay, when does the rebirth consciousness descend into the woman's womb?*

Consciousness does not do any descending. Dependent upon specific conditions, consciousness arises. After the woman and the man have sex, it might be as long as two weeks before the rebirth consciousness arises along with the mass in the womb, linking the past kamma to the new kamma. This is conception. When conception takes place is dependent upon the needs of the new being; conception isn't dependent upon the needs of the mother or the father. At the moment of conception, materiality is already present in the womb. During sex, the mother contributed an egg and the father contributed sperm. Egg and sperm are materiality; the elements—earth, water, fire, and air. Out of these elements, a mass of similar elements gradually develops in the womb.

In the Indaka Sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya,<sup>17</sup> the Buddha explains to the yakkha Indaka the characteristics of the mass in the womb. In its early stages of development, the mass is devoid of consciousness, similar to a plant. The rebirth consciousness is the first consciousness of the new life. Once it dies, a new consciousness linked with the new birth arises, and then it too dies. With the arising and dying of two or three more moments of consciousness, mentality-materiality linked with the new birth is being produced by kamma and by mind. In some Buddhist traditions, the rebirth consciousness is seen as descending into the womb when the woman and the man are having sexual intercourse. The egg, sperm, and consciousness all arrive in the

womb at exactly the same time. This doesn't make any sense, as the rebirth consciousness would have to be hanging around, like a spirit, waiting for the woman and the man to have sex.

This explanation of the birth process is far from complete. For example, the sperm are effects just prior to one of them becoming a condition. After the sperm left the man and are swimming towards the egg, they are effects. Once one of the sperm joins with the egg, it is no longer an effect. Causes. Conditions. Effects. There is a mix of events happening. You'll have to come back for a more complete discussion!

## Effects Are Separate From Their Original Causes

Effects are always separate from their original causes. Results are separate from actions. Mango trees produce mango fruit. With support of suitable causes and conditions, a mango gradually develops and ripens. When the mango is fully ripe, it falls off the tree and breaks the link with the tree. The mango is a distinct entity. In the same way, after nine months of developing in your mother's womb, you emerged from her womb and broke the link with your mother. At this point in time, you take it for granted that you have none of your mother's mentality or materiality. You are a completely unique person, completely separate from your mother. Moreover, your mother had a stroke and died when you were eighteen. Despite the fact you could do nothing to prevent her death, you still felt sad. It is in the nature of beings to experience sadness when friends and relatives die. But the sadness you are experiencing now is separate from your mother's death. She died more than thirty years ago.

What we experience now is always separate from what we

experienced in the past. Like a mango in a mango tree, the effects of our actions gradually ripen until they are fully ripe and operational. By the time the effect is fully operational, the effect has no link whatsoever with the original cause. The results, the vipāka, that are taking effect in our lives as adults are not only separate from the kamma we performed as children, but they are also entirely different. The mango fruit is not the same as the original mango seed. And once a mental formation arises, that mental formation has no link to the ignorance that gave rise to it. In the end, when the effect is fully developed and is on its own, it has no link to its original cause. With the original cause lost, we only experience the effect. Even though the original cause isn't linked to its eventual effect, there still is a cause and that cause is the owner.

*Since the effect is separate from the cause, maybe I look at the effect as a thing in itself? I don't think my past can reach out and force an effect in the present. Please explain.*

Elizabeth has four children. Whatever actions her children perform, the children are the owners of those actions—Elizabeth can't own her children's actions. The experiences of her children are her children's experiences. Elizabeth, the original cause, gets lost and the children, the fruit, experience their own emotions—any happiness or sadness or whatever. By linking different objects together, we create totally new objects. For example, bricks, sand, and cement are all different objects. Individually, they are not meditation huts. But by linking them all together, we build many huts. Similarly, the composite nature of what we commonly call our selves, our minds and bodies, is summed up in the five aggregates of clinging, the pañc'upādānakkhandhā—the aggregates of feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness, and materiality. By linking together the causes for the arising of these five aggregates of clinging in one moment, the five aggregates are experienced as a self in the next moment.

*I'm struggling with why I should try to understand dependent origination. Does it affect my mind, my attitudes and decisions?*

## Active Minds

Our minds are very active. We're forever creating lots of mental formations, saṅkhārās. When we create beneficial mental formations, beneficial effects arise. When we create harmful mental formations, harmful effects arise. Mental formations arise at one of three levels: vague and weak, volition, and kammic. Because ignorance activates our greed, aversion, and delusion, we hold onto vague and weak mental formations—and by vague and weak I mean gāha, maññanā, papañca, coming from past saṅkhāras—and we gradually develop our vague and weak mental formations into clearly formed mental formations that are called volition, cetanā, and it's with the arising of volition that effects can happen. Then by developing volition, kamma arises and at that point the kamma is already performed and experienced. We can even find the Buddha saying on certain occasions, "Volition is kamma." When we talk about mental formations, saṅkhārās, we always have to talk about volition and kamma. Saṅkhārās, cetanā, kamma—all three must be discussed together as one topic.

With the support of suitable conditions, causes always lead to the arising of effects. We said with enough good soil, water, and nutrients, mango trees bear mango fruit. Similarly, with the support of our ignorance, we develop our vague and weak mental formations into volition and kamma. However, without support of suitable conditions, causes won't lead to effects. Without good soil, water, and nutrients, a mango seed does not



grow into a strong mango tree that produces mangoes; the seed will just lie on the ground and rot. Without proper nutrition, mothers don't give birth to healthy babies, despite carrying their fetuses for nine months. Without supportive conditions, babies do not grow into adults; they might even be stillborn or die shortly after birth. Just because a cause is present, there is no guarantee that a matching effect will arise. Of course, our ignorance is strong and deeply rooted. Yet, without mixing our ignorance in with our vague and weak mental formations, the majority of our vague and weak mental formations leave our minds as quickly as they entered. They die. Karma cannot arise unless we develop our vague thoughts up to the level of volition.

*You said effects are coming about gradually. Does this mean that I have some time to intervene?*

You don't have to develop the thoughts that cause you so many problems. There is a close link between your intentions and the effects you experience. We have to move on. Even though an effect is eventually separate from its cause, its strength is directly proportional to the strength of its cause. How high a stone flies up into the air depends upon how hard we throw it. Likewise, in whatever way and to whatever extent our ignorance arises, our mental formations arise in the same way and to the same extent. Led by his or her ignorance, a strong meditator undertakes a specific practice to leave the sense-sphere and fine-material worlds behind them. If his or her mind is only directed towards the non-material world, the beneficial formation of the imperturbable will arise as the effect. The imperturbable is the fourth jhāna and the non-material attainments.

*Due to ignorance, the meditator makes the imperturbable arise?*

Yes. Once a fully operational effect arises, it simply runs for its set period of time. The meditator has not attained path. The

meditator is still in the mundane world of experience, lokiya dhamma, and as such, he or she has the potential to bring about effects now or in the next birth. Only arahats are free of the effects. Read the chapter on suffering in the Nidāna Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.<sup>18</sup> The stone we throw might be in the air for a few seconds; humans often live for eighty years; strong meditators experience the imperturbable formation for hours; and if you live a wholesome and beneficial life, you could take birth as a deva, experiencing a blissful and delightful world for thousands of years. Attain to anāgāmi and experience the imperturbable formation for aeons.

After running its course, the effect dies. No matter how hard we throw the stone into the air, it eventually falls to the ground. At the point where one effect exhausts its energy and dies, another cause comes forward. Many causes come forward. With the arising of the subsequent causes and with the support of suitable conditions, more effects arise and run continuously until they too end their lives. They die. Yet more causes come forward, resulting in yet more effects. The cycle repeats and repeats. Though often looked at as a continuous unbroken chain, dependent origination is more like a bird's nest with strands of causes and effects coming and going in every possible direction. It's complicated.

*I can almost understand what you are saying! Does one cause produce one effect?*

No. One cause does not produce one effect. There is no linear chain of causation. For a fully operational effect to arise, various other causes and conditions must support it. And as soon as a full effect arises, it becomes a cause.

*Are you saying that an effect is the same as a cause?*

No. But once an effect arises, it becomes a cause, part of the mix of causes and conditions—many interconnections. As a sense-

sphere being living in this sense-sphere world, your mind is very active—new causes and new effects are constantly arising. A *viññāṇa*, a consciousness, can arise because of past causes; something comes up in our minds and then we think about it. Though effects end, we haven't made an end to our mind's capacity to produce causes. A temporary suspension of causes and conditions is of little use. During the time that meditators experience the imperturbable formation, no new effects arise. That is true. But after the imperturbable formation runs its course and ends, ignorance comes forward again. New effects arise. Without destroying ignorance, meditators accomplish nothing more than the experiencing of the imperturbable formation for a period of time. That is all they are doing. As long as causes and the suitable conditions exist, effects arise. Because we keep picking up and throwing stones, the stones keep flying through the air; and because ignorance is present, mental formations arise. The stones always come back to the ground. *Magga-phala*, the attaining of path knowledge, is no stone. More like a rocket blasted into space—it's not coming back. The attaining of *magga-phala* would be a very good day.

The highly attained ascetic Asita was happy to pay respects to baby Siddhārtha because he saw that this baby was destined to become the enlightened Buddha. But when Asita realized that his own destiny was to take birth in a non-material world before Siddhārtha became enlightened, Asita's happiness turned to sadness. Missing the chance to be taught by the future Buddha, Asita would miss attaining what is beyond that non-material world. This account of Asita's encounter with the Buddha sounds like a fairytale because Asita could have cut down his birth destination to human, say thirty years hence, and studied with the Buddha at that time. The account implies Asita was clinging too strongly to the non-material world, or lacked the confidence in attaining arahatship as a human, even under the guidance of the Buddha.



*Not to associate with the foolish, but to associate with the wise; and to honor those who are worthy of honor—this is the greatest blessing.*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>19</sup>

## 5. Ignorance

**Pemasiri Thera:** I don't see any ignorance in the world. The Buddha, on the other hand, said that there is ignorance in the world. So, I too want to say the same, that there is ignorance. The Buddha declared that it is our ignorance—avijjā—that binds us to the cycle of repeated births known as saṃsāra. I can say that ignorance is not knowing. But what is it that I do not know? We have to think about this. I can also say, because of ignorance, our contact with objects is useless.

*David:* You say our contact with objects is useless. That's interesting, as I wouldn't have thought that everything I do is useless. I sure hope not!

Ignorance leads to the arising of defilements, and then we suffer. For example, we don't know the four noble truths. However, when we start to understand the four noble truths, we see our defilements when they arise, see the causes that give rise to our defilements, and then do our best to destroy these causes. Step-by-step, we overcome our ignorance, get away from our defilements, and jump across saṃsāra.

I'm sure you've heard the story of the 100 blind men who went on a journey. They are all connected to one another, all part of one big circle with each blind man holding the hand of the man ahead and the hand of the man behind. Each blind man is in touch with his neighbour. These blind men are happy to go on

this little journey and once in awhile they stop at a teashop to have a cup of tea and a piece of cake. Yes, all 100 blind men are quite satisfied with their modest little outing. But these men aren't actually going anywhere. All they are doing is going around in a circle—the blind are leading the blind. They're going nowhere.

In a similar scenario found in the *Tittha Sutta*<sup>20</sup> of the *Udāna* collection, just for his amusement, the king of *Sāvatti* rounds up a group of blind men and orders them to lay their hands on an elephant and describe it. The first blind man happens to make contact with the elephant's trunk and tells the king, "An elephant is a great thick pole of a plough." A second man makes contact with the head, "An elephant is a big pot." The third collides with the front leg, "An elephant is a great pillar." The fourth feels the tusk and cautions his fellow blind men, "Be careful. An elephant is a sharp iron rod." Each blind man's perception of the elephant depended upon how he managed to make contact with it.

Our perception, a rough translation for the Pali word *sañña*, is like a blind man's perception. It's as if we live out our lives in the depths of a dark forest, where it is always night time, where it rains continuously, and no light shines from the moon. It is absolutely pitch-black in our forest and we never manage to see anything. We are forever groping around in the dark hoping to make contact with an object that we think might be useful. Maybe we latch onto a rat or a snake. We don't know what it is that we've latched onto because we are in the depths of a dark forest and can't see. We think we've latched onto something useful until it's brought out into the light of day. What we have isn't useful. We just don't see that because we never leave our dark forest and come out into the light. We don't like the light. Or maybe it's a view. Sometimes we latch onto various views to get across *saṃsāra*. Then after falling into views, we look for freedom from there.

Our blindness, a simile for ignorance, remains unseen because not one of us ever wants to leave the dark forest and venture into the light. For instance, I occasionally lose my temper and shout at people. Without me seeing the arising of the causes and conditions that lead to the losing of my temper, various causes and conditions arise and I lose my temper. I simply do not see the formation of the causes that lead to the losing of my temper nor do I see the shouting while I'm shouting. This is my ignorance. It is unseen. Being in ignorance and giving a talk about ignorance! What more do you want?

*Is saññā memory?*

Saññā is not memory. It is our understanding of the nature of the objects that we contact; it's the nature of our experience. All of our learning is through saññā, our perception. In whatever way we understand objects, that is the way we see them. As long as I have a certain perception, I hold onto that perception until I get a new one, and I am unaware of just how distorted my perception is until a clearer perception arises. If I attained arahatship, my perception of the nature of life's experience would be radically different from my current perception of the nature of life's experience. My understanding of the dhamma would be radically different, which means the dhamma talks I would give as an arahat would be worlds apart from the dhamma talks I currently give. Without practising bhāvanā, we think our perception—our saññā—is perfectly normal; we simply accept and enjoy our defilements. We're experiencing what we shouldn't experience and not experiencing what we should experience. We're happy to be with the defilements and unhappy when we're without them. When we find our defilements pleasing, we hardly see the passing of the day. If you get a chance to go for a walk with a pleasant woman, you're happy. That's your nature, your mind's inclination, and if I suggest you avoid these types of experiences, you'll get upset.

*Oh well, it's normal for a guy to like girls.*

If your ignorance could be seen, you could remove it. It's because ignorance remains unseen that you don't bother to remove it. You and I—yes, this applies to me too—are ignorant of our ignorance. Only after I've lost my temper do I realize that something went amiss and then I regret, “Why did I allow this to happen?” or “Why did I get angry with this person?” Only after the fact, we reflect and see our ignorance. Even when we have some understanding about the true nature of life's experiences, know how to relate to objects wisely, we often go ahead and relate to objects unwisely. We may be well aware that we are indulging, that our actions are harmful, and yet we still behave foolishly—this is the nature of ignorance, *avijjā*. It is in us completely.

## Past Life Habits

*Why does ignorance arise?*

Such a good question. “Ignorance arises because of the *āsavas*,” said the Buddha. An *āsava* is generally translated as a canker or as an effluent. It's more useful to understand *āsava* as a past life habit that arises in the present life. *Āsavas* are like the smell of whiskey that remains in the bottle after washing it. Though you scrub the bottle really well, a trace of the whiskey smell sticks to the bottle. It's a process of *hetu-phala*. Because of the *āsavas*, there is ignorance; because of ignorance, there are the *āsavas*. The quality of being, of our very life, is the *āsavas*. Four *āsavas*, four habits, have been with us for such a long time—many lifetimes:

- The habit of craving for sensuality, *kāmāsava*



- The habit of craving existence, *bhavāśava*
- The habit of views, *diṭṭhāśava*
- The habit of ignorance, *avijjāśava*

Hunger, sleep, fear, and sex—these four behaviours come from past lives and do not need to be taught in our present lives. No one teaches us to be hungry, to be sleepy, or to be afraid.

*I heard of an experiment where a group of male rats were raised from birth through to adulthood only with other males, and a group of female rats were raised from birth through to adulthood only with other females. The males were always isolated from the females, and vice versa. When the adult males and the adult females finally met, they knew how to have sex.*

I'm not surprised.

*Is killing a past life habit?*

Killing can be taught.

*Are there beneficial āśavas?*

The nature of beneficial habits is the same as the nature of harmful habits, as they are both based on ignorance and therefore bind us to saṃsāra. The word āśavas, however, is not used for beneficial habits. Instead, the word pāramīs is used. Āśavas always connect us with ignorance and our ignorance connects us with the kusala and the akusala. Even kusala habits, our beneficial habits, bind us to saṃsāra. Because a meditator established the habit of attaining jhāna in a previous life, he or she attains jhāna easily in this life. The practice of jhāna can potentially help the meditator understand ignorance and the āśavas, and then destroy the āśavas. When ignorance is destroyed, the āśavas naturally go; when the āśavas are destroyed, ignorance naturally goes. The arahat destroys the

āsavas.

*You said that I am not seeing my ignorance. Well, how do I go about seeing it?*

Knowing your mind comes through the practice of bhāvanā. One's own ignorance is a topic that should be reflected upon and discussed in detail. How to see ignorance? Good question. There is not one specific cause that leads to the arising of ignorance. No. Objects that arose in your past, your non-restraint when interacting with people, your views—many things link together with an object that arises in the present. And when you link so many things together, you aren't seeing the true nature of objects that you are contacting in the present. No one makes ignorance operate in this way; there is no creator of ignorance.

Not only you, all of us should be experiencing a mind without defilements. Our clinging needs to be to the kusala, to places and things that are beneficial, such as the practice of kindness and compassion. Through bhāvanā, we find that kusala place and develop our vision: we see when we're going around in circles and we see objects, such as that king's elephant, in their entirety. When lightning flashes, we see our forest clearly and discover that all this time we've been sitting on the head of a snake! The light from the flash allows us to see this dark forest that we call home is a wildly dangerous place. It is definitely not a safe place to live. And even though our clarity of sight lasts but a few split seconds, we use this brief window of opportunity to see clearly and jump off the snake's head. Yes, we land in the midst of thorny thicket; there is nowhere else to put our feet down. All the same, we continue jumping forward. Each time lightning flashes, we see the obstacles on our path and do our best to avoid them, and then take another jump forward.

At any rate, we exist only momentarily—our life span is like a lightning flash. It's such a rare event to be a human in a period of a Buddha's teaching; we need to make use of this opportunity to

see clearly, overcome our ignorance, and jump across saṃsāra.

*If we gain freedom from saṃsāra by overcoming ignorance, ignorance must be what keeps us in saṃsāra.*

You can't say that. Dependent upon various causes and conditions, a being arises as the effect. This is what the Buddha saw during his enlightenment. If ignorance were the first cause for our arising, we would have to fall back into ignorance each time we repeatedly arise, which means we would have no possible escape. Ignorance is not causeless. If all the interwoven causes and conditions—including ignorance—are eliminated, the being no longer arises.

## Understanding

*Could you be a bit more practical? I am mostly interested in improving the quality of my daily life. I'm not particularly interested in learning a lot of Buddhist facts.*

The Buddha also emphasized the importance of being practical, of learning how to live in the present moment. Patience. Penetrating the nature of ignorance, avijjā, is a gradual process that is comparable to penetrating a thicket of thorn-bearing bush. The thicket has hundreds of small bushes all with branches going in every direction; they're all tangled up with each other and the sharp-pointed thorns cut our skin. It is very difficult to get through this dense thicket, even if we are wearing sturdy boots and heavy clothing and use a machete to hack our way through. No, we cannot easily penetrate it. Avijjā is like that. We can't just get through to our ignorance and pull it out all at once. It's a gradual process that starts from the basic level of our daily lives. When we look at our actions as well as the effects of our

actions, by investigating our behaviour, we see that some of our actions support our liberation and progress, while some of our actions hinder liberation and progress—we see that we’re often creating our own suffering. The understanding we gain through this personal investigation guides our future actions.

*Sorry, I missed what it is that I am understanding. Myself?*

You are trying to understand the workings of dependent origination. Your ignorance. You’re trying to understand the nature of your actions. Are your actions helpful or harmful? Is your behaviour kusala or akusala? It’s all about causes and effects. You used to be a little boy and as you grew up your understanding of the world also grew. At some point, your mother must’ve warned you, “Don’t play with matches. You’ll get burned.” Though not knowing anything about matches, you probably went ahead and played with them, and burnt your fingers. It hurt. The little boy David now has some understanding about the nature of matches, which guides his future use of matches. In the same way, a good understanding of the effects of our past actions, seeing if they were beneficial or harmful, guides our future actions. We don’t try to investigate the nature of ultimate reality, comparing ourselves to arahats. No. Daily life is where we start our investigation into the workings of dependent origination. We start at a fundamental level.

Later, when sati is more fully developed, we gain supernormal knowledges, abhiññās, we differentiate and penetrate mentality and materiality, and bring about nibbāna. Differentiating, penetrating mentality and materiality is investigation into the nature of things, the second factor of enlightenment. ‘Materiality’ is the translation for the Pali term rūpa. Rūpa is also translated as ‘form’. It includes everything that is not mentality, such as physical objects, our physical bodies as well as sights, sounds, smells, and nimittas, those

images gained in meditation. Rūpa has the nature of deteriorating and breaking up. If something deteriorates or breaks up, it is rūpa. People who differentiate mentality and materiality see things as a continuous flow of dependent origination, a river of causes, supportive circumstances, and effects. Hetu-phala. They have a good understanding of their ignorance and won't let it rule their lives, not as much anyway. They might commit a few minor offences, but nothing horrendous, such as murder.

*Evidently, the reason for all your nitpicking is to help me disengage myself from life's experiences which appear seamless, but are not in fact seamless. Then once I'm disengaged, I'll have a chance of picking my way through and out of the constant change, and end suffering. I hadn't understood that.*

Moving forward from a habitual and known level of understanding is rare and difficult. For instance, a sotāpanna starts from an established known level of understanding—he or she has seen nibbāna. But just because the sotāpanna has seen nibbāna does not mean that he or she can proceed easily and attain nibbāna. The ignorance is still there, but the sotāpanna doesn't see the ignorance. On the contrary, seeing nibbāna leads the sotāpanna to mistakingly think that he or she also knows nibbāna. For example, out of studying the non-material jhānas with Ālāra Kālāma, Siddhārtha came to understand that even the non-material sphere wasn't conclusive liberation. Yet, despite such a great depth of understanding, Siddhārtha still went the wrong way after leaving Ālāra Kālāma—he did the ascetic practices and he continued to suffer. His understanding of his ignorance did not lead him to liberation. Knowing often leads to non-knowing, as is the case for many Sri Lankans who consider themselves Buddhists and that the noble eightfold path is the way. Invariably, they get stuck in the knowledge of the morality

part of the eightfold path and don't develop the wisdom part. And without wisdom, sammā-samādhi never arises. Even the eightfold path becomes a rut for many people and they don't move forward.

## Knowledge

Knowledge always means making a choice between the beneficial and the harmful, between the kusala and akusala. There are always two sides. For example, doctors think it's a great advancement in medicine to use the heart valves of pigs to replace the damaged heart valves of humans. The pig, however, must be slaughtered to harvest its valves. At the time of slaughtering, the knowledge of using a pig's valve to replace a human valve arises out of ignorance. A choice is made: a human life is measured to be more valuable than a pig's life. In Sri Lanka, mosquitoes carry diseases, such as Dengue Fever and Malaria. If government authorities spray the swamps with DDT, millions of mosquitoes die; if they don't spray, many humans die.

*That's clear enough!*

Knowledge gives rise to choice. Is it okay to kill mosquitoes for the benefit of humans, and not okay to kill humans? The government skews information towards the benefits to humans and they don't mention all the killing of mosquitoes. The government could decrease the incidence of Dengue Fever and Malaria by promoting safety and hygiene, such as removing stagnant water where the mosquitoes breed. Nuclear technology can be used to generate electricity, or to arm a warhead. Again, out of knowledge, ignorance arises and a choice is made. The West is absorbed in the development of knowledge of this sense-

sphere world and it's not all harmful. Advancements in technology—healthcare, engineering, computers—benefit society in countless ways. Knowledge also applies to the jhānas. They are attained through the use of knowledge, not through the use of wisdom. Knowledge is not wisdom, as wisdom doesn't require making a choice and there is no harmful side.

*Perhaps, I'm better off without knowledge? You make it sound like it's a nuisance.*

No. We can't live without knowledge. It's needed to grow our little seed into a big tree that bears the fruit of wisdom. We develop knowledge towards wisdom. That's the goal. Oppenheimer was the father of the hydrogen bomb. If he had focussed his attention on the development of wisdom instead of developing his knowledge of nuclear physics, he might have been an arahat. Oppenheimer said, "If I had spent all my time and energy learning the teachings of the Buddha, I would have been of more benefit to society." Knowledge is used to live in this world and it binds us to saṃsāra. Wisdom is used to leave this world. Apart from dependent origination, it is impossible to talk about any dhamma, any idea or phenomenon. The whole of the Buddha's teaching is about dependent origination. There is nothing either material or non-material that falls outside this teaching, except the attainment of nibbāna. Nibbāna is the unconditioned. Now, do you realize this? Are you grasping that our whole nature of being is nothing more than dependently originated phenomena?

*I'm trying.*

The foremost example of dependent origination is the bodhisatta Siddhārtha Gautama's night of enlightenment. Through all three watches, Siddhārtha meditated on nothing else but the workings of dependent origination. In the first watch, he looked at his past births. In the second watch, he looked at the births of other beings. He saw that those beings who performed harmful actions

in one birth took a later birth in a more woeful state; whereas, those beings who performed wholesome and beneficial actions in one birth took a following birth in a more happy state. Then finally, on the third watch, Siddhārtha looked on a microscopic level at the dependent origination of what is called self. You'll find the basic formula for the origination of self in the Mahānidāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya.<sup>21</sup>

Through a deep understanding of dependent origination, Siddhārtha was able to approach enlightenment and then by fully realizing the noble truth of dependent origination, he attained enlightenment and became the Buddha. A full realization of dependent origination is equivalent to enlightenment. In the verses of joy of the Dhammapada, the Buddha declares, "Through many a birth I wandered in saṃsāra, looking for the builder of this house. When I found the builder, I told him, "You won't be building any more houses for me. I've broken the rafters of the house and attained the end of suffering." And us? Finding the builder of our house, we pick up a hammer and start helping! The Buddha taught the process of dependent origination in various ways, sometimes in just a few words. "There must be in what is seen, just the seen," he said to the ascetic Bāhiya,<sup>22</sup> "In the heard, just the heard; and in the experienced, just the experience."

*Wasn't it Bāhiya who begged the Buddha for a teaching?*

Yes, then the Buddha told Bāhiya, "It's an insuitable time to teach you." Bāhiya was insistent. He again begged the Buddha for a teaching because he had a huge amount of faith in the Buddha. Despite Bāhiya's insistence, the Buddha still delayed in giving a teaching, as he wanted to decrease Bāhiya's intensity of faith and balance it out with wisdom. Bāhiya's faith was covering up his wisdom; he saw the Buddha different from other objects—he saw the Buddha as great and most other objects as minor. The Buddha needed to bring Bāhiya around to seeing that all



conditioned objects are exactly the same, that truth is in every single object. Whatever arises, also dies. Eventually, when the time was right, the Buddha gave Bāhiya a brief teaching about dependent origination, “For seeing to arise, there must be some object that causes seeing to arise.” A concise teaching. Without a visible object of form, seeing cannot arise. There is seeing and there is a cause for the origination of seeing. The cause is an object and the effect is seeing.

*What about your insistence on supportive conditions?*

There are numerous supportive conditions at work. However, I’m trying to get this one point across to you, that the concept of a self is separate from the object perceived. Clearly, without objects contacting the senses, there is no self. Is the self in your eye? Is it in your ear? Nose? Tongue? Mind? Where are you? Where were you? And if you weren’t there in the past, you cannot be here now. And if you aren’t here now, you won’t be here in the future. There are no problems when you realize that you don’t have a self. What’s the problem? To Bāhiya, the Buddha said, “See what is actually happening, bhava-sati.” Most people say that the Buddha told Bāhiya, “Stop mental proliferation at what is merely seen.” This is incorrect. He didn’t say to stop mental proliferation, stop the mental formations. The Buddha said, “See what is happening.”

*I can’t stop my thoughts.*

The objects of your senses are too important to you. I once told you of the direct teaching the Buddha gave to Commander Santati who was grieving the death of a beautiful dancer. “Drop the present,” said the Buddha to Santati. “Drop thinking about the past, drop thinking about the future, and do not cling to anything in this very moment.” Immediately understanding the Buddha’s teaching, Santati dropped grieving, dropped creating mental formations about the future, and gained insight. The death of the dancer was a past cause. It was already finished.

Santati's sadness was the effect. Sadness being a hindrance to equanimity, the Buddha told Santati to let go of it. Stop grieving. Drop it. If Santati had held onto his grief, if he had created further causes and conditions, he would have continued to suffer.

*I thought meditation meant being in the present?*

The present does not exist. There are only causes that lead to the arising of effects. Effects are continually arising, then they are mixed with many other effects, which are the causes for yet more effects—what we call the future. If you drop thinking about the past and drop thinking about the future, you get nothing. In the middle there is only craving, and it is this craving that stitches the past to the future. The day we see there is no present will be another very good day.

*Can the future be a cause?*

Your idea of the future is taking place in the present. The future cannot be a cause because it has not yet arisen. What if we die now? How can there be an effect? And if the future could be a cause, there would be no way out. The arahat wouldn't have any freedom.



*To reside in a suitable locality, to have done meritorious actions in the past and to set oneself in the right course—this is the greatest blessing.*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>23</sup>

## 6. Ignorance → Formations

*David: I'm shooting myself in the foot with this question. All the same, since we are ostensibly talking about the process of dependent origination, which states, dependent on ignorance, saṅkhāras arise—then, what exactly is a saṅkhāra?*

**Pemasiri Thera:** The meaning of the term saṅkhāra depends upon the context in which it is used. The type of saṅkhāra that you mentioned, where a saṅkhāra is the fruit of ignorance, is only one of many different types of saṅkhāras. Saṅkhāras are either active in forming things together, or passive as the formation itself, the thing that is formed together. In the widest sense of the term, saṅkhāras are all conditioned material and non-material phenomena that exist in the world. Teacups, stones, sweeping the leaves in the yard, a garbage heap, and a human being—each and every one is a saṅkhāra. You must have read the verse in the Dhammapada<sup>24</sup> where the Buddha states, “sabbe saṅkhāra anicca,” which translates as all conditioned things are impermanent. Here, the Buddha is using the term saṅkhāra in a completely general sense that includes all types of conditioned things. At the Buddha's final Nibbāna,<sup>25</sup> Sakka, lord of the devas, also uses the term saṅkhāra to mean anything formed and conditioned.

In the context of the process of dependent origination,

however, we're not talking about saṅkhāras being teacups or stones or sweeping the leaves. In dependent origination, saṅkhāras are specifically the fruit of ignorance, avijjā. The formula states, "Dependent on ignorance, formations arise; avijjā-paccayā saṅkhāra." A saṅkhāra is the fruit of ignorance.

*Okay, then what is this fruit?*

Lobha, dosa, and moha—that's greed, aversion, and delusion. The way these three combine, we call them the fruit, the saṅkhāras. Ignorance produces saṅkhāras. Simple as that. With our ignorance as a cause, our greed, aversion, and delusion arise as the result. In the Nidāna Saṃyutta,<sup>26</sup> the Buddha lists three types of saṅkhāras that apply to the process of dependent origination:

- Body formation, *kāya-saṅkhāra*
- Speech formation, *vacī-saṅkhāra*
- Mental formation, *mano-saṅkhāra*

*Sounds like greed, aversion, and delusion are just other names for ignorance.*

If you are sincerely interested in understanding dependent origination, you'll find it useful to read the Book of Causation in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. And it's best that you read the whole of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, as reading one sutta here and another sutta there only leads to confusion. Better to get a complete picture.

*I find it an extremely difficult and unpleasant task to read these ancient texts.*

You have no difficulty reading the newspaper or a murder mystery for hours on end, often reading late into the night. The reduction of suffering requires making some effort! In the Kāmabhū Sutta,<sup>27</sup> body formation is given as in-breathing and

out-breathing; speech formation is applied and sustained thought; and mental formation is feeling and perception. You'll also find the topic of saṅkhāras amongst the questions the lay follower Visākha posed to the bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā in the Cūḷavedalla Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya.<sup>28</sup>

Speech formation, vacī-saṅkhāra, is considered by many people to be the words we speak. This is a misconception. Speech formation is rather the applied and sustained thoughts, the vitakka-vicāra, that are connected with speech. If you think about it, you can see that the production of speech is different from the physical act of speaking. The formations that arise in our minds to produce words are not quite the same as the words that come out of our mouths. In our dreams, we have vacī-saṅkhāra; even a mute person has speech formation. It's a way of recognizing what is on our minds.

For example, look at the production of my speech formation needed just to say your name. I start with a vague thought to say your name, a vague thought from past saṅkhāras, and then I sustain and develop this vague and weak thought into a clearly formed thought. At this point, however, you can't say for sure what's on my mind; you still don't know whether or not I will actually say your name. I am now finished producing the speech formation to say your name. Yes, it's complete and I am just about to say your name and it's on the tip of my tongue. But, and here's the rub, despite a fully produced speech formation in my mind, you have yet to know this formation. For that to happen, for you to know this speech formation, I must combine it with the four primary elements—earth, water, fire, and air—and then say your name out loud, "David!" Only now do you know this speech formation, know that I had your name on my mind. You now know my mind. The words that we speak out loud are not speech formations. They are material formations, rūpa-saṅkhāras.

## Beneficial and Harmful Formations

Keeping your wish for practical advice in mind, we'll focus in on mental formations, *mano-saṅkhāras*, because what goes on in our minds determines the quality of our lives now as well as in the future. Our *mano-saṅkhāras* give rise to various other *saṅkhāras*. At this point, we won't try to make any connections between *saṅkhāras* and materiality, *rūpa*. No. Instead, we'll stick to mental formations and the process of developing vague and weak mental formations up to the level of volition and *kamma*. Vague and weak, volition, or *kamma*—our mental formations arise at one of these three levels.

There are lots of vague and weak mental formations that sit only momentarily in our minds and are not in any way dangerous. Ideas come and go. Most are completely inactive and never amount to anything at all. In spite of most mental formations being harmless, the level of *mano-saṅkhāra* that arises in our minds corresponds to the level of ignorance that we allow to arise. When our ignorance arises to a high level of strength, our mental formations will also generally arise to the same high level. Thus, as is usually the case, when our ignorance runs unchecked up to high levels, we develop our vague and weak mental formations into clearly formed mental formations. Vague ideas become volition. Nevertheless, just because we developed our vague mental formations up to the level of volition, we haven't necessarily developed them to the level of *kamma*, not as yet—there is still hope. It's only by allowing an even higher level of ignorance to arise that we develop our volitional mental formations up to the level of *kamma*, and then that *kamma* has already been performed.

*If we weren't ignorant, would we ever act? I don't understand the difference between volition and kamma.*

Discussing the nature of volition, *cetanā* in Pali, and *kamma* is another topic that will take us away from our discussion on ignorance and the fruit of ignorance. There's a difference between volition and *kamma* and we'll just have to leave it at that for now. *Saṅkhāras* conditioned by ignorance, the *saṅkhāras* arising from ignorance, fall into two broad categories:

- Beneficial and wholesome formations, *kusala-saṅkhāras*
- Harmful and unwholesome formations, *akusala-saṅkhāras*

Ignorance is in us completely. When we cultivate beneficial formations, *kusala-saṅkhāras*, beneficial results arise; and when we cultivate harmful formations, *akusala-saṅkhāras*, harmful results arise. We're talking about ignorance, the nature of being human, and why we are entangled in *saṃsāra*; beneficial and harmful *saṅkhāras* play an active role in this process of dependent origination. And though both *kusala* and *akusala-saṅkhāras* are the fruit of ignorance, it's important to remember that there is no permanent link between the ignorance and the *saṅkhāras* that arise. Ignorance and the fruit of ignorance, the *saṅkhāras*, are separate and distinct.

*Why is it important to remember that there is no permanent link between ignorance and the formations that arise?*

Since there isn't a permanent link between ignorance and the *saṅkhāras* that arise, there is a possibility of escape from *saṃsāra*. Very important! Once ignorance produces the *saṅkhāras*, the link between those *saṅkhāras* and the ignorance is broken, in much the same way as the link between mango fruit and the mango tree is broken. Once the tree produces a ripe and tasty mango, the mango breaks off the tree and falls to the ground. The mango is no longer connected to the tree, and the *saṅkhāras* are no longer connected to the ignorance. Then with the mango fruit on the ground, it always takes some time and the

right conditions for the seed of the mango fruit to start sprouting on its own. Without proper support, say the mango lands on sandy soil, the mango seed soon dies. Maybe the seed doesn't get enough sunshine—it too dies a quick death. No further development.

It's the same with the vague and weak formations that arise in our minds. It takes time and the right conditions to develop them up to the level of volition and kamma. Thus, without the right supportive conditions, vague and weak saṅkhāras won't develop up to the level of volition or kamma. It could be that our avijjā, our ignorance, is very strong, is operating at a high level, and we produce lots of vague and weak mental formations, good ones and bad ones. Yet, we do not produce the matching kamma formations. Even though the ignorance is present, some vague and weak saṅkhāras will develop further up to the level of volition and kamma, and some vague and weak formations will not develop any further at all. Our vague and weak saṅkhāras only develop up to the level of volition and then kamma when we provide them with the supportive conditions that they require for their development.

*And what are the supportive conditions?*

Greed, aversion, and delusion—lobha, dosa, moha. The Buddha recommended making four efforts—restrain and abandon harmful and unwholesome formations, and then develop and maintain beneficial and wholesome formations. As long as we don't mix our greed and aversion in with our harmful formations, our akusala-saṅkhāras, then our akusala-saṅkhāras won't develop any further. They die. Anger need not develop into full blown hate. Instead of feeding our defilements, we practise kindness, compassion, and renunciation. Beneficial results arise when we develop and maintain beneficial formations. Good causes lead to good results.

*There seems to be a disconnect here in the logic. Are lobha,*



*dosa, moha also the conditions for wholesome formations?*

Yes, even wholesome formations are based on delusion and bind us to the cycle of rebirth. Gradually, however, right effort moves us away from greed, aversion, and delusion, and moves us towards non-greed, non-aversion, and non-delusion—alobha, adosa, amoha. As unenlightened beings, it is in our nature to develop countless beneficial as well as countless harmful formations, kusala and akusala-saṅkhāras, up to the level of kamma. We must be careful what we develop. In the Thorough Investigation Sutta,<sup>29</sup> the Buddha divides these formations into three groups:

- Meritorious formations, *puññ'ābhi-saṅkhāras*
- Demeritorious formations, *apuññ'ābhi-saṅkhāras*
- Imperturbable formations, *āneñj'ābhi-saṅkhāras*

Merit and demerit are the effects of kamma. Many people fail to differentiate between meritorious formations, the puññ'ābhi-saṅkhāras, and beneficial formations, the kusala-saṅkhāras. They are not the same. Meritorious formations include the beneficial formations and the kamma effects of the beneficial formations, which is the merit. With the meritorious formations, there's been an accumulation of merit, an accumulation of the results of good kamma—a ripening. The rūpa-jjhānas are an excellent example of a meritorious formation. A strong meditator undertakes a particular beneficial practice and experiences the meritorious formation of the rūpa-jjhānas as a result. Similarly, demeritorious formations include both the harmful formations, the akusala-saṅkhāras, and the effects of the harmful formations, the demerit. A demeritorious formation is the opposite of a meritorious formation; there's been an accumulation of demerit, an accumulation of the results of bad kamma.

The imperturbable formation, āneñj'ābhi-saṅkhāra, is another state of merit. It's the state of mind of the meditator while abiding in the non-material world, and it includes the fourth jhāna and the non-material attainments. Unlike the meritorious and demeritorious formations, however, nothing new is produced from the imperturbable formation. And though the imperturbable is poles apart from our everyday experience of sleeping, the imperturbable does have something in common with sleeping—no new causes arise. And without new causes, new effects won't arise either. Once the meditator produces his or her mind to the level of the fourth jhāna and the non-material, the meditator's mind is just at that level of consciousness. No new causes and no new effects. The mind goes on and on and no in-between thoughts arise. If a passing thought arises, the meditator is no longer in the imperturbable formation, no longer in the non-material world. While in the imperturbable, there is only mind and there is no rūpa, no materiality, which is also a little bit like sleeping. Again certainly, there is a difference between sleeping and abiding in the imperturbable. Whereas the person who is asleep sometimes directs his or her mind towards the body, the meditator who is in the imperturbable never directs his or her mind towards the body. Of course, he or she still has a material body. Yes, but like the water that's unaware of being in a glass, the meditator is unaware of being in a body.



*To have much learning, to be skillful in handicraft, well-trained in discipline, and to be of good speech—this is the greatest blessing.*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>30</sup>

## 7. Formations → Consciousness

**Pemasiri Thera:** Thinking, knowing, mind, consciousness, one of the five aggregates—the term *viññāṇa* is used in numerous and often overlapping ways, making it difficult to quickly grasp its meaning. Where is your *viññāṇa*, your consciousness?

*David: I think it's in my brain, but I've been told that it's in my heart.*

Consciousness is not in your brain nor is it in your heart. It doesn't have one fixed location, much in the same way that music doesn't have one fixed location. In the Lute Sutta,<sup>31</sup> you can read about the king who searched in vain for the location of lute music. Despite ripping a lute to shreds, he failed to find where the music came from. His ministers tried to explain to him that music requires a musician to play the lute. Without a skilled musician, a lute, and then the musician playing the lute, there won't be any lute music. And it's the same for the arising of consciousness. Consciousness only arises when the right conditions come together. And the right conditions? When one of your sense doors experiences its matching sense object, consciousness arises at that sense door. Since you have six sense doors, six types of consciousness arise:

- Eye-consciousness, *cakkhu-viññāṇa*

- Ear-consciousness, *sota-viññāṇa*
- Nose-consciousness, *ghāṇa-viññāṇa*
- Tongue-consciousness, *jivhā-viññāṇa*
- Body-consciousness, *kāya-viññāṇa*
- Mind-consciousness, *mano-viññāṇa*

Because our eyes and ears experience objects that are both far away as well as nearby, these two sense doors give rise to consciousness more frequently than our noses, tongues, and bodies, which only experience objects that are nearby. And of the eye and ear, the eye is likely to give rise to consciousness more often than the ear. Overall, however, our hearts gives rise to consciousness most often, and this is why consciousness is said to be heart based.

*I don't see heart in your list.*

The heart is considered by some to be the place where mind-consciousness arises. In the same way the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are the places where we experience material objects, the heart is considered the place where we experience mental objects. The heart is called hadaya vatthu. It knows the sense objects—the sights, sounds, and smells, etc. When one of your sense doors experiences its sense object, consciousness arises at that sense door as well as at the heart, both places. Every time a sensory impression is made upon one of your five material sense doors, an impression is also made upon your heart. When your ear experiences a sound, both an ear-consciousness and a mind-consciousness arise. Venerable Mahā Kaccāna gives us a good explanation of this process in the Honeyball Sutta.<sup>32</sup>

When sense door, sense object, and sense door consciousness come together, there is contact, phassa, in the mind. And, where there is contact, feelings arise. Consciousness is considered to be

located in and around the heart because a consciousness arises at your heart whenever a consciousness arises at one of your five material sense doors. Even when your sense doors are not experiencing sense objects, such as when you are asleep or if you happen to be in a coma, a consciousness, the bhavaṅga, arises at your heart. The material sense doors are the places where there is just the possibility of a viññāṇa arising, just the possibility for a consciousness arising because consciousness must necessarily be directed towards the object to experience that object. For example, you have fully functioning eyes and you experience visible objects. You see things. However, when you direct your viññāṇa towards another sense door, maybe towards your ears, nose, or tongue, you aren't aware of seeing anything.

We can discuss the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue forms of consciousness fairly easily, but if we want to understand mind-viññāṇa or body-viññāṇa, we have to study the texts. Mind and body are a challenge to quickly comprehend. The term mano for instance is almost inseparable from the term viññāṇa. Both are used to mean mind. Yet, in the expression mano-viññāṇa, where they are being used together; mind is one term and consciousness is another. Mano is being used to mean distinguishing or measuring in the same way the eye is used in eye-consciousness, in cakkhu-viññāṇa. Mano-viññāṇa arises because of past rūpa, materiality, or because of future plans. In the Maha-Vagga of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Buddha states that citta, mano, and viññāṇa can even be used as synonyms. It is hard to discern all the slight differences in these terms and I'm not very interested that you do understand these slight differences. It's more important for your practice that you understand the general concept of causes, supportive conditions, and effects.

*I'd just get bogged down and lost in subtle distinctions anyway.*

Maybe. Try to keep your mind moving along with what I am saying; try to keep the mind going in the direction that I am leading it. Right?

*I do try to pay attention because you seem to find it so important that I understand.*

Viññāṇa has three qualities:

- Knowing
- Birth
- Death

Consciousness has the quality of vijānāti, which means to know and be aware of. At the moment a formation, a saṅkhāra, is fully ripe, consciousness knows the formation, gives birth to mentality-materiality, and then consciousness dies. The moment of knowing and birth and death is a moment of consciousness, like a mother who dies just as she gives birth. It is not that she gives birth to a child and later on she again gives birth to another child. No. As the newborn child sees the light of day, at that very moment of the child's birth, the mother dies, immediately.

Saṅkhāras do the forming and linking. They form and link our feelings, perceptions, etc., together into one unified object of experience. Once all the various phenomena are linked together, consciousness knows the object, the effect arises, and consciousness dies. Saṅkhāras are endlessly forming and linking. Forming, forming, forming. Linking, linking. At the point where the formation peaks, where it is complete, consciousness knows the formation, giving birth to mentality-materiality. This process is awfully complicated. Like a bird's nest with strands coming and going in every possible direction, dependent upon many causes and conditions, the mentality-materiality of human life comes into being. "Through our craving, conceit, and views,"

said the Buddha, “we bring together various causes and conditions and produce mentality-materiality.” Consciousness plays the role of knowing whatever causes and conditions link together. Feelings, perceptions, ignorance, mentality and materiality, countless mental formations—many, many different phenomena link together and form a unified object, which is then known by consciousness. Forming and linking and knowing. Whatever links together, consciousness just knows it as an object.

## Iinactive

Consciousness is always tough to talk about because it doesn’t have its own active and inherent characteristics. Even though almost every other teacher says consciousness is very active, consciousness is inactive. It’s passive. I’m probably the only teacher who says consciousness is inactive.

*Yes, one teacher told me the mind has two sides to it—one active and one passive. The intellect, he said, is the active side of the mind because intellect works with thoughts, concepts, and words. It knows birth and death. The intuition, on the other hand, is the passive side of the mind because there is only knowledge.*

If this teacher goes so far as to say the characteristics of viññāṇa are somehow fixed, he is equating it to a soul. Consciousness is not active; it doesn’t have fixed characteristics. It is inactive, as it only knows the various things that temporarily come together to form an object. Yesterday, for example, we had a sour tasting curry at lunchtime. Consciousness knew the curry tasted sour, but it was feeling that experienced the curry as quite pleasant and it was perception that perceived it as sour. Our

consciousness had nothing to do with the experience of the sour curry. Consciousness just knew our feelings and perceptions of the curry and then consciousness died.

*Very helpful example.*

Fully dependent upon feelings, perceptions, and mental and material formations that are constantly changing, the characteristics of consciousness are also constantly changing. With the knowing of the object, the new experience arises and consciousness dies simultaneously. New feelings, new perceptions, and new formations subsequently arise, link, and form another object, which is again known by consciousness. With birth of the new experience, consciousness again dies. This process of knowing, birth, and death takes a billionth of a second—maybe a trillionth of a second. The process is repeated again, again, and again. It's endless.

*What happens to my feelings and perceptions?*

When consciousness knows your feelings and perceptions, it gives birth to a new experience and all your old feelings and old perceptions cease to exist. Once your old feelings and old perceptions die, your old consciousness also dies. You are constantly experiencing new feelings, new perceptions, and new moments of consciousness. Though you feel you're experiencing the same old consciousness, that it's continuous and fixed, this is not so. No. Rather, you're repeatedly experiencing new and different moments of consciousness. Totally new feelings and totally new perceptions are constantly arising; not one of them lasts for even a second.

Any man or woman who has wisdom realizes that every moment in their lives, every experience, is totally separate from every other moment and experience in their lives. They see that causes give rise to effects, that experiences arise and then die. Life is seen as a steady stream of moment-to-moment



experiences. Whatever beneficial or harmful actions are performed here and now in this life, a wise person knows that the results of those actions are also experienced here and now. He or she knows a living being is just one mind-moment of consciousness, one moment in the stream or bird's nest of mind-moments. That's all. One moment. You can refer to the Being Devoured Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya,<sup>33</sup> and also the Ayoniso-Manasikāra Sutta.<sup>34</sup>

*You lay these teachings out fairly clearly, but I'm still not sure why I should persevere and sort this all out.*

Since you have a need and a want for these teachings, I'm trying to push you along into understanding.

## Explosion

In spite of being inactive, consciousness produces major effects. Nitroglycerine, a fuse, and a spark—when dynamite's key elements come together, there's an explosion and the buildings in the area are destroyed. After the explosion, nothing remains of the dynamite and nothing remains of the explosion. Nonetheless, the explosion produced far-reaching effects: many buildings were destroyed. Consciousness functions in the same way as an explosion. Feelings, perceptions, and mental formations—when these standard three elements come together as an object, as a formation, consciousness knows the formation and mentality-materiality arises. That's the mentality-materiality. After consciousness knows the formation, nothing remains of our old feelings, old perceptions, and old mental formations. And nothing remains of that individual moment of consciousness. It dies. Though now nothing, that moment of consciousness

produced mentality-materiality, fueling saṃsāra's cycle.

*I didn't understand until this moment that the importance of understanding all these intricate interconnections is in order to break out of samsara.*

Yes, as I said earlier, penetrating ignorance, avijjā, comes about gradually. We have to cut our way through a prickly thicket, which is difficult and time consuming.

The effects produced by the continual arising of consciousness are like the growth of a Banyan tree. The tree began its life as one extremely small seed planted in the ground; Banyan seeds are so small you can hardly see them. But from one small seed, a huge tree grows, spreading out its branches like tentacles, which again take root. One Banyan tree can cover many acres of land. Looking at a massive Banyan tree, we ask, "Where is the seed?" And clearly the seed is not to be found—though new seeds may arise. Similarly, our lives as human beings began when a rebirth consciousness arose along with the mass in our mother's womb, linking our past kamma to our new kamma. This was the first consciousness of our current birth. The minute entity that was present in our mother's womb in those first few moments, you can't call it a baby. But from that microscopic beginning, we grew into what we are today. Consciousness again and again kept knowing the formations that arose, which gave birth to our ever-developing mentality-materiality. Consciousness might continue to give birth to our mentality-materiality for seventy years or more. And now? Where is our first moment of consciousness? That rebirth consciousness? We can't find it.

*Can a computer have consciousness?*

It would have to be a walking and talking computer. It can't be stationary, maybe a robot. Yes, since the arising of consciousness is a process of hetu-phala, of causes and effects, if all the appropriate causes are present, then some type of consciousness

will arise. I don't, however, think that plastic, glass, and electronics are the suitable causes and conditions. Nonetheless, someday, if scientific researchers discover substances that are similar to the rūpas where consciousness generally arises, then consciousness may arise in these artificial substances, possibly in the form of a computer. It's conceivable. It doesn't conflict with the teachings of the Buddha.

I accept that almost anything, with the exception of consciousness, can be created by science. Viññāṇa cannot be created. Scientists do not create consciousness. In a controlled environment, often a lab dish, scientists sometimes manage to create the right conditions for the arising of consciousness and then a consciousness happens to arise. This arising of consciousness comes about by chance. Scientists only create the right conditions; they don't create the consciousness that arises. A few years back, scientists cloned a sheep and called it Dolly. Not differentiating between consciousness and materiality, some scientists concluded, "We can now create mammals, similar to humans." They are assuming they can create consciousness. But they are mistaken. That assumption comes out of ignorance and craving. No conclusions about the nature of consciousness can be made from cloning animals. The scientists only helped to bring about the materiality, the rūpa. Nothing more. And Dolly died.

*Why does consciousness arise only by chance?*

Chance means the being is moisture born as opposed to womb born or spontaneously born. I am not much interested in this discussion. Let this thing that we call a human being function like a machine, maybe your laptop computer. The only difference between you and your laptop is mind, and the beneficial and the harmful. The rest of you is just like your laptop, a machine. We only need to consider the beneficial and the harmful in what is taking place, in what we are thinking and doing. As long as this machine functions without causing harm

to other machines, to other living beings, then that's enough.

*The Abhidhamma lists eighty-nine different kinds of consciousness. Should I study the Abhidhamma?*

Yes, study. Only, make sure that you study the Abhidhamma and consciousness within the broader context of the Buddha's teachings on suffering and the end of suffering; don't study the Abhidhamma just as an isolated academic subject. That's a waste of time. And when you're ready to learn, really ready, I will teach you and clarify any of your doubts.

*I won't just get confused? The Abhidhamma seems to be way beyond my powers of thinking.*

The Abhidhamma is not beyond your abilities and I'd be surprised if studying it leads to a great deal of confusion. After all, I managed to get through the Abhidhamma! And a little bit of confusion is healthy, a good way to learn, as you'll need to have discussions with meditators who have a solid understanding of it. Approach the Abhidhamma as a practical teaching.

To whatever extent we talk about consciousness, we can keep on talking about it. We need to shift our attention away from harmful objects and direct it towards beneficial ones.

*You assume that I know the difference between harmful and beneficial. Yet, I don't know and spend much effort attempting to distinguish which is which.*

Harmful, akusala in Pali, means that you are acting against your best interests. You are your own worst enemy. Instead of looking out for your welfare, you engage in harmful actions which increase your suffering here and now, and may even result in an unhappy future birth. In contrast, beneficial, kusala, means you are engaging in courses of action that are in your best interests. You decrease your suffering right now and quite possibly take a happy future birth, maybe as a deva or again as a human. Not as

an animal. It's beneficial to be generous, kind, and compassionate. We know this. And it's harmful to chase after the sensual pleasures that we find in our sense-sphere world. This shouldn't be news.

When we shift our attention away from objects of the sense-sphere world and towards an object of the fine-material world, our hindrances are suppressed and we enter into the fine-material jhānas. Samādhi arises. And when we shift our attention away from the object of the fourth fine-material jhāna and direct it towards the sphere of boundless space, the sphere of boundless space arises. Progressing, attention is then shifted away from boundless space towards boundless consciousness, then away from boundless consciousness towards nothingness, and finally away from nothingness towards neither-perception-nor-non-perception. If we do not direct our attention towards the objects of the fine-material and the non-material worlds, the higher mentality of fine-material and the non-material worlds will not arise—it cannot be attained. Even the arising of the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception was not satisfactory for the Buddha, as two questions remained unanswered, “What is kusala and what is akusala? What is beneficial and what is harmful?” So, the Buddha left his teacher Ālāra Kālāma to find a more satisfactory attainment. Did he finally answer his questions? Did he find a more satisfactory attainment? “Yes,” said the Buddha. “It's the attainment of extinction—nibbāna.”



*The royal ministers bring the king a lute and tell him, “Sire, this is that lute, the sound of which was so tantalizing, so lovely, so intoxicating, so entrancing, so enthralling.” The king says: “I’ve had enough with this lute, man. Bring me just that sound.”*

*The royal ministers reply to the king, “This lute, sire, consists of numerous components, of a great many components, and it gives off a sound when it is played upon with its numerous components; that is in dependence on the parchment sounding board, the belly, the arm, the head, the strings, the plectrum, and the appropriate effort of the musician. So it is sire, that this lute gives off a sound when it is played upon with its numerous components.”*

Simile of the Lute Sutta<sup>35</sup>

## 8. Consciousness → Mentality-Materiality

**Pemasiri Thera:** When we talk about mentality-materiality, we also have to talk about consciousness. Mentality-materiality, nāma-rūpa, and consciousness, viññāṇa, must be talked about together because mentality-materiality and consciousness arise together and are not easily separated. “Just as two sheaves of reeds might stand leaning against each other,” said Venerable Sāriputta, “so too, dependent on mentality-materiality, consciousness arises; and dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality arises.”<sup>36</sup> Viññāṇa has to be there for the nāma-dhammas and rūpa-dhammas to arise, and vice versa. They are built upon each other.

Even though mentality-materiality and consciousness arise

together, mutually support one another, we still have to differentiate between the characteristics of mentality, materiality, and consciousness. There are differences between them.

## Mentality

Mentality, *nāma*, means leaning or bending towards the object—that's why the word *nāma* is used. Then there is a bending towards the form, the *rūpa*, and a bending towards *vedanā*, feeling.

*David: Isn't mentality basically the mental factors, the cetasikas?*

Yes, in a moment of consciousness, when *viññāṇa* knows an object, five mental factors arise:

- Contact, *phassa*
- Feeling, *vedanā*
- Perception, *saññā*
- Volition, *cetanā*
- Attention, *manasikāra*

These five mental factors are regularly designated as mentality, *nāma*. Since these five arise along with a moment of consciousness, they are called concomitant mental factors, *cetasika*. Concomitants function together along with a moment of consciousness. They arise simultaneously. In most moments of consciousness, at least seven concomitant mental factors arise. To the five already mentioned, we add:

- Mental essence, *jīvitā*
- One-pointedness of mind, *citt'ekaggatā*

These seven mental factors continue to arise whether we are sound asleep, anaesthetized, or in a coma. The seven are in operation just two or three moments after a rebirth consciousness arises in a mother's womb and conception takes place. The mass that is present in the mother's womb in those first few moments cannot be called a baby. The mass doesn't seem to be alive. But as soon as the rebirth consciousness has died and new moments of consciousness are arising, these seven factors of mentality, the cetasika, are also arising. Generally, however, far more than seven mental factors arise along with a moment of consciousness—feelings, perceptions, and fifty different types of mental formations—numerous mental factors can potentially arise. With a beneficial moment of consciousness, dozens of mental factors arise. Or when we indulge in hating someone, roughly twenty-seven mental factors arise. In a jhāna moment of consciousness, relatively few mental factors arise.

*Can one mental factor operate independently?*

Why do you ask this question?

*Well, I know that I have feelings. Seems clear enough. I enjoy the company of some people and can't stand some other people. There are types of food that are a pleasure to eat and types of food that are a real chore to get down. Happiness. Sadness. I see all these feelings as being quite distinct from any of my perceptions and even my volitions. It sure seems that these mental factors are acting independently.*

There have to be a couple mental factors working together for mentality, for nāma, to take place. One cetasika cannot operate independently by itself or in isolation. No. Many mental factors operate together, with different ones operating every now and



again and at varying levels of strength. When we meet a friend, the mental factors of feeling, *vedanā*, and contact, *phassa*, are both present in our minds, but the factor of feeling, our pleasant feeling of happiness, is stronger than the factor of contact. When we meet a stranger, however, the mental factors of volition, *cetanā*, and perception, *saññā*, dominate our minds. We speculate, “Who is this stranger?”, “Where did he come from?” and “Why is he here?” The mental factors of feeling and contact are still present when we meet a stranger, but the factors of volition and perception are stronger. We give strangers second class treatment.

## Materiality

Whether we are talking about our current life in this five sense sphere world or talking about the *brahma-lokas*, we have to talk about materiality, *rūpa*. Our materiality consists of four primary elements, *cattāro-mahā-būtām*, and twenty-four secondary forms of materiality, the *upādā-rūpa*, which include our material sense doors—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. The four primary elements:

- Earth element, *paṭhavī-dhātu*
- Water element, *āpo-dhātu*
- Fire element, *tejo-dhātu*
- Air element, *vājo-dhātu*

Wherever the earth element is present, water, fire, and air elements are also present. Each element has its own characteristic—earth has solidity, water has cohesion, fire has heating, and air

has lightness and motion. When doing walking meditation, the thought comes to raise the foot and then a sensation of lightness occurs in the foot. That is the air element. The heat of the fire element un-sticks the foot from the ground, the lightness of the air element lifts and moves the foot forward, and the solidity of the earth element brings the foot down. And it's the cohesiveness of the water element that sticks the foot back onto the ground. All four elements are at work.

*As I raise my foot, am I creating new material?*

The materiality of the four primary elements—earth, water, fire, and air—is already present and from it similar secondary materiality, the upādā-rūpa, is produced. Throughout our lives, four causes are constantly producing new materiality:

- *Kamma*
- *Mind, citta*
- *Nutriment, āhāra*
- *Temperature, utu*

First, you have the volition to raise your foot and then new rūpa form as you raise it. It's your mind that is producing the materiality, the rūpa, as opposed to your kamma producing the rūpa. New materiality continues to arise as long as there is sufficient nutriment and a suitable temperature. The workers just planted some bamboo shoots next to the pond. When I looked in on them yesterday, the shoots were six inches tall; today, they are a foot tall; and tomorrow, they will likely be a foot and a half tall. Bamboo shoots grow and are maintained by nutriment and warmth. They are growing so fast you can almost see them growing.

Even though every possible form of materiality produced has the same four primary elements as its basic building blocks,

every form of materiality has a unique set of materiality, a different type of rūpa, associated with it. For example, a bamboo shoot's materiality is unique to bamboo; a chimpanzee's rūpa is unique to chimpanzees; and a human's materiality is unique to humans. Bamboo, chimpanzees, humans, brahmas etc.—each is characterized by its different and unique type of materiality. Despite chimpanzees and humans both being mammals, the materiality of a chimpanzee is different from the materiality of a human.

### *Do women differ from men?*

Of course they're different—little boys play with toy guns while little girls play with dolls; women often have gender specific roles in society; their bodies, voices, ways of walking and moving, ways of thinking and talking, dressing, jewelry, and behaviour are all different. You'll find Venerable Narada's book on the Abhidhamma useful, as he explains how bhāva-rūpa produces male and female appearances and characteristics. Bhāva-rūpa is sub-atomic, smaller than hormones, and can only be seen in the highest jhāna.

There's no need, however, to dig too deeply into the differences between men and women, else you're just fooling yourself and reinforcing harmful measurements. It's better to be objective and see the reasons for the arising of your defilements—from ignorance, hate, and lust. In the Dhammapada

Commentary,<sup>37</sup> you'll find the story of a man named Sorreya who transformed into a woman, and then after many years transformed back again into a man. This all happened within one single body and within one life. First as a man, the male-Sorreya had two sons, and then as a woman, the female-Sorreyā had another two sons. Four sons in total. By the time the female-Sorreyā had again transformed back into being the male-Sorreya, the male/female/male-Sorreya was disillusioned with the householder life and decided to ordain. Bhikkhu-Sorreya's lay

supporters then asked him, “Was it better to be a woman or better to be a man?” Initially, he said, “Being a woman is certainly better than being a man! With all my heart, I love the two sons that came from my womb.” However, Bhikkhu-Sorreya soon attained arahatship and then, when asked the same question about gender superiority and love of sons, he gave a different reply, “Being a woman is the same as being a man, and I am free of bonds to all four sons.”

David, you think you are a man. Men generally think they are men in the same way as women think they are women, and it’s this distorted *sañña*, perception, that controls approach between men and women. A woman’s blood is female and a man’s blood is male. If a woman donates blood to a man, then in time her female blood transforms into male blood. Materiality changes.

Materiality arises in an enormous range of forms, from gross to subtle to bizarre. The material world—the external objects that we see, hear, smell, and taste—has gross forms of materiality; our bodies and our sense doors in this life that we’re now leading have both gross and subtle forms of materiality; and the fine-material *jhānas* have only subtle forms of materiality. We could spend many days talking about *rūpa-dhammas*. There is the life-force materiality and the nutrition materiality, which sustains all our other forms of materiality. There is also *lahutā*, material agility, and *mudutā*, material elasticity; and *ākāsa*, illuminated space. These are real forms of materiality that go along with certain mental factors. When conditions are suitable, the materiality of a science fiction type of animal can arise in a human womb—with the head of a fish, nose of an elephant, mouth of a lion, and tail of a peacock. Bizarre things can happen in the story of *nāma-rūpa*. And there are worlds of being where materiality doesn’t even arise, where only the *nāma-dhammas* are at work without any *rūpa-dhammas*. There are worlds without *rūpa*. In the *arūpa-lokas*, the non-material worlds, the materiality aspect is totally out. We have to acknowledge those

worlds too.

*I can assume that those worlds exist!*

## Mentality and Materiality

As a human, you're four primary elements—earth, water, fire, and air—and what else?

*I don't know.*

Think! You're materiality, rūpa, and what else? We just talked about it.

*Sorry.*

Mentality! Nāma.

- You are mentality and earth
- You are mentality and water
- You are mentality and fire
- You are mentality and air

Don't confuse mentality with materiality; they're not the same. Nonetheless, arising at the same time, mentality and materiality are both connected and unconnected. They are separate with their own distinct characteristics; yet they act together and are inseparable. To help us understand this apparent contradiction, connected versus unconnected, separate versus inseparable, we compare ourselves to a cup of tea. A cup of tea is made by pouring hot water over some tea leaves, and then adding lots of milk and sugar. After the hot water connects together the tea, milk, and sugar, we pour the brew into a cup. The tea, milk, and

sugar, connected by the hot water, are comparable to the mental factors of our mentality; and the cup is comparable to our bodies, our materiality.

Normally, we just see the cup of tea as a cup of tea; that's our ordinary perception, our *sañña*. And of course, there's no denying that it's definitely a cup of tea. That's conventional reality. Nevertheless, even with an unconcentrated mind and without much effort, we can also see that a cup of tea has its separate parts—tea, milk, sugar, water, and a cup. In the same way, we normally see ourselves as a whole person. But unlike the cup of tea, we only see ourselves as a whole person and fail to see that this person is composed of separate parts. Through the practice of *vipassanā*, with thorough investigation, we penetrate the nature of mentality-materiality, separate mentality from materiality, and separate the mental factors from each other. This insight knowledge arises when our *sati* is well developed.

## Mentality, Materiality, and Consciousness

We now bring in consciousness, *viññāṇa*.

*Oh, I wonder why it's so important to make these subtle distinctions. Does consciousness operate separately from mentality?*

You can look at *viññāṇa* as operating separately from mentality. When the *nāma-dhammas* of mentality—contact, feeling, perception, volition, attention, and the rest—are in operation, consciousness is inactive; and when the *nāma-dhammas* of mentality aren't in operation, consciousness, *viññāṇa*, again becomes active. Sometimes we do have attention, *manasikāra*, and sometimes we don't have *manasikāra*. When we do have

manasikāra, viññāṇa is inactive, silent. Does that help? Are you following? Or, you can look at consciousness as operating along with mentality. One aspect of the nāma-dhammas is phassa, the mental contact. As one of his duties here at our centre, Piyumantha has to climb to the tops of coconut trees to cut down coconuts. When you see Piyumantha high up in the tree, perched precariously thirty feet above the ground, you are afraid and shivers run down your spine. The fear that arises in you for Piyumantha's safety is viññāṇa operating along with phassa. It was viññāṇa that saw Piyumantha high up in the coconut tree, and then the fear that you felt was the phassa and the viññāṇa acting together. When we're afraid of something, there is always the mental factor of feeling linked to that fear.

*Is mentality-materiality a single unit?*

No. We can't say that nāma-rūpa is a single identifiable unit because numerous and differing mental factors are always operating together. With mentality-materiality, there's a dynamic mix of things going on. We could however say that viññāṇa is a single unit if we remember that consciousness is inactive and has no inherent characteristics of its own. Consciousness only arises in dependence with existing mentality-materiality, which means the characteristics of a consciousness are the characteristics of the objects that it knows at that certain moment. Don't think that viññāṇa has its own unique characteristics. Whatever mentality and materiality link together to form a unified object, a consciousness knows that formation, gives rise to more mentality-materiality, and then that single unit of consciousness dies. Right now, my bladder is full and I feel a need to go to the toilet. It occurs to me that I better excuse myself because a viññāṇa knows the mental factors of feeling, vedanā, and contact, phassa, that are presently taking place in my body. A viññāṇa comes out of those nāma-dhammas and I know that it's time to go to the toilet. I've got to get my body, my rūpa-dhammas going!



Now that I've gone to the toilet, all those old feelings and contacts connected with the full bladder have died. The old nāma-dhammas, as well as the old rūpa-dhammas and that old viññāṇa—everything has died and in its place another set, a new set of nāma-dhammas and rūpa-dhammas and a new viññāṇa has arisen. A viññāṇa connected to a fresh cup of tea has arisen. Another example. We can say the body of a lute is the rūpa-dhammas part of our story; the lute's strings are the nāma-dhammas part, and its sound is the viññāṇa part. When a skilled musician strums the strings, beautiful music goes forth. You'll find the Simile of the Lute Sutta in the Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta.<sup>38</sup>

There's a question that needs to be asked. I just said that mentality and materiality give rise to consciousness, that a lute makes sounds. But I also said at the beginning of this talk that consciousness has to be there for the mentality and materiality to arise. How can the sound make the lute? The sound from the lute has come and gone! How can it be that viññāṇa comes about? Because of nāma-rūpa? In the teaching on dependent origination, viññāṇa gives rise to nāma-rūpa. So, nāma-rūpa giving rise to viññāṇa seems the wrong way round. Let's leave rūpa, materiality, aside for the moment.

The lute's sound is one thing and the knowing of the lute's sound is a second thing. Nevertheless, the sound and the knowing of the sound cannot be separated. How can sound be known if it isn't there at the same time as the knowing? Even though we like to think that a viññāṇa and the nāma-dhammas are separate things, they always arise together. Simultaneously.

*Okay, the knowing of the sound comes along with the sound itself.*

Yes. Understand this one point: Consciousness depends upon mentality-materiality, and mentality-materiality depends upon



consciousness. They mutually support each other. As Venerable Sāriputta put it, “If we remove one of the two reeds, the other reed falls down.” Likewise, if we remove mentality-materiality, there won’t be any consciousness. And vice versa: if there is no consciousness, there won’t be any mentality-materiality. We aren’t trying to separate them in any way, are we?

*Nāma, rūpa, and vinnana seem like parts of yet another complicated and abstract Buddhist theory. Not very practical. Why bother?*

By discussing the factors of dependent origination, we are trying to convince ourselves that they really exist, that this is in fact the true nature of things. We are hoping a little knowledge will dispel our doubts, open up our minds, and we will attain insight. We are aiming for that goal, aiming ultimately for path knowledge, breaking free from saṃsāra’s cycle. And if we keep that goal in mind, then okay, it is worth digging into these teachings. If we don’t have that goal in mind, or aren’t at least trying to decrease our suffering, then discussing these factors of dependent origination is nothing more than philosophical speculation, a complete waste of time. And for most people, digging into and tearing apart these teachings is a waste of time and rarely yields any beneficial results, let alone insight knowledge. On the contrary, many people who use brute force to analyse the Buddha’s teachings develop strong views, which is worse than a waste of time!

*You can smile and laugh. I don’t find myself laughing a lot when I study this material, as it’s nearly impossible to understand.*

That’s okay. Don’t worry about it. You’re overcoming your laziness. Based on sila and living in a supportive environment, dedicated meditators develop a deep samādhi, work their way through the fine material jhānas, and see for themselves the

nature of mentality-materiality and consciousness. When they remove themselves from the first jhāna, they clearly see the mental factors that arise along with the first jhāna—applied and sustained thought, rapture, happiness, and one-pointedness. Through direct experience, meditators penetrate the nature of nāma-rūpa and viññāṇa. Destroyed is their doubt. And if meditators have a strong practice, they attain to the non-material jhānas where they see that materiality, the rūpa-saññā, is out. Meditators who make the right effort have no difficulty with the Buddha’s teachings on dependent origination.

Mentality and materiality—we think this combination is stable and lasting, calling it me and mine and self. But from the day we were born right up til now, all our mental states were transient and every part of our bodies changed, died, and was renewed. Our lives are nothing more than a process of mental and material phenomena continually arising. Mentality and materiality are created in change. Anicca. They are impermanent. Yet, we prefer to see them as permanent and we suffer. Dukkha. Mentality and materiality do not maintain themselves according to our wishes. They are beyond our control. Anattā. Just watch. You’ll see that apart from mentality and materiality, there is nothing else. You’ll see that there is no such thing as a me or a mine or a self, just the three characteristics of all conditioned things: anicca, dukkha, anattā. Look, see, and know.

If you were doing a Ph.D. in Buddhism, we would discuss mentality and materiality in far greater detail. We would look at the workings of kamma-vipāka, that’s kamma and its resultants. We’d also look at how nāma-dhammas create nāma-dhammas, how viññāṇa affects nāma-dhammas, how nāma-dhammas sometimes do come along with rūpa-dhammas, as in our lives in the kāma-loka, and how nāma-dhammas sometimes don’t come along with rūpa-dhammas. You’re not doing a Ph.D. So, this brief introduction to mentality, materiality, and consciousness is more than enough for your practice. Develop your beneficial

qualities, build up your samādhī, and discover for yourself that everything is nothing more than nāma-rūpa.



*To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children, and to be engaged in peaceful occupation—this is the greatest blessing.*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>39</sup>

## 9. Mentality-Materiality → Sense Bases

**Pemasiri Thera:** As I said earlier, various forms of secondary materiality, upādā-rūpa in Pali, are derived from the materiality of the four primary elements, cattāro-mahā-būtāni:

- Earth element, *paṭhavī-dhātu*
- Water element, *āpo-dhātu*
- Fire element, *tejo-dhātu*
- Air element, *vāyo-dhātu*

Upādā-rūpa is not original materiality. It is secondary; it is derived from the elements. The four primary elements are already present, and from them similar things are produced; similar in that they are built up from these exact same four elements. It's all the same rūpa; it is all the same four building blocks of earth, fire, water, and air. Secondary materiality is not anything apart from these same four basic blocks. By kamma and by mind, twenty-something different forms of secondary materiality are produced. Bear with me. The four primary elements are already present, and what is produced by kamma and by mind is of the same composition. The four primary elements are only being put together in altered formations,

which is the heart of the proposition, “Dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality arises; viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ.” All of our physical sense doors—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body—are simply secondary forms of materiality. We’re concerned with the workings of kamma and citta, that’s the mind. Is this clear enough for you? Are you following?

*David: So far, so good.*

## Six Sense Doors

Through our six sense doors, we experience six types of objects:

- Eyes and sights
- Ears and sounds
- Nose and aromas
- Tongue and tastes
- Body and tangibles
- Mind and ideas

These six sense doors enable us to see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and experience all sorts of different states of consciousness, viññāṇa.

*Good. Finally a topic that should be easy to grasp! I’m pretty familiar with my eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body.*

You’re on the right track. Both this brick meditation hall where we are now sitting and our sense doors are forms of derived materiality; they are both produced from the four primary elements—earth, fire, water, and air. But inanimate objects such

as this hall as well as our lifeless nails, hair, and dry skin have only gross forms of materiality, and they do not have any subtle forms of materiality, called *pasāda-rūpa* in Pali, nor do they have any of the life essence forms of materiality, *rūpa-jīvitindriya*. The materiality of this hall and our hair are not in this subtle and extremely sensitive state called *pasāda*. *Pasāda-rūpa*, the subtle materiality, is the most sensitive part of your sense doors and it helps you contact sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles. *Pasāda-rūpa* is the subtlest form of the four primary elements. If your eye were the size of this hall, your eye's *pasāda-rūpa* would be one ray of sunshine reflecting off a spot on the floor. *Pasāda-rūpa* would be just one grain of sand out of this whole big hall.

Each of our sense doors has its own subtle materiality:

- Eye subtle materiality, *cakkhu-pasāda rūpa*
- Ear subtle materiality, *sota-pasāda rūpa*
- Nose subtle materiality, *ghāna-pasāda rūpa*
- Tongue subtle materiality, *jivhā-pasāda rūpa*
- Body subtle materiality, *kāya-pasāda rūpa*
- Heart and growth materiality, *hadaya-vatthu* and *upacaya-rūpa*

Gross, subtle, and life essence—these three forms of materiality, three forms of *rūpa*, support our experiencing of sense objects. These three are vital. It's easy to accept that the gross materiality of our eyes exists and that our eyes are necessary for the seeing of objects. Obviously, an eye-consciousness cannot take place at our eyes if we don't have eyes. Then again, it isn't so easy to accept that the subtle materiality and life essence materiality are also necessary for the experiencing of sense objects, such as the seeing of things. If this subtle materiality, the *pasāda-rūpa*, of a

sense door is absent or damaged, it is impossible for that sense door to make contact with its sense object.

*Can I prove that subtle materiality really exists?*

Yesterday, a wandering bhikkhu dropped in for a visit. He is completely blind. There is absolutely no eye-consciousness arising. Yet, when you look at him, his eyes appear to be in quite good health. All right, I said that an eye has at least these three forms of materiality—gross, subtle, and life essence. Since this bhikkhu's eyes physically exist and they are alive, we accept that his eyes have the gross and the life essence forms of materiality. Then why can't he see? Definitely something is wrong with his eyes—something must be missing or damaged. So what's missing? Well, maybe this subtle form of materiality called pasāda-rūpa is the missing element. I told you four soldiers were here at our centre a few days ago. Do you remember me telling you about them?

*Yes. All four soldiers were blind and two of them were also missing a leg or an arm.*

The eyes of those four soldiers also appeared to be in quite good health. But just as the subtle materiality, the pasāda-rūpa, of our wandering bhikkhu's eyes is damaged, the subtle materiality of those soldiers' eyes is damaged, and there is no possibility for eye-consciousness to arise.

*I often feel my life would be easier if I were blind like those soldiers. All my senses seem to be such a nuisance, like when I'm riding on a crowded Colombo bus. People are rude; they're always bumping into me.*

Because your body has these extremely sensitive forms of the four primary elements called pasāda-rūpa, your body has the characteristic of sensing and you feel people bump into you. After a bump, you create a scenario, "He bumped into me because he is rude." or "She bumped into me out of desire." The

mental states of ill-will and greed come up because you cultivate ill-will and greed. There is nothing else happening. If someone bumps your body where there is no pasāda-rūpa, no subtle materiality, you don't think there is a problem.

The subtle materiality in your body, eyes, ears, nose, and tongue makes it possible to feel bumps, see me, hear this dhamma talk, smell the flowers, and enjoy a tasty cup of tea. Likewise, there is materiality in your heart that makes it possible for your heart to beat. The form of materiality in your heart is not pasāda-rūpa; it is upacaya-rūpa. Upacaya-rūpa is similar to the pasāda-rūpa in your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body in that it is the initial, gathering materiality. Can you follow what I am saying? We're getting a little technical. Upacaya-rūpa is the first arising of materiality, the frontline growth materiality. Apparently, it's this form of materiality that creates and controls the beating of the heart—that's what it does. Just as a bump stimulates the subtle materiality in your body and you feel a bump, energy loaded blood stimulates the growth materiality in your heart and your heart beats. The blood supplies the energy to the heart, and the heart circulates the blood throughout the body to pick up the energy. Blood is pumped through the lungs and other organs. The blood and the heart work together.

Eyes, ears, nose, and tongue—understanding the nature of these sense doors is fairly straightforward. However, understanding the nature of the body, kāya, and the heart, hadaya-vatthu, is anything but straightforward, as mind comes into play; we always need both nāma and rūpa there. Take into account, whenever one of your sense doors experiences its sense object, a consciousness arises both at that sense door and at the heart. Both locations. If we accept that mind is actually in the heart, then this growth materiality, the upacaya-rūpa, must be in and around the heart. So, when energy loaded blood flows into the heart, the heart's growth materiality is stimulated, the heart beats and moments of consciousness, viññāṇa, are produced. If



the heart doesn't beat, no energy loaded blood flows into the heart, the heart's growth materiality isn't stimulated, and no moments of consciousness are produced.

Suffice it to say, the body and the heart are complex sense doors. No, they're not easy to come to terms with. We'll learn a little at a time, in as practical way as possible.

### *Practical?*

It's enough to bear in mind that our bodies have gross, subtle, and life essence forms of materiality, and to also bear in mind that our bodies are extremely delicate, vulnerable to decay and destruction. For example, surgeons who perform skin graft operations do their best to preserve the skin's subtle as well as its life essence materiality. These two forms of materiality—subtle and life essence—must survive the operation as they are crucial to the skin's experiencing of touch. Though most surgeons know nothing of subtle and life essence materiality, for any operation on the human body to be a success, the operating surgeon must somehow care for the health of these two forms of materiality, whether he or she is operating on skin, eyes, hearts, or whatever part of the body. In theory, even tongues and ears can be transplanted, as tongues and ears are nothing more than the four primary elements. Pasāda-rūpa and life essence materiality are not forms of mentality, not mind things. Since all our sense organs are purely rūpa, purely materiality, it follows then that any one of them could be transplanted or produced artificially.

Years ago when I was in Australia, I had a conversation with a man who had suffered a heart attack and had been clinically dead for a brief period of time. He was taken by ambulance to the local hospital where he was fortunate enough to receive a heart transplant. He made a full recovery. Upon returning home, the man called his family together, "Being close to death changed my life. Someone, a person I don't know, gave me his

heart. I can't even thank him. What should we do?" As a family, the man, his wife, and his children immediately agreed that they too should make their organs available for donation. Soon after that decision was made, just one short month, the man's son was killed in a car accident. Yes, the man was sad that his son had died. That was a great loss for him. But since the son had agreed to donate his organs, surgeons transplanted the son's organs into the bodies of eight different people. Organs from the man's son improved the lives of eight people. Said the Australian man, the father, "I now have eight new children!"

*That's an inspiring story. I always carry my organ donor card —you never know.*

Yes, it's difficult to predict our exact moment of death. Funny, as a child, I read commentaries on life at the time of the Buddha as science fiction because many of these ancient commentaries seemed far too remarkable to be true. There are accounts of surgeons transplanting organs as well as repairing eyes, transferring blood from one person to another person, and operating on brains. Dr. Jīvaka, for instance, reportedly performed many of these types of operations. Since it all sounded exaggerated, I always read these ancient commentaries as fairytales, that is right up until I heard that our present-day surgeons were also performing organ transplants. The Buddha lived at a time when society was in an advanced stage of development. And whenever society as a whole is in an advanced stage, the arts and sciences, which include medicine, are also in an advanced stage. I now have much more confidence in the ancient commentaries.

Six Sense Bases

We're now going to talk about saḷāyatana. Saḷā means six, and āyatana means the base of mental contact with sense objects. Thus, saḷāyatana is generally translated as the six sense bases of mental contact, or simply the six sense bases:

- Eye sense base, *cakkhāyatana*
- Ear sense base, *sotāyatana*
- Nose sense base, *ghānāyatana*
- Tongue sense base, *jivhāyatana*
- Body sense base, *kāyāyatana*
- Mind sense base, *manāyatana*

There are many ways to teach the six sense bases, from briefly to detailed to the deeply profound. One teacher will tell you the sense bases are identical to the sense doors, that your eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are the sense bases. A brief teaching. A second teacher will tell you that there are six pairs of internal and external sense bases. Your physical eyes would be an internal base and the objects you see would be your eyes' matching external base. A third teacher will tell you the sense bases are the subtle materiality, the pasāda-rūpa, part of each sense door—he or she will say that is real sense base. There are many, many ways of teaching the sense bases. Sense bases are taught in scores of suttas and in the Abhidhamma. A fourth teacher will tell you the nature of sense bases must be penetrated on your own by descending into a deep samādhi; otherwise, their nature remains nothing more than book knowledge.

Even though these various ways of teaching appear incomplete and contradictory, all these different ways may be correct. All these teachers could be right in what they have to say about the sense bases—it depends upon the needs of the student.

*How can teachings be at odds with each other?*

A teacher's way of teaching depends upon the temperament of his or her student. For instance, in the Buddha's teaching to Ānanda on the process of dependent origination found in the Mahānidāna Sutta,<sup>40</sup> the Buddha goes from the factor of mentality-materiality directly to the factor of contact, and he doesn't even mention the six sense bases.

*Why are you teaching me about sense bases if the Buddha didn't see the need to teach the sense bases? Maybe we could skip them?*

The Mahānidāna Sutta is not the only sutta dealing with the process of dependent origination. And since many of these other suttas do treat the six sense bases as a separate link, we too should best treat the six sense bases as a separate link. Let's look at how the Buddha presents dependent origination in the Nidāna Saṃyutta:<sup>41</sup>

- Dependent on ignorance, formations arise; *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*
- Dependent on formations, consciousness arises; *saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ*
- Dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality arises; *viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*
- Dependent on mentality-materiality, the six sense bases arise; *nāma-rūpa-paccayā salāyatanaṃ*
- Dependent on the six sense bases, contact arises; *salāyatana-paccayā phasso*
- Dependent on contact, feeling arises; *phassa-paccayā vedanā*
- Dependent on feeling, craving arises; *vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*

- Dependent on craving, clinging arises; *tañhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*
- Dependent on clinging, bhava arises; *upādāna-paccayā bhavo*
- Dependent on bhava, birth arises; *bhava-paccayā jāti*
- Dependent on birth, decay and aging and death arise; *jāti-paccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ*

In this sutta, a teaching given to bhikkhus at Sāvatthi, the Buddha feels the need to mention the six sense bases. He states that mentality-materiality is the necessary condition for the six sense bases, and then states that the six sense bases are the necessary condition for contact.

*Did the Buddha somehow forget the six sense bases in the Mahanidana Sutta? Did he make a mistake?*

No, the Buddha didn't forget them or make a mistake! The needs of Ānanda as a student were different from the needs of those bhikkhus at Sāvatthi. The Buddha doesn't have to treat the six sense bases as a separate factor in the Mahānidāna Sutta because Ānanda understood that the sense bases are included with mentality-materiality. The Buddha can omit the six sense bases simply because he already covered the sense bases when he talked about mentality-materiality. Don't think the six sense bases are something totally separate or different from mentality-materiality, *nāma-rūpa*. They aren't separate. *Salāyatanaṃ* is part and parcel of the same *nāma-rūpa*. I mentioned this point earlier in our talk on the relationship between consciousness and mentality-materiality, that everything can be seen as mentality-materiality. Everything. Thus, and leaving aside *nibbāna*, if we accept that everything is within the scope of mentality-materiality, then the sense bases must be within the scope of mentality-materiality. If the appropriate mentality-materiality is

present, a kamma based sense base of mental contact will definitely arise.

*Are you talking about my eyes and ears when you say sense bases? Are the sense bases the same as the sense doors?*

No. Your eyes are not a sense base, as a sense base is more than the materiality of sense doors.

*My eyes and ears and the rest of my senses must be somehow related to my sense bases. Right?*

Yes, there's a close union between sense doors and sense bases. For you to experience objects, for you to see or hear or taste, the gross materiality of your eyes and ears and tongue must be present and undamaged. If the sense door is not there, the mind cannot arise at that place. We all know that we need eyes to see, and ears to hear. However, sense bases are also in close union with mentality. Sense bases have two sides—a mentality side in addition to the materiality side. Since your sense doors—eyes, ears, nose, etc.—are built up from the four primary elements, they are the materiality side to your sense bases.

*Alright, the gross materiality of my sense doors is only half the story.*

Correct. And don't forget about the subtle and life essence forms of materiality of your sense doors. Furthermore, though the gross, subtle, and life essence forms of materiality of the sense doors are needed to experience objects, the materiality of the sense doors is not what is meant by the term sense base, āyatana, as sense bases have that mentality side too. So, from the mentality side, there is consciousness.

*One side of a sense base is materiality and the other side is consciousness?*

No, we can't quite say that either, as the mentality side to the sense bases is not only consciousness. Yet, when we talk about

mentality, we also have to bring in the concept of consciousness. And when we talk about consciousness, we have to bring in mentality as well as materiality. Consciousness is not something that operates in isolation. It doesn't have its own active and inherent characteristics. It only knows what has arisen. Feelings, perceptions, mentality and materiality, mental formations—many different phenomena unite and are known by a moment of consciousness. This topic of sense bases is not easily approached intellectually because there's a complexity, an inter-relatedness with the other factors in the process of dependent origination: consciousness conditions mentality-materiality; consciousness also depends upon mentality-materiality; mentality-materiality is the condition for the arising of the six sense bases; and the six sense bases condition mental contact. Yes, mentality-materiality, *nāma-rūpa*, and consciousness, *viññāṇa*, must always be talked about together because mentality-materiality and consciousness arise together.

*Whew!*

Sense bases are in union with mentality, which means sense bases are in union with consciousness; a sense base is where consciousness is generated. If we can penetrate the nature of consciousness, we can penetrate the nature of the sense bases. As the Buddha states in the Honeyball Sutta,<sup>42</sup> “When the sense door, the object of the sense door, and the sense door consciousness come together, there is mental contact.” Your eye sense base, the *cakkhāyatana*, is not your material eye, is not the *pasāda-rūpa* that is present in your eye, and is not the object that you see. Your physical eyeball is no more than the material place where your eye-consciousness arises.

A sense base, *āyatana*, requires the sense door, requires a sense door's matching sense object, and requires the sense door consciousness. Consciousness. The consciousness of the sense door must arise. To taste curry, for the sense base of taste to

arise, we need our tongue, some curry, and the tongue consciousness. Clearly, the arising of the tongue sense base requires the surface of the tongue where the consciousness of taste can be generated. We have feelings, perceptions, and mental formations about the delicious curry. These various causes and conditions arise and then die. Not just one cause. Many causes come together. Only when there is the sense door, the matching object of the sense door, and the sense door consciousness can there be mental contact. When all of these come together, we find the curry to be delightfully sour! The consciousness must arise. The eyes of the blind bhikkhu and those blind soldiers appear to be okay. Their eyes look as if they are fine. But the place within their eyes where eye-consciousness arises is dead, and that's really the āyatana, the sense base.

*The place where consciousness arises is the sense base?*

Consciousness is a critical component, as it's consciousness that knows all the causes and conditions that come together. Consciousness knows the objects of our senses. Without the arising of consciousness, viññāṇa, there is no sense base; and for consciousness to arise, the sense base must also be there. Both ways.

*If I'm following correctly, a sense base is not a sense door, not the subtle materiality, and not the sense object. And not really even consciousness, as you said earlier that consciousness is inactive and doesn't have any inherent characteristics. Then, what is a sense base?*

See a sense base as a characteristic of mentality-materiality. Yes, a sense base depends upon mentality-materiality. Nevertheless, try to let go of sense bases being something either mental or material, or being a fixed place or being anything substantial in any way at all. Āyatana, sense base, means the gross and subtle materiality, the rūpa, of sense doors make contact with external



objects. In other words, a consciousness, based on an object, arises at a sense door. For example, the eye-āyatana means, based on the eye and sights, an eye-viññāṇa arises. That's the nature of eyes and sights. Nothing more. Sense base is a characteristic, simply the nature of things, the way that many different things come together and behave for a brief period of time. Āyatana means gathering places where mind can arise. More than mind, āyatana means a consciousness, a viññāṇa, can be produced.

Consciousness is only produced at one of our sense doors when our faculty of attention, manasikāra, directs consciousness towards that sense door. You have healthy and fully functioning eyes. When you direct your consciousness towards your eyes, you experience visible objects. If you direct your consciousness somewhere else, towards another sense door, then you won't be aware of seeing anything; you won't be experiencing visible objects. The same applies to your ears, nose, and tongue. The arising of consciousness at a sense door is always only a possibility.

*Why are you stressing the importance of consciousness and seeing sense bases as a characteristic? It sure seems easier to see my sense bases as my sense organs.*

Sense bases are not just the materiality of sense doors, as the possibility of consciousness arising has to be considered.

*Yes, I believe you. But why should I bother seeing sense bases in this way?*

Sense bases fuel this engine called a human being. It's this characteristic of mentality-materiality that supplies the fuel for craving, suffering, and in the end saṃsāra. Our suffering doesn't lie in our ears, in the sounds, or in ear-consciousness. It's in the craving that arises in dependence of all these, lies in the sense bases, that's where suffering lies. Ears are not interested in

sounds! Do you agree? So, if we penetrate the nature of sense bases, we use our sense doors in beneficial ways, in kusala ways, to overcome the akusala. When our consciousness picks up sense objects, we experience these sense objects without abhijjhā or domanassa, without coveting or grieving. We're talking about the practice of sati, a practical training to open up our minds to nibbāna!



*To be generous in giving, to be righteous in conduct, to help one's relatives, and to be blameless in action— this is the greatest blessing*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>43</sup>

## 10. Mentality-Materiality → Contact → Feeling

**Pemasiri Thera:** Now, let's get going on contact and feeling, phassa and vedanā. These two factors in the process of dependent origination must be spoken about in the same breath, as the Buddha states, "Dependent upon mentality-materiality, contact arises, nāma-rūpa-paccayā phasso; and then dependent on contact, feeling arises, phassa-paccayā vedanā." I'm including the six sense bases with mentality-materiality.

Contact, phassa, is different from touch, phoṭṭhabba. Touch just means there is some form of link with the four primary elements. Contact, on the other hand, means a sense impression is made upon the mind. The term samphassa is used in compounds, such as cakkhu-samphassa—eye-contact. Though these two terms, touch and contact, are often used as synonyms, they are two separate terms.

*David: Does phoṭṭhabba apply to the mind?*

Our bodies are often touched without contact, without a sense impression made upon the mind. When the barber cuts your hair, there is no contact. When a blind woman wears a beautiful bangle, the beauty is not something she can see and know because there is no eye-contact. Does the wrist know it has a bangle on it? Does the bangle know it is on the wrist? Of course,

both do not know and there is no contact, no phassa. The woman knows she is wearing the bangle on her wrist because of the material sense of touch that is present. In that case, there is both touch and contact. A person who has the power of sight can look at the bangle and tell her about it. That form of contact is also possible. Contact means that feelings arise. Your hair is touched by the barber, but feelings don't arise; and feelings don't arise because your hair has no pasāda-rūpa. Our hair is similar to the building—there is no sensitive, subtle form of the four primary elements present. As a result, feelings don't arise. There is no contact.

*Very often, I haven't a clue as to what you're talking about.*

I know.

*Which makes me wonder why you teach me things I don't understand.*

I could tell you about simple matters that you would easily understand, but I'd get bored.

*Yes, probably me too!*

All your material sense doors—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body—have their own mode of responding to sense stimuli. When these responses also take place in your mind, there is contact. Sense doors are similar to strands in a spider's cobweb. When one of the strands starts shaking, the spider knows it has caught an insect. And note, phassa often occurs without phoṭṭhabba. When I consider going to the city of Kurunegala, my mind connects with ideas and images of Kurunegala. This is not phoṭṭhabba; this is only phassa. The person called "I" makes contact.

*Can the term touch apply to both my body and my eyes?*

Almost always, the term phoṭṭhabba is used when talking about the body and the term phassa is used when talking about your

eyes, as well when talking about your ears, nose, and tongue. When someone bumps into you, the *pasāda-rūpa* of your body responds and senses the bump. The *pasāda-rūpa* of your body is sensitive, but it isn't as sensitive as the *pasāda-rūpa* of your other sense doors. Your body's *pasāda-rūpa* is relatively gross. When the gross *pasāda-rūpa* responds to sense stimuli, the term *phoṭṭhabba* is used because the gross *pasāda-rūpa* is making a link with the four primary elements. *Phassa*, on the other hand, is used when the finer, more sensitive, *pasāda-rūpa* responds to sense stimuli, and there is no direct link with the four primary elements. When you see a visible object, the more sensitive *pasāda-rūpa* of your eyes responds and there is contact in your mind. Sight occurs. This is *phassa*, only *phassa*. Though sight of the object may cause you some grief or joy, the sight is neutral for your material eyes—your eyes don't make a link with the four primary elements. But when the bright light of the sun glares in your eyes, the relatively gross *pasāda-rūpa* responds. Glaring sunlight is not neutral. It hurts. Your eyes physically feel the glare, which means there is a link with the gross *pasāda-rūpa*, and *phoṭṭhabba* occurs. So, in this case, we can say that the experience of touch, the term *phoṭṭhabba*, applies to the eyes.

## Five Types of Feeling

In the Honeyball Sutta, the Buddha states, “Through the means of the sense door and sense object, a sense door-consciousness can arise. The coming together of sense door, sense object, and sense door-consciousness is contact, *phassa*. Dependent on contact, feeling arises.” There are five types of feelings:

- Pleasant body feeling, *kāyikā sukhā-vedanā*

- Painful body feeling, *kāyikā dukkhā-vedanā*
- Pleasant mental feeling, *cetasikā sukhā-vedanā*
- Painful mental feeling, *cetasikā dukkhā-vedanā*
- Neutral feelings of equanimity, *upekkhā-vedanā*

There are both pleasant and painful body and mental feelings. The term body includes our five material sense doors—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, as well as the body. Resting between the pleasant and the painful lies equanimity. It is neutral. Neither a pleasant nor a painful body or mental feeling, equanimity is a well-balanced mind free of clinging and aversion. The term feeling is a mental factor, not something external. You have a few mosquito bites on your arm and they are itchy. But, contrary to what many teachers state, itchiness is not a feeling. It is just changes in materiality, changes in non-mental forms called rūpa. The difference between feeling and just changes in rūpa is subtle, but it's important to know the difference. Now, because the bites are itchy, you are scratching them which gives rise to pleasant and painful feelings, and then there is some liking and disliking. It always feels good to scratch an itch.

When feelings are pleasant and we're comfortable, our experience is suitable, *sabhāga*. When feelings are painful and we're uncomfortable, however, our experience is unsuitable, *visabhāga*. You find sitting on a cushion to be suitable; while you find sitting right on the concrete floor to be unsuitable. At the beginning of each session of sitting meditation, the contact between the rūpa-kalāpas of your bottom and the rūpa-kalāpas of the cushion is pleasant. Like water and water, your bottom and the cushion do not clash. They are similar.

*What are rūpa-kalāpas?*

They are unit bundles of minute particles, atomic level, which come from the four primary elements. The bundles can be

animate, as in your body; or the bundles can be inanimate, as in the cushion. After sitting on the cushion for an hour, your bottom gets sore because there is a clash between your bottom and the cushion. No longer like water and water, more like oil and water, your bottom and the cushion are not similar. The four primary elements of your bottom are out of balance with the cushion. The fire element has increased; the skin's temperature has gone up. The water element has also probably increased, and you've started to sweat. In an attempt to balance the four primary elements, your body increases the blood flow to your bottom. But when the balance of the four primary elements changes, feelings also change. Whatever comfortable state the four primary elements were in when you began your sit, that state no longer exists and painful feelings arise. You feel uncomfortable and want to adjust your sitting position. The comfortable has become the uncomfortable; *sabhāga* has turned to *visabhāga*. What had originally suited our minds no longer suits our minds. This is the nature of contact and feeling.

*Do I look at my craving?*

The balance of the four primary elements changes. This realization is enough for your vipassanā practice. People who are bedridden get bedsores because they remain in the same position for weeks. They never roll over or make any adjustments to the position of their bodies. For them, only painful feelings are present. This does not happen to us because just as soon as pleasant feelings fade and painful feelings start arising, we change our position. If we try to experience too much pleasant contact, the contact becomes painful. When you look at a beautiful woman, pleasant feelings arise in your mind. If you stare at the same woman for an hour, your feelings change from the pleasant to the painful. But before that happens, you think, "I've looked at her long enough." We cannot experience the same object for a long time. At some point, the original

pleasantness we experience with the object changes to unpleasantness.

The mind must alternate between the pleasant and the painful, sukha and dukkha. A person can only rationally exist in this sense-sphere world where we live, when the contact with objects keeps changing from the pleasant to the painful. Even meditators who are practising properly alternate between the pleasant and the painful. If people remain in one state, without switching back and forth, they become mentally sick. You must have seen mentally sick men living on the streets of Colombo, men who never bathe, are very dirty, and are always in some sort of pain. For them, it is quite all right and normal to live in painful conditions. At the opposite extreme, if people constantly experience the pleasant—beautiful house, food, clothes, etc.—possibly the condition for Princess Diana, they too become mentally sick.

## Pure Enjoyment

Only pleasant and painful feelings drive people towards extreme behaviour and mental sickness; whereas neutral feelings of equanimity, upekkhā-vedanā, never unbalance people.

Thieves steal cars with craving, tañhā, and experience a form of happiness or a certain amount of joy from stealing cars. Otherwise, they wouldn't steal cars! While racing away, a thief's contact with the stolen car is pleasant; he feels happy because he's got the car. There's pleasant contact with the object. Pleasant feeling. But when the thief realises that the owners of the car are chasing him and he is just about to get caught, his contact with the car changes from the pleasant to the painful. The thief knows the owners of the car are mad at him for stealing it and he knows



that they want to beat him up. So, not surprisingly, the thief's contact with the object, the car, is getting quite painful. He starts to regret his actions when the owners of the car finally catch up to him. Joy has changed to pain. The irate owners then hand the thief over to the police and the police take him to court where the judge sentences him to a jail term. Later, while languishing in jail, the thief is indifferent towards the car. The situation is out of his control.

*I used to be a heavy drinker.*

Well, over a night of heavy drinking, getting really drunk, you experienced both pleasant and painful contact with alcohol. By morning, you found yourself in a neutral state of indifference towards alcohol, possibly with a hangover and you had no reason to continue drinking. These days, you are meditating instead of drinking. If you ever settle your mind down into the state of samādhi, you will see that feeling is coreless.

*By coreless, do you mean anattā?*

Coreless is fine. Since the same pleasant feeling that you're clinging to will eventually turn into a painful feeling, we say that feeling is coreless and without foundation. When you are settled in samādhi, you will clearly see that feeling has this characteristic of anicca and as a result you won't cling to pleasant feelings. I'm not talking about anattā. When there is sati, mentality and materiality are differentiated and everything is seen as a continuous flow of dependent origination, an unbroken chain of causes and effects.

*And when I can manage some sati, I'll be in peace then?*

Equanimity may arise out of ignorance, delusion, or wisdom. When I ask you a question about a subject that you know very little, for instance, the nature of jhāna consciousness, you are simply incapable of answering me. As a result of ignorance, your mind leans towards equanimity. You simply have no other

choice than indifference. Equanimity can also arise when a person realizes they are terminally sick, as he or she gives up hope. Equanimity also arises when certain drugs are taken. And it arises when a meditator suppresses his or her defilements through the practice of samatha. Even this type of result, this equanimity that arises out of a meditator's samatha practice, arises out of the meditator's ignorance and delusion. In contrast, equanimity arises for a wise person because he or she realizes that the same conditions in life leading to the arising of pleasure, the assāda, also lead to the arising of pain. Pain is the drawback, the ādīnava, the dangers, of pleasurable conditions.

Understanding that pain is connected with pleasure, a wise person moves towards equanimity regarding all objects. An arahat fully realizes the true nature of life's assādas and its ādīnavas, and abides in equanimity. You can read about the pleasures, pains, and dangers of feeling in the The Seven Cases Sutta<sup>44</sup> and also in the If There Were No Sutta.<sup>45</sup>

*Okay, you're saying that if I'm ever to find peace of mind, I have to get it through my head that there is always pain and danger connected to sense pleasure.*

The bodhisatta Siddhārtha Gautama fully understood the nature of enjoyment, and understood how enjoyment is tied to misery and danger. Studying with Ālāra Kālāma, he attained to the sphere of nothingness, an extremely refined and peaceful object for his mind. With no applied thoughts or even anything to think about, the sphere of nothingness is such a high attainment that Ālāra Kālāma thought it to be the highest possible attainment. Ālāra Kālāma measured it to be a state of pure enjoyment with no misery or drawbacks. Siddhārtha, however, saw misery and drawbacks in the sphere of nothingness—it too is conditioned, which means it is subject to decay and death, and therefore suffering. Siddhārtha continued his search.

## No Concerns

As I said right at the beginning of this section, contact and feeling —phassa and vedanā—must be discussed together. They cannot be separated, which is why the Buddha said, “Dependent on contact, feeling arises.” To develop our minds, to attain liberation, we must understand the nature of vedanā. When we live out our lives in the kāma-loka, this sense-sphere world, we have to look at the nature of vedanā in the kāma-loka. We must look at events happening around us, which means looking at kāma, looking at sensuality.

A meditator who suppresses cravings for sensuality leaves the kāma-loka behind and enters into the rūpa-loka, the fine-material world. He or she attains the first jhāna. When the meditator has full control of the first jhāna and enters it at will, it is called first jhāna-samāpatti. The mind of the meditator is fully settled down in the state of samādhi, in jhāna. He or she doesn’t think about the sensual world, no sensual concerns whatsoever; this consciousness is not of an ordinary nature. The meditator only thinks about the fine-material world, a world completely apart from sensuality and apart from the harming of beings that arises on account of chasing sensual pleasures. In the jhāna, the meditator only makes contact with extremely refined forms of derived materiality, refined forms called upādāya-rūpa, which is a more pleasant form of contact than the contact found in the kāma-loka. A good meditator directs mind towards the refined upādāya-rūpa and avoids directing mind towards the gross forms of derived materiality of the four primary elements. In due course, the meditator perceives a lightness in the body, a softness, also perceives changes in the body and the arising of sensations. Since the meditator avoids making any direct link with the four primary elements, he or she only experiences

mental contact and doesn't experience any touch. Are you following? There is phassa for the meditator, but no phoṭṭhabba. It's only mind that perceives the changes in the body, that's at the upādāya-rūpa level.

A good meditator can choose to look at the arising of materiality produced by kamma or to look at the arising of materiality produced by mind. A man or woman who has full attainment has trained the mind in the sign of the jhāna—the nimitta. A nimitta is a totality sign that appears internally, in the mind. It is upādāya-rūpa. While in jhāna, the meditator chooses contact with the nimitta and avoids contact with the gross materiality of the four primary elements.

*I don't suppose the meditator is making any mental contact with that materiality of his bottom that hurts from sitting for hours on a cushion! Can the meditator contact subtle materiality, the pasāda-rūpa, while in our sense-sphere world?*

No. This is only at the time of being in jhāna. Depending on the situation, the meditator can choose to have phassa with the extremely refined upādāya-rūpa. He or she directs the mind towards pleasant objects of contact and avoids directing the mind towards any painful objects of contact. The meditator has no phassa with the four primary elements, whether they be gross or the subtle pasāda-rūpa. Selecting only pleasant phassa, no painful feelings arise, attaining both mental and material serenity. The fine-material world of the jhāna is totally removed from the sensuality of the sense-sphere world. It is incompatible with sensual ways. When the meditator experiences the fine-material world, he or she is fully immersed in the fine-material world. Once the meditator is removed from jhāna, is experiencing the sense-sphere world, he or she is fully immersed in that sense-sphere world. It is back to sensuality again.

*Do we always have phassa?*

Worldly, lokiya, means that there is phassa, contact. All mental phenomena, except magga-phala of the lokuttara, have phassa. In the lokuttara, there is only vedanā and no phassa.

## Conflicts at Home

You once had a glimpse of jhāna, just a quick look. While living here at our meditation centre, you engaged in relatively intensive periods of walking and sitting, and gained a degree of serenity, maybe some insight. You never truly experienced jhāna and you definitely never became proficient at entering jhāna. You only experienced a pleasant feeling that you created in your mind.

*It's peaceful at the centre. Yet I still get into conflicts at home.*

You are not alone. Many people, even those who consider themselves good meditators, have conflicts at home. Conflicts come out of views. If the experiences at the meditation centre are pleasant, meditators often want the same pleasant experiences at home. This is not possible. For example, at the same time a man wants to do sitting meditation and wants silence in his home, his wife chats with her friends or his son watches TV. The man is disturbed and scolds them, "Be quiet!" or "Why don't you meditate?" or "You must meditate." or "You shouldn't watch TV—it's no good for you."

"Daddy," says his son, "you're going crazy. I think meditation is bad for you." Wife and son do not understand why the man wants to meditate and are concerned about him.

A meditation centre is geared to walking slowly, sitting for hours, and silence. No one takes any special notice of these practices. It is, however, impossible to engage in these types of

practices outside a meditation centre and attempting to do so only leads to conflicts. Conflicts arise when meditators just get a glimpse of what lies beyond the sense-sphere world and do not fully penetrate the jhānas. Measuring and finding faults in others is a huge impediment to progress. Some bhikkhus measure other bhikkhus, “When I go on alms round, you should go on alms round.” and “Since I sit in meditation for four hours, you too should sit and meditate for four hours.” Hopeless, how can anyone approve of such behaviour? They haven’t found any serenity even after seeing objects for what they really are. And you? Because you attained some concentration in your practice here at our centre, you expect your fellow meditators to also attain the same concentration. Much of your fellow meditators’ behaviour irritates you, including their unsolicited and unwanted advice, which means you have yet to understand the nature of being human. You don’t know your own mind and don’t know how to live in this sense-sphere world.

*But when I look around this meditation centre, I don’t see anyone applying your teachings.*

A person’s character is subtle. By observing external signs, by looking at people, you can’t measure a person’s mental state; you can’t tell their spiritual attainment. Some meditators look very restrained. They are silent, always directing their gaze towards the ground, never looking around, and are always walking carefully. They may eat and breathe slowly. These signs are meaningless. Another meditator may eat fast and may even talk a lot, but is more advanced in terms of suppressing hindrances and overcoming defilements. Try to have some compassion for your fellow residents, as many of them are in the middle years of their lives and things are complicated with family responsibilities—there are husbands, wives, children, jobs, financial concerns, and so on and so forth. In spite of that, these lay people who left their work at home for a month or two

and are dedicating themselves to the practice at our meditation centre can go quickly on this path. And when they return home, if there is understanding between family members, then things will continue to progress smoothly and quickly. The father may meditate and the others co-operate by not making noise. Similarly, when the mother takes her turn to meditate, she gets the same support, and then the practice is balanced. Read the Nakulapitā Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya.<sup>46</sup>

Some people, because of their experiences in meditation, do not lead a balanced life in the society. And of course, because of their unbalanced nature, others are discouraged from meditating. We must not confuse the society with the things we do at a meditation centre. When I first started meditating at Kanduboda, my parents advised me, “Do not tell stories about meditation to anyone.” So, when I was at home, I did what the other teenagers were doing, like flying kites and biking.

*Are teenagers good meditators?*

Teenagers do very well at meditation centres. And their parents aren’t anxious because they know their children are in a safe place. When I was a teenager, my parents gave me permission to meditate on one condition, “Don’t behave in a way that brings shame to our family.” By bringing any shame, they meant stealing, or lying, or being deceitful. I knew if I protected myself from those things then I was on the right track and could do anything else! I was free and it was easy for me to meditate. The practice can go very well for young people.

## Sensuality and Passion

Kāma is different from rāga. The term kāma means sensuality. It

means that, through our sense doors, we take in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and body touch. Rāga on the other hand translates as passion, or is sometimes translated as simply appreciation and enjoyment. The two terms are often connected, as in *kāma-rāga*, but *kāma* only applies to the sense doors. We don't use the term *kāma* when talking about the *rūpa-jjhānas* and the *arūpa-jjhānas*. There are three types of *rāga*:

- Sensual passion, *kāma-rāga*
- Fine-material passion, *rūpa-rāga*
- Non-material passion, *arūpa-rāga*

Sensual passion, *kāma-rāga*, also known as enjoyment of sensuality, is what we experience when we have pleasing contact with objects of our sense-sphere world. A familiar occurrence, enjoying sensuality is normal, nothing extraordinary. We all have our personal preferences—some things we like and some things we don't. When I take overseas guests on a car trip to Kandy, I do my best to be a good host. I start by making sure they have comfortable seats because, like you and I, they prefer comfortable seats to uncomfortable ones. They appreciate that form of body touch. This is the enjoyment of sensuality, *kāma-rāga*. During the trip, I point out waterfalls, panoramic views, birds, and elephants. My guests always tell me the sights are beautiful and the wildlife is fascinating. They are expressing their appreciation, *rāga*. At a resthouse, we drink tea, eat cake, and smell the fresh mountain air. Again, my guests express their appreciation and enjoyment. In Kandy, we take pleasure in hearing a bhikkhu recite a *gāthā*. Comfortable seats, beautiful sights, tasty tea and cake, the smell of fresh air, and the sounds of a *gāthā*—enjoyment of sensuality was taken by my guests through all of their sense doors. Of course, enjoyment arose for them. Why wouldn't they like pleasing objects of contact? It's



completely natural for everyone to enjoy sensual pleasure. Kāma-rāga. It arises in everyone.

*Does an arahat experience rāga?*

We can't use the term rāga in reference to arahats, or anāgāmīs. Adherence to or an acceptance of social conventions is closer to their experience with sense objects. He or she accepts that sitting in a comfortable chair is pleasant. They may accept that abiding in the rūpa-jjhānas and the arūpa-jjhānas is pleasant. The Buddha accepted pleasant surroundings. On two occasions, the Buddha's body was radiant—upon enlightenment and upon final passing away. Though an acceptance of sensual pleasure still arises for arahats, sensual pleasure doesn't disturb their equanimity, as it does for those of lesser levels of knowledge.

Parents often bring their children to our meditation centre. Five to ten-year-old boys and girls casually sit on the floor and even sit on me. I talk with them, give them sweets, pat their backs, sometimes hold their hands as we walk around the centre, and if they are small enough I carry them over rough ground. I enjoy the company of young boys and girls. I also enjoy the company of teenage boys and girls, and what I feel towards the teenagers is the same as what I feel towards the five to ten-year-olds—appreciation and enjoyment. It's my kāma-rāga.

"You should not be teaching teenage girls," said one man. "It's okay to teach the five to ten-year-olds and the adults, but it is wrong to teach teenage girls."

There is nothing wrong in teaching teenage girls the dhamma—nothing whatsoever.

*A few people might take what you're saying in the wrong way.*

## Two Different Conditions

Whatever we have developed for ourselves is ours and ours alone. It is internal. While living in a meditation centre, we conduct ourselves in ways that are suitable for a meditation centre. While living a worldly working life, we conduct ourselves in ways that are suitable for the normal way of being in the worldly working life.

*What's suitable?*

Being suitable means involving ourselves in wholesome and beneficial activities that are common to everyone. We are born in this sense-sphere world; we have to live in this sense-sphere world. This does not mean living at a low level in the sense-sphere world—full of envy, jealousy, and lust. No. We practise kindness, compassion, and generosity. We meditate to develop wisdom and live in harmony with people. Avoid conflicts. And to avoid conflicts, we interact with others in ways that others understand, not in ways that only we understand. When in a worldly situation, we speak and act in worldly ways. We don't impose our views about the nature of contact and feeling upon people who aren't considering contact and feeling. No. And a meditator who has attained jhāna isn't talking about the nature of jhāna consciousness with people who have no interest in jhāna. Contact and feeling in jhāna is one thing; contact and feeling in the kāma-loka is something else.

*What are my chances of attaining jhāna?*

If you understand the beneficial and the harmful of the kāma-loka, you can easily attain the solitude and peace of the jhāna. And then when back in the kāma-loka, you would have some objectivity on the nature of the kāma-loka. Far better than the person who had never attained jhāna, never entered the rūpa-loka, you would have the opportunity to clearly see the kāma-loka's pleasures and pains, its assādas and its ādinavas, as the jhāna is a complete contrast to our disturbing kāma-loka. Some strong meditators know what I am talking about and thus know

how to live in harmony with others.

If the Buddha gave us 1000 units of teachings on the nature of contact and feeling—1000 being an arbitrary number—a sotāpanna might understand 100 of the 1000 units, and the average person probably only understands 25 of the 1000. The average person doesn't know the difference between the beneficial and the harmful; he or she won't be attaining jhāna. A sotāpanna always interacts with the average person at a level that is equal to or below the average person's level of understanding, maybe interacting at a level of 23 or 24 units. If a sotāpanna interacted with the average person at a level greater than the average person's level of understanding, say helped at a level of 26, the average person would be confused and would definitely misunderstand. He simply wouldn't be able to relate. Even though 26 units is just a bit beyond the average person's 25 units of understanding, the average person would consider the sotāpanna to be acting with greed, acting out of anger, or acting in a way that is a sign of mental sickness. So, conflicts would occur between the sotāpanna and the average person. Yes, interactions between people are always problematic. If I can help someone, I help them as much as I can. But very often my help has resulted in a great deal of confusion and serious conflicts; they thought I expected something or I was leading them somewhere.

*At home, I want the same serenity I have here at the centre.*

You can't have the same serenity at your home, as contact and feeling depend upon the conditions in which they arise. The conditions in which you live must be considered. When you go to a meditation centre and practise relatively intensively for fifteen days to a month, conditions are meditative, a little less worldly than at home. Thus, dependent upon the less worldly meditative contacts, meditative feelings arise. And when there are meditative contacts and feelings, meditative rūpa-kalāpas

come to be. Your mentality and materiality, your mind and body, are affected by existing conditions. Your mental formations at a meditation centre are of a slightly less worldly nature than your mental formations at home.

When you leave the meditation centre and return home, conditions are completely worldly and you encounter sensual objects, which means sensual forms of contact and feelings arise. For this reason, dependent upon worldly contacts and feelings, worldly rūpa-kalāpas arise in your mind and body. It always takes some time for the rūpa-kalāpas of your mind and body to transform from their calm meditative state to their, relatively speaking, disturbed worldly state. Until that transformation takes place, you simply have to wait. It can take a number of days before you can easily form words, have normal thoughts, and are completely readjusted to the worldly life. Possibly, it's in this readjustment period between meditative and worldly conditions, you find yourself getting into conflicts by imposing views, measuring and giving marks, and criticizing. You might think, "I'm very restrained and serene, but others aren't at all restrained or serene."

Be aware that the conditions in a meditation centre and the conditions at home are both worldly. The meditation centre is only slightly less worldly than the home life. Kāma-loka, rūpa-loka, and arūpa-loka—it's all worldly, lokiya. For conditions to be anything other than worldly, a meditator must attain the path and fruit of the supramundane, the lokuttara. Must attain to sotāpatti.

People who are always in meditative conditions such as a meditation centre experience meditative types of contacts and feelings each and every day of their lives. Because they are not switching back and forth between the two different conditions—meditative and worldly—transformation of the rūpa-kalāpas never occurs and there are no conflicts between the two different

conditions. Of course, even these sincere meditators might occasionally be in a five-star hotel, attending a wedding for a relative. The Buddha attended weddings. As long as these meditators don't fully immerse themselves in the ways of the world, they can help people who are fully immersed in the world.

*Are these people sotāpannas?*

No. Not necessarily, as it's feasible they were bodhisattas in one of their previous births and instead of attaining magga-phala, they help others, once in a while.

*Why help others only once in a while?*

Only once in a while, a person comes along and asks the right questions.



*To loathe more evil and abstain from it, to refrain from intoxicants, and to be steadfast in virtue—this is the greatest blessing.*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>47</sup>

## 11. Feeling → Craving—part 1

**Pemasiri Thera:** Any time that feelings arise, tañhā also always arises. Tañhā is the Pali word for craving. Feeling, vedanā, is the necessary supportive condition for the arising of craving. “Vedanā,” said the Buddha, “is mother to the child known as tañhā.”

Ratnayaka just brought me a cup of tea. Since I find the cup of tea satisfying and I get some pleasure from drinking it, I want to bring the cup of tea closer to me. I crave the cup of tea. A mental formation then emerges to possess and protect the cup of tea—to make it mine. Our craving, tañhā, for an object only emerges after we contact and in some way experience the object. I craved the cup of tea only after the tea was brought to me and some pleasant feelings arose. It was at that point I wanted to possess it, to make the cup of tea mine. Now, if I drop my cup of tea on the floor, spilling the tea and breaking the cup, I suffer. So, before Ratnayaka brought me the cup of tea, before I found drinking the tea such a pleasurable experience, I didn’t crave the cup of tea; there wasn’t any craving whatsoever. Nothing arose in my mind with regard to this particular cup of tea—no craving, no possessing, no protecting, and most importantly no suffering.

Feeling is the most dominant cause for the arising of craving. It is born of feeling. Feeling is the mother who gives birth to craving. Where pleasant feelings arise, we want to get closer.

Where unpleasant feelings arise, we want to get away. Look around this hall where we are now sitting and having a nice chat. You see many different objects—a statue of the Buddha resting on a stand, men and women, dozens of books on a shelf, cushions and mats. You don't look at all the objects in the same way. You look at the mats differently than you look at the women—you don't crave the mats! Craving only arises when the object bears some significance to you, where feelings arise.

*David: If I go off to the forest, I won't be thinking about having a relationship with a woman.*

You're right. While practising in the forest where there are no women, you can suppress your craving for women. All the same, when you leave the forest and come in contact with women again, your craving will be like a dam bursting. It'll come on stronger than ever! You're better off interacting with women, seeing them and talking with them. To whatever level of strength feelings arise, craving arises to the same level. There is a direct correlation between feelings and craving. Where intensely pleasant feelings arise, we want to bring the object as close as possible. We pursue pleasant feelings with the same intensity. We really want to possess the object. Where our contact with an object arouses intensely unpleasant feelings, we want to be as far away from the object as possible. We reject the painful object. Where pleasant and unpleasant feelings are absent, however, craving doesn't arise.

Craving is never neutral. It always leads us in one of two directions: the beneficial or the harmful. Knowing our direction determines our destination, our birth, we restrain our craving for harmful objects and instead connect our craving with the beneficial. Craving performs the same function in the beneficial and the harmful, in the kusala and the akusala. Yes, craving can lead to a low birth, to a woeful state. But craving can also lead to a high birth and to high states of consciousness, such as the rūpa-

jjhānas and arūpa-jjhānas. When the parents build a house for their son or daughter, the craving is there. The meditator recognizes his or her craving and wants liberation from it; this is kusala-cchanda.

*Are you saying craving can be beneficial and wholesome?*

No. There is no such thing as beneficial craving, kusala-taṇhā. No. Craving is linked to the hindrances, and is the origin of suffering—the second noble truth. Ultimately, craving always leads to some form of suffering.

*Is it kusala, beneficial, to crave the end of craving?*

Yes. In that case, the taṇhā converts to chanda. Kusala-cchanda is the beneficial road of experience. Whether beings are human, deva, ghost, goblin, or ogre, craving exists within them and it is an oversimplification of the Buddha's teachings to just dismiss it as all harmful. The nature of craving is not a black and white issue. During the performance of both beneficial as well as harmful actions, moments of pleasant and unpleasant feeling surface, which means at those moments in time craving also surfaces. Time after time, the Buddha said, "Dependent on feeling, craving arises." Any time we experience a pleasant or an unpleasant feeling, there is almost always craving, even in beneficial actions. With the arising of feeling, the mind automatically responds with craving. We can't say that things are otherwise. Craving is without doubt present in those moments of our lives. In spite of that, craving isn't present in each and every moment of our lives.

Kāma is sensuality, our sense-sphere—our links between our sense doors and their matching sense objects. In the kāma-loka, in this sense-sphere-world where we live, we are constantly using our sense doors to contact sense objects. When our sense doors contact sense objects that arouse pleasant feelings, we crave those sense objects; this is kāma-taṇhā. For example, when



you participate in the evening pūjā here at our centre, paying homage to the Buddha, you are craving pleasant contact with sense objects.

*The pūjā seems pleasant enough and even a bit mystical. I can't say however that I participate in pūjā all that often.*

You're missing out. The atmosphere in the hall is beautiful: meditators are all dressed in white; an oil lamp is lit; flowers and incense are offered; and a bhikkhu chants. When you see the peacefulness of the bhikkhu with your eyes, craving is there towards the sight of the bhikkhu. This is craving sensuality, kāma-taṇhā. When you hear him chanting with your ears, more pleasant feelings come up. And based on your ears, craving arises towards the sound of the bhikkhu's voice. Incense sticks are burning. You find the aroma pleasant and think that it would be nice to have this same kind of incense back at home. There's some clinging. After the pūjā, you might join me for a cup of tea. Then tasting the tea with your tongue, craving arises again, this time towards the tea. Through all of your sense doors, craving arose, even while paying homage to the Buddha. Sense doors are used to activate beneficial experiences, such as the pūjā, and also activate harmful experiences. One month ago, you were in Colombo and you went to a bar.

*Yes, a group of us went out to a club called Splash and had a beer. It was a nice break from the meditation centre. I sure needed a break. I was getting fed up with the routine here.*

You had a good time at Splash, found the whole night quite enjoyable. The place looks good. It's modern, trendy, and they play music that you like, perhaps Michael Jackson. You got a chance to smoke some cigarettes, drink beer, and chat. If I recall correctly, you had a few snacks later in the evening. Upon seeing Splash with your eyes and hearing its music with your ears, craving arose towards the sights and sounds of Splash. Both your

eyes and ears were being used and there was some clinging towards what you were seeing and hearing. One of your friends smokes cigarettes. Smelling his cigarette with your nose, craving arose towards that smell and you had one yourself. The beer tasted good. The snacks tasted good. Based on your tongue, craving arose towards the beer and the snacks. These days, you have painful arthritis in your hands. It's chronic. Even so, that night at Splash you didn't likely direct any of your attention or craving towards your body, towards the pain in your hands. You ignored it. So, you can see, whether you are attending pūjā or out at Splash, both your craving and your sense doors are functioning in exactly the same way. Craving and its mother called feeling are always playing an important role in our lives.

## Chanda

Chanda is the big picture, it's the nature of tañhā within our overall experience of living. And though tañhā and chanda are often used as synonyms, tañhā is not the same as chanda. Tañhā just means craving and a little clinging. Chanda, on the other hand, is a process that involves wishing for and activating an experience. This process involves studying details and there's a plan of action, with tañhā playing the deciding role within that process and within that plan. Chanda lasts only as long as the craving lasts. Chanda stops arising when the object of the plan is obtained and the craving is fulfilled. Consistent with the two ways of travel for tañhā, there are two ways of travel for chanda:

- The beneficial road of experience, *kusala-cchanda*
- The harmful road of experience, *akusala-cchanda*

When tañhā only plays a minor role, the experience is considered to be beneficial and its activation is kusala-cchanda. However, when tañhā plays a major role, the experience is harmful and its activation is deemed akusala-cchanda. If you lose your spectacles, you can look for them with very little tañhā, with kusala-cchanda; or you can look for them with lots of tañhā, with akusala-cchanda. It then follows, taking into consideration whether the role played by craving is minor or major, sense doors can be used in kammically harmful, beneficial, or neutral ways:

- Harmful excitement of sensuality, *akusala-kāma-cchanda*
- Beneficial work on the dhamma, *kusala-dhamma-cchanda*  
\*\*\*\*\*
- Neutral wish to do something, *kattu-kamyatā-cchanda*

Since harmful excitement of sensuality leads in the opposite direction to beneficial work on the dhamma and a neutral wish to do something, it must be kept separate from them. Excitement of sensuality leads to the hell worlds; whereas beneficial work on the dhamma leads to the heavenly worlds, and to liberation. A neutral wish only applies to the arahat. In the excitement of sensuality, kāma-cchanda, sense doors are used in harmful ways, akusala-cchanda. Craving plays a major role, with as much as 90% of the excitement of sensuality based on craving. When you perform an action with lots of craving, the feeling mind predominates. You hold onto the action and get sad or angry when the action is obstructed. If there is too much feeling and tañhā, you cannot perform the action in any beneficial or wholesome way whatsoever. Work on the dhamma, dhamma-cchanda, is the second way of using our sense doors. It's the beneficial way of experience, kusala-cchanda, with craving playing only a minor role. As little as 10% of work on the

dhamma is based on craving. The feeling mind doesn't predominate; it has a lesser presence in dhamma-cchanda. When you engage in actions with kusala-cchanda, the chances of getting angry are minimal. Do you cut the grass here at our centre with a little or a lot of craving? With kusala-cchanda or akusala-cchanda?

*Both. It's a mix.*

While you are cutting the grass?

*Yes, I want other meditators to cut some grass.*

I understand why you get upset. As part of the community, meditators have a duty to help. Be that as it may, in the cutting of grass, are you doing it with craving? I am not asking about the craving that arises with other objects and people. Specifically, what about the craving that arises with the cutting of grass?

*Yes. There is craving. I cut grass with both kusala and akusala-cchanda.*

Though you say both, craving is minimal in your cutting of the grass. Any sort of help around a meditation centre is kusala-cchanda. In the midst of cutting the grass, do you get angry when I ask you to show visitors around the centre? You have to stop your work.

*I get a little annoyed at you.*

If you could cut the grass without any craving or expectations, you wouldn't get angry at all when I take you away from cutting it. Tañhā is connected with greed, expectations, and suffering. Not everyone has to cut grass. People support our centre in various ways. Some make donations. We wouldn't function without donations. It's dhamma-cchanda to give things, to help. It takes the donor's money and effort. All the same, a few people do get upset when their act of donation is obstructed or the donation isn't used in the way they want. Tañhā is present.

Dhamma-cchanda means exerting an effort to perform beneficial actions. There is appreciation, enjoyment, and willingness—even excitement and some craving. You might be surprised to hear that there are a few people who get excited about hearing one of my dhamma talks! They go into the details of the talks and make plans to hear me. They look forward to one of my talks in exactly the same way that you might look forward to a break away from this meditation centre—energized. And some of these people who like my talks travel all the way out from Colombo to our centre here in Kanduboda. It is a long and rough trip from Colombo to Kanduboda. Yet, many people, some who are old and frail, make the effort to do so. In spite of the fact that pleasant feelings and craving arise for these people who like my talks, we cannot say any harm, any akusala, arises with wanting to hear the dhamma. Such efforts and craving are strictly linked with the beneficial.

It seems to me that you find my talks boring and are often thinking, “Why doesn’t Pemasiri finish off this talk?” or “Why does he always have to drag it out for so long?” During long periods of only listening to me, as a bystander and not as a participant, it’s normal for you to have such mental formations. Still, craving plays only a minor role in listening to a dhamma talk; you are using your sense doors in a beneficial way. What do you think? Are you listening to my dhamma talks with tañhā?

*You’re a free thinker. I wish you were a lot less free thinking and a lot more logical.*

Even though you have a few complaints about my teaching methods, harmful effects aren’t arising. A person who is not an arahat performs all of his or her beneficial actions with dhamma-cchanda. Your work of editing some of my talks into a book is an example of dhamma-cchanda. Craving is involved, but its role is minor in the action. To finish editing the book, you travelled all the way from Canada to Sri Lanka. You are currently correcting

the manuscript with my students and are doing various other things connected with editing and publishing. You willingly spend a great deal of time and effort because there is minimal tañhā present. Nonetheless, your editing work is being performed with a degree of conceit, māna.

*And what about an arahat?*

Arahats use their sense doors in kammically neutral ways. Travelling the kammically neutral road of experience, they perform all their actions with kattu-kamyatā-cchanda, which means there is simply a wish to perform their actions. The mental formation comes up to perform an action and he or she just performs it. Nothing else. Completely free of craving, arahats never have any sorrow or anger come up when actions are disrupted and, if necessary, arahats can let go of their actions entirely. There is no conceit whatsoever. No craving. And when there is no craving, a new being isn't created.

## Our Main Concern

As I said, kāma-cchanda translates as the excitement of sensuality; we can also translate it as delighting in wrong actions. It is our main concern. Kāma-cchanda is the path of greed and it is mixed up with craving, clinging, and suffering. Of the five hindrances, kāma-cchanda ranks at the top of the list. The man who told me to stop teaching teenage girls has a high level of kāma-cchanda. From his level, it looks as if I am indulging in sensual pleasures when I teach teenage girls. I am not indulging in the company of teenage girls. I have no kāma-cchanda towards them. If I wanted the teenage girls to return day after day, he could say that kāma-cchanda is there in me. This is not the case. I simply enjoy teaching the dhamma to men and women of all

ages.

There is one woman, now in her twenties, I have known since the day she was born. Because of her background, she is the only woman I feel a need to look out for. There is a degree of concern, “What does her future hold?” and “Will she be okay?” I write to her at Vesak, and when her grandfather visits I always ask him how she is doing. What I feel towards her is similar to what a father feels towards his daughter: I want her to be all right. Yes. There is a form of clinging, but it is an appropriate form of clinging. I am not using her in a wrong way, for any personal benefit, and I definitely have no thoughts of a physical relationship.

Kāma-rāga and kāma-cchanda are two distinct phenomena. Kāma-rāga is purely the liking of sensuality, a general enjoyment that comes through the sense doors. There is no desire to possess the object. For example, it means you find a person’s company to be, on the whole, pleasing. Even anāgāmīs prefer the company of one person to the company of another person. Kāma-cchanda, on the other hand, means there is a strong liking for sensuality and there is a wanting to possess the object. You study and latch onto the sensual details of a person. Anāgāmīs don’t study sensual details.

*I like hiking in the Singharaja Forest Reserve. Is that kāma-cchanda?*

Enjoying a hike in Singharaja is one thing. That is kāma-rāga. It is quite another thing to study the flora and fauna of Singharaja, and to dream of building a resthouse there. That is kāma-cchanda.

*Is liking a woman’s curves kama-cchanda?*

Yes. You are indulging in the excitement of sensuality when you prolong your mental formations about the woman’s body for a day or two. In dhamma talks, I generally only deal with

secondary objects of sensual pleasure, of sensuality, such as drinking a cup of tea, and I don't deal with primary objects, such as the sexual relations between men and women.

*Sex is an important topic.*

Yes. Sexual relations is an important topic and it's good you ask about it. When I speak about sexual relations, however, many people misunderstand and some are offended. Says the Buddha in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, "I don't see any other phenomenon that entangles people so completely." When you see a beautiful and attractive woman, kāma-rāga arises in you towards her. Kāma-rāga means you appreciate her beauty and you enjoy her company, purely in the moment. You don't expect anything. Kāma-rāga can just be there, by itself, in your mental processes. You can think that she is a very attractive and a really pleasant person to share company with, and still not have thoughts of wanting to possess and make love with her. Any other mental formations are kāma-cchanda, "How old is she?" or "What should I say?" or "I want her company." or maybe "Can I have sex with her?" But if it's only kāma-rāga that arises, then these mental formations definitely don't arise. You're not thinking and thinking. You're not making up a story about her. No. Rāga is only to appreciate her beauty. You certainly aren't thinking about having sex.

When the woman sees you looking at her, even when you are only trying to be helpful and you don't want anything sexual, she may assume you want something sexual because men frequently look at her in that way. Then, she says things that confuse you. Perhaps because of childhood abuse or because of kamma, she is suspicious and views the situation as sexual, rejecting you and your help.

*Can I have sex without kama-cchanda?*

No. Kāma-cchanda is eliminated only at the stage of anāgāmi. A



lot of useful things can be said about the relations between men and women, if these things are taken in a balanced way.

*Women sometimes drive me crazy, one in particular.*

I am not entirely unworldly about these matters. This is two non-selves trying to make a self. You are craving. If you weren't craving for this woman, you'd be craving for another woman. When you stop craving, you stop the disturbance, the fear. Fear and craving are opposite sides of the same coin. Remember the three characteristics of conditioned things—anicca, dukkha, and anattā. Men cannot completely isolate themselves from women, and women cannot completely isolate themselves from men. You have to learn to live with women, because they're everywhere. They are women—nothing more and nothing less. They needn't be craved or condemned just because they are women. There's a good Jātaka story about a prince's unbalanced views on women. In his youth, the prince liked the company of men, but he disliked women. He even disliked the woman who breastfed him when he was a baby. Unless the women in the palace, including his mother the queen, disguised themselves as men, they couldn't visit him. If the prince saw a woman, he blacked out. He had almost no concept of women, no perception of them. He only wanted the company of men.

*And I thought women drove me crazy.*

When the prince turned sixteen years of age, his father the king put into action a plan to change his son's views on women. He arranged for a beautiful young woman to sing a ballad and play the violin in the nearby hills, just within earshot. "What's that sound?" asked the prince. "That's a woman singing a ballad and playing a violin," said his father. The prince blacked out. A few weeks later, the woman sang and played again. Instead of blacking out this time, he liked the sound of her voice and the sound of the violin. The father's plan was working. He brought the woman into the palace and then into his son's bedroom,

hiding her behind a curtain. The woman sang and played once more and the prince couldn't restrain himself; throwing open the curtain he embraced her—contact was pleasant. Enjoying one woman, the prince wanted another woman, and then another. Now liking women instead of disliking them, he murdered his father to get the harem. The prince on becoming the king started murdering men—first in the palace, then in the nearby towns, and eventually throughout the country. He was a tyrant and was soon overthrown. At first, the prince disliked women and liked men; and then he disliked men and liked women. It's better to develop a little wisdom. When we have a wise and balanced approach, we can associate with people of either gender without caution or suspicion.

## Differences Between People

Many women are genuinely interested in learning and practising the dhamma. The majority of bhikkhus, however, don't want to be too close to them, owing to the fact they are women. Thus many women can't find a good teacher, or they find a poor one and get into serious trouble. Young, middle-aged, and elderly—women of various ages and various natures come here to our centre to learn the dhamma. I talk with them according to their nature. I talk with women who are virtuous according to their level of virtue. I talk with women who have a great deal of faith according to their level of faith. And I talk with women who have a lot of wisdom according to their level of wisdom. Some women have jhāna and some women have attained path and fruit. In whatever way the women are, I talk with them in the same way. I associate with all of these various types of women and I treat them kindly, helping in any way possible. Women are free here and they get proper instruction. Though people criticize me for

acting in this way, for even the teaching of women, I have no interest in debating the matter.

*You've got a good attitude towards women. Me? I can't say that I understand them all that well.*

You will never understand women. The kammic nature of women comes along with being born a woman. A woman's perception of a situation is different from a man's perception of the same situation. A woman's feelings are also different from a man's feelings. Men's and women's perceptions and feelings are simply not the same. And with differences in perceptions and feelings, men and women don't understand each other, which makes interactions between men and women difficult. Conflicts can emerge. As a man, you are better off letting go of trying to understand women. I can't comprehend how a man and a woman can get married and live together for so many years. Before the Buddha allowed his own step-mother to ordain and start the order of bhikkhunis, he laid down rules of discipline that are specific to bhikkhunis because he wanted to avoid the difficulties that arise out of the differences between men and women. The rules of discipline for bhikkhunis are very strict.

*Are men born as men in their next birth, and are women born as women in their next birth?*

By and large, both men and women have the same gender in the next birth. Though a woman might say she wants to be born as a man, she is generally born as a woman because she clings to objects associated with being a woman, such as a woman's form, being a wife, and being a caring mother. A woman rules the home. It's her first priority and she gets caught up in running it. If a woman starts clinging to the objects a man clings to, she will be a man in the next birth. This is difficult to understand. We have to look at the relations between men and women in a balanced way, from both sides. And at the end of the day, you need not worry about being a man or a woman. Just accept the

fact of the matter. If you are a man, you are a man. If you are a woman, you are a woman. Both men and women have the potential to overcome their defilements and attain liberation. It isn't necessary for women to become men. And if female and male body parts are isolated, can you tell me which parts are female and which parts are male? Is there such a thing as a female liver or a male kidney? No, just parts. No difference. Female and male is just a perception.

*I think I've found the right woman.*

You say you want a woman and then later on you say that you don't want a woman. "In this world," said the Buddha, "it is rare that any person finds another person of the same inclination." The differences between people are significant. Even among the Buddha's Sangha, there were bhikkhus that always associated with Sāriputta and there were bhikkhus that always associated with Moggallāna; and then there were those who associated with Devadatta. In inclination and mind, the bhikkhus that associated with Sāriputta were slightly different from the bhikkhus that associated with Moggallāna. "Milk is similar to milk," said the Buddha.<sup>48</sup> "Thus, milk mixes well with milk. In the same way, urine is similar to urine. Urine mixes well with urine. And excrement is similar to excrement. Excrement also mixes well with excrement." You will not find a partner who is just right for you. Total communication and total trust between two people is exceptionally rare. A few people might find someone who is of a similar inclination; most people don't find anyone of a similar inclination.

In the Migasālā Sutta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha talks about the differences between people. Migasālā was a young girl who lived at the time of the Buddha. Her father had renounced the householder's life and all its sensual pleasures, and he led a brahmachariya life, abstaining from having sex. In contrast, Migasālā's uncle had lived a householder's life with his

wife and children, and he enjoyed all the sensual pleasures available to him, including having sex. After her father and her uncle died, Migasālā went to the Buddha, “Where were my father and uncle born?”

“Your father and your uncle took births in the Tusitā Heaven,” said the Buddha. “Both were sakadāgāmīs.” Migasālā doubted that her father and her uncle could have the same destiny. When Venerable Ānanda arrived at Migasālā’s home for alms, she asked him, “How can it be that both my father and my uncle took births in the Tusitā Heaven? My father led a pure brahmachariya life, but my uncle indulged in sense pleasures.” Venerable Ānanda reported Migasālā’s comments to the Buddha.

“Migasālā is a young girl of little wisdom,” said the Buddha. “She plays games and eats mangoes like a little child. How can she understand the differences between people? How can she measure another person’s level of realization? Morality was her father’s strong characteristic and wisdom was her uncle’s strong characteristic.” According to the Buddha, the father and uncle were equal in that way. Even in our meditation centre, there are people like Migasālā’s father and uncle. If we measure those amongst us, as Migasālā did from external signs, we will make mistakes. Only someone like the Buddha can measure people with any accuracy.

## Studying Details and a Plan of Action

The excitement of sensuality, kāma-cchanda, involves studying details and a plan of action. Because of taking delight in the details of sensuality, a plan of action is worked out to indulge in sensuality. Both men and women study the sensual details of the opposite sex. Men long for women, and women long for men.

Nevertheless, what's an object of sensual pleasure for one person is solely dependent upon that person. There are women who are commonly considered beautiful that you don't find at all beautiful, and there are women who aren't commonly considered beautiful that you find very beautiful. Which characteristic of the person causes kāma-rāga to arise often has nothing to do with material beauty. Various characteristics can cause kāma-rāga to arise.

*A little sympathy and helpful wisdom, and I'm sunk! Seems hopeless.*

Yes. When women speak kind words with you, your kāma-rāga starts going. You approve of them. To your detriment, however, your kāma-cchanda starts going too. You enjoy the little things about women. Not only talking with them, you enjoy looking at parts of their bodies, maybe their eyes, and enjoy watching them move. You enjoy being with women just because they are women. Caught up in noticing the sensual details of women, you latch onto them and get stuck. Yes, little restraint and then you're sunk! Thinking you need their company, you look forward to women dropping by to speak with you, and you make plans to be with them. Pursuing, doing various things, you excite yourself to the point of wanting to experience the sensual pleasure of having sex with them.

*Is sexual self-stimulation any different from a night emission?*

Self-stimulation is kāma-cchanda; a night emission isn't kāma-cchanda. There may be a sotāpanna or a sakadāgāmī who has kāma-cchanda about these objects of sensuality. The kāma-cchanda is there; even so, neither the sotāpanna nor the sakadāgāmī indulges in illegitimate sex, sex that leads to the four lower worlds, the four apāyas. Sex is only with a legitimate partner, such as a spouse. Sex isn't with another man's wife, another woman's husband, or with any other person's partner. Though kāma-rāga may arise towards these certain individuals,

neither the sotāpanna nor the sakadāgāmī let kāma-cchanda come on; they don't let it develop concerning these individuals, not in that way.

*Is sex a problem?*

You don't have to make kāma-rāga into a problem. You find sex within a legitimate relationship and you don't go looking for sex outside that relationship. If you have sex within your relationship, there is no problem. A relationship belongs to you and your partner in the same way any material object, say a chair, belongs to you and your partner—it's okay for the two of you to use it. Even the ability to attain jhāna is not destroyed just by having sex. Of course, at the time you are having sex, you won't have the possibility of attaining jhāna. All the same, later on, you again meditate and again you have the possibility to attain jhāna. Sex within a legitimate relationship is not detrimental to the spiritual practice. You must abstain from illegitimate sex. When you go looking for sex outside a legitimate relationship, when you break the third precept, the possibility of attaining jhāna is destroyed, and you will never be able to attain jhāna, not in this birth as long as you indulge in breaking the precept. You lose the jhāna because your mental formations are of a low level.

A Sri Lankan arahat, who lived during the Anuradapura period, had a student who had the spiritual power to travel through the air. When his teacher needed flowers to offer at a stupa, the student travelled at a great speed to a forest in the Himalayas, filled up a basket, and then returned. The basket was bottomless. It remained full of flowers until the arahat turned the basket upside down. Looking into the future, the arahat saw his student as a layperson. "Be careful," said the arahat to his student. "Protect yourself. Otherwise, you will lose your spiritual powers and live an unhappy lay life with a one-eyed lady." The student did not protect himself. Once while travelling

through the air, he caught a glimpse of a stunning and gorgeous woman, and was overcome with sensual passion. Instantly, he descended and committed an offence with her, and lost all his spiritual powers. Later, as man and wife, they scraped out a living on a chena farm. It was a hard life and they often fought with each other. One day, he gave her a brutal punch to the head and she lost an eye. At this point in time, he remembered his teacher's warning, "You'll live with a one-eyed lady." He fell down and cried.

Also during the Anuradapura period, a highly developed student of meditation lived in the Sithulpahuwa area of Sri Lanka. He could walk on water and travel through the air. Yes, he was a good student and he generally exercised a great deal of restraint. On one of his pilgrimages to the Kelaniya temple, however, his restraint slipped a little. While floating above the temple, he saw a group of bhikkhunis. He was very surprised and happy to see them. With his divine powers, he stretched out supernatural arms and embraced the whole group of bhikkhunis. By mistake, he touched the breast of one of the bhikkhunis, and immediately he too lost all his divine powers.

In another Jātaka story, King Maha Pratapa falls in love with a beautiful woman called Chandra Devi and he takes her to be his queen. Queen Chandra Devi loves King Maha Pratapa and in due course she bears him a baby boy, which they call Dhammapala. The queen also loves the baby. Little by little, the king gets less of the queen's love and the baby gets more and more of her love. Eventually, the king gets none of the queen's love and the baby gets all her love. When the king enters the queen's bedroom, she doesn't even notice him. She no longer pays respects to the king, and the king is jealous. One day, the king walks into the bedroom when the queen is breastfeeding the baby, and his hate explodes, "Cut the baby's hands and legs off." Soon after, the king puts the baby to death. Recently right here in our own city of Colombo, one family's disturbing story



came to light. A father forced two of his three daughters into having sex with him. When he tried forcing his third daughter into also having sex, she refused and fought back. The father was very angry, “I gave you life. I fed you. I raised you.” Then failing to have his way with her, he stabbed her to death.

Kāma-cchanda has a close relationship with kāma-rāga. Because you enjoy sensuality, you excite and take delight in sensuality. And when you choose to excite and delight in sensuality, the enjoyment of sensuality flows into you. Using the Pali, because of kāma-rāga, kāma-cchanda arises. And when you choose the road of kāma-cchanda, kāma-rāga arises. Your sense doors and the objects of your sense doors are not the problem. Lack of restraint is the problem.

*This sure sounds similar to Christian piety. That through sheer force of will, I better practise self-denial and stop doing the things I like to do, else I'll end up in hell.*

No. Wise people aren't denying themselves the joys of life.

## The Nature of Restraint

Wise people make the effort to restrain kāma-cchanda. When wise people have a good meal at our meditation centre, they don't go into the details of the meal and they don't wish to have the same meal tomorrow, the day after, or next month. When they finish the meal, the experience of the meal ends. It's over. Like you and I, wise people enjoy eating the meal. That's kāma-rāga. Why wouldn't they enjoy a good meal? It's not that wise people don't enjoy a good meal and foolish people do enjoy a good meal. Both groups enjoy a good meal. But kāma-cchanda doesn't arise for wise people as a reaction to enjoying the meal.

Only kāma-rāga arises. We aren't out to destroy our kāma-rāga. We are reducing our kāma-cchanda. When kāma-cchanda is decreased, kāma-rāga is as you would expect also decreased. Kāma-cchanda needn't arise and it doesn't arise for wise people because they make the effort to see objects as they really are—impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial. Clearly comprehending these three characteristics of all conditioned things, wise people have hardly any problems. It seems to me that, when it comes to enjoying the company of women, you're not making much effort to restrain your kāma-cchanda, or to see the three characteristics.

*Yes, I have to admit that I'm still working through a few problems with women. I guess it's because I'm not as developed as you are. Apparently, I'm not all that wise.*

Comments like that annoy me. You like to perform virtuous actions, then you dislike reducing your kāma-cchanda. Only after the woman departs, you start thinking of reducing your kāma-cchanda towards the woman. You aren't interested in reducing your kāma-cchanda while you're enjoying her company.

*Okay. That's true enough! Then please tell me how am I supposed to restrain my cravings? All these pleasant feelings keep coming up.*

It's a gradual process that you have to figure out for yourself. For some people, asubha helps them to restrain their kāma-cchanda. Asubha means contemplating the unpleasant realities of the body and seeing the problems in the pleasure. Through practising asubha as well as skeleton, people get a slight aversion towards sensual objects, and this aversion removes their minds from those objects of desire. Aversion leads the mind away from always thinking about the pleasant nature of the body. It's a kind of suppression of desire. For others, relevant

dhamma discussions help them to restrain their kāma-cchanda more than contemplation on asubha helps them. Fear of unpleasant consequences is enough to restrain excitement of sensuality for many people. And quite often, because of physical sickness or too much work at the office or excessive family concerns, a lot of people simply have no spare time to indulge in kāma-cchanda.

These meditation practices and life conditions, such as asubha and sickness and work, do not overcome kāma-cchanda. They only keep it away, only temporarily turn minds away from desiring objects of pleasure.

To overcome our tendency towards the excitement of sensuality, kāma-cchanda, we need to see clearly and develop a little wisdom. We know that it's because of our non-restraint with our sense doors that the objects connected to kāma-cchanda keep flowing into us. Thus, where kāma-cchanda is liable to enter, an understanding of the three characteristics, the tilakkhaṇa, has to be recalled. At that exact moment, at that very instant in time, we need to make the effort to restrain kāma-cchanda. We avoid going into the sensual details of objects, avoid wishful thinking and avoid plans of action. That is right effort. It often takes a great deal of effort to restrain kāma-cchanda. The practice isn't always easy. All the same, when we train properly, making the effort to restrain kāma-cchanda becomes a habit. And when kāma-cchanda is completely restrained, kāma-rāga won't arise. Does this help you? Restraining through samādhi and effort, together with wisdom, now that is real progress.

*You're a teacher. Yet, you never give me any specific advice.  
What am I supposed to do?*

Not only you, I never tell anyone what to do because life is unpredictable. I can only give you a few clues, such as it's wise to put your chanda into travelling roads to power, iddhipāda.

These are four beneficial roads of experience:

- Concentration arising out of intention, *chanda-samādhi*
- Concentration arising out of energy, *virīya-samādhi*
- Concentration arising out of mind, *citta-samādhi*
- Concentration arising out of investigation, *vimaṃsa-samādhi*

In closing for today, I'd like to remind you that we can't just outright reject kāma-taṇhā and kāma-cchanda, craving for sensuality and the excitement of sensuality, because, as the Buddha states in the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, "Wherever objects are pleasant, craving arises." It's natural. It's automatic. Craving is also powerful and leads into repeated births. So, just be careful.

*Why am I in this birth?*

You are in a human birth because sense doors were used in beneficial ways in previous births. If you turn your sense doors towards the beneficial in this birth, you should again take a future birth in a good world of being, for instance one of the six lower deva worlds or again in the human world. You'll have sense doors that are in good working order, and you'll again be able to indulge in the pleasures of sensuality. Living a good life, performing beneficial actions here and now—this is the way to a good future birth. You also have the opportunity to realize there is no person behind the eye, ear, nose... Since all your sense doors are in good working order, you could use this birth to develop the jhānas, break the concept of self, and attain path and fruit. You could use this birth for that purpose. You have the opportunity. It's possible. You have no obstructions.

Through samatha and vipassanā-bhāvanā, you could suppress the rūpa-kalāpas, the unit bundles of minute particles, atomic

level, which are associated with sensuality. The rūpa-kalāpas' appetite for sensuality varies according to the person. One person's rūpa-kalāpas are satisfied with a small meal, and another person's rūpa-kalāpas want to eat again and again. You must know the appetite of your rūpa-kalāpas. Practise awareness on body touch, phoṭṭhabba, and awareness on mental contact, phassa. See how the sabhāga turns to the visabhāga, how the suitable turns to the unsuitable. The place where there is neither phoṭṭhabba nor phassa, you see the asubha. When you practise bhāvanā well, the structure of your body's rūpa-kalāpas transforms temporarily, hormones change, and your skin will shine. If you practise really well and attain path, the structure of your rūpa-kalāpas transforms irreversibly. The sotāpanna drops views, no longer sees what is non-self as self. To be completely free of your craving for sensuality, however, you have to attain to anāgāmitā.

You aren't in this birth to abuse your sense doors, such as putting your chanda into travelling harmful roads of experience, agati:

- The road of greed, *lobha*
- The road of aversion, *dosa*
- The road of delusion, *moha*
- The road of cowardice, *bhaya*

Yes, these are without a doubt very bad roads to travel! There's some advice. And if you continue to use your sense doors in harmful ways, you might end up in a lower-world of being, in a hell or in an animal world as a dog or a cat or a bug on a tree. A being who takes birth in a hell is really suffering the effects of harmful actions, akusala-kamma-vipāka; he or she may not even have eyes. Some dogs have wealthy owners and live a life that is more comfortable than many poor Sri Lankans can possibly

imagine. Nonetheless, these dogs do not have human sense doors. In a previous human birth, they used their sense doors in harmful ways—kāma-taṇhā led them down the wrong road—and they were born as dogs. You recently bought me a packet of razor blades. What if I used one of the blades to slit my throat? Did you give me the razor blades to help me kill myself?

*No, of course not.*

Sense doors are like razor blades. We don't use them to slit our throats.



*To be respectful, humble, contented and grateful; and to listen to the Dhamma on due occasions—this is the greatest blessing..*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>49</sup>

## 12. Feeling → Craving—part 2

**Pemasiri Thera:** If you were lost in the hot and dry Saharan desert for a week, how do you think you'd feel?

*David:* Terrible. Thirsty and tired and dirty.

And if you saw an oasis, how would you feel?

*Great! A big relief.*

Before you saw the oasis, there was dukkha. After you saw it, there was sukha. Between the dukkha and the sukha, there is pīti, rapture. That moment of rapture and gratification is an assāda. Always together with dukkha and sukha, assāda is a mental effect which leads to the arising of pleasant feelings. It does not mean enjoyment or pleasure.

*Don't causes and conditions lead to the arising of pleasant feelings?*

All effects create conditions. An assāda is a big effect as well as a big condition because it splits dukkha and sukha down the middle.

*Is sex an assada?*

Yes. Pleasant feelings surface when your sense doors contact pleasing sense objects. When you have sex with a woman, pleasant feelings arise. Your experience is one of some

satisfaction and enjoyment. Sex is an assāda because it leads to the arising of pleasant mental feelings that are quite separate from the pleasant feelings which arise while you are physically having the sex.

*I derive lots of pleasure just from thinking about sex, not even having it.*

In the same way that one mustard seed is trivial when compared to a farmer's hundred-acre field of mustard, your few minutes of engaging in sex are trivial when compared to your months of thinking about sex. One little seed of rapture leads to the arising of a whole field of pleasant feelings, the field being the sukha-vedanā derived. The assāda is very small and insignificant in comparison to all the pleasant feelings you generate from the assāda of sex. The pleasant feeling is huge. You make a big deal out of a little thing.

Last week, a religious ceremony, a Pinkama, was held in remembrance of Sumathipāla Na Himi, who died in 1982. A Pinkama is an assāda. When laity see the bhikkhus and hear the talks, a moment of rapture arises; and when laity offer alms, again more moments of rapture. Still, these few moments of rapture that the laity experience while directly participating in the Pinkama constitute a tiny amount of time compared to the hours of pleasant feelings the laity generate about the Pinkama. Well before and well after the ceremony, likely for weeks, they talk about the Pinkama, taking a lot of pleasure from it. Since the vast majority of the pleasant feelings the laity generate about the Pinkama are completely separate from their actual participation in the Pinkama, the Pinkama is an assāda for the laity.

As you come around to seeing the conditions in our sense sphere world that lead to the arising of pleasant feelings, you will also see that these same conditions have serious drawbacks. Ādinava is the Pali word for the drawbacks and the pain and the misery in conditions that lead to the arising of pleasant feelings.



Though Sumathipāla Na Himi's Pinkama was only three or four hours in duration, the laity who put it on worked very hard prior to and during the event; they endured dozens of hours of hardship.

*I don't see any drawbacks in having sex.*

The Buddha called sexual intercourse, indulged in by all types of sense-sphere beings, not just humans, right through from worms to the devas, a low-level activity. Sex is not the highest pleasure. Gross and non-ariyan, it has no benefit and generally leads to problems at some time or another. If you go outside a legitimate relationship, there are major drawbacks. I know a man who has AIDS. Not long ago he was robust; now he is frail, sick, and dying. I also met the woman from whom he contracted AIDS. She too is dying. And on top of her physical suffering, she feels responsible for infecting the man with the AIDS virus. She feels awful. From morning until night, all your problems arise out of three poisons—greed, aversion, and delusion. Lobha, dosa, moha. You're using objects of sensuality, of sense pleasure, without seeing any danger in using them. If you could just have a little amoha, a little non-delusion, you'd be much more aware of the dangers in objects of sensuality. You'd have far fewer problems and be okay for the day. This is wisdom.

*Does sex result in a poor future birth?*

It conditions the punabbhava, the future birth. Your craving for sex has caused you a lot of grief in the past and it is bound to cause you some grief in the future. You won't find liberation through sex. I'm not saying relationships are wrong or that sex in itself is a problem. It's the craving and the clinging, the intensification and development of craving into clinging, which is the problem. And to attain jhāna, you have to let go of your craving for sex.

Since your perception, your saññā, is muddled, you simply

don't see the ādīnavās, the pains and troubles in relationships. Instead, you make the asubha into subha and make the subha into asubha, such as finding young women attractive and old women unattractive. Rouge and bright red lipstick might look good on young women. Maybe. But no matter how much rouge and red lipstick women in their seventies or eighties wear, you still think they look garish—you manage to see the asubha in elderly women, as your perception of old and elderly women is a little clearer than your perception of young women.

A wise man's perception is completely balanced and clear. He sees the asubha and the subha in both young and old women, and he doesn't lose himself in attraction to either young or old women. He knows that lipstick is an artificial product that women wear just to beautify their faces and that it has no function other than beautification. Historically, lipstick was worn because it protected the wearer's lips from the sun and wind, but now it doesn't give any such protection. Please don't misunderstand. I am not against women wearing lipstick. Only saying, we must know the reality of objects. Read Ānanda's advice to Vaṅḡisa, which you will find in the Ānanda Sutta of the Vaṅḡisa-Saṃyutta.<sup>50</sup> Vaṅḡisa was disturbed by kāma-rāga and unhappy with his life of celibacy. Also read the Kāma Sutta in the Sutta Nipāta.<sup>51</sup>

*I can't imagine a life without sex.*

Through the practice of asubha, seeing the non-useful and troublesome aspects of the body, you have at times led your mind away from craving women. With your kāma-taṇhā, your craving for sensuality, temporarily suppressed, you had the opportunity to see the dangers and drawbacks in sense pleasures, yet failed to do so. Not just you, most of us don't see the ādīnavās, the drawbacks, inherent in sensuality and only see the assādas, the few moments of rapture. Like the prickly little mimosa-pudica, that sensitive type of touch-me-not weed, which

opens up to the sun and warmth of the day but closes up to the slightest vibration, we only open our eyes to the pleasant and always close our eyes to the unpleasant. We are blind to the unpleasant. In putting on Sumathipāla Na Himi's religious ceremony, the Pinkama, the laity simply don't see the drawbacks—all the work they have to do—and only see the few minutes of joy and happiness.

## The Need for Craving

Make no mistake! We need *kāma-taṇhā*; we need craving sensuality. It is an indispensable factor in attaining liberation from suffering because it is forever leading us into direct contact with objects of sense pleasure, which also always puts us in direct contact with their many dangers and drawbacks. If we didn't crave objects of sense pleasure, of sensuality, we would never discover their drawbacks and we would never want to go beyond. Craving is certainly necessary if we are to ever realize there is no person behind our sense doors. The Buddha talks about this in the Gratification Suttas.<sup>52</sup>

*Is the goal of meditation to go beyond the kama-loka?*

You don't have to go beyond the *kāma-loka* to attain path—a *sotāpanna* is still in the *kāma-loka*. If people had to go beyond the *kāma-loka* to meditate, no one would ever want to meditate.

Before we discover the drawbacks of pleasurable objects, we must have the opportunity to fully experience these pleasurable objects, which means all of our sense doors must be in good working order, and the pleasurable objects must be readily available. Conditions need to be suitable. As an able-bodied young prince living a life of luxury at Kapilavatthu, the bodhisatta Siddhārtha Gautama experienced every possible sense pleasure to its fullest—he experienced wonderful sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and ideas. He had free rein with

many women, had a wife, and had a son. His father gave him three palaces, living in the one best suited for the season. All of Siddhārtha's clothes were made of fine Benares silk and, to fill them with a pleasant fragrance, they were stored in sandalwood closets for seven years before he wore them. His food was the best the world could offer. While taking in all these pleasures, Siddhārtha was intoxicated with his health and youth and energy. Working at a well paying job in Canada, with physical health intact and abundant access to sense pleasures, including a marriage, you too have indulged in enough sense pleasures and enough pride. Sense objects can be delightful.

Once objects of sense pleasure are fully experienced, insight into their drawbacks, their *ādīnavās*, can arise.

Many Sri Lankans believe that Siddhārtha was completely sheltered from the harsh facts of life while he lived at Kapilavatthu. And all in one day, on a trip outside the palace grounds, he encountered for the first time in his life a sick person, an old person, a corpse, and an ascetic. Then straightaway, in a flash of insight, he was struck by the universality of suffering, renounced the householder's life, and sought the attainment of *nibbāna*. Not true. At the same time Siddhārtha was experiencing the pleasures of Kapilavatthu, he regularly confronted sick people and old people and he regularly reflected on these unpleasant truths. Then gradually, over the course of years, Siddhārtha came around to realizing that his body was also subject to sickness and death and that his life of luxury had its limitations. It took a long time for Siddhārtha to overcome his intoxication with sense pleasures. He wasn't struck by the true nature of being human all in one day. It was a gradual process.

Through direct observation of your life, you know maintaining a comfortable lifestyle in Canada has its drawbacks, that you have to work hard at a regular job which leaves you with little

spare time or freedom. You also know that marriage has its drawbacks and you went so far as to get a divorce. Initially, you had craved a relationship with your girlfriend, got married, and then saw some drawbacks in married life. Once the assādas, the moments of rapture, are experienced, it's possible to notice that these moments of rapture are brief and small things, and that there is a huge amount of craving and suffering surrounding these moments. You know your body wears out, ages, and gets sick. Our bodies are fragile and we'll die someday.

We need to contemplate the misery and dangers that come through our sense doors. We are suffering birth, sickness, decay, death, and again birth, sickness, decay, and death. Saṃsāra is endless. When you see the dangers that come through your sense doors—your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—more clearly, you will want release from the dangers that come through your sense doors. When you see the dangers that come through the eye, you will want release from the dangers of the eye. All six sense doors are necessary to attain jhāna and to attain nibbāna. When you see the dangers that come through the body, you will want release from the dangers of the body.

*I'm bound and determined to find a good woman.*

Yes. You do still want a relationship with a woman, but not as much as you did seven years ago. You are making progress. Since all the necessary conditions have come together—working sense doors, lots of kāma-taṇhā, plenty of access to objects of taṇhā, and enough misery, you might conclude, “Escape is a good idea. I must realize nibbāna.” You don't have to waste your life looking for objects to satisfy your cravings; your main aspiration in life needn't be to fulfill any lack. And you needn't fall into a lower state. No. You have the chance to practise generosity, attain jhāna, and attain path and fruit. That opportunity exists. You could win.

*How can boys who ordain before puberty see any drawbacks in*

## *having sex?*

Young novices aren't thinking a lot about having sex. They miss playing games with other young boys and I think that they should be allowed to play games with other boys. Young novices just want to play cricket. Only much later they begin thinking about sex and they don't have to ever experience sex to attain nibbāna, not in any real physical way, because the conditions that give rise to pleasant feelings, the assādas, need only be mostly experienced. Only mostly experienced because what is experienced through one sense door applies to all sense doors. Through extrapolation, the novices can apply what they know about the nature of their eyes to the nature of their bodies. They only need to appreciate that their bodies have the potential to experience the assāda of sex.

Craving, indulging, discovering dangers, and seeking escape—all are necessarily connected.

People who are missing a sense door don't seek escape from the kāma-loka. They are stuck. For example, if the kamma to develop eyes was missing at the moment of their conceptions, when their past kammās linked to their new kammās, they don't develop eyes and can't indulge in the pleasure that comes through the eyes. And if they don't indulge in the pleasure that comes through the eyes, they can't discover the dangers and drawbacks of the eyes. If they don't discover the dangers of the eyes, they will never want to seek escape from the eyes. The attainment of jhāna is impossible for people who lack the kamma to develop all sense doors. No chance. However, if the kamma to develop all sense doors was present at a person's conception—but through accident one of the sense doors was destroyed—it is still possible for that person to attain jhāna. A person may have had the kamma to develop eyes at conception, yet was born blind because the mother was malnourished during the pregnancy. That person can still attain, even without eyes.

Anyone who doesn't fully experience objects of sense pleasure doesn't seek escape from the kāma-loka. Beggars with their six sense doors intact have the potential to attain arahatship. They have that chance. But they don't seek or go towards nibbāna because of their lack in kāma-taṇhā, a lack in the objects of sense pleasure that need to be experienced. Some of these beggars don't fully experience objects of sense pleasure because they simply don't care to fully experience objects of sense pleasure—they are quite satisfied with their lives. Other beggars do want to fully experience certain objects of sense pleasure, such as tasty food and fine clothes and a home, but they can't fully experience those objects because they don't have the skills to obtain them. Since these two types of beggars don't fully experience the needed objects of sense pleasure, they don't discover the drawbacks in these objects and don't seek escape. How can beggars appreciate, as you do, that holding a high paying job, marriage, sleeping in a comfortable bed, and owning a home is fraught with drawbacks?

The people who fail to satisfy their cravings for objects of sense pleasure often waste their lives pursuing objects of sense pleasure, which means they usually never realize the thought of giving a dāna, never think escape is a good idea, and never look towards nibbāna. And because of the taṇhā that is continually arising in them, perhaps overcome with thoughts of having sex, they might commit acts of violence; they might commit an akusala-kamma. On account of greed, they miss the chance to attain path and fruit, and sink down into the apāyas, the lower worlds. These people lose. Understanding taṇhā and using it wisely is the practice of meditative development, bhāvanā.

*I've never heard of a teacher recommending the wise use of craving.*

No. No other teachers say that. Better to use the word chanda. There are conditions that give rise to pleasant feelings, assādas,

and there are also drawbacks in those conditions, ādīnavās. The meditator who attains to the rūpa-loka sees the drawbacks of the kāma-loka. The meditator who attains to the arūpa-loka sees the drawbacks of the rūpa-loka. And the meditator who attains to equanimity regarding formations, saṅkhāra-upekkhā, sees the drawbacks of the rūpa-loka and the arūpa-loka, and then turns towards nibbāna. We must see the asubha—the problems in the pleasure—and develop equanimity regarding formations. The sotāpanna has a good understanding of the conditions that give rise to pleasant feelings, the assādas, and has a good understanding of the drawbacks in those conditions, the ādīnavās. The arahat has a rock solid understanding of the assādas and ādīnavās, and abides in equanimity.





*To be patient and obedient, to associate with monks and to have religious discussions on due occasions—this is the greatest blessing.*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>53</sup>

## 13. Feeling → Craving—part 3

*David: It seems to me that sexual is the worst form of craving because it is so strong. And you're telling me that if I can understand my sexual craving, then this is one way for me to realize the limitations of craving and my bondage. Apparently, since craving is the cause of my human birth, or births, then I can use these conditions to avoid bad behaviour, do something worthwhile, and maybe even develop a little wisdom and be a little more free.*

**Pemasiri Thera:** When you reflect on the dangers in pleasurable objects, your craving will cease.

## Three Types of Craving

In the Magga Saṃyutta, the Buddha recommends the understanding, destroying, and abandoning of three types of craving, taṇhā:<sup>54</sup>

- Craving sensuality, kāma-taṇhā
- Craving existence, bhava-taṇhā

- Craving annihilation, vibhava-tañhā

Your efforts to understand craving sensuality, kāma-tañhā, are very important because it's the craving of sensuality that gives rise to craving existence and the extremely dangerous craving annihilation. Once the Buddha understood the nature of these three types of craving, he then destroyed and abandoned all three of them.

## Craving Sensuality

Kāma-tañhā means craving sensuality. In our sense-sphere world, it is only from the standpoint of sensuality that we can investigate the phenomena happening around us. A person who has developed his or her mind to a high level has a good understanding of sensuality in the sense-sphere world. A developed person knows the true nature of feelings and tañhā, and knows there are two ways he or she can use the six sense doors to crave sensuality: in a harmful way or a beneficial way.

*While we're on this topic of craving sensuality, what are your thoughts on marriage? Is it a good idea for me? A wife could be quite helpful.*

You have to figure that out for yourself. I'm not surprised, though, that you want a relationship with a woman, as attraction to the opposite sex is the most common form of approach for humans, as well as for plants and animals. This male-female law of nature supports reproduction and perpetuates the species. Marriage between men and women happens. "For a man," said the Buddha on many occasions, "there's no greater asset than a good, kusala woman and no greater burden than a bad, akusala woman." The same holds true for a woman—there's no greater

asset than a kusala man. By kusala, I mean the man or woman lives in a wholesome way and has abilities. In the Abhyākatavaggo of the Aṅguttara Nikāya,<sup>55</sup> the Buddha states there are seven kinds of wives—murderer, robber, shrew, mother, sister, friend, and slave. The shrew is lazy, a glutton, and overbearing. She would stab you in the back and keep you underfoot. After death, the akusala kinds of wives—murderer, robber, and shrew—take a downward birth. The mother kind of wife would likely be your best match.

*I thought a friend would be my best wife.*

No, the friend kind of wife always does what you do. If you enjoy boozing and partying, she'll be boozing too. On the other hand, the mother kind of wife treats you as a son. With affection and patience, she tells you when you're wrong, points out your faults, and you'll make some progress.

*Can't a woman be a mixture of all seven kinds of wives?*

No. The woman is either an akusala kind of wife or a kusala kind of wife. She can't be both a bad wife and a good wife. Nonetheless, she could be a mix of either the bad kinds of wives or a mix of the good kinds. There are four kinds of good, kusala wives—mother, sister, friend, and slave.

*What about checking out our palms and horoscopes?*

I don't know a great deal about reading palms or matching horoscopes. What I know about relationships between men and women comes from the Buddha's teachings, what my students tell me, and my own family life.

*How to evaluate our compatibility?*

The relationship should be okay if the two of you have the same interests—bhāvanā, sīla, saddhā, generosity, learning, wisdom, and socializing—and the two of you need to be equal in these interests. For instance, you need to be equally sociable. If she

likes to socialize a lot and you don't, if you're moody, there'll be a clash between the two of you. And if you are generous and she's not, again, there's the possibility for a clash. Don't put yourself in a cage. In the Samajivīna Sutta,<sup>56</sup> the Buddha explains to a married couple how they can live in tune with each other. And the Mātugāma Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya is also a worthwhile read. A good relationship is based on mutually recognized qualities. Recognize the good qualities in your partner or the relationship won't last.

*Agreed. We certainly have to respect each other. And if we can talk and have some fun, I think we'd be okay.*

Many couples lead Brahmacariya lives, that is spiritual lives. Through sīla and suppression, they observe the eight precepts and generally always abstain from sexual intercourse. If you attain path, as a Magga-Brahmacariya person, you could still lead a householder life. The eightfold path would be firmly established and you'd walk the path, hopefully with a wife that supports walking it. The two of you might still have sex, enjoy pleasure, but that doesn't obstruct the path. Avoid taking on a fake ariyan wife, who has a lot of conceit and puts on airs of purity. If you can, marry a sotāpannā. She'd be a good wife for you. No problems! I decided at an early age not to get married because the situation in my home and in my neighbours' homes was difficult. In the kāma-loka where we live, everything is geared to experiencing some form of kāma, some form of sensuality, which means in marriages constant stimulation of the six sense doors—five sense doors and mind—is of primary importance. The wife is the primary object of sensual experience for the husband, and the husband is the primary object for the wife. At least until the children come along, the husband and wife take pleasure in each other, with sexuality their highest form of pleasure. It's the number one driving force in the relationship. All other objects of experience—house, car, and

household goods—are secondary. Secondary objects are obtained for the couple’s convenience, only after the primary object has been experienced.

## The Issue of Sex

*Will sexual intercourse hinder my development of the spiritual faculties?*

As I mentioned once before, if you have sex within the boundaries of the third precept, *kāmesu micchā-cārā*, which means sex with your legitimate partner and not with someone else’s partner, your spiritual practice needn’t suffer. What constitutes a legitimate partner depends upon society’s conventions and a person’s role in society. At the time of the Buddha, it was accepted that the king was entitled to a harem. No one, including the queen, objected to the king having sex with one of his harem wives, as harem wives were all legitimate partners. Even today here in Sri Lanka, many Muslim men have more than one wife.

Prostitution was also accepted at the time of the Buddha. Local governments monitored the health of prostitutes and they also regulated them. If a prostitute engaged a client, say for 1000 pieces of gold, it was against the law for her to engage a second client; she couldn’t have two clients at once. Some prostitutes only provided sex, while others provided additional services, such as housework and companionship. They worked as temporary wives. They might escort their clients to social functions and, sometimes, good friendships developed between prostitutes and their clients. In one story, the story of Uttarā and Sirimā,<sup>57</sup> Uttarā engages the services of Sirimā the prostitute for her husband. After two weeks of Sirimā’s *dāna* to Uttarā’s husband and a talk from the Buddha, both Uttarā and Sirimā attained path. Very good friends. Uttarā’s husband also attained upon hearing the Buddha’s talk. There was no question of

impropriety and not the slightest bit of jealousy, as Uttarā had a great deal of faith in the teachings of the Buddha. She practised kindness. Prostitutes like Sirimā weren't breaking the third precept because they weren't breaking the conventions of society at that time; their sexual partners were legitimate. If you do eventually get married and want to have an extramarital liaison and your wife approves, you won't be breaking the precept as long as the other woman isn't someone else's partner. She can't be in another relationship, which means she must be single, widowed, or divorced. That is the way. No one's freedom can be disrupted.

*A friend of mine is getting a divorce because his wife committed adultery. He's very angry.*

They needn't get divorced. Adultery is a small problem.

*You're wrong. This is not a small problem. And what about Tiger Woods? Is he a modern day king?*

In the context of a marriage that spans many years, a few minutes of extramarital sex is one petty and immature incident. There are always good and bad times over the course of any lengthy relationship. Your friend has a problem because he thinks that he owns his wife. She isn't his property. He doesn't own her. His wife was born to a different mother than your friend was born to. When the two of them were born, they didn't think that they would ever get married to each other. Now, after marrying, the two of them are fighting and they want to get a divorce. Tell your friend he must try to be what he was when he was born. He must rediscover that mind. He has to maintain that mind. A small incident is getting blown up into a large incident because your friend is thinking, "She thought in this way; she behaved in this way." This is papañca. Mental expansion. He is expanding a little bit of anger into ill-will and hate by taking on the object. You and I have known each other for about ten years. We have had disagreements and yelled at each other a few times. When a

few disagreements are put in the context of all the good and worthwhile things that have happened over those ten years, those disagreements are insignificant.

*In Matthew, Christ says, "Whoever even looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Is there any way I can tell a married woman that I'm interested in her?*

No. She must first ask her husband what he thinks about the idea, and only then can she approach you. Not the other way around. If you say anything at all to her about having an affair, if you approach her in secret without her husband knowing, then you are breaking the third precept and will suffer consequences, with severity of consequences escalating in accordance to the level of akusala-kamma committed: with mind, speech, or body. Just thinking about these sort of things isn't as bad as actually doing them.

*I guess Christ was right.*

At the age of twenty-one, one of my sisters married a good friend whom she had known since she was thirteen. After many years of marriage, she told her husband one day, "There is a man that I find attractive." Her husband said, "Fine, go ahead. You can be with him. No problem." The rest of our family, however, was very upset with my sister when they heard what she wanted to do. So, because of our family's views, she thought, "Everyone is thinking in this way; I'll drop the idea of going with this other man." She gave up on the idea, despite her husband saying, "Okay! Go ahead and be with another man." Since my sister had total trust in her husband, she could ask him if it was okay to have sex with another man. There was 100% trust between the two of them. If your friend's wife had been able to trust your friend with her feelings of sexual craving, there wouldn't have been a problem. She didn't trust your friend enough to tell him

the truth, and now there is a problem.

Some people think family life is an obstacle to properly practising the dhamma. This isn't rational. A fine example is Visākhā; she was a sotāpannā who lived at the time of the Buddha. Along with her husband, she had children, indulged in business, and was very wealthy. All these activities belong to the excitement of sensuality, kāma-cchanda. It's not that she overcame all craving for sensual pleasures and then afterwards attained to sotāpatti. No. She craved sensual pleasures and she attained to sotāpatti. Visākhā raised twenty children—ten girls and ten boys! The people who clearly understand the Buddha-Dhamma minimize a lot of life's problems. Yet, most people don't want to try to understand the Buddha-Dhamma, and prefer to fall in with a system of views.

*Do many women attain path knowledge?*

There are more women who attain path than men who attain.

*How is that possible?*

Attainment is easier for women than it is for men because, as the Buddha said, "Women know dukkha-vedanā. I can teach them." Women come to know painful feelings during the carrying, delivering, and raising of their children. They know the nature of feeling far better than men.

*Was the Buddha's society superior to today's society?*

Society was more open and people didn't quarrel about sex. Within a legitimate relationship, sex is kammically indeterminate, avyākata. It is not declared to be beneficial nor is it declared to be harmful, much like eating and sleeping aren't beneficial or harmful. Sex isn't the problem. The problem lies in the additional mental formations and actions surrounding sex. For example, outside the bounds of a legitimate relationship, say rape, sex is not kammically indeterminate. It is harmful. As is the



case for most everyone, you came to bhāvanā because of problems and turmoil in your personal life, and you still just want to fix your personal problems. Your practice of bhāvanā will only truly start when you start looking honestly at your craving and views.

*I sure miss having sex.*

Back in Canada, you were involved in a casual relationship with a woman and you had sex with her on a regular basis. Sex is no different than food. When you have it, you don't crave it. Because sex was available while you were in that relationship, you weren't thinking about trying to get it and instead you were thinking about trying to get other things. Whether it is sex or food or any sensual object, you don't know what you've got until it's no longer available. You can live without sex; it's possible. You can't live without food. Another thing, you have lots of views about how you should and should not think and behave here at our meditation centre. You're forcing a rigid frame of mind upon yourself, clinging to views of non-clinging and that craving sex is wrong. All of this simply intensifies instead of abating your cravings for sex. You need to develop your sati-sampajañña, your free and clear state of mind. Because you only have the manasikāra, the attention, you are only suppressing your craving, which leaves you still differentiating between men and women. Reading the story of Meghiya in the Udāna<sup>58</sup> will improve your understanding of these matters.

*What about having sex in the morning and entering jhāna in the afternoon?*

It's possible, but this is wrong view, micchā-diṭṭhi. Your perception of the world is distorted. You see sex as the highest form of pleasure and fail to see its asubha aspects.

*I do practise asubha. I visualize body parts, like bones, blood, and intestines. And I go to lots of autopsies too.*

Even though you think you know the reality of the body, you only have an academic understanding of it. Craving and clinging arise because you're taking the impermanent as permanent, the unsatisfactory as satisfactory, the pleasurable as trouble-free, the harmful as beneficial, and the non-self as self. You're not seeing the true nature of the body. As long as your *kāmāsava*, your habit of craving sensuality, persists, you'll only see the *subha* and won't see the *asubha*. "I do not know of any other phenomenon that invades and captivates the mind of a man so completely as that of a woman," states the Buddha in the first sutta of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*. "And I do not know of any other phenomenon that invades and captivates the mind of a woman as that of a man." The craving a man has for a woman as well as the craving a woman has for a man is the very first subject the Buddha addresses in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*. It was his first example of craving sensuality, *kāma-taṇhā*, which means all other objects of craving are secondary. It was the Buddha who made this statement. There is no higher authority.

Craving sensuality, *kāma-taṇhā*, has six classes:

- Craving for sights, *rūpa-taṇhā*
- Craving for sounds, *sadda-taṇhā*
- Craving for smells, *gandha-taṇhā*
- Craving for tastes, *rasa-taṇhā*
- Craving for touch, *phoṭṭhabba-taṇhā*
- Craving for ideas, *dhamma-taṇhā*

These six classes of craving overwhelm both men and women. To a heterosexual man, there is no sight more pleasing than the sight of a woman; to a woman, no sight is more pleasing than the sight of a man. Similarly, there are no sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or ideas more pleasing than those of the opposite sex.

Hindu teachers recognize the vagina and breasts as focal points of sensual experience, both for men and women. The minds of men and women get completely overrun by craving.

*How can men and women have the same focal points?*

The vagina gives life and breasts nourish life—there's a craving to exist, bhava-tañhā. Nonetheless, any part of the body can be the object of attention. Opposites attract. When talking about kāma, sensual experiences with a member of the opposite sex are miles apart from sensual experiences with food, drink, music, etc. Sexuality is not in the same league as eating and drinking.

*These teachings are controversial. We can publish them after you die.*

No, publish now. It's important for all of us to discuss these topics.

## Craving Existence

The second of the three types of craving is bhava-tañhā. Bhava-tañhā means we are craving results from our actions. It is also known as craving existence, the craving to exist, and the craving to be. Bhava-tañhā is born out of fear. People who crave results from their actions want to exist. They embrace religion, believing in an abiding permanent self, an immortal soul, and a permanent heaven of delights. Bhava-tañhā people keep the precepts, practise bhāvanā, and practise dāna—all with the underlying view that these good actions will take them to a heaven of delights where they will live in peace for all eternity. Thus, they are known as the eternalists. Those who see the Buddha-Dhamma as a religion are leaning towards bhava-tañhā, often confusing nibbāna for heaven. In the Buddha's time, the most

advanced bhava-tañhā person was Ālāra Kālāma. See the Noble Search in the Majjhima Nikāya.<sup>59</sup>

Because bhava-tañhā people have enough right understanding, enough sammā-diṭṭhi, they believe in kamma-vipāka, which means believing they'll experience results from their actions. Bhava-tañhā people cling to ten right views, that there are definitely results of their good and bad actions, and that there really is such a thing as beneficial and harmful kamma. People with enough sammā-diṭṭhi cling to the view that it's beneficial to give, and that it's right to look after their mothers and fathers and wrong to neglect them. They cling to the view that there are hells and deva worlds, and that beings are born spontaneously. People with even an inkling of right understanding never want to kill beings. The Buddha talks about right understanding in the Mahācattārisaka Sutta.<sup>60</sup>

*Do you think Christ had right understanding?*

Jesus Christ was another advanced bhava-tañhā person. Another eternalist. He was a good person who didn't die on the cross, but died later. I don't know where he went to when he died—I think he was reborn a bodhisatta. Though I can't say much about Christ's early followers or our current Christian brethren, Jesus Christ was an extraordinary person whose teachings found in the Bible are similar to the teachings of the Buddha. The Sermon on the Mount, turning the other cheek, and looking for one lost sheep—these teachings reveal his high quality of mentality and his depth of character. He intervened to save an adultress from being stoned to death, asking the person who was free from sin to throw the first stone. Christ gave teachings on two of the three characteristics of all conditioned things—the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, the anicca and dukkha. He didn't give any teachings on non-self, the anattā. And Christ's teachings on anicca really only go so far as to deal with the gross changes in life, what the Buddha taught as vipariṇāma. No, there are no

teachings to be found in the Bible on the subtle moment-to-moment changes of anicca.

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ was special. He knew the brahma-loka area of the rūpa-loka, and he taught people how to live properly to take birth in the brahma-loka. Similar to the Buddha, Christ explained the natural order of things and encouraged the transcendence of religion. Christian saints work hard to develop their minds to that level; martyrdom, now that is a completely different path. Christ didn't kill or promote the killing of beings, couldn't have promoted killing, as he had many supernormal powers, healed the sick, performed miracles, walked on water, and predicted his own death. Christ had jhāna and is now likely in the brahma-loka. Whether a person is Christian or Buddhist or atheist, it doesn't matter. Anyone who promotes killing won't attain jhāna and won't find themselves in the brahma-loka.

The people who lived in ancient pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka were animistic and worshipped spirits they believed lived in trees, animals, and other places. Living close to nature in this way, these people always respected animals and only killed animals when there was a need to kill them. Early Sri Lankans never killed an animal while it was eating, drinking, sleeping, or mating. And a female animal was left alone if she were pregnant or were suckling her young. That was the sīla back then, common decent gestures towards animals. In the art of war, the military attacks its enemy at these exact same times, while the enemy is eating, drinking, sleeping, etc. Sri Lankans are very different these days.

*Wasn't Christ promoting killing when he told a group of fishermen to cast their nets into the Sea of Galilee?*

I don't believe that story because it's the extreme opposite of the non-violence he constantly promoted. It doesn't seem plausible that Jesus Christ could switch his behaviour so radically. It's a contradiction. You ask a lot of questions about Christ.

*Hard to get away from my Christian background. What about Devadatta? He tried to kill the Buddha and had jhāna.*

Attacking the Buddha was only one incident in Devadatta's life. In general, Devadatta was against killing of all beings and even wanted vegetarianism to be a monastic rule. Yes, the acts he created with the Buddha definitely sent him to a bad destination, but the Buddha saw that Devadatta had also developed many good qualities. When Devadatta's bad qualities wear off, his good qualities will surface again, and these good qualities will successively lead to a Pacceka-Buddha state. I feel bad about killing mosquitoes. I also don't like them biting me, however. So sometimes when I brush them away, they happen to die. We brush mosquitoes away because of bhava-tañhā.

*Meditators should be vegetarians.*

That's your view, your diṭṭhi. You don't know dhamma.

*It's hypocritical to send loving kindness to all beings and then eat their flesh.*

There is nothing in that. It is more important to restrain your mind and develop kusala qualities than it is to stop eating meat or fish. People who devote their time to bhāvanā are not trying to gratify their taste buds; so, this idea of eating meat or just vegetables drops off. Refer to the Āmagandha Sutta in the Cūla Vagga of the Sutta Nipāta, the Jīvaka Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya, and the General Sīha Sutta in the Mahāvaggo of the Aṅguttara Nikāya.

*Are Christ's teachings on the nature of sin the same as the Buddha's teachings on ignorance?*

We are all in ignorance. Some people believe that only humans have souls and that animals don't have souls. Using this view, killing people is a sin; whereas, killing animals isn't a sin. The people with right understanding see causes and effects, see that

neither animals nor people have souls.

*What about a wish to attain nibbāna?*

Making a firm resolution to attain nibbāna is not bhava-tañhā, definitely not a craving to exist in some eternal place.

*Do Christians attain jhāna?*

Yes, of course. Even these days, there are Christians who attain the rūpa-jjhānas as well as the arūpa-jjhānas. I believe many in the Carmelite Order have jhāna. When I was in my twenties, I knew two Christian Fathers who were on this path of developing the jhānas. And just recently, I met a Christian man who had jhāna. A very solid and independent thinker, he criticized both Christian and Buddhist clergy, managing to get kicked out of many churches as well as many Buddhist temples! The rūpa-jjhāna state of consciousness is generally all the same for Christians. They see the four rūpa-jjhānas as one big jhāna and don't subdivide it into four separate jhānas. This is not micchā-samādhi, wrong concentration, only incomplete samādhi, as the jhāna isn't being turned towards nibbāna. People from various religious traditions attain jhāna—when they practise well.

## *A Higher Mentality*

All religious people want to move towards a higher mentality, beyond sensuality and the hindrances. Buddhists use the four foundations of the satipaṭṭhāna to attain jhāna, while people from other religious traditions use some other method, a method that in some way makes use of one of the four foundations of the satipaṭṭhāna. The Buddha supported the use of jhāna solely to help people see the three characteristics of all conditioned things and to attain nibbāna. Many Buddhists dismiss the methods used by other traditions, saying that everything must go through the Buddhist method. Not so. Moral and wise people from other religious traditions hear beneficial dhamma, then attain jhāna, go

through the vipassanā knowledges, and attain path. The vipassanā knowledges come to any person who practises morality properly, and even if he or she doesn't attain path the truly moral person knows what is path and what is not path. Nevertheless, don't jump to the conclusion that all religious traditions are the same. That is also wrong, as not all the religious traditions are the same.

*If I attain path as a Christian, do I become a Buddhist?*

No. You would drop all religions and views, including your views about the three characteristics of conditioned things. There is no such thing as a true Buddhist. Either you realize the three characteristics, understand nibbāna, or you don't. A person who has attained still lives in a normal way, a way that's appropriate to his or her cultural milieu. At this point in time, we have the Theravāda Order, the Mahayana Order, the Christian Order, and others. Someone who has attained arahatship simply enters an order. Catholic priests already have the robes. If a Catholic priest attains, he would continue to live the life of a priest and as such would be well accepted in society. It would be unusual for people who have attained to live the life of the beggars you see on the roads of Colombo. It could be that a Pacceka-Buddha is not well shaved and just wears a robe for comfort or solitude. Nevertheless, a Pacceka-Buddha's way of living doesn't trouble anyone. A person who understands nibbāna has no need for a teacher—you wouldn't need me!

*That got a chuckle out of you!*

Yes, we have to laugh sometimes. The presence of a permanent heaven is a fact for many bhava-tañhā people, not just speculation nor an abstract intellectual theory. Heaven is a very real place for them. Through some sort of practice, they suppress their defilements and personally experience a high state of consciousness, such as a rūpa-jjhāna. They find this high state of consciousness to be extremely pleasurable because their



defilements are not to be seen. Kāma-rāga is suppressed. Ill-will, conceit, and restlessness—their defilements are suppressed and are definitely not arising. Quite a heavenly place! It's a vast area for the consciousness and no beings are to be seen. And since their minds are stable and change is also not to be seen while in this high state of consciousness, they are convinced that it must be a permanent and unchanging place. People who experience rūpa-jjhāna can speak clearly and genuinely about the impermanence and suffering in the kāma-loka. Up to that point, they know how the kāma-rāga and the ill-will and the other defilements of the kāma-loka function in the minds of people.

Trying to measure one's own spiritual progress is like trying to measure the height of a mountain in the Himalayas—it's difficult. Climbers who struggle to the peak of an extremely high mountain could easily conclude that they have reached the peak of the highest mountain in the world because they don't see any mountain peaks that are higher. They look around from the top of their mountain, and nothing seems to be beyond it. Similarly, people who attain a high state of consciousness, such as a rūpa-jjhāna or an arūpa-jjhāna, often conclude that their attainment is the highest possible attainment because they don't see how any attainment could be beyond it. Ālāra Kālāma, for example, thought the sphere of nothingness was the highest possible attainment—he simply didn't see anything to be beyond the sphere of nothingness. The Buddha went beyond.

*Isn't it foolish to think that heaven is permanent?*

No. Unless path knowledge is realized, it is easy to be fooled into thinking that the rūpa-loka state of consciousness is a permanent place of rest. If you ever manage to attain jhāna, experience the rūpa-loka, you too would likely conclude that heaven is permanent, and it would be difficult to get you out of that view, unless you gain path knowledge. You are criticizing beliefs in a permanent heaven, stating that everything is

impermanent, because this is what you have read in the Buddhist texts. This is your view and it's a meaningless view, as you haven't experienced the rūpa-loka, failed to reach even that level. If you experience the rūpa-loka and go beyond, then fine. You have the right to question the views of those who believe in heaven. You can relate your experience to them.

Bhava-tañhā, your craving for results from actions, believing that some things are eternal, leads you into latching onto views of what the Buddha said—that all objects are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial. Latching onto views about these three characteristics of conditioned things turns your mind towards the dark side of pessimism and towards the criticism of other people. Our whole society is in a mess because people are forever latching onto views and then condemning others. Bhava-tañhā is the root cause for criticizing other people and other religions. Views are dangerous. Even though the three characteristics of all conditioned things are true, these three characteristics have to be realized by one's own self, and not just read about and then taken on as a view. Don't confuse knowledge for wisdom. By all means, general knowledge must be heeded if our worldly society is to function smoothly. Wisdom, however, is all about going beyond the world, which is a completely different thing from knowing how to live properly and peacefully in the world.

We've been talking about the jhānas and we feel pretty good that we've been talking about the jhānas. The jhānas exist and talking about them is useful. Well, let's not get too conceited about a little discussion on the jhānas, telling other people that they too should hold the same view about jhānas that we hold about jhānas, and then shoving that view down their throats, "I have found this! Why don't you find this too?" This sort of behaviour is completely wrong. People need support where they are as individuals; they need acceptance to bring them around and help them. Almost no one needs a lot expectations imposed

on them. And those who have actually attained jhāna don't, or at least rarely, criticize people who haven't attained jhāna. Instead, they are exceptionally kind and compassionate.

It's easier for a teacher to get his or her meditators to break their bond of kāma-taṇhā than it is to get them to break their bond of bhava-taṇhā, the craving for results from actions. That eternalist view. With the practice of samatha-bhāvanā, strong meditators suppress their defilements and achieve states of jhānas. Because they don't see any defilements in themselves, strong meditators assume they're on the right track and are practising properly. However, if they don't have path knowledge and aren't striving for path knowledge, they are on the wrong track—they're craving a form of existence. Thus, to break this bond of bhava-taṇhā, the teacher encourages these meditators to practise vipassanā-bhāvanā in combination with their samatha-bhāvanā. Breaking this bond of bhava-taṇhā is difficult for strong meditators because just that final big dismissal is required.

*You told me earlier there was a time in the forest when your defilements didn't arise at all and your teachers thought you had attained arahatship. Were you one of these strong meditators who was just fooling himself and on the wrong track?*

Yes, I thought I had possibly attained something. And then a moment of fear arose when I saw some debris that looked like a snake. I wasn't an arahat. To be fair and despite not attaining, during that period of intensive practice, I did get to know most of the things that I am now teaching about arūpa-dhammas, rūpa-dhammas, and nekkhama—the renunciation. It wasn't a waste of time. And if I had forced myself to remain there in the forest and had continued to practise hard, I wouldn't have been fooling myself because I knew that I hadn't attained and eventually the practice should have broken the defilements. I had other goals. We always have to be true to ourselves and not

jump to the conclusion, “I have attained. I have reached this much, this level.” Okay, if it’s all over, let it be over.

To clearly understand kāma-taṇhā, bhava-taṇhā, and vibhava-taṇhā, we really need to go beyond the intellect, beyond all this talking, and instead work on our samādhi. Since you only meditate a little bit here and there, haven’t experienced any rūpa-jjhāna states, you have no possibility to fully discuss path and fruit, confidence, energy, sati, samādhi, or wisdom with people who have experienced rūpa-jjhāna states. You might even think they are talking about nibbāna. And when they talk about the nature of the kāma-loka, the nature of defilements, you can’t grasp what they’re saying because you lack the long perspective of the rūpa-loka. Their understanding of all these qualities is far more advanced than your understanding of these qualities. They are talking about mangoes and you are talking about jackfruit. Now, you perform many good actions here in our meditation centre. Are you performing your actions with bhava-taṇhā, the thought of having a good future life?

*No. I’m Christian. We have only one life.*

Many people perform good actions with that purpose. Some even joke about enjoying a good life the next time around. This is bhava-taṇhā. We must try to perform good actions without thinking of future results, but it’s difficult.

*I have to do some sort of work.*

What happens if you don’t?

*Life is meaningless.*

Despite not working for a good future life, you are working to be happy in the moment. At the time of the Buddha, many bhikkhus also worked on community projects and they also found the work meaningful. And though they weren’t working for a good future life or for any material reward in that life, the Buddha

advised them to decrease their involvement in community projects because they were doing the work for themselves, and they weren't doing the work solely for the good of the community. No one is saying, "Stop doing good things. Stop helping people." No. Helping people doesn't obstruct the realization of nibbāna.

*Does working reinforce the self?*

No. That's why I asked if you were thinking about a future birth. If you are performing good actions to attain a good future birth, you are reinforcing the self, bhava-tañhā. This isn't happening in your case. Nevertheless, you are clinging to the performance of good actions, and it's this clinging that obstructs the realization of nibbāna.

*Since I'm provided with a room and board and teachings, I need to do something.*

We must help each other. However, if there is no acceptance of something after death, you could fall into the view of craving no results from actions—vibhava-tañhā; you might take on the annihilationism view. It's a tricky point in one's life. If you're not thinking of future births that come out of bhava-tañhā, if you're not thinking of any future results from your actions, then that could be a problem.

*My problems come from people with bad energy.*

This is bhava-tañhā and kāma-tañhā. You're blaming people for your problems and how you're feeling, saying they have bad energy, or let's use the expression bad vibrations. If you believe that other people have bad vibrations, you'll find and feel bad vibrations from other people. Since Devadatta believed in bad vibrations, he felt the Buddha was a bad person and then Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha. We have to let go of good or bad place—good or bad people—it's a way of clinging onto objects. In a place, there are no good or bad vibrations; all that's

just a creation out of your imagination.

Another person's thoughts don't have any affect on you and your thoughts don't have any affect on any other person. There was a time when I believed my practice of mettā-bhāvanā, sending thoughts of loving-kindness, had an affect on the people to whom I was sending mettā. I no longer think in that way because over the years I've observed that sending loving-kindness to people doesn't seem to do much for the people who are the targets of my loving-kindness. For thoughts of loving-kindness to flow between two people, the two people must be at the same high level of development and they must be open to receiving mettā. Sāriputta sent mettā to Moggallāna, and Moggallāna sent mettā to Sāriputta. Don't confuse the practice of sending mettā with the supernormal powers of the abhiññās. People who have the jhānas under control can choose to develop the abhiññās and penetrate the minds of other people.

Mettā-bhāvanā is about sending thoughts of loving-kindness, developing the spiritual qualities of the person who is doing the sending. It doesn't make any difference who or what is the object of mettā. You can send mettā to trees or birds or anything. No problem—the results are the same. You have relatives who criticize and look down on you for studying Buddhism. And though you've offered to help them in various ways, they've always rejected any sort of help. Now, by sending mettā to these relatives, your feelings of guilt are eased, especially if one of them dies. Mettā-bhāvanā is not about receiving thoughts of loving-kindness. We can't give kindness to another person any more than we can give wisdom to another person, for kindness and wisdom have to come from within a person; they are internal qualities and not something external. Wisdom grows through cultivation of the four brahma-vihāras:

- Loving-kindness, *mettā*

- Compassion, *karunā*
- Sympathetic joy, *muditā*
- Equanimity, *upekkhā*

That's the path. There are things you can do for yourself and things that we all must do for others. Thoughts of kindness of course lead to acts of kindness. We can be kind to the people around us, speaking and behaving in ways that have a positive effect on them. We might care for people who are dying by giving them a bath or by washing their feet—these are acts of loving-kindness that actually help people. If you were kinder, better at supporting and working along with other people, you would have fewer interpersonal conflicts. And our meditation centre would function properly and *samādhi* would naturally arise if everyone here worked together with the same kindness, effort and mindfulness. We must decrease our expectations and measuring of people. We can practise the good vibration of *sīla* and right thought—generosity, kindness, and non-violence.

*S.N. Goenkaji is a respected meditation teacher. Is he Hindu?*

Goenka follows the Burmese tradition of the Buddha. Then again, since Goenka's family background is Hindu, he does sometimes come across as a Hindu, especially when he teaches Hindus and draws from the *Pātañjali Yoga Sūtras*. And his teaching that *saṅkhārās*, mental formations, can be eradicated creates conflict and confusion in the minds of his meditators. The nature of *saṅkhārās* needs to be known and seen by meditators. *Saṅkhārās* need to be understood. Many of my immediate relatives were Catholic and I have some understanding of the teachings of Christ. Thus, in the same way as Goenka, when I teach Christians such as yourself, my Christian background comes across and some people listening in on our discussions may come to the conclusion that I am also a Christian.

*On a retreat, I picked up a lot of bad vibrations when I sat in another meditator's chair. His vibrations screwed me up for the rest of the day.*

Just forget it. There is nothing in that. It's wrong view and unnecessarily complicates the situation. If people picked up vibrations from objects and places, there shouldn't be any bad people in Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha attained enlightenment. Vibrations should be exceptionally good in Bodh Gaya. Yet, if you go to Bodh Gaya, you'll find that it's a dangerous place infested with violent thieves who ambush and rob pilgrims, and these thieves don't seem to be affected in any way at all by the Buddha's good vibrations. No doubt, some places are more conducive to meditation than other places. These grounds here in Kanduboda are clean, natural, quiet, and uncluttered, which is why they were chosen for our meditation centre. When I was young, from fifteen to thirty-five years of age, this is primarily where I practised the Mahasi method of meditation. Arahats and anāgāmis—Mahasi Sayadaw, Webu Sayadaw, and Sumathipāla Na Himi—practised here at that time and it's very inspiring that they practised here, on these very grounds. And over the years, many good meditators also practised here, gained samādhi, and some attained path knowledge. The arahats and anāgāmis who practised here years ago, however, aren't creating the current environment of our meditation centre. We are creating our current environment.

What a person thinks of any place is based on the mind of that person, on his or her perception of the place. People create their own environment. Since pilgrims to Bodh Gaya have a lot of saddhā in the Buddha, they believe Bodh Gaya is a place of great vibrations. Similarly, the gaining of samādhi is based on the meditator's perception, on internal conditions and is not based on external conditions. Meditators with strong minds and a clear perception easily gain samādhi here, and the meditators with



weak minds and a distorted perception gain no samādhi at all. Good meditators always have altogether different results from poor meditators. Many rascals also practise here. Some rascals do find peace of mind and some don't. Hard to say. If they are too disturbed about their lying or stealing or whatever, they don't gain any samādhi. So you see, in exactly the same place, a place such as Kanduboda that is conducive to meditation and has a long history of good meditators gaining samādhi, the results of meditation range from a complete waste of everyone's time right through to path knowledge.

It's more important to strengthen and train your mind than to worry about vibrations. So, fortify yourself and do not be affected. With a strong and well-trained mind, you won't be affected by energies or vibrations or even by ghosts. Ghosts are also driven by greed, aversion, and delusion, though at a grosser and lower level than our human level, which means they can't have any effect on our level. I slept overnight in cemeteries on many occasions and never had any problems. A meditator who has good samādhi can go anywhere and be with anyone, be they rascals or murderers, and not be adversely affected by them.

## Craving Annihilation

Our third of the three types of craving is vibhava-tañhā, which is often translated as craving non-existence or craving not to be—both translations are weak. A stronger translation for vibhava-tañhā is craving annihilation. These people hope there will be no results from their actions, at least no bad consequences in the long term. Vibhava-tañhā is born out of doubt, is against religion, and tends towards philosophy. It is the belief there was nothing before this current birth and there will be nothing after

this birth; at death, there will only be annihilation. And since vibhava-tañhā people believe that nothing happens after their deaths, that nothing unpleasant happens in future births, they do whatever they please in their present lives, often indulging in sense pleasures as much as possible. They might do things that are very good or might do things that are very bad and harmful. Most people who live modern materialistic lives are vibhava-tañhā people. Vibhava-tañhā is wrong view, micchā-diṭṭhi. It is essentially and utterly wrong. A dangerous view.

*Are annihilationists prone to suicide?*

The thought to commit suicide can come through bhava-tañhā or vibhava-tañhā. A bhava-tañhā man who can't tolerate his current vedanā, feeling, might kill himself hoping for a better birth. He isn't trying to escape from existence and the cycle of repeated births. We can't puff up ourselves up with pride as Theravāda Buddhists saying that we don't have any bhava-tañhā or vibhava-tañhā, and that Christians and Muslims and philosophers do have bhava-tañhā and vibhava-tañhā. 99% of the world's population, including Theravāda Buddhists, have bhava-tañhā and vibhava-tañhā. Though Buddhists in a Buddhist culture don't have a lot of bhava-tañhā in the sense of believing in a permanent self or believing in eternity, Buddhists still do have bhava-tañhā.

Both bhava-tañhā and vibhava-tañhā lead to the arising of wrong views. Both eternalists and annihilationists, the people who crave results from actions and the people who crave no bad results from their actions, have the concept of a soul and self and think that they exist. Bhava-tañhā people hold the view that their soul is eternal and vibhava-tañhā people hold the view that the soul is destroyed at death. Even the people who are convinced that death is the end of their existence, the vibhava-tañhā people, believe that they exist here and now. The Buddha-Dhamma is not the middle view between eternalism and annihilationism; it's

not the middle view between craving a process of existence and craving no process of existence. No. The Buddha-Dhamma is about seeing that there is no existence right now. This is a very important point, the heart of the Buddha's teachings. There is no existence. Right now, at this instant! If you are trying to extinguish existence, you are living with the delusion that you exist, that there is an existence to extinguish. It's the arahat who fully realizes this truth, that there is only nāma-rūpa. You can read what the Buddha said on this topic in the Diṭṭhi Saṃyutta.<sup>61</sup>

*Allright. So, I must be one of these bhava-taṇhā people because I'm pretty sure I was here yesterday and will be here tomorrow. I also hope to make it to heaven someday.*

Yes, that's your delusion. The third noble truth, the extinction of suffering—dukkha-nirodha-sacca—does not mean the extinction of existence. On the night Siddhārtha became the enlightened Buddha, the knowledge arose that there is no existence, that there is only dependent origination, that there are only causes and effects. Through full realization of this knowledge, the Buddha destroyed ignorance and ended the cycle of causes that were leading to perpetual suffering. He ended the taking of births, and attained the extinction of suffering. He didn't attain the extinction of existence. The details are in the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta<sup>62</sup> of the Majjhima Nikāya. See also the Kaccānagotta Sutta<sup>63</sup> of the Saṃyutta Nikāya. This is an extremely important point to come to terms with.

Earlier, you said to me that the teachings of Jesus Christ parallel the teachings of the Buddha, "Wisdom is wisdom." Yes, many Christians and Buddhists do like to say the teachings of Christ are the same as the teachings of the Buddha. And on a community and religious level, regarding right speech and right action and right livelihood, Christianity is comparable to Buddhism. Despite that common ground, the similarity between

the teachings of Christ and the teachings of the Buddha ends when we look at politics and the existence of a self. Christ had a political agenda and believed in the existence of a permanent self. The Buddha never involved himself in politics, only offering advice to leaders who asked for it, and he didn't believe in the existence of a permanent self.

The Buddha's teachings are to bring people around to seeing beyond the self, beyond the kamma-vipāka, and to seeing that there are just phenomena—hetu-phala, causes and effects; we can say actions and reactions. The belief in a permanent self, which arises out of craving results from actions or craving no bad results from actions—bhava-tañhā and vibhava-tañhā—only applies to people who haven't attained path. Even a sotāpanna, who just entered the stream to nibbāna, has done away with bhava-tañhā and vibhava-tañhā. Even a sotāpanna no longer believes in a permanent self, a permanent heaven of delights, or that death is the end. All this talk of everything happening to a self, to a me or to an I is fantasy.

*Why does a sotāpanna take subsequent births in the kāma-loka if he or she isn't craving to exist?*

The sotāpanna still has kāma-tañhā, craving sensuality; and still has kāma-cchanda, the excitement of sensuality. And the sotāpanna still craves the five aggregates, the pañca-kkhandha:

- Feeling aggregate, *vedanā-kkhandha*
- Perception aggregate, *saññā-kkhandha*
- Mental formation aggregate, *saṅkhāra-kkhandha*
- Consciousness aggregate, *viññāṇa-kkhandha*
- Materiality aggregate, *rūpa-kkhandha*

It takes attainment to anāgāmitā to be free of kāma-tañhā and

kāma-cchanda. You might now ask me why the anāgāmī takes birth in the arūpa-loka of the Pure Abodes or takes birth in one of the higher-worlds of the rūpa-loka. Why? Because he or she chooses birth in the arūpa-loka or the rūpa-loka. When the anāgāmī was in the kāma-loka, he or she practised the arūpa-jjhānas and the rūpa-jjhānas and gained an appreciation, the rāga, for the arūpa-loka and the rūpa-loka. Thus, it's this appreciation for the arūpa-loka and the rūpa-loka, the arūpa-rāga and the rūpa-rāga, that leads the anāgāmī to choose birth in the arūpa-loka or the rūpa-loka. Due to path and fruit, the anāgāmī has to experience one of those high worlds of consciousness at the end of his or her life in the kāma-loka. It's this appreciation and liking, the rāga, that leads the anāgāmī into a birth in the arūpa-loka or the rūpa-loka. The anāgāmī practises the jhānas for a pleasant abiding, to decrease the dukkha of the kāma-loka, not with any thoughts of bhava-tañhā, as he or she doesn't believe in a permanent self or a permanent heaven of delights. Even an arahat sometimes practises the jhānas just for a pleasant abiding in the brahma-loka.

Arahats and vibhava-tañhā people have some things in common. Both conclude that human life is nothing more than the four primary elements and the aggregates of mentality and materiality, nāma-rūpa, and both conclude that there will never be anything more to human life other than elements and nāma-rūpa. Most importantly, both conclude that at some time or other it's all going to stop. The right understanding of arahats and the views of people who hope for no bad consequences from their actions, the annihilationists, are just a hair's breadth apart.

*What is it that's going to stop?*

The cycle of repeated births will stop. Arahats and vibhava-tañhā people both conclude that there won't be another birth for them. Both know there is nothing more to come. Arahats come to this conclusion because they travelled the same road as the Buddha,

which led them to penetrating the three characteristics of all conditioned things—anicca, dukkha, and anattā. Arahats see dependent origination. They fully understand the nature of mentality-materiality, nāma-rūpa; they watch the flow of causes and effects, the hetu-phala; and they see for themselves that there is no substantial existence, only causes and effects. Actions and reactions.

Arahats disentangle the tangle of mentality-materiality that we commonly refer to as a self. They watch their inflows and watch the resulting outflows. Watching this flow of causes and effects, they see that the actions performed in one birth are not just simply carried forward to the next birth. One action does not equal one reaction. Instead, what comes up in a subsequent birth is always somewhat different. Arahats see that outflows never exactly match the inflows; they see that the effects that arise cannot be directly linked back to one specific cause or action. The arahat fully understands that something different is always flowing out. There are always many causes, many conditions, and many effects. Birth is a complicated tangle of causes and effects interacting in a multitude of ways.

Despite all this, the arahat knows that being human is no more than nāma-rūpa, and knows for him or her nothing at all will be carried forward to a subsequent birth. He or she knows beyond a shadow of a doubt the cycle of repeated births is going to stop. The unconditioned. Arahats realize there can't possibly be anything more to come for them because they know that they've stopped putting together the causes and conditions that are required for a subsequent birth. No more outflows. No more births. There is nothing to be carried forward from this birth to another birth.

*This is starting to get a little unclear to me. Are you saying what is happening to me now in this life is or isn't the result of what I did in my past life? And what I'm doing now does or*

*doesn't affect what happens in my next life? Seems you are giving up on the cause and effect rule.*

The wanderer Moliyasivaka asked basically the same question.<sup>64</sup> “When ascetics,” said the Buddha, “say all is caused by what was done in the past, they are ignoring what one knows by oneself and are ignoring what is considered to be true in the world.”

Only people with a primitive view of the process of dependent origination think, “If I give money to a beggar in this life, then I will get lots of money and I’ll be rich in my next life!” or “If I kill a dog, I’ll be a dog in my next life, and the dog that I kill will be born as a human.” I’m saying that the wholesomeness of an action has nothing to do with the specific action. Yes, there’s an impact, something always does go forward from our actions, but the eventual effects that come about often have nothing to do with these actions that we are now performing. Ultimately, dependent origination is completely different and far more profound than one cause leading to one effect, and it’s only the arahat who has fully penetrated this truth.

*I’m obviously not enlightened, as I’m now lost! Sorry, I’m doing my best to understand—really. Now what about those annihilationists you mentioned? Why do they think the doctrine of rebirth to be untenable? Maybe I can understand their point of view.*

Vibhava-taṇhā people conclude there won’t be a subsequent birth by studying the nature of human life and observing, “Nothing is being carried forward from my actions.” Or, they may use the logic of philosophy to determine that there cannot possibly be another birth. My father, who was a vibhava-taṇhā person, didn’t think anything was going forth from his birth to some future birth. If vibhava-taṇhā people can drop their wrong views, they will gain right understanding, sammā-diṭṭhi, much

faster than the bhava-tañhā people will gain right understanding.

There are three aspects to right understanding, sammā-diṭṭhi:

- Religion
- Philosophy
- Dhamma

Religion and philosophy—and these two aspects include being kind and generous, and common meditation practices such as paying attention to our daily activities—are steps on the road to dhamma; they're helpful bases for spiritual development. If you feel an obligation to cut the grass at our centre because I'm teaching you meditation, then you are practising the religious or philosophical aspects of right understanding. Dhamma, the third aspect of sammā-diṭṭhi, is completely apart from religion and philosophy. It means seeing the three characteristics of all conditioned things: anicca, dukkha, and anattā. A person who understands dhamma knows that being human is only nāma-rūpa and dependent origination. He or she sees hetu-phala, sees that actions performed here and now are not simply carried forward to the next birth. Something else goes forth. Dhamma—this knowing and seeing of anicca, dukkha, and anattā—is far deeper than anything that can be clung to through a doctrine of religion, the bhava-tañhā view; or clung to through the logic of philosophy, the vibhava-tañhā view.

*You said arahats and annihilationists share some common ground, that an arahat's right understanding is just a hair's breadth apart from the annihilationist's view. Is the annihilationist on the right track?*

No! Absolutely not. Do not start thinking that there is a subtle difference between the vibhava-tañhā view and sammā-diṭṭhi, or start thinking that the annihilationist is going down the right



road. Nothing subtle here. Wrong road. This hair's breadth of difference between right and wrong understanding creates a vast difference in the way the arahat and the annihilationist practise and in their real states of mind. Vibhava-tañhā view is in direct opposition to right understanding. Vibhava-tañhā people do not care about kamma and results, kamma-vipāka, and know nothing of right understanding. Instead, vibhava-tañhā people cling to ten wrong views. For them, there are no results of good and bad deeds; it's pointless to give; and it doesn't matter whether or not they care for their parents. A violent vibhava-tañhā criminal would have no qualms at all about killing the husband of a woman he finds attractive.

On the other hand, a person with a highly developed sense of sammā-diṭṭhi never does any sort of good action with any expectation at all nor does he or she do them because of, as in your case, a work ethic. A person with right understanding simply does good things. He or she is not performing them because of social pressures from society. No. We can say there was a subtle difference between Ālāra Kālāma's view and right understanding. Ālāra Kālāma understood kamma-vipāka and was also very close to a full understanding of hetu-phala, causes and effects; sometimes, it's easier to translate hetu-phala as actions and reactions than as causes and effects. Ālāra Kālāma's view of actions and reactions was correct, which is why he was the first person Siddhārtha as the enlightened Buddha thought of teaching.

Throughout his life, the Buddha only taught the dhamma to people who understood kamma-vipāka and understood, at least to a degree, hetu-phala. People with yoniso-manasikāra, those who know that there are always results from their actions, can be taught. The others who won't make any effort to know or to look honestly at causes and effects can't be taught. It's impossible.

*Can we say that annihilationists are generally ruthless? Are*

*they the ones who kill anyone who gets in their way?*

No, many people who don't believe in rebirth still do care for their parents and do conform to the laws and cultural conventions of society. Nevertheless, they care for their parents because their parents gave birth to them and it's the right thing to do. It's their duty. They aren't caring for their parents because they believe in future results. If they can get away without conforming to the rules and expectations of society, then fine. It makes no difference to them.

### Annihilation or Existence

Way back at the beginning of this third talk on the nature of feeling and craving, I said it's extremely important to understand how craving sensuality, *kāma-taṇhā*, gives rise to craving existence, *bhava-taṇhā*, and gives rise to craving annihilation, *vibhava-taṇhā*.

*Both types of craving look attractive. I can relate to people wanting to live forever in heaven, and also relate to others not wanting to believe in any sort of rebirth. After all, if there's no rebirth, then we can pretty much do as we please without any fear of bad consequences in a later life. Not going to hell sounds very attractive for a Christian like me.*

Well, you might want to think twice about where you stand on these two types of craving because there will be results from your actions, definitely. Annihilationists hold many wrong views. Since they doubt the veracity of *kamma-vipāka*, annihilationists see no need to restrain their cravings for sensuality, and they pursue sense pleasures by whatever means available, by fair means or foul, which inevitably leads to disastrous results. The thieves in Bodh Gaya who rob pilgrims at gunpoint are likely going to take downward births as animals. In contrast, the eternalists who are firm believers in *kamma-vipāka*

really hold only one wrong view—belief in a permanent self, and this doesn't have to be a dangerous view. For these reasons, annihilationists are living far riskier lives than eternalists. Though still craving sensuality, a decent man never indulges in illicit sex, let alone kills the husband of an attractive woman. If he is interested in a woman, he does it correctly, making sure she isn't already in any other sort of relationship and talks to her parents. It's common for wise bhava-taṇhā people to attain jhāna and then take birth in the brahma-loka. If a person has good human qualities, the jhānas and path come easily. Never underestimate the power of good human qualities.



*Self-restraint, a holy and chaste life, the perception of the Noble Truths  
and the realisation of nibbāna— this is the greatest blessing*

Maha-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>65</sup>

## 14. Craving → Clinging—part 1

**Pemasiri Thera:** The Pali word for clinging is upādāna; it's an intensified form of tañhā. For example, tañhā is similar to your recent search through Colombo's bookstores for a copy of Bhikkhu Bodhi's new translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, and then the clinging, the upādāna, is similar to your buying of the book and the taking it back home with you. Clinging means holding onto something very tightly. The difference between craving and clinging is a matter of degree, much like the difference between a young boy and his older brother. The young boy is tañhā and his older brother is upādāna. Since the older brother is bigger, tougher and stronger, his hold on things is a lot firmer than the younger brother's hold. The presence of tañhā is not in itself a problem, as often craving can be let go of quite easily. Alas, through our craving, conceit, and views, we develop our tañhā into clinging, and clinging, that's this upādāna we're talking about, is dangerous.

*David: A professional writer is helping me edit a transcript of your teachings, and last week I discovered she had made a dozen edits without telling me she had done so. We ended up arguing, not that the edits were unnecessary—some of her edits definitely were necessary. We argued because she made the edits without consulting me and I came upon them by chance, which upset me and undermined my trust in her. So, I*

*told her in no uncertain terms that I wasn't at all happy with her doing this. Am I clinging?*

Not necessarily. Anger can come up and not develop any further. Are you still angry with her?

*She's a good person with a big heart, and she sincerely wants to help with these teachings on the dhamma. And I appreciate her expertise. No, I'm not angry with her, not right at this instant.*

Then you need not look at that as upādāna. Even though you were a little annoyed and inconvenienced, even though a modest amount of clinging did arise, it's more useful for your practice to see upādāna as craving that continues for a long period of time, say days, weeks, or years. I told you about a businessman who argued with his colleagues over the funding of a construction project. He then proceeded to mull over that argument for days and days, and in doing so developed his anger for his colleagues into hate. He is clinging; this is clearly upādāna. If you are really clinging to an experience or for that matter any object that can be known through your senses, the craving for that object doesn't finish there and then at the time you experience it. No, you continue to crave and continue to think about the object for days and days. The anger with your editor arose and finished relatively quickly, with no anger towards her within a week's time. Thus, in this case, we can't say you were craving strongly for a long period, which is how we are defining upādāna. Just because you get angry about something doesn't mean you are automatically clinging too. upādāna is the continuation of the craving, the holding onto the object with a very firm grip for a long time. Anger is spontaneous. It doesn't have to develop into clinging.

*I've been thinking about having sex with someone for the past six weeks.*

Yes, this is upādāna. There is a lot that could be said about upādāna—there is clinging that will take you to the sugati, the happy courses of being in the heavenly worlds; there is clinging that will take you to the apāyas, the lower worlds, and there is clinging that will take you to the jhāna states of consciousness. Venerable Sāriputta told the wanderer Jambukhādaka of four types of clinging, upādāna:<sup>66</sup>

- Clinging to sensuality, *kāmupādāna*
- Clinging to views, *diṭṭhupādāna*
- Clinging to rites and rituals, *sīlabbatupādāna*
- Clinging to personality view, *atta-vādupādāna*

Of the four types of clinging, the clinging to sensuality is generally taught first. Clinging to views means holding and grasping things to make them intelligible. Because of views, various kinds of rituals and pujās arise. Rituals and pūjās are not harmful in themselves—clinging to them is harmful. Clinging to personality view means getting stuck in the belief of a permanent soul or self.

*Clinging that gets me to heaven is clinging as it should be.  
Heaven would be wonderful.*

Yes, it's true. If you live a good life, you should take birth in a heavenly world. However, your way of thinking is risky, as you may well take birth in a hell at the end of your life in the heavenly world, and that's only if you do indeed get to the heavenly world!

We can see upādāna in our daily lives—between parents and children, between teachers and students, and between bhikkhus and lay people.

## Parents and Children

Of all these objects of upādāna, however, parents and children top the list. Children are foremost in the minds of the parents, and parents are foremost in the minds of the children—those are places where the tañhā and its successor the clinging, the upādāna, are very strong. Almost all parents want their children to behave in a specific manner, a manner which the parents deem to be suitable, often laying down strict rules for what is right and wrong. That is upādāna, and it works both ways. Children also want their parents to behave in a specific manner. For example, since parents use a lot of kindness and compassion, the children expect their parents to always be good, kind, and compassionate. The children cling to the idea that a parent's total love should be present at all times.

When children do not live in the way the parents want them to live, the parents tend to lose their patience, and they'll scream at their children and sometimes even go so far as to beat them. Again, this is upādāna. The other side is true as well. When parents are no longer being wonderfully kind and compassionate and generous, most young children get angry with their parents. So, since neither parents nor children are getting what they want, parents and children fight with each other, which is why the grandparents are brought in. Children expect grandparents to at once oblige them, and they generally do—that is once again upādāna. Grandparents are often less severe than the parents.

If parents are too severe, the children instinctively disagree with them about everything, even when their parents are sincerely trying to do what's in the children's best interests. Years after a furious fight, the parents may want to pass along some important information or make arrangements for an

inheritance. Despite the fact that these activities are definitely in their best interests, the children look upon them with suspicion, and not at all in the way the parents meant. A young boy who fights with his father might never let go of the grudge he bears against his father. Instead, he incites this anger into hatred and then as an adult blames his father for many of his emotional and domestic problems, "Because you beat me when I was five years old, I'm now insecure and my life is a mess." Yes, it quite often happens that children continue to hate their parents after the parents are long dead and gone. Amongst those we associate, there are enough examples of people who blame their parents for their own shortcomings and they'll likely continue blaming their parents right up until the day when they too drop dead. Here, there are a lot of people like that.

*I'm no better than the rest of them. Even though my mom died more than thirty years ago, I hold her responsible for my inability to sustain intimate friendships and for many of my bad habits, such as constantly judging and criticizing people. To this day no one ever lives up to the high expectations she instilled in me. She was very clever. While my dad is an easy-going and quiet man who grew up on a farm in rural Canada, my mom was demanding and opinionated; she grew up in the city of Toronto. Farm-boy dad and city-girl mom—they fought like cats and dogs, with my mom doing most of the yelling, "You should've been a hermit and never got married." and "What I say to you goes in one ear and out the other; I might as well be talking to the wall!" and "There's no rhyme nor reason to what you're doing!" and "If there's a hard way to do something, you'll figure it out!" She was very critical. My friends called her the Wicked Witch of the West because she regularly yelled at them too. All of these fights were nasty and I'm sure they scarred me for life.*

I had a few conflicts when I was living at home. By the age of



seven or eight, I realized meditation meant doing things with awareness and I began a lengthy series of experiments with various techniques. A gentleman, who lived in an old building thought to be haunted, taught me how to concentrate on a black dot, and another gentleman, brought into my elementary school class by the principal, taught me and others about hypnotism. I was just a young boy. Yet, a special kind of knowledge developed. For instance, if I focused my attention correctly, I could see what was on the other side of a building. These types of knowledges were not without their drawbacks. It soon became obvious that my way of looking at the world differed from the way that most other people looked at the world.

I stopped accepting their run of the mill explanations for things, which led to conflicts. Initially, I was pleased to share my uncommon knowledges with others, such as proving to my older sister that I could indeed see what was happening on the other side of our house. She twisted my ear and scolded me, "You must have looked before! Stop lying!" So, because of these types of conflicts, I stopped telling people about my unusual knowledges and experiences. With the onset of puberty at around age fourteen, with kāma-rāga starting, I lost these special knowledges and turned towards more typical teenage activities, like cycling and photography. By sixteen, my formal meditation training had begun with Sumathipāla Na Himi.

*We've talked about this before. But again, why Sumathipala Na Himi?*

Sumathipāla Na Himi had a lot of good qualities and a good base of meditation. I was interested in developing the same for myself.

*And the life of a bhikkhu?*

I wanted a free life.

# Teachers and Students

Teachers have this extreme form of craving, this upādāna, towards their students, and students have this extreme form of craving towards their teachers. Upādāna is almost as strong in relationships between teachers and students as it is between parents and children, and it functions in much the same way. Teachers want their students to learn and act in accordance with the teachings, and students want their teachers to be, just like parents, always kind and compassionate—the effects of upādāna work both ways; it's a place for anger to arise. When students refuse to learn their lessons, teachers get angry; equally, when teachers aren't kind and compassionate, the students get angry. That's clinging. It's the kindness and compassion that cares for the children and teaches the students. So, sometimes it doesn't happen like that; sometimes, the kindness is absent and the children and students get upset.

Kindness and compassion cannot be present at all times, even when it is expected to be there at all the times. Where the disciplinary actions of the teacher are too painful, just like parents who are too severe on their children, the student stops accepting anything and everything the teacher says and does, even when the teacher is doing his best to be kind and helpful. In some measure, both teacher and student have to share the blame for conflicts, as it's partly the teacher's upādāna and partly the student's upādāna—both have different expectations of the other. If a conflict turns vicious, the teacher and student may part their ways, forever. Sadly, some teachers beat their students.

*My grade five teacher didn't like me clowning around in class, and she'd either send me out into the hall, down to see the principal, or give me a detention.*

That was a major problem for me. I wouldn't learn. I was against

learning when I was in those early grades of school because my interests lay with meditation and not with what was happening in class. For example, I had a good English teacher and was given lots of opportunity to learn English. And yet, to this day, I don't speak English and we need a translator to communicate. I was just plain contrary. My English teacher would say this is the letter 'A', this is the letter 'B', and so on. I would say to her, pointing to the letter 'B', "Why don't we call this one 'A'?" and, then pointing to the letter 'A', "Why don't we call this one 'B'?" I pulled the same stunt when learning the Sinhalese characters—I always modified them, dropping a tail here or adding a dash there, always something different than what the teacher wanted. Teachers didn't like my attitude at all and I had lots of problems at school. All the same, I did attend school and was pushed through the system. Right up until grade seven, if there were thirty students in my class, I was right at the bottom. Number thirty! Things got so bad in my classes that no one wanted to sit beside me. Eventually though, from grade eight onwards, instead of going my own way and against the teachers and their teachings, I followed the way of my teachers, started accepting their teachings, and then was first in the class. Topped all the students in the class!

*Are some teachers too strict?*

When I was nineteen or twenty years of age, I studied meditation for a few months with a bhikkhu who more or less physically forced all his students to meditate. He was a tough disciplinarian and he regularly yelled at each one of us, "Sit!" Everything was this way with this teacher and it was all too common to hear, "Is this why you came to take sil?" or "Go and sit!" or "Why did you bother coming here?" or "You're just wasting your time." These sort of remarks were unnecessary and really shook up the meditators, especially the young teenagers who were making as much effort as possible, sometimes sitting for three or four hours

in one session. If he saw me up and about, even though I had only minutes before finished a three hour sit, he would say to me, "Is this the way you meditate?" And any sort of pleasantness in the whole activity vanished. This teacher had no use at all for trivial things, such as books or dwellings made of bricks and concrete. He would ask us, "Why do you have so many books? Throw them away!" He also said, "Go and live in a hut made of fronds. Get used to living like that."

Upon consideration, this meditation teacher was in principle correct—discipline and effort are required for progress in meditation, there were no books at the time of the Buddha, and all the halls in those ancient times were indeed made of fronds. We cannot say he was wrong. The Sinhala word we use for a village temple is pansala, which literally means a building made out of fronds. He was right. And he was a skilled practitioner and definitely thought, "Since I attained a high mental state by practising hard, my students will also attain the same high mental state if they too practise hard." There's no denying he was strict and no denying he yelled at us, but we have to remember that his tough methods were based on kindness and compassion, and not based on any ill-will or hatred. He was sincerely trying to help us in the same way that his teacher had helped him, which was the only way to liberation that this teacher knew. That was his experience.

Nevertheless, even though this tough method of meditation had worked on a personal level for this teacher, it did not work for each and every one of this teacher's students: the method yielded good results for some students and then, yielded no results at all for others. One general method of meditation never yields good results for an assortment of students because each and every student is unique and thus requires his or her own unique method of meditation. One size doesn't fit all. "It is not easy to teach the dhamma," the Buddha states in the Udayi

Sutta.<sup>67</sup> Strong encouragement is one thing; that's okay. Pushing students beyond their limits is something else. I have had enough of harsh treatment.

*Compared to this tyrant, you're an easygoing old softy! In fact, I enjoy our talks and find your teachings remarkably helpful. Does this mean I have upādāna towards you?*

And I have upādāna towards my closest students. I shout at them when they aren't the way I want them to be, and then afterwards of course there's some fear of retaliation. The more intense the upādāna, the more intense the shouting.

*I certainly get angry with you often enough.*

You're just a little bit upset with my ways, nothing of any substance to worry about. And I've never given you a fierce scolding, nothing near the scoldings Sumathipāla Na Himi used to give to his students. Things were much worse with him.

*Your teachings can be pretty tough, and from time to time fear comes up. I get scared.*

Sometimes the mind misunderstands. If you're afraid of me, then you're not much better than a child who is afraid of a gunnysack blowing in the wind—there's nothing there.

*I'm doing what I can.*

There are weak walls and strong walls. While weak walls are easily damaged and crumble when children throw rocks against them, the strong walls stand firm and the rocks bounce off. We need to be a little stronger, like a well-constructed wall. Many of my students are intelligent, well versed in the Buddha's teachings found in the Tipiṭaka, and meditators. I have students who have been coming to see me on a regular basis for twenty years, and, from what I hear of their troubles with domestic employees, with colleagues at work, with friends, and with family, it's clear that many of my students are bursting with

jealousy, envy and ill-will. When I point out this strange inconsistency between their ample knowledge of the Buddha's teachings and their behaviour, they tell me, "I'll overcome my negative qualities when I attain to sotāpatti." These students of mine are waiting for the attainment to sotāpatti, thinking the attainment somehow comes along first and the overcoming of defilements, their kilesas, automatically comes along with that attainment.

*To my way of thinking, what your students are saying makes sense, that my negative qualities would be destroyed upon the attainment of stream entry. We have a similar event in Christianity—God bestows His Grace upon us.*

You are looking at things backwards, from a wrong stand.

*I can't see thinking in any other way.*

Even if you live for an eon thinking in this way, you will not attain to sotāpatti! It won't happen because you're not thinking maybe it's the reduction of your defilements that in fact makes you into a sotāpanna. The overcoming of negative qualities has to come first; it's the precondition that leads to the attainment, not the other way round. We can't be waiting the whole of our lives for defilements to magically disappear. No, defilements are decreased and sotāpatti is attained by living in a way that decreases defilements and leads to the attainment.

Good meditation teachers use various methods to bring their students around to understanding the nature of things, which means students see their defilements very clearly and experience a reduction in these negative qualities. Then, with any luck at all, armed with this brand new understanding, the students make the effort to change the habits that lead to the arising of the defilements. Let's say they contact an object that brings out jealousy. Good students immediately recognize how their minds are reacting to the object and make an effort to decrease the

jealousy—that's where a good student applies the understanding gained through meditation. He or she tries to decrease the defilement right there and then, at that exact moment in daily life. And it's called right effort, sammā-vāyāma, because it's quite a substantial effort that students have to apply in order to change bad habits. It's a difficult process of gradual training; this seeing clearly and changing happens slowly.

*Your teachings force me to take an honest look at myself, and oftentimes I don't like what I see.*

Many of my students don't like the meditation objects I give them.

*When I meditated with you, we ended up working with bones and it was an entirely unpleasant experience. Bones even made me physically sick at times. So, if you're giving your other students similar objects of meditation, I don't blame them for not liking these sorts of objects.*

Not everyone gets bones, nor does everyone have the same experiences that you had. And in any case, what we're talking about is hypothetical, as these days I rarely give meditation objects to any of my students.

*Why not?*

Because I don't see any good reason for it. Now, I have been associating closely all these long years with hundreds of students, many of whom practised hard, and, in so doing, made real gains in understanding the nature of their minds. They saw the receding of defilements from their systems and the absence of defilements—no kāma-rāga, ill-will, jealousy, restlessness, or envy. Practicing correctly is hard work both for the student and the teacher.

Through sincere talks with them, however, I've discovered that the vast majority of my students make no effort at all to change

their bad habits. In spite of all the meditation, all their understanding, all the dhamma studies, and all the visits to the temple, they continue to live in ways that lead to the arising of defilements. In spite of knowing how to relate to objects wisely and how to live in ways that overcome defilements, they still relate to objects unwisely. They indulge, even when they know that doing so is wrong and harmful. This is just plain peculiar. Inexplicable. It's what we defined before as ignorance, avijjā. Far from applying the understanding they gained through meditation, it's clear that nothing fundamental has changed in their lives. Most of my students aren't even thinking along the lines that changing their lives is necessary. On the contrary, whatever mind-state the student brought with him or her into this current birth, that mind-state continues on. Whenever an object arises in the student's experience, say an object that brings up jealousy, the student is back to reacting to the object in the exact same way as he or she did at birth, just as jealous as ever.

*If memory serves, Gandhi said, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." To make these changes to one's life is not easy and not a lot of fun. In my life, for instance, I'd have to change the way I interact with women. I think you're expecting a lot, maybe too much, from your students.*

It's difficult for me, as a teacher, to accept that, however much you seem to know the dhamma and however much you meditate, when you're with a woman, the way you react to her seems to be in contradiction to all your knowledge of the dhamma and all your many years of meditation. No change is to be seen. You and I have spent a long time together, off and on now for more than ten years, and you do indeed understand some important things. Yet, you still think about women in the same old way.

*I'm not always thinking about women.*



No, of course not and you're not always in the company of women either. A teacher can only get a reasonable look into a student's level of practice when the student is in a situation that brings out defilements. A teacher waits and watches. For example, before taking up the practice, *kāma-cchanda*, the indulging in the excitement of sensuality, might have been there in the student. The teacher waits for the student to come in contact with objects that previously brought out sensual passion, *kāma-rāga*, and previously brought out *kāma-cchanda*, and then the teacher watches to see if the student still indulges in the excitement of sensuality. I have gone through this process of teaching and waiting and watching so many times with so many students. And, according to the students I have associated with through long personal experience, they do not genuinely practise, do not exert themselves in meditation, and do not decrease their defilements. This is terribly frustrating and the reason why I'm reluctant to teach. I have no students.

*That's not true. You have dozens of really dedicated and hard-working students of meditation.*

While you like the idea that you're a student of meditation and that I am your teacher, to all intents and purposes, I am not teaching you nor anyone else meditation, not really. You and I are just having a few nice kindergarten level discussions about the teachings of the Buddha. I am not saying being in kindergarten is a complete waste of time—at least you are in school. No, I am merely making the point that I won't go beyond a kindergarten level of meditation instruction and start teaching you more advanced levels because I have found there is almost no point. I have seen far too many strong students whose defilements laid dormant for years and years, deeply suppressed way below the surface of their daily lives. Yes, to my measurement, it looked as if these students of mine had made some real progress; it looked as if their defilements were

overcome. Then, when a particular set of conditions arose, the jealousy and ill-will also arose and I saw that they hadn't made much progress, which also means my teachings were not of much use at all. I really dislike this result. Since my measurement of a student's level of practice has proven incorrect way too many times, I try to avoid making any measurements. I work, the student works, and then what? So, I have to ask myself, "Why should I bother making substantial effort in trying to develop my students if my students fail to develop?" Oftentimes, it seems that it's not even possible for me to help my students.

*This is crazy. I'm studying meditation with you and making progress.*

I can of course offer solutions to problems connected with sickness, dukkha, or meditation. However, many people come to see me in a worldly way to solve worldly problems. They're not coming to see me as a bhikkhu to solve spiritual problems or to see me as a meditation teacher to solve meditation problems. Quite the opposite. For example, knowing I'm friends with a few senior bureaucrats, they want, at times demand, me to intervene on their behalf to sort out land disputes, government applications, or the like. A lot of people come looking for employment. So here, these people are clinging strongly to the idea that I can somehow solve their worldly problems—all that is upādāna and nothing to do with the dhamma. In these types of personal situations, I cannot be the way I really should be.

*And what's your way?*

My way is to distance myself from the world, from the objects of the world, and from the problems of the world, which is opposite to the way these people are going. They are worldly people who are leading worldly lives. Their ways of thinking are different from my ways of thinking. I am not a worldly person; I don't want to get deeply involved with the world. When these

people demand, though, that I intervene on their behalf, I do feel an obligation to make a few compromises and get involved to a limited extent because, if I don't do what these people want, there's a good chance they will be disappointed, annoyed, or angry. And the anger may be directed at that bureaucrat. Thus, to soften any wounded feelings and to avoid conflicts, I say them, "I'll do what I can to help." And then that's the end of it, as I have little or no influence with senior bureaucrats and the mechanics of government are full of twists and turns, even if the bureaucrat did want to help. Surely, nothing ever comes out of a request from me! Worldly problems are difficult to resolve in a way that does not hurt anyone. It is difficult to live like that.

*Right now, you're only giving me half the story—you told me earlier there were times when you had assessed some of your students as being very poor and they turned out to be very good. And I'm not sure I like the idea of being in kindergarten.*

I am not saying these people have no good qualities. They do have many good qualities. However, I just have to be more cautious about measuring them because invariably, when they contact the right object, their reaction to the object is not in accordance to the mark or judgment I give to them; they often react in a totally different and foolish way that causes problems for me. So, because of bad experiences, I no longer think, "This person knows how to relate to the world with wisdom; this person knows the dhamma well, and this other person is very developed." This is a personal matter and it has little bearing on your life. What's more, I am not even necessary to you, as almost anyone can teach you what you need to know.

*That's a gloomy scenario.*

No, not gloomy. We need to see things clearly. There is simply something amiss—either I'm teaching in the wrong way, the students are practising in the wrong way, or the Buddha's

teaching is wrong. And I don't believe the Buddha's teaching is wrong.

*This frustration, is it another example of upādāna?*

It's a defect.

*What's defective?*

It's a defect in my character that, in order for me to teach students how to meditate, they should genuinely practise and exert themselves. To want their defilements decreased, at least a little bit, is a defect in me. While I know I shouldn't have this expectation of my students and know I shouldn't have this attitude towards teaching, since I dislike the results so much or should I say I dislike the lack of results from teaching, I no longer teach meditation and only have classes where a group of us discuss aspects of the Buddha's teachings. I have come around to this way of relating to people—if someone comes here to our centre and needs food, I give them food; or if they want to take sīl, I might give them sīl; if they want clothes or help to find a house, I try to find them clothes and a house; if someone needs a place of rest and seclusion for awhile, that's fine too. So, whatever people want, I say, "Fine." I help people in these ways—food, sīl, clothes, housing, a place of rest—and that's it! I don't think of doing anything beyond that level of help, not on my own initiative.

*You're forever giving me lots of support.*

I'm just acting in ways of common humanity.

When foreigners seek permission to stay at our centre for awhile, I make a quick measurement as to whether they'll fit in or be a nuisance. If I think the foreigners fit in well enough, I let them stay. Even if our centre is full to capacity, I always do my best to make some form of lodging available for the foreigners, in whatever way I can. I cannot be thinking, "Now, this man

David is from the rich country of Canada and our centre is not a rich place. He should stay somewhere else until we get to know him better." No, I can't be thinking like that. Granted, my measurements went wrong at times and the foreigner only wanted to use our centre as a cheap hotel; at other times, my measurements worked out quite well.

## Bhikkhus and Lay People

*What about the clinging displayed in religion?*

I have to be careful what I say about the upādāna in religion, such as the intense craving between bhikkhus and laity, because many bhikkhus and many lay people are totally against any honest discussion about what is happening in our Buddhist religious community. This is an extremely sensitive issue that hits far too close to home. Briefly, I can tell you that, when bhikkhus inform lay people, relatives, and friends of their annual almsgiving ceremony, the bhikkhus expect all of them to readily oblige—this is upādāna. And similarly, when lay people inform bhikkhus of ceremonies in their homes, they expect the bhikkhus to also readily oblige. Many lay people insist bhikkhus come whenever they call them for a dāna, and expect the bhikkhus to be enthusiastic and pleasant. In both cases, one party says the other party has a duty to behave in a specific manner—but again, it's clinging. A lot of bhikkhus and lay people get angry if some small thing goes wrong in a Buddhist ceremony. It's rare that bhikkhus or lay people are free from expectations and misunderstandings.

*You once said that craving can be used wisely. Can clinging be used wisely too? I like to think that my clinging to the dhamma is a good thing.*

Although we spoke about kusala-taṇhā, what we called kusala-cchanda, the beneficial road of experience, and also spoke about akusala-taṇhā, harmful craving, we can't speak about any kusala-upādāna, wholesome clinging. No, nothing good ever comes from upādāna. With the arising of upādāna, clinging, only harm follows—it's impossible to say that things are any other way. Nevertheless, it goes almost without saying that clinging might arise towards something that is beneficial or arise during the performance of an otherwise wholesome activity, such as studying the dhamma or giving a dāna. On your mother's death anniversary, you paid for and helped prepare a meal for the residents of our community. No problem, that was a kind action and an appropriate form of dāna. However, if there was taṇhā and clinging towards the dāna you gave in memory of your mother, you would have disliked others participating in it. Many people who give a dāna think, "I will lose part of the merit because others are involved."—that is upādāna. Clinging is the extreme form of taṇhā. It is never helpful or beneficial in any way, even in the performance of wholesome actions.

*Yesterday, an elderly Buddhist said to me, "Buddhism is far superior to Christianity; it should never even be taught to Western Christians."*

Why not?

*He said I'm only accepting the teachings of the Buddha that fit with my Christian views and with Western psychotherapy, and I'm rejecting the teachings that don't fit, such as the law of kamma and rebirth. According to this man, since I'm an outsider to the Buddhist culture and religion, my writings on the teachings of the Buddha are helping to undermine the true teachings of the Buddha. This hurt my feelings, as I'm doing the best I can.*

You need to talk with him. You need to tell him that his words

hurt you.

*I'll try.*

The older generation is generally less tolerant than the younger generation. When this man talks about religion—you say he's a Buddhist—he would have to talk about the dhamma without any clinging to the dhamma, for his words to be in accordance with dhamma!

*Thanks for the joke. It cheers me up a bit.*

Dogs bark at the moon; the moon doesn't care. Just forget what he said. My Catholic relatives used to give me many books on the teachings of Christ and I used to read them, even when I was living in Buddhist communities and even when Buddhists told me in no uncertain terms, "You should not read Christian books." So, I hid them! Anyway, that was their view. It's okay, many Buddhists have upādāna towards their own race and towards the Buddha's teachings; the terms Sinhalese and Buddhist are considered by many to be synonyms. They're clinging to the religion, the race, and the sīla. I like to think that, at the time of the Buddha, people of different religions lived together far more harmoniously than they do today. More accepting. All the friendship and compassion seemed to be there back then. Today, for various reasons, there are many misunderstandings between the different religious groups. The Buddha had no qualms about discussing and living in a friendly way with people of other religions. In the first sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, he says, "If anyone scolds me, don't be angry and, if anyone praises me, don't be pleased."

We are forever meeting people of different religions, different views, and different ways of thinking. People who are outside your religion and culture generally insist that their religion and culture is correct, and that their values and codes apply. These people have the right to their views. We don't have to prove our

views to be correct or superior. Leave it all at different. Having differences need not be a problem. Some think one way; some think another way. Where's the problem? A person may experience nibbāna; yet, he or she still needs to know how to live in this world, a world that's full of defilements. Each one of us, regardless of who we are, still has to live according to the way of the world. Some people may not accept or even be up to the task of accepting what you insist that they accept. Everyone thinks differently. You think one way; I think another way. I can't think in the same way that you or any other person thinks. How you live is also one way; everyone else in the world lives in another way. We don't have to make a problem out of our differences. When Muslims and Christians and Hindus come here to our meditation centre, I talk with them about meditation.

*I often wonder if you're actually a Buddhist.*

Religion is connected to views. If the teachings expounded by humans are beneficial, wise, and true, I accept those teachings—whether they come from the Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, or arahats. These teachers talked about the importance of practising kindness; they didn't talk about killing people and killing animals. Mohammed said, "Help those who are in need." If a person is poor, we must help. There are those who need help and don't ask, and then there are others who ask and don't need. And sometimes, we even have to help extremely rich people. I have no interest in religion, race, caste, or nation—just true nature. Of all these good and worthwhile teachings, though, the teachings of the Buddha are first and foremost with me. That is my way.

*I don't see a lot of tolerance in Buddhist countries, not that Christian countries are much better. Religion is intolerant.*

What I am saying is not a religion. The Buddha's teaching is not a religion. If what the Buddha taught becomes a religion, then there is the upādāna. And the form of Buddhism we have in Sri



Lanka is far more tolerant than the form of Buddhism you'll find in some other countries. We here in Sri Lanka are not quite as intolerant as you might at first think. You're a foreigner from an exceptional country and you don't have a good understanding of our history and culture. The clinging to the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka runs at say 40% or even less; whereas, the clinging to the Buddhist religion in some other countries may run as high as 90%. Other religions have little chance of spreading their teachings in those countries. This is not the case here. Despite being in the majority in Sri Lanka, Buddhists allow other religions to spread and thrive.

*We can't forget that Hindus, Christians, and Muslims make up a significant portion of Sri Lanka's population. Hard to ignore millions of people.*

More than that, the Buddhist people of Sri Lanka are a reasonable people and, almost without exception, they think it's quite alright for all people of all religions to follow the religion of their choice. All forms of religion have the opportunity to thrive in Sri Lanka.

*And the war? Aren't Buddhists fighting Hindus?*

That's the propaganda you're getting from your Canadian media, conceiving this conflict in the North-East to be a religious or ethnic war. It's not. The majority of Buddhist people have no anti-Hindu feelings, nor do Sinhalese people have any anti-Tamil feelings. The war is against the movement. And anyone who is truly religious definitely doesn't have any ideas like that.

*Thousands were killed in the 1983 riots.*

Those riots were provoked and organized. These days, it's rare that people of one community attack the people of another community because everyone is much better informed about what is actually going on in the country. We are now getting into a specific political topic and getting away from our general

discussion on upādāna.

*This is clinging, isn't it?*

What?

*Wars. Nationalism. Patriotism. Religion.*

Yes, those are types of upādāna for some people and not types of upādāna for others; they fall within the category of attavādupādāna, clinging to personality belief. Many people manage to let go of these types of upādāna.

*The war is so sad.*

Everyone, whether they be Sri Lankan or Canadian or Buddhist or Christian, has some type of upādāna, unless they attain path knowledge. Canadians are the same as Sri Lankans, in this regard.

## Accepting

*Can we talk about women instead of wars?*

That's clinging. If you can't find happiness with your own objects, ārammaṇas, why do you expect to find happiness with a woman's objects?

*A woman who shares my interest in meditation would be good for me—I'd make progress. Maybe together, we'd both make some progress and besides, there's the companionship.*

You're expecting women to be kind and supportive, in the same way a little boy expects his parents to be kind. We must stop clinging to these sorts of mental formations, saṅkhāras. Let them go. It's impossible for any other person, event, or activity to make you happy. It's not going to happen. Decrease this

dependency on external objects.

*Is that what I'm trying to do, going out to beautiful and fun things because I'm not happy enough? Movies, restaurants, good books, friends, travel—all in the pursuit of happiness?*

"Figs!" said the Buddha. All those objects are unstable. You're clinging to insubstantial things.

*Figs?*

Yes, you're expecting beautiful blossoms from a fig tree. Fig trees, though, don't yield beautiful blossoms. Just the figs come. You can fertilize and water and care for a fig tree, all with the expectation of getting lovely blossoms. Still, despite all your efforts, the fig tree never yields a single blossom.

*I've known some wonderful women over the years.*

I too am happy when I have good company. A short time ago, I had a nice visit from a former student. However, was I sad and lonely when he left? No, definitely not because I don't base my happiness on whether or not he drops in for a visit. What happens when these wonderful women aren't in your life?

*Oh, I generally miss them, wonder why I lost them, and hope someone else soon comes along to fill the void.*

"Separation from those you love is dukkha," said the Buddha.<sup>68</sup> Our friends come and go, and are subject to change; they're not reliable sources of happiness. This is a danger. External objects will never make you happy, not in the long run.

*You're making me question my interest in writing because I get a lot of happiness from writing, at least when it goes well. There's also some pain, I suppose.*

Why do you spend so much time writing?

*Writing is my way of learning what you tell me about the*

*Buddha's teachings. And I really do want to learn and use everything that you're telling me. But in those times when my writing goes well, I forget all about that goal and simply enjoy the fact that my writing is going well. Yes, okay, I know I have a certain amount of conceit. You've pointed that out often enough. And I know I need to be aware of that conceit. Then again, when my writing goes badly, of course, I get frustrated. Maybe frustration is more useful than enjoyment?*

I can't say being frustrated with your writing is any more useful than enjoying it. No. If you can turn your mind towards vipassanā, see these mental states as anattā, that they are short-lived and passing through, then you could say frustration is beneficial. Otherwise, as a result of being frustrated with your writing or any other object or activity for that matter, perhaps meditating, you will get fed up, go away, and do something else that is more enjoyable and useful. Frustration isn't more beneficial than enjoyment, unless you can look at the nature of that mental state and turn towards vipassanā.

*Everyone wants to be happy. I don't know anyone who wants to be sad.*

What we create in our minds determines our happiness or sadness. When we accept the true nature of conditioned objects—just the three characteristics: anicca, dukkha, anattā—we are happy. Happiness or sadness is all according to how we take the object. When we reject the three characteristics and expect objects to be permanent, satisfactory, and substantial, we are sad. We're always getting fooled by our delusions about the nature of things. Wherever we go, whomever we meet, and whatever we do, we expect these places, people, and activities to behave in a certain way—we already have the upādāna—and, when things don't work out the way we expect and want, then the dukkha arises. Dukkha doesn't come out of nowhere; it arises out of our distorted perception about the nature of objects. Such

expectations are unrealistic and all wrong.

*No matter what you may say, there are people I like a lot and people I simply can't stand.*

The Buddha also said, "Association with those you loath is dukkha."<sup>69</sup> There's nothing wrong with being happy and having fun with friends. The problem isn't other people; the problem lies in your expectations of other people—the clinging. In the same way garden-fresh mushrooms always come along with a little dirt, the objects we find so pleasurable also always come along with a little sadness. It's the same for our friends and colleagues—there's an element of danger and sadness. So, we must watch our expectations.

Many years ago, I went off to Burma with great expectations to develop my practice. Most every day, I meditated for ten to twenty hours. Well, I found the meditation to be unnecessary and fruitless for me, as their teachings did not take me beyond Sumathipāla Na Himi's teachings. I also went for alms in a few of Burma's poorest neighbourhoods and, even though I often had to walk through masses of animal and human excrement, I found going for alms to be surprisingly enjoyable. The roads in rural Burma were very dirty! Meditating should have been rewarding and walking through excrement should have been disgusting. The opposite was true. On a separate trip in 1985, I travelled with a group to India and ended up in jail for three days. Again, what I expected didn't happen.

*How did you end up in jail?*

The Indian police suspected a member of my group of swindling some locals. And, since the police didn't know who was the thief, they jailed everyone in my group to catch the thief. Jail wasn't my idea of India. We should be able to accept whatever happens, not just what we expect and want to happen. When we accept an experience for what it is, we will get so much more from the

experience. I also spent some time with a group of naked ascetics while I was in India and, though I was doing vipassanā and wasn't following their form of practice, I did consider joining them and living the life of a naked ascetic. I didn't join them. The committee at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre expected me to return from India and run the centre. Abbots have responsibilities. The more we are entangled in the world, the more difficult it is to disentangle ourselves from the world.

*Should I drop the objects of sensuality that cause me a lot of pain?*

When you get a taste for the dhamma, you naturally distance yourself from sensuality. Reading suttas helps to get this taste.

*And what makes you happy?*

Meditation and teaching. Sometimes, you find it amusing when I am in trouble—that's not good. And there are those who are happy when their enemies are in trouble. American troops, for example, were happy about Saddam Hussein's capture, trial, conviction and then execution. Again, that's wrong. Happiness without anger is okay. Sharmini was happy to lend her vehicle to our centre; that's a short-lived form of happiness. I told her we used her vehicle to help many needy people; that's a more enduring form of happiness for her. We are happy when we contribute to the happiness of others. If you are happy to decrease your defilements, then that's an even more enduring form of happiness. We should be getting our happiness from a settled mind. Phone me when you're happy!

*My mind is rarely settled—the defilements are out of control a lot of the time. A disaster.*

Good meditators don't have expectations about these things and are never disappointed. Arahats don't have expectations about anything at all; only kindness and compassion and no upādāna—there's the true happiness.

*To act without expectations is a very difficult thing to do.*

We must try because, when we act without upādāna and any expectation, then maybe we will actually get something from the experience or the person. Of course, what I am saying is difficult. People are always living within expectations, with preconceived ideas. What I am saying is an ideal situation; it is very difficult. However, when we really do act without upādāna, then obviously the results are extraordinary.



*Of course you are uncertain, Kalamas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering' — then you should abandon them.*

Kalama Sutta<sup>70</sup>

## 15. Craving → Clinging—part 2

**Pemasiri Thera:** We really need to talk about the Pali word *upaya* when we are talking about clinging, *upādāna*. *Upaya* is our natural tendency to engage with the objects of our sense doors. When we direct our attention to our eyes, ears, noses, tongues, bodies, or minds, we experience a myriad of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, feelings, perceptions, and mental formations. And then almost immediately, the thoughts start rolling along. We don't just contact and experience the objects of our sense doors. No, we engage with them and take our first steps on the road to clinging. *Upaya*, engagement, always precedes *upādāna*.

We engage with what we see and hear and feel and perceive because these things sit so very close to us. Indeed, we engage with the objects of our sense doors in the same way we engage with our closest and most intimate friends. Whenever we meet close friends, we remember the good old days and may well talk with them for hours on end. We are forever engaging, *upaya*,



with whatever is close at hand. When we're in a room with 100 people and take a look around, the first person we see is the person who is sitting right next to us, and then only afterwards do we see the other 99 people in the room. This is the nature of engagement; it takes on whatever object is closest.

Whether an object be wholesome, kusala, or be unwholesome, akusala, once we engage with that object, the way we think and behave changes accordingly. Since caring mothers want their children to engage in wholesome activities, they place wholesome toys close to their children. A mother, however, may discover that her five year-old son is joyfully playing with a cobra! Of course, the good mother wants to protect her son. Yet, she doesn't want to scare her son by yelling at him, as that too could be fatal. So, she must somehow engage her son in something harmless, and away from the cobra. She calls out, "Son, would you like to have an ice cream?" Her son leaves the cobra, goes into the house for an ice cream, and is safe from harm. By changing the object that was closest to her son, she guided him to safety; his unwholesome and in this case dangerous engagement changed to a wholesome engagement. Just as readily, a wholesome engagement can change to an unwholesome engagement. One or two months ago, you drove past a Colombo club called Splash. The seeing of Splash was an accident. It was an unplanned and minor incident. All the same, the sight of Splash was enough for you to turn your attention away from all your good work here at our meditation centre and turn it towards having a beer at Splash, not a particularly wholesome activity.

*David: Just one beer.*

We must remember what the Buddha told the ascetic Bāhiya, "There must be in what is seen, just the seen; in the heard, just the heard; and in the experienced, just the experience." The Upaya Vagga of the Khandha Saṃyutta explains this topic of

engagement further. You could also read the Saccavibhaṅga Sutta,<sup>71</sup> and the commentaries.<sup>72</sup>

*Suttas, suttas, and more suttas—it's too much.*

This is not a path we walk in darkness. A person who meditates without reading the suttas is like a blind elephant who wanders through the jungle. It'll get thirsty, fall into a pit, and die. Read also the Sotapatti Vagga in Saṃyutta Nikāya.

## Craving, Conceit and Views

Our minds' engagement with objects takes the form of craving, conceit, and views—these three sit close to our hearts and minds. When you first arrived here at our centre in Kanduboda, I saw you with my eyes. The sight of you was the object of my attention. Then immediately, upaya started working and I took the seeing of you with craving, conceit and views. My thoughts went off in an entirely different direction. I didn't just see you. No, I engaged. I took the seeing of you with craving and thought, "I am happy to see David because he continues to study the dhamma and it has been a couple years since we last met." Craving got mixed up with the seeing. After that, I took the seeing of you with conceit and thought, "Oh, only I can teach David. He is a good student and I'm the best teacher for him!" And finally, I took the seeing of you with views and thought, "David must practise the Pemasiri method of meditation!"

*What's the Pemasiri method?*

Yes, once upon a time, I claimed to have my own method of meditation. This conceit arose out of studying many different methods of meditation with many good teachers. At the time I thought, "If I want to teach meditation, then I should know all

methods of meditation.” Now, I have collected all those methods together and thrown them into the sea! They’re all absolutely useless! With some methods of meditation, the concentration comes fast—wrong concentration. There is only one complete method of meditation in the world and I claim no ownership: the practical method of the Buddha.

Earlier, I said engagement, *upaya*, always precedes clinging, *upādāna*. We could just as easily say engagement is clinging.

*How can engagement be the same as clinging? Sounds contradictory.*

Engagement with objects takes the form of craving, conceit, and views—that’s the *avijjā*, our ignorance. When we allow thoughts of craving, conceit, and views to proliferate for a long time, thoughts of craving, conceit, and views develop into clinging. We all have three ways of clinging:

- Clinging with craving, *tañhā-upādāna*
- Clinging with conceit, *māna-upādāna*
- Clinging with views, *ditthi-upādāna*

Clinging is simply the continuation of the craving, conceit, and views for a long time. Since our minds get established in these objects, we hold onto them with a very firm grip and take the risk of a birth in a lower-world, that’s unless we attain path knowledge. Even the person who has attained path and fruit still has the tendency to cling to life because life is the closest thing to all of us. There is the will to live, the wanting to go on.

### Clinging with Craving

Were you ever sick when you were a child? Were you ever afraid?

*Yes, I was often sick and afraid.*

And to whom did you run for comfort?

*My mom.*

Almost everyone answers in the same way. When we Sri Lankans are in great pain or our old age becomes unbearable, we cry out, “Mother!” The clinging we have for our mothers is an extremely strong force; it’s *tañhā-upādāna* in a big way. Thus, whenever I give a talk about clinging with craving, mother is the example that immediately comes to mind. I came to understand *tañhā-upādāna* through my relationship with my own mother. At the time when I was in my late teens, I still occasionally crawled into her bed! My sisters laughed at me for going towards her in that way. I even found comfort in the fragrance of my mother’s clothes. Then once I ordained and was rarely visiting the family home, she used to visit me at the meditation centre—those were *really* bad days for me, as I had to wait for her arrival. I waited and waited. My mother scolded me for not letting her go. One time, while meditating out in the jungle at a hectic pace, I was very sick, and there was no medicine available nor anyone to care for me. I remembered my mother and cried.

*I too loved my mom very much.*

It’s natural. Many years later, when I was the abbot at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre, my mother taught me a good lesson. She was sick at the time and lying in her deathbed at the hospital. My sister phoned and gave me the news, “The doctor said mother is going to die any day now. He recommended that we take her home and make her as comfortable as possible.” I agreed and, despite my position at Kanduboda, dropped all my duties and went home to see my mother. She was in bed, semi-conscious, and did look close to death. My sister said, “I’m sure mother will die in an hour or two. Even though she is weak, she can still hear us. You better recite the five precepts with her.” I

almost shouted into my mother's ear, "I'm now going to give you the five precepts. Prepare yourself to accept them." I should have known better than to do this because she replied in a faint voice, "Are you mad? Are you out of your mind? This is not the time to be taking the five precepts. What are the five precepts to a dying person?" I was shocked and then upset with my sister for leading me into this situation. I realized right then and there that my mother was right: there is no point in giving the five precepts to a dying person. Her mind was sound, even though she was so close to death.

My mother didn't die that day. On the contrary, she lived on for many months, and I visited her as often as possible, which was almost every day. I would leave Kanduboda at around 9 p.m., have a brief chat with her at the old family home, and return to Kanduboda by 2 a.m. These visits always left me tired the next day. After about one month, my mother said, "What is the meaning of all this visiting? You have better things to do. You don't have to come here each and every day. Do your own work." So, I cut back on the visiting. I remember one visit when she was sitting up in bed and my elder brother asked her, "Are you afraid to die?" My brother also got it from her: "Just think what you are saying!" Then she asked him, "Why were we born in the first place?" Not surprisingly, my brother did not have a reply. Mother had a reply, "If a person is born, that person must die. Death is not a problem." I had some idea of my mother's way of thinking, but sometimes we looked like fools in her presence. My mother was quite developed.

She lay in that semi-conscious state for three months, which dragged into four months. Thus, with her suffering in this sickness, and with me feeling that all this travelling up and down between Kanduboda and our family home was a waste of time, my craving for her was waning and I couldn't help thinking, "I wish she would die." My thoughts had turned in a strange and unexpected way and I couldn't keep them to myself,

telling my brothers, “It’d be good if our mother passes away now. She ought to die.” Of course in short order, my sisters got to know what I was thinking and they were shocked, as they considered it to be quite rude to voice such opinions, even if everyone feels that way now and again.

On the night our mother died I suggested we leave her body just as it was. I didn’t feel there was any need to embalm her or undertake any other special measures. Everyone in the family approved of my suggestions and the funeral with cremation was scheduled for the following morning. However, I arrived at the cemetery the following morning to find my mother’s funeral to be proceeding in the same way as any other funeral. Her body had been embalmed, placed in a coffin, and she looked beautiful. Sri Lankan people are peculiar. When we look at a corpse at a funeral, we always say, “Oh, she looks so very beautiful and so peaceful.” When her body was pushed into the fire for cremation, everyone started crying and I told them, “You should not cry. You should recite the verse that venerates the mother. Stop crying.” And most everyone did actually stop crying. At that point, my craving had turned into conceit, as much of Sri Lanka held me in high regard.

*To say much of Sri Lanka held you in high regard must be a bit of an exaggeration. You’re not the president.*

Yes, that’s a mistranslation. I can say that scores of people held me in high regard—that is not the case anymore! Fair enough, while I had just moments before stood brave and strong and instructed all the others not to cry, I too started crying as her body went deeper into the fire. I felt the tears rolling down my cheeks. A few people noticed me crying and asked, “Why are you crying?” I had to say, “Because she is my mother!”

*You’re bringing up some sad memories.*

Until the fetter of craving is destroyed, craving will always turn

up at unexpected times. Tañhā, māna, diṭṭhi.

Another example of clinging with craving. You own a copy of Bhikkhu Bodhi's new translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya. Initially, before you bought the book, you were only craving the book and were not clinging to it. Once you bought your new Saṃyutta Nikāya, however, you handled, studied, and discussed it with many people, and various thoughts connected to liking the book arose. You engaged. Upaya. Your craving for the new book continued for a long period of time, many months, and in so doing developed your craving for Bodhi's Saṃyutta Nikāya into clinging very tightly to it. Nowadays you're uncomfortable with anyone else using your fine new book. You want it maintained according to your wishes. And if you do manage to lend the book to someone, many akusala states, such as anger and pride, will likely arise. Your strong tendency to possess the book is tañhā-upādāna.

*You also own a copy of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.*

Correct. I do. And ten years ago, a Brahmin layman who later ordained as a Buddhist monk restored my collection of the Buddha's teachings, the Tipiṭaka; the books of the Saṃyutta Nikāya are part of that collection. Prior to restoration, these books were in extremely rough shape. After restoration, they looked just like new and I was very pleased, and I had some craving to bring these freshly bound books closer to me. That's how my mind was working in the beginning, ten years ago. And these days, I still have various thoughts about liking these beautiful and important books. However, I don't let my thoughts of craving for these books intensify and develop to the level of clinging to them. I just let the tañhā be there. Since upādāna never gets established, since this strong tendency to possess the books does not arise, I have no problem with lending you these wonderful books. If upādāna were established in my mind, there

would lots of problems with lending them to you.

## Clinging with Conceit

*I think Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya is an extremely useful book, essential to my understanding of the dhamma and your teachings. Bodhi's translation is excellent.*

The person who reads the Buddha's words in Pali can get closer to the real meaning of the Buddha's words than the person who reads his words in English. The Buddha's words have a very deep meaning.

If we look at your relationship with Bodhi's Saṃyutta Nikāya in terms of tañhā, māna, and diṭṭhi, we can say you first took the book with craving and, since you say this book is essential, we can say you're also taking it with conceit, māna. You see Bodhi's book as part of how you see yourself, and you want your English language Saṃyutta Nikāya to be as good as my Pali language Saṃyutta Nikāya. You don't want your book to be inferior in any way to my book.

*I don't see any conceit in how I look at this book. If anything, I feel clumsy when it comes to talking about Buddhist stuff. Or are you saying that I am somehow incomplete without the book? I don't understand why you say conceit.*

No, no. Nothing like that here, that without the book you are incomplete. Māna, the word conceit, means you have a certain perception of yourself. As you consider the book to be essential for you and not essential for me, you're clinging to the book with conceit.

*Being arrogant and self-important is my idea of conceit.*

Conceit is the standard English word used for the Pali word māna. Conceit may not be a satisfactory translation. Instead of books on the Buddha's teachings, suppose you own a two



million rupee truck. If your neighbour wants to buy a three million rupee truck, if he wants a truck that's at least one million rupees more expensive than your truck, he is taking his truck with conceit, māna. He isn't at that moment taking his truck with craving. Your neighbour isn't considering his truck with craving. No, he is demonstrating clinging with conceit, māna-upādāna.

I am trying to clarify differences between the three ways of clinging—clinging with craving, tañhā-upādāna; clinging with conceit, māna-upādāna; and clinging with views, diṭṭhi-upādāna.

Māna relates to pride in being better, equal, or worse than others. There is a sense of “I” and a sense of comparison. You might think I am a superior person and you are also a superior person; or think I am just an average person and you are the superior person; or think I am inferior and you are superior. There are nine ways to compare better, equal, and worse. I could be the superior person and you be only an average person; or you and I are both average; or I am actually the inferior person and you are the average one. The comparisons go on in this way. You might think I am the superior person and you are the inferior person; or might think I am the average person and you are the inferior person; or maybe we are both inferior. You can also include the element of time—in the past, I was better than you; in the present, we are equal; and in the future, well, we don't know what the future holds.

*I don't think I'm conceited.*

Most people do not see their conceit, māna. Still the conceit is there, expressed in your education, race, social standing, wealth, and views. A meditation teacher can have conceit over concentration. When I was twelve years old and just experimenting with various forms of mind training and hypnotism, and not as yet practising the Burmese tradition of vipassanā meditation properly, I was very conceited and had no respect for anyone. I recall a Catholic Father sitting down beside

me on the bus one day and asking, "What is your religion?" I told him in no uncertain terms that I didn't need any religion. Then he asked, "Do you do things that are sinful?" I joked, "Yes, sometimes!" The good Father said, "Those sins can be forgiven in my tradition." I told him that I didn't think actions could be cancelled out. "If you have a wound," he said, "it can be healed. Similarly, if you have a wound in your heart, it too can be healed." I showed the Father the scar on my arm where I had been vaccinated—"It didn't heal. And no matter how much I treat that scar, it will never heal." I was rude to that nice old man. Later, one of my Catholic relatives pointed out to me that I was quite polite in earlier times. But after taking up mind training and hypnotism, I had become a pain in the neck. He was right. There was something wrong in my attitude towards other people. I went to the Father I had met on the bus and apologized.

My clinging with conceit also surfaced at the time of Sumathipāla Na Himi's death in 1982. On the day heart trouble forced him into the hospital, many people at the centre were afraid he would die. And then when he did die later on that same day, a lot of people could not contain their sadness, and they cried and cried. I looked over these people and thought, "This is not how Sumathipāla Na Himi instructed us. He told us to be brave and strong. He taught us that everything is impermanent. So, what's this that I see?"—there was my conceit. Yes, I felt very good about myself, as obviously I had the ability to contain my emotions and any sadness. I wasn't weak. I wasn't about to start crying, as crying is a sign of weakness. The job of organizing the funeral ceremony was assigned to me. So, with excess energy, I walked up and down the centre, felt important, and gave detailed instructions to one and all. And if the people doing the work didn't follow my instructions, they were in trouble. Many bhikkhus, who were older than me but younger in rains, noted how stable and strong I was. They too thought, that while others were breaking down with sadness, I was a pillar of

strength and a good example to all. They were quite proud of me.

At the moment the funeral pyre started burning, I thought, “We should keep this fire going for as long as our meditation centre is going. We should never let this fire die.” Hindu parents often light a fire when they have a child, and keep the fire burning until the child is about eighteen years of age, when they hand the fire over to the son or daughter saying, “Now, you keep the fire burning!” Because of conceit, I put this Hindu practice into action at Kanduboda and started a memorial fire from Sumathipāla Na Himi’s funeral pyre. After a couple of months, while I was away from the centre and couldn’t check on the fire, Sumathipāla Na Himi’s memorial fire went out. Someone had failed to attend to the fire and it died. Aiyo! When I discovered that the fire had gone out, I was angry and sad and dejected. Conceit was making me sad. Seeing how my conceit had surfaced left a deep mark in me for quite some time. I saw that I was more impressed and concerned with how I had managed the whole funeral ceremony than with the death of my teacher and everyone’s grief. My conceit had taken first place; everyone else had taken second place. And my conceit didn’t stop when the memorial fire went out. I made a life-size sculpture of Sumathipāla Na Himi.

*It’s a great work of art.*

People who do a lot of work are often running on māna.

*I guess it’s my conceit that drives me to write books.*

If you want to see the amount of my conceit, take a look at that sculpture. Because I was clinging so strongly to my teacher and because I knew him so well, I wanted to make the sculpture as lifelike as possible. The hair, the eyes, the nose, and there was a birthmark on his head—I think I did a perfect job! Kneecaps and other hard bones often survive cremation. Nothing had

happened to one of Sumathipāla Na Himi's kneecaps during cremation. I collected it along with other bone fragments and put them inside the sculpture. That's a bit of a secret!

*It isn't a secret now.*

People who see the sculpture say, "Oh, this is exactly like Sumathipāla Na Himi." I am now known as a bit of a sculptor and people ask me about the finer points of sculpture making. Conceit created that sculpture; those are the things that māna does to a person. With Sumathipāla Na Himi's death, I became the abbot at Kanduboda and set upon making it one of the best meditation centres in Sri Lanka. And two decades back, I got it to that level. The centre was thriving and I was quite happy. When I left Kanduboda and shifted to the Lanka Vipassana Meditation Centre in Colombo, I wanted to bring the sculpture along with me; I wasn't comfortable leaving it behind at Kanduboda. Upon reflection, however, I thought the Kanduboda Meditation Centre is where Sumathipāla Na Himi taught, lived, and died—let his sculpture remain at Kanduboda.

*I think conceit must be a good thing because it drives me to edit your teachings into a book.*

Māna is a form of clinging and clinging is never good. It is not possible to say from entrenching māna-upādāna, harmfulness will not arise—it's not possible to say that. You have to be careful when writing about meditation, when living in meditation centres, and when practising meditation because meditation can easily breed a conceit that is difficult to break. Meditation centres are places where many people get very, very conceited! Some people leave the householder's life, then create their own world of exclusively practising in meditation centres. If they attain jhāna only through samatha, then the jhāna is a fetter to them and it won't help to break their conceit. It is almost impossible for teachers to get people out of a jhāna practice and turn them to vipassanā, and it is hard to live with these people.

So, watch out because, once you know a little bit of this and a little bit of that, you might start teaching others. It's very common for all of us to think that we know and others don't know. Of course, others must know something, but we tend to think that we know much more. That is the nature of conceit.

*Spiritual insights are priceless.*

Yes, having a spiritual insight is definitely a good thing; conceit may lead to good results. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya, you can read the story of Gavesin whose conceit drove him to the attainment of arahatship.<sup>73</sup> And it is also good that the old Kanduboda Meditation Centre is functioning well, good that we're studying the dhamma at our new centre in Kanduboda, and good that you study Bodhi's translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya. If that is all because of māna, then conceit must be playing a wholesome role. But it is very bad to think "I" have this spiritual insight or "I" have the jhānas. Practising meditation and building up meditation centres, these things are by themselves worthwhile. However, the moment we say "I" have this or that insight, or "I" built up a meditation centre, it all turns against us and we're stuck.

All in all, do you understand the nature of clinging with conceit? And if so, "Is conceit good?" or "Is conceit bad?" Even my questions stem from māna. "Was our discussion on conceit good?" or "Was it bad?"—all that is conceit. Some might say our discussion was bad because it was hopeless and we wasted our time—again, more conceit! Māna is overcome only at the stage of arahatship.

### *Clinging with Views*

We looked at how our engagement, upaya, with objects takes the form of craving and conceit, and now we will look at how our engagement takes the form of views. Views means seeing the

objects of our craving and conceit as we want to see them, as opposed to seeing these objects as they truly are. We are trying to make the world intelligible to us in some way. Views are based in the concept of a self, which leads to the arising of fears and doubts. Because of fears, religions arise; because of doubts, philosophies arise. Everyone, including most meditators, has strong views and is in some form of wrong seeing. Read the Kalama Sutta.<sup>74</sup>

We were born with the tendency to cling with views and society does its bit to totally support our clinging with views. If a child is born into a Christian family, as you were, the God loving and fearing parents take it upon themselves to teach the child about God and how God created everything in the world, good and bad. The idea of God naturally comes along for the child when his or her parents talk about what is right and what is wrong. My extended family included Christians and Hindus, which meant the concepts of one Christian God and many Hindu Gods were ever-present in my household. I was taught from my first days in this life to appreciate the Christian and Hindu religions. When I was young, I liked going to church and the Kovil, though not out of religious conviction. I went to church for the good food, to sing songs, and for the fireworks.

If religious views are held strongly, it is upādāna of the faith, a form of diṭṭhi-upādāna. The tsunami that hit Sri Lanka in December 2004 washed off tens of thousands of lives and tens of thousands of homes and other buildings. A Muslim man told me, "The tsunami was God's Will." In some coastal areas, every last building, including Buddhist temples, was completely destroyed. In other areas, Buddhist temples remained intact, while all surrounding buildings were destroyed. In the Kallady Beach area of Batticaloa where a Buddhist temple remained intact and a nearby Hindu Kovil for Ganesh was badly damaged, many of the local Hindus held the view that Buddha must be

more powerful and so much better than Ganesh. The Buddhists in that area also held the view that Buddha was more powerful and better than Ganesh. I visited the Kovil. The statue of Ganesh lay on the floor. With many helping hands, we got the statue back onto the altar. I told these Hindu people, “Your Kovil was damaged because, at the time of the tsunami, Ganesh was over at the Buddhist temple protecting Buddha!” These Hindus were pleased with that story. It gave them some relief and helped a little in re-establishing their faith in Ganesh. They were distraught over their loss and needed something to believe in.

*People with strong religious views, both Buddhists and Christians, drive me bananas. Back in Canada, Christian fundamentalists are constantly trying to save my soul. It's a form of abuse.*

You're getting into conflicts with people, without realizing that the conflicts are within yourself. We all have to undergo these sort of criticisms, but we are not willing to look at these criticisms from that perspective. Instead, we pick fights with others and try to force and control the situation.

*I am not about to be a doormat to these lunatics.*

They are doing something for themselves; you're doing something for yourself. In the Akkosaka Sutta,<sup>75</sup> you'll find the story of the Brahmin who abused the Buddha at length. When the Brahmin stopped the abuse, the Buddha simply told the Brahmin, “No thank you. I do not accept your abuse. It still belongs to you.”

It is inherent in being human to look outside ourselves for solutions to our problems. For people who believe in God, everything—health or sickness, winning or losing, wealth or poverty—is God's Will. When they are afraid, if their child is sick, God and doctors will have to be consulted. Buddhists looking for miracles to heal the sick child sometimes convert to

Catholicism. God always comes to mind when people are in trouble and have no where else to turn. Once the trouble is over or the sickness is cured, however, people start scolding God and the doctors! There are Muslim, Tamil-Catholic, Sinhala-Buddhist, Tamil-Hindu, and Sinhala-Catholic players on our Sri Lankan cricket team; yet, all players share the same view that some external force can help them win an important match. Just watch a match: the religious views of our cricket players are clearly visible. Our leading batsman, Jayasuriya, is a Buddhist. He believes the wearing of many, many Pirit strings on his wrist will help him win. One of our great bowlers is a Christian. He believes making the sign of the cross will help. If it is an especially decisive ball, he blesses the ball before he bowls it! All these things happen because our players are latching onto views about something that is external to them. Most of them believe in the power of faith.

*The Sri Lankan cricket team isn't winning a lot of matches these days.*

Yes, true enough. The last time we played Australia, they beat us like we were nothing! So, where was God, or the Gods, or the power of faith for that match?

*Or Buddha for that matter.*

Everyone of course experiences good and bad things; we don't always get what we want, despite our beliefs, pleas and rituals.

*God gives people the courage to carry on when life gets too difficult. This seems like a good thing. And when Christians win at sports, they often give the victory to God and not to themselves. This also seems like a good thing, as the ego is out of the picture. Afterwards, they might reclaim the victory.*

Views can be held blindly or be based on reason and understanding. We say, for example, that both Christ and Ālāra Kālāma had micchā-diṭṭhi, wrong view. However, both men



were highly developed and their views, such as believing that there is a link between actions and results, and believing in the importance of virtue, were based on understanding. Christ and Ālāra Kālāma were not holding onto views blindly, and their views were wrong only in the sense that they weren't those of an enlightened Buddha. For the most part, both of these men held the correct views. In this country, we have many Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists who also hold correct views about the nature of things. They too hold the view that there is a link between their actions and the results that they'll experience—what we know as kamma-vipāka. Most of these religious people promote the correct views, saying it's wholesome to help others, take care of parents, follow precepts, abstain from killing, and be generous to those in need. Good religious people restrain their speech and actions, and engage in livelihoods that are in the best interests of their communities. Though still clinging with views, these people do have some understanding and, when they act accordingly, are not bad in any way.

*The religious fundamentalists that I've met over the years are certainly not restraining their speech or actions. Many of these people strike me as fanatical and bad, as their views divide one segment of society from another. Will their strong religious views take them to hell?*

While sīla-upādāna is an obstacle to the attainment of path knowledge, it will not take the bearers of these views to the apāyas. Clinging to correct views, declaring for example that kamma-vipāka is true, is not dangerous in that way; this view even when held strongly will not take them to hell. However, clinging to obviously wrong views and acting on these wrong views is extremely dangerous. If people don't believe there is any correlation between their actions and the results of their actions, these people can fall into all sorts of foul ways and suffer terrible results. They might not feel any duty to care for their

mothers and fathers. I know people who call themselves meditators, but don't respect their parents because their parents drink alcohol. That is wrong view! The Buddha said if we harm our parents, sammā-diṭṭhi, our right understanding, is destroyed and will not arise again. We must relate to our parents, elders, and teachers in respectful ways. Some people believe that killing and lying is alright. Again, this is a dangerous view to hold, as killing and lying lead to painful consequences.

*The Buddha was a very wise man.*

You don't need a Buddha to tell you to care for your parents. And I'm not just talking about caring for your parents in worldly ways—food, shelter, maybe nursing them, etc. Anyone can do that. Read the Mahā Maṅgala Sutta. You must care for your parents in spiritual ways—with their faith, virtue, generosity, learning, and wisdom. If your father doesn't have any faith in anything or if his virtue is lacking, then you can incline him towards this eightfold path.

*My father is Christian and doesn't care one iota about Buddhism.*

Your knowledge of the dhamma is of no use to you or to your father unless you put it into action. It doesn't make any difference that your father is a Christian, as we are not talking about religion. We are talking about developing wisdom, talking about reducing views and reducing suffering, which requires faith, intelligence, knowledge and understanding—these are the necessary stepping stones on the road to wisdom. It is very difficult to remove clinging with views. You must read about sīla in the suttas and then practise the sīla, and after that go beyond your intellect and attain path knowledge. Clinging with views cannot be removed solely through the use of your intellect; it can only be removed through attainment to sotāpatti. Until attainment, you will have moments when you aren't clinging with views, maybe even two or three lifetimes will go

by without views.

## Turning This World Upside Down

Craving, conceit, and views always serve as the basis to generate more craving, conceit, and views. In other words, our craving only ever turns into more craving, conceit only turns into more conceit, and views turn into more views. Moreover, when we allow our craving, conceit, and views to proliferate for a long time, our craving, conceit, and views develop into clinging with craving, clinging with conceit, and clinging with views.

*Things are getting frustrating again. It must be my clinging.*

You have clinging. I too have clinging. The process of dependent origination goes up to clinging, upādāna, for all of us, unless we attain path knowledge; only the arahat is completely free from clinging. Where our clinging to an object arises with craving, our clinging to the same object can also arise with conceit and views. And this happens just as easily the other way round: where we were initially clinging to some object with views, clinging to the object with craving can arise. Perhaps we were first clinging to an object with conceit, then our clinging to the object with craving and views arise later.

If we are not clinging to objects with craving, conceit, and views, then that is not ignorance.

Only 3 or 4% of the people I know have enough skill in practising the Buddha-Dhamma to avoid having problems with clinging, not that these people have no upādāna or that they were somehow born without upādāna—the clinging is there in them. However, by being honest with themselves, through sati and sampajañña, they see their clinging and don't get caught up

with insignificant things. When a major difference of opinion erupts, they don't get stuck in their anger, avoid the other person, or bear a grudge against him or her.

*They don't get angry?*

They do get angry. They don't get stuck in their anger. At the same time they are angry with the other person, they see their anger and just let it be there and do their level best to prevent it from persisting and developing into hate. They practise kindness. Remember the story I told you about the businessman who argued with his colleagues and did not let his anger develop into hate. This is similar. These 3 or 4% of the people I know, who work hard at practising restraint and consideration and kindness, are rarely found in this world. Far more often than not, differences of opinion lead to enduring quarrels and grudges.

*If the process of dependent origination goes up to clinging for everyone, what am I supposed to do? There seems to be no release in sight.*

Even though most of us only ever see the unwholesome side of upādāna and stop there, and never come around to seeing its kusala side, there is a wholesome side to clinging.

*Just minutes ago when talking about conceit, you said,  
"Clinging is never good." And in your last talk, you said,  
"Nothing good ever comes from clinging. With the arising of  
clinging, only harm follows."*

Neither a religion nor a philosophy, the Buddha-Dhamma means thinking and seeing and then deciding for yourself. Clinging, whether it is with craving, conceit or views, may be mixed up with good actions and may lead to good results. When you gave a donation to our centre last week, this wholesome side of clinging surfaced to a large extent, as you have standards of giving and apologized, "I would like to give more money to the

centre.” Never able to give to their hearts’ content, many people think in the same way, “Oh, we cannot do this or that.” There is always a degree of clinging in acts of generosity. Don’t you agree? Today, I wanted to talk with you for one hour on upaya and clinging and that isn’t going to happen, and this talk will end in a few minutes, far short of my hoped for one hour. All these things fall under wholesome clinging, and I didn’t have anything to gain out of spending this half-hour talking with you. Seeing as we are clinging to these acts of generosity, doing good things, and being kind, then don’t we have to say that our clinging is at times wholesome, that there is kusala-upādāna?

*I want to help people and do something worthwhile with my life.*

Then you have to accept that there is wholesome clinging. The best kind of clinging is to the jhāna. That is clinging in a big way. And clinging to the jhāna is only an obstruction if you are thinking final enlightenment, as clinging to anything obstructs enlightenment. Otherwise, if you’re not thinking about enlightenment and want to take birth in the deva loka or the brahma loka, it would be good for you to acquire and stick with jhāna.

*Saying there is wholesome clinging turns my world upside down, yet again.*



*A mind unruffled by the vagaries of fortune, from sorrow freed, from defilements cleansed, from fear liberated—this is the greatest blessing.*

*Those who thus abide, ever remain invincible, in happiness established.  
These are the greatest blessings.*

The Buddha—Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta<sup>76</sup>

## 16. Clinging → Bhava—part 1

**Pemasiri Thera:** And now bhava. Bhava is the process of kamma, where all our kusala and akusala-kammas are gathering together, working themselves out, and coming to completion. Kamma is forming itself into a condition that can give its result. Bhava is not the place where the result, the vipāka, of kamma arises. Bhava is only shaping and determining the result. Bhava is not the result. For the result of kamma to arise, various other causes and conditions have to combine with the kamma.

*David: What is kamma?*

You could spend your whole life studying kamma.

*Is there an English word for bhava?*

Becoming is the standard English translation. I reject it. Bhava is what is happening in our lives, what we do and what we consider ourselves to be. Do you understand? It is our ways of thinking, speaking and acting. The term ‘happening’ works better as a translation for bhava. To begin with, there is no time when we are not subject to bhava, to happenings—some are animal and hell being, some are human, and a few are deva and brahma. Wherever we are clinging with craving, conceit and views, we are creating bhavas. When I am angry, I create an

animal type of bhava. When I am kind, I create a human bhava. When I am generous, I create a deva bhava. And when I practise mettā, I create a brahma bhava. From morning until night, our clinging leads to the creation of bhavas. We create bhavas when we give a dāna, when we observe sīl on poya day, and when we meditate. At this moment, we are discussing the dhamma and creating the better kind of bhavas. There are two kinds of bhavas, of happenings:

- Unwholesome happenings, *akusala-bhavas*
- Wholesome happenings, *kusala-bhavas*

By unwholesome, akusala, I mean whatever comes out of greed, hatred and delusion. And by wholesome, kusala, I mean whatever comes out of non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion. We've been creating akusala and kusala bhavas since the time of our births. Animal, ghost, demon, hell being—these bhavas are unwholesome and harmful. Human, deva, and brahma—these bhavas are wholesome and beneficial. Akusala-bhavas and kusala-bhavas are constantly arising. It is impossible to count all the billions of bhavas created over the course of our lives. We can't remember all our thoughts, words and deeds. Did you create mostly akusala or kusala bhavas today?

*Overall, I think I created more good ones than bad.*

Many people only remember the good. When I look back on the quality of the bhavas that arose in my mind today, I see there were more of the good quality brahma bhavas early this morning when I sat in meditation. Then as the day started, it was the human and animal bhavas. And just before our dhamma class started, my mind had chiefly animal bhavas coming up. Now during class, while I am teaching the dhamma, my mind has turned towards human and deva bhavas. Later this evening when I watch the news, I expect my mind will go back to animal

bhavas again, as the news is always bad. If you look at your mind, you will notice that some deva bhavas have been arising of late. Deva bhavas tend to arise when you relax at a meditation centre. Whereas, it's more the animal bhavas when you live at home and go to work. We are creating animal, human, deva and brahma bhavas each and every day, with most of them animal and human.

In our earlier talks on viññāṇa, consciousness, I said wise people believe in kamma-vipāka, that good actions produce good results and bad actions produce bad results. We can all see a relationship between what we do and what we experience. That's observable and applies to bhavas. Whenever we cling with craving, conceit and views, we create bhavas and bhavas lead to birth, with the good bhavas leading to a good birth and the bad bhavas leading to a bad birth. Since we create animal, human, deva and brahma bhavas, then we put together the conditions for birth as an animal, human, deva, and brahma. Some of our bhavas allow for a birth as a hungry ghost or even as a dog, a cat or a rat! We are not only creating the possibility to take birth again as a human. No. We are creating bhavas that could bring about a birth in any world of saṃsāra. I also said earlier that wise people see their lives as moment-to-moment experiences. They see each moment as unique, that it arises and then dies, and is followed by another unique moment that arises and then dies, and so on and on and on. Clinging, bhavas, and birth—all are part of these unique moments of experience. In almost every one of our thoughts, the strength to be reborn is there. Bearing this in mind, bhavas have two elements to them:

- Shaping our current lives
- Determining our future births

Before we go any further, I want to dispel a misconception,



especially among Sinhalese, that bhava means birth in one of three worlds of being—the sense-sphere world, kāma-loka; the fine-material world, rūpa-loka; or the non-material world, arūpa-loka. There are those who think bhava means one of these worlds, or means rebirth in the next life, or means a new being in the next life. This isn't right. Bhava is not another world of existence, is not rebirth in the next life, and is not a new being. Bhava isn't any form of existence. Bhava is the process of kamma, where things are working themselves out. Wherever there is clinging, bhava is created and bhava produces results. A bhava is not the result. Bhava only conditions and leads to the arising of birth; it is not the birth. We can say there are three types of bhavas, and these three types of bhavas lead to three types of births—using the Pali, kāma-bhavas lead to kāma-loka, rūpa-bhavas lead to rūpa-loka, and arūpa-bhavas lead to arūpa-loka. The term bhava does not mean the future birth. The creation of bhava is happening now, not in the future.

## Animal Bhavas

*What are animal bhavas?*

Greed, anger, hatred, fear—when we act like animals, we create animal bhavas. A viper, for instance, seems to be living in hatred. A little anger—without extreme hatred—is all right. It's okay to get angry once in awhile. I think dogs are less dangerous than vipers. We can say some dogs are good. Even if the dog is on edge and barks and snaps, he still has a love for master and home. When I bark and snap at you, I have the thoughts and feelings of a dog. You think it is the bhikkhu Pemasiri, but my mental state and actions, my bhavas, are that of a dog. I also sometimes have the bhavas of an elephant, the bhavas of a

demon and of a hungry ghost, and, at other times, the bhavas of a fox. Foxes are cunning. Last night, I scolded eight workers harshly for an hour because the construction project is progressing poorly. Though I created a few dog bhavas at the time of scolding and put together the conditions for birth as a dog, I don't think I committed any great sins. I told the workers I was going to sack them all. They know I won't sack them.

*I heard some shouting. Did you lose your temper?*

No. Many of the workers hold views about construction that conflict with my views about construction. Thus, to break their views, I use harsh words and tell them what is true. Despite having nothing but goodwill towards the workers, there must be a defect in my compassion, as anger seems necessary for me to speak harshly to them. Still, I cannot speak to the workers in the same way I am now speaking to you during our dhamma classes. Giving a heartwarming dhamma talk to the workers will not get the work done properly. Scolding without anger is difficult and calls for practise.

*You've been practising.*

It has been practised. Even if some anger arises during scoldings, I'm only disrupting my samādhi for a few minutes; I'm only creating weak bhavas. If anger is allowed to continue for many days, however, it develops into ill-will, samādhi is completely destroyed, and strong bhavas are created. Ill-will leads to hell. A little anger once in awhile doesn't lead to hell. My scoldings are not based in ill-will, vyāpāda. Some people delight in ill-will, "May he be destroyed." They take real pleasure in seeing rivals beaten and harassed. It's a terrible thing. Killing, stealing, lying, abusing people, adultery, gossiping—akusala-bhavas are created by people because people enjoy creating akusala-bhavas. Some get a sadistic pleasure from hating and killing and stealing. Others are skillful at lying and get a great kick out of slander and telling tall tales about people.

People are inclined to fall into all sorts of cruel ways when they cling with views, *ditṭhi-upādāna*. Thugs hold views such as killing and lying have no consequences, *kamma* is nonsense, it is meaningless to respect one's parents, and there is no result from good or bad actions. But surely, there are results from actions. The *bhavas* created shape and determine birth, in the present and in the future. Thugs live in misery right now, and will likely be reborn into another state of misery. If at the last moment in a thug's life as a human, he clings strongly to an animal *bhava* created during his lifetime, then an animal *bhava* will be the basis for his next birth and he will be born as some sort of animal. Each time we put together a *bhava*, we put together what is necessary for our next birth. If we constantly bite people like vipers, we might be born as vipers. At your certain death, out of the countless billions of *bhavas* created throughout your life, one *bhava* will come forward and determine your next birth. Whatever comes up at the breakup of your body, you go to that place.

*I often dream of making love, of fighting and at times killing.  
Can dreams determine birth?*

And I dream of giving dhamma talks, and they're always much better than my real talks. The thoughts of our dreams, though, are not strong enough in themselves to determine birth. Dreams alone are not sufficient. For a dream to create the conditions necessary for a new birth, you have to carry the dream over into your awake state, develop it to the level of clinging strongly, and then act on it. Sensual dreams have harmful consequences only if you allow the lust, *kāma-rāga*, of your dreams to proliferate. When you generate strong actions from what you see in a dream, you create *kamma* for your current birth and beyond. Of course, delighting in sensual pleasures lengthens your journey in *saṃsāra* and, if you don't control it, can take you to a woeful state.

Our awake state is different from our sleep state. While awake, all of our sense doors—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind—are open and operating fully. We see clearly. While asleep, our external sense doors are essentially closed, leaving only our mind doors open and operating. Hence, we are cheated and don't see or think clearly. The sleep state is much like walking down a forest path on a new moon night, which means no light is shining from the moon. It is absolutely pitch-black in the forest and our minds play tricks on us. We think something is moving in the shadows. We hear strange sounds and sense danger. We imagine this and that is happening. Our footing is unsure. We slip on wet rocks. The manner of mental activity that occurs while sleeping, when only our mind doors are open, is called dreaming.

Dreams have their causes. During the day, we cling hard onto many objects and experience a range of emotions and desires. A strong mind suppresses emotions and desires during the day, burying them deep beneath the surface, especially the things it doesn't like. We go to sleep with these latent tendencies, *anusaya*. Then at night, the buried emotions and desires come to the surface as dreams and disturb our sleep. Dreams mix up the past, present and future. They combine anger and sadness. We think of a past event and relate it to a future. Many fears about the future arise. All our problems come from the past. Does the future exist or is it just an invention based on memories?

*I have a future, for sure.*

You don't have a future.

Practising well during the day leads to sleeping well at night. Lust or anger, whatever object comes up—see its impermanence. Wishing won't make this person good or that person bad. One person is seen as beautiful. Another disgusting. Almost everything is out of our control. We take far too many things as pleasurable and permanent—this is wrong view, the wrong way

of thinking about tilakkhaṇa. We must see that anything can change at any time, see anattā clearly, to decrease suffering. People behave in ways beyond our understanding and control. Whatever comes up is fine. No fixed ideas, no expectations and no forcing. If you get this, then all right. If you don't, then that's acceptable too. Whatever happens, happens. No discriminating thoughts. The past is dead. See arising and see passing away. See that you are now liking this, now disliking that. See your reactions. No clinging to anything.

*Whew.*

As the quality of your mind goes up, the amount of dreaming goes down. Good meditators rarely dream. We all have to change our way of thinking to get the most out of the practice. So, practise in a good way and tonight, no dreams.

*I could use a good night's sleep. Do all bhavas produce births?*

Let's say we created ten billion unwholesome and wholesome bhavas today. There's a possibility that each and every one of those ten billion bhavas did produce results over the course of the day and will produce results of some form in the future. It's more likely though that only ten million out of the ten billion bhavas did produce results today and will produce results in the future. Do you remember the mango tree? A mango tree produces hundreds of mangoes. Does every mango that falls to the ground grow into a mango tree? No. Only a few of the fallen mangoes ever sprout and fewer still grow into trees. Mangoes must have good soil, water, and nutrients in order to become trees. The bhavas we create are seeds for births in the here and now, and seeds for births in the future. Bhavas, like mangoes, require supportive conditions. Thus, bhavas are no more than possibilities for the aggregates and sense bases of various births to arise. Births are always only possibilities. Though there is a correlation between the bhavas we create and the births we take, we can't say this specific type of bhava will definitely produce

that specific type of birth. We can only say this bhava might produce that birth.

Then again, we can't say births are only possibilities because births and rebirths take place. They are not just possibilities. When you die, some form of bhava will definitely come forward and determine your next birth.

*There you go again with contradictory ideas. I didn't think I had a future.*

You don't have a future. Every experience in your life is separate from every other experience in your life. When you perform beneficial and harmful actions here and now, the results of your actions are experienced here and now. Your contradiction lies in believing in the existence of a self. If you practise the Buddha's teachings properly, you see no more than phenomena. You won't find a permanent David with a future.

We are constantly creating and losing billions of weak, medium strength, and strong bhavas. We are constantly allowing for sense-sphere, fine-material, and non-material ways of being to arise now and at the end of our lives. Weak bhavas have no potential for the taking of new births, while medium strength and strong bhavas do have the potential for the taking of new births. A short jog in the morning will likely only produce a healthier day-to-day life, and not produce the birth of another Usain Bolt. Usain was the Jamaican sprinter who won gold at the Olympics in Beijing. Bhavas lead to a spectrum of results: from nothing whatsoever, to births in the here and now, to births at the breakup of our bodies. There are people who create extremely strong good bhavas and people who create extremely strong bad bhavas; that is to say, their births can be from the jhānas or from monstrous crimes. Of course, your intentions were wholesome when you worked on a tsunami relief project and you created many good bhavas. Sometimes, the blind man throws a stone and hits the target. It happens. You could have a good rebirth.

Bhavas are not the future births in the sense-sphere, fine-material, and non-material worlds of being. They are the basis for possible future births. At the stage of bhava, kamma is still forming, working itself out, and not as yet able to give rise to birth. For birth to take place, kamma has to work itself out in supportive conditions.

*I can accept that I am creating billions of human bhavas right now. If a human bhava comes up at my death, according to what you say, my next birth will be human. At the end of that next life as a human, does a bhava from that next life take effect or is it possible for a bhava from my current life to take effect?*

You can never say. Just because a bhava produces a birth does not stop other bhavas from coming forward at a later date and producing further births. Bhavas are not destroyed. A bhava you created many lifetimes ago could come up when you die. This process of birth, decay and death and again birth just goes on and on and on—it's endless. Unless broken, there is no end to saṃsāra. The Bodhisatta realized, "If there is craving, then clinging to things strongly always follows." The Bodhisatta looked for the causes that give rise to birth, and realized that wholesome and unwholesome activity is the cause for birth. And so, for most of us, the clinging is there and it has us moving towards the kusala and the akusala. It is these kusala and akusala-bhavas, these happenings, where we are clinging tightly. If clinging is not there, if there is no upādāna, there will not be any bhava, then no birth, and no decay and death. You can then ask yourself, "How can I eliminate upādāna?"

*Kindness creates good bhavas and cruelty creates bad bhavas. Accumulating lots of the good bhavas should improve my chances of ending up in heaven. Is birth based on relative percentages of good versus bad bhavas? Is it a numbers game?*

No, not that way at all. Take a longer view. While travelling around over so many lifetimes, you did countless evil and terrible things as well as countless really good things. As a result, you have a mixture of the lower-world and higher-world bhavas. Moreover, the Buddha said, “Through our journeys through saṃsāra, we all performed far more harmful actions than beneficial actions.” There is no greater authority than the Buddha. You must have done a great deal more bad than good in your long journey through saṃsāra, and thus must currently possess a higher percentage of the bad lower-world bhavas within you. There is no chance that you possess a higher percentage of the good bhavas.

*Looks like birth is a bit of a gamble. Nothing is guaranteed.*

There are many stories from the time of the Buddha. There’s the one of Prince Ajātasattu who had the potential to be an arahat, and then killed his father. Another of Devadatta who had psychic powers, performed many feats, and the potential to realize liberation. Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha and went downward to a woeful state. There’s a story of the Buddha seeing a pig and smiling.<sup>77</sup> When asked why he smiled, the Buddha said, “This pig was a hen in one of its previous births. At the end of its life as a hen, it took birth as a royal princess, and at the end of its life as a princess, it took birth as a brahma. And when the brahma merit was exhausted, it took birth as this pig. It will eventually be released from the state of pig.” A princess who was raised to the level of a brahma and then lowered to the level of a pig—this is saṃsāra. We have all been animals, humans, devas, and brahmas in the cycle of births.

*What about sotāpannas? They have also allegedly been on this long journey through saṃsāra and also done some rotten things. What happens to their old animal bhavas?*

Attaining to sotāpatti does not annul the lower-world bhavas



that were created before the attaining to sotāpatti. Sotāpannas keep their old animal bhavas and may continue to create animal bhavas. There is a change, however. Since the minds of sotāpannas are established in a high plane of purification, their old lower-world bhavas never have a chance of coming through and taking effect, and their newly created lower-world bhavas are weak and unproductive. The possibility of lower-world bhavas is there because sotāpannas still have kāma-rāga and anger.

There are thoughts connected to greed and also connected to wrong view—lobha and micchā-diṭṭhi. And then there are thoughts connected to greed and yet not connected to wrong view. Thoughts which are only connected to greed and not connected to wrong view may arise in sotāpannas.

The chief differences between sotāpannas and people who have yet to attain to sotāpatti lie in degree and severity: weak bhavas versus strong, undeveloped animal thoughts versus developed, and anger versus ill-will. Though sotāpannas have anger, could be bad-mannered and shout at you, their anger is weak, operates at a low level, and remains undeveloped. With ordinary men and women, anger is often strong and allowed to develop into ill-will, vyāpāda, and all too often allowed to develop into hatred. One of your co-workers may have thought, “I hope David’s life is ruined.” A great many Sri Lankans think of the LTTE leader, “It’s good Prabhakaran died at the hands of the army.” Sotāpannas perform unwholesome actions to some extent—that happens. They never hold onto anger for a long period and never develop anger into ill-will or hate. Hate is a dangerous development because hate leads to revenge. Sotāpannas by no means wish for the ruin or death of others. It’s this absence of ill-will that truly sets sotāpannas apart from ordinary people.

From the time of attaining to sotāpatti, sotāpannas stop acting

on lower-world bhavas, which means lower-world bhavas never become strong enough to be the basis for birth. Sotāpannas have put an end to the possibility of being born as animals and hell beings in their next births. And if sotāpannas take human births, they won't be deaf or dumb or blind or physically deformed. You can read about the life of Anāthapiṇḍika in the Saṃyutta Nikāya.

## Anger

Clinging strongly to wrong views leads to birth in the apāyas. There is no chance to be born as a human or born in any high world of being. Your only possibility is to be born in one of the lower-worlds—animal, ghost, demon, or hell. There once was a man with strong views who lived near the Mahaveli River in Sri Lanka. He was a good upāsaka, very devoted to the Sangha. He regularly gave dāna, observed sīl, and eventually took bhikkhu ordination. He was in robes for thirty years and, though he made great effort in meditation, he never attained jhāna. Angry at his lack of progress in meditation, he concluded the Buddha Sāsana was useless and he disrobed. As a layman, he hardened his many wrong views over the years, and then died with these wrong views in mind. He took birth as a crocodile. The crocodile lived on a river where there were many water buffalo, and the crocodile had more than enough to eat. Yet, in spite of eating and eating and eating, the crocodile's hunger was never satisfied, even when it ate a whole adult bull water buffalo. This was the crocodile's habitual kamma, āciṇṇaka kamma. We have to be careful about the views we hold.

*Why do we get angry?*

Yes, we must at least ask that crucial question, "Why is anger arising in my mind right now?" Anger needs an object. When I was a child, anger arose at the sight of any food that I disliked. I used to get so very angry when I was forced to eat something

that I found disgusting or I was forced to eat food that wasn't cooked to my liking. I simply would not eat it. Absolutely not. Anger also arose at the sight of foods that I liked. If I was sick, mother said, "This food is not good for you to eat. Don't eat it!"—from both these objects, anger arose. Food was a big issue in our household. Of course, it was out of love that my mother wanted me to eat some foods and to avoid others. I was a child and did not see things her way.

*My mom was much the same.*

When I was fourteen years of age, I owned a racing bicycle, which was so much the object of my affection that I didn't want to take it to school because the other kids always wanted to ride it. I did not want anyone to ride my bicycle. And if I did take it to school, I hid it in a nearby shrine room. More often than not, I left the bicycle at home. One day, I came home from school to find that something was a little different about my bicycle. There was mud on its front tire and the bicycle wasn't parked in exactly same place where I had left it. Somebody had been using my racing bicycle! I asked everyone in my family, "Who used my bicycle? What happened?" Not one person gave me a satisfactory answer, not even my older sister. I was angry. I grabbed a large and sharp knife from the kitchen, dragged the bicycle out into the middle of the street, and cut its tires to shreds. I then bought a gallon of kerosene from a shop, splashed it all over the bicycle, and set a match to it. Lots of flames. Big fire.

*Wow.*

A young boy put the fire out with an old blanket, and then hauled away the hulk. "Good riddance," I said. "It's yours." I eventually found out that a friend of one of my brothers had taken my bicycle for a short ride. It didn't matter, as nobody in my family was talking about bicycles, and nobody had any plans to buy me a new one. Weeks later, I saw the young boy riding

my old bicycle and joy arose in me. He came from a poor family. In spite of that, he had rebuilt the burned-out hulk and it looked great. I asked him if I could take it for a ride. "Yes, of course." I was so happy. And then some understanding arose. I realized my anger had disappeared when the bicycle disappeared and my joy had arisen when I saw the poor young boy riding it. I concluded that anger was not at all good for me and decided to get rid of it, if that was at all possible.

*It's not clear to me why you got angry in the first place.*

Anger arose because things didn't work out the way I had expected. I have been an angry type of person from birth and used to completely lose myself in extreme fits of anger, real tantrums, sometimes without any good cause or even an identifiable object. I was a viper that bit at anytime. No one knew when I would bite and most of my family steered well clear of me. One day, I stubbed my toe on one of our lawn ornaments, smashed the ornament to pieces. Pointless. I also used to get into a lot of brawls, mostly with thieves and bullies. If some tough thug was picking on a weakling, I'd side with the weakling and usually beat the living daylights out of the thug. My mother worried. One of my uncles taught my brother and I a form of martial arts fighting that he had learned while in China. My brother and I practised this martial art and became quite skilled in it. Eventually, my brother gave up martial arts fighting and turned more towards meditation and I too, simply following my brother's example, gave up martial arts fighting and turned more towards meditation. Since my brother took up meditation, I too took up meditation. Mother was happy that two of her sons were meditating, and on cloud nine that I was meditating, as she thought I was the worst of the lot. I did not start meditating to get rid of anger. I was young and assumed meditation to be a good thing.

Sick and terminally sick people are often angry. And yet, what

right do sick people have to get angry? We were born with sickness. We were born to die. Sick people get angry because they haven't accepted these facts of life. I also get angry because I haven't accepted the facts. Our anger may be pointless, and necessary to overcome.

*How do you get rid of anger?*

To get rid of anger, we must admit that anger is bad for us and sincerely *want* to get rid of it. There has to be a need to overcome anger; otherwise, it flares up again and again. At seventeen years of age, I was regularly travelling from home to Kanduboda to visit Sumathipāla Na Himi and practise meditation, that's whenever I had some free time away from school and my part-time job. I enjoyed being with Sumathipāla Na Himi, working hard at meditation, and bringing my grosser defilements down to a level where they were not appearing. I enjoyed doing this. My anger, for example, if it was originally at the 100% level, was brought down to the 50% level and at times down to the 25% level. While not a bhikkhu at that time, I impressed several bhikkhus, "You have a strong practice. Surely, you have jhāna and path knowledge." After being told this story half a dozen times, I too came around to believing, "Yes, it must be so—I must have path knowledge." These so-called achievements were increasing my conceit, not reducing it.

I then beat up a man. He was a thief and a convicted murderer, who had just been released from prison. This thug was threatening the owner of a shop in my village. I couldn't accept his intimidation. The thug had no chance, not a hope. I attacked using all my training in martial arts fighting and gave him a thorough going over, from the top of his head to the toes of his feet. I broke two of his ribs and inflicted other injuries that sent this unfortunate man to the hospital. The police were called. They tied me up with a rope and took me to the station.

*Good that you eventually ordained. You might have killed*

*someone.*

And this happened while I was in a high state of meditation. What was the use in meditating? All my defilements, all my anger, arose at the time of the fight. And just like my life before practising meditation, I was losing myself in fits of anger. What to speak of jhānas or path knowledge? I went home and told my mother what I had done. She reminded me, “It’s me who suffers when you fight. Me. Not you.” I wasn’t looking for fights. On the contrary, after I had sent this unfortunate man to the hospital, I felt ashamed and stayed at home as much as possible and only ever walked around town late at night. I never walked around town during the day. And I was too full of shame to visit Sumathipāla Na Himi, definitely wasn’t about to go anywhere near the Kanduboda Meditation Centre. I had broken two of the man’s ribs! I stopped meditating. It didn’t make any sense to meditate, as I was more angry after taking up meditation practice than I was before meditation. It was better to die than to have this anger.

I ran off to a remote area where I wasn’t known, and then just kept running, farther and farther afield. After a while, I took refuge in a remote estate owned by a friend of the family. The owner asked, “Why are you here?” I confessed the whole sorry tale, of how I attacked a man and didn’t want to go home. He said, “You are welcome to wait here for a few days. Then go back home.” I did stay at the estate for a few days, but didn’t go home. I went instead to my father’s village for a few more days, and then finally made my way out to Kanduboda where I came clean with Sumathipāla Na Himi. He said, “This is what happens when you listen to other people. I never said you had jhāna or path knowledge.” Sumathipāla Na Himi instructed me to seclude myself, decrease talking, and this time practise meditation properly.

*Does right meditation get rid of anger?*

The five spiritual faculties are at work both in samatha and vipassanā, the only difference is the level of wisdom—it is low in samatha and high in vipassanā. Although my anger was down by 75%, there was little wisdom in what I was doing and my anger could flare up at any time. And it did flare up when I met that thug. I took his words personally and let them play in my mind. The defilements—all the anger and ill-will—exploded. Fortunately, Sumathipāla Na Himi was always, despite my groans, turning me towards vipassanā. He taught me about patience and the importance of understanding, and I developed the ability to recognize which objects gave rise to violent outbursts. These days, almost fifty years from the time Sumathipāla Na Himi gave me those words of wisdom, there's not as much me or mine, my anger has levelled off at the 50% level, and I no longer have any extreme fits of anger. Before proper vipassanā, I was a wet chicken. After vipassanā, a dry chicken!

## Human Bhavas

I also have the bhavas of a human.

*Hopefully.*

Something surprising—words of friendship and encouragement, helping and respecting others, treating everyone equally—the ways of humans are exceptionally rare in humans. Nonetheless, I was more human today than I was last night when scolding the workers. First thing this morning, I gave a worker a job, then went back in the afternoon and asked him, “How are you?” and “Is the job running okay?” This is being human. I spoke pleasant words and helped him in whatever way I could.

To be more human, we must recognize the objects that set us off and drop them. I don't like having anger in my mind. I don't like creating animal bhavas. For example, though last night I gave one of the workers a proper scolding because he too hadn't done his work, I didn't stay angry with him, not for long. No, I dropped the whole episode of the worker's lackadaisical approach to work and today I had a pleasant chat with him over a cup of tea. I made every effort to resolve this conflict. If I cannot immediately drop the objects that make me angry, then I get someone to help me drop them, and then, with his or her support, I drop them, at once—that's if I can't drop these objects by myself. Today has not been a bad day for anger and animal bhavas.

*Being firm sometimes looks like anger.*

Almost everyone in my village thought my father to be constantly angry. If you had met him, you might have thought he was a fierce and rough person. Father wasn't an angry, fierce or rough person. He was simply straight and direct. Most people do not like crows. Father had a real fondness for them. Even wild dogs were calm and like shy children in my father's presence. I remember one adult male elephant that got itself into a frenzy and crushed its mahout to death. No one wanted to go anywhere near that killer elephant. Father talked to it, stroked it and then brought it home. And having an elephant in our yard wasn't a problem for anyone in our family. Father was also a well-known marksman in our village. He could always hit the target. Good concentration. Bull's-eye!

*Was he religious?*

My father was familiar with all the main religions. He did not subscribe to any one religion, however.

*Was his way just kindness?*

I cannot say for sure. Yes okay, I can say he was a kind person.



He placed great value on the Buddha's teachings and read widely in the Tipiṭaka. He had no religion. If Christians at the local church wanted his assistance, he was there at the church doing whatever he could to help them. I cannot say for sure what he was thinking, as my father and I were at odds for many years and didn't speak with each other a great deal.

*Did you fight with your father?*

The bhava based on anger is very different from the bhava based on ill-will and hatred. Mothers and fathers get angry with their children. As parents, they are entitled to shout at their children, to punish them, and maybe at times to give a whack or two on their bottoms. It's hard to raise a child without getting angry. Normally though, good parents don't have any ill-will towards their children, "I hope my son dies." or "I want my daughter's life ruined." Parents don't want to destroy their children. In their minds, good parents have no thoughts of harming their children. No intentions like that. Their anger arises at the time of the correction and clash, and it finishes there and then. My father wanted the best for me. Teachers are also entitled to yell at their students. I scolded you once or twice and yet the scoldings were done for the purpose of teaching, and were done with kindness and compassion. I never had any thoughts of ill-will towards you, let alone ever wanted to destroy you. The bhavas that parents create when they are angry with their children and the bhavas that teachers create when they are angry with their students are weak bhavas, and do not lead to the lower worlds. On the other hand, the bhavas created by ill-will and hatred, such as wishing someone's downfall, are very strong and have serious consequences.

*I didn't see the kindness at the time you were scolding me.*

Teachers and students often misunderstand each other. When you understand my methods of instruction, I can teach you in the most useful way. When you have confidence in me and make the

right effort, I reciprocate by focussing all my attention on you. It's just you and me, alone, and I know exactly where you are in your practice. I know when I should ignore you, when to be kind, and when to be a little rough. If you are doing well and practising properly, I ignore you. And though you might well think I don't care at all and have dropped you as a student, I am in truth teaching you with the greatest of kindness, by letting you go on your own and develop. If you are going through a difficult and painful stage, perhaps crying, confused and afraid, I am openly friendly and we spend a great deal of time with each other. However, if you are delighting in a high state of mind, I might yell and scold—this is the most useful time for you. You progress rapidly when I am rough.

Meditation students who attain high states generally want to remain in them. I know whether or not a state of mind is of any benefit. If you delight in a special state for too long, you get stuck in a rut and don't make any progress in your practice. Hence, to help you, I push you out of that state. Telling you that I am happy with your high state of mind would be a disaster. Meditation teachers are like mothers. A mother knows when to ignore, when to be kind, and when to yell. Children like eating hamburgers and, whenever they see a McDonald's restaurant, they want to go in and have one. The mother firmly says to her child, "No. You shouldn't eat too many hamburgers." A hamburger once in awhile is okay. Sumathipāla Na Himi was an excellent teacher. He yelled at me dozens of times, all for my benefit.

*I've been told many a time to be a bit kinder.*

We can all be kinder and more patient. Many people are concerned about my diabetes and offer lots of advice—take this medicine; take that medicine; western medicine is good; western medicine is bad; traditional medicine is good; traditional medicine is bad; red rice is good; hot foods are bad; yoga is

good; riding in the truck is bad; get more exercise; eat garlic; whatever you do, don't eat curd. And on and on and on. My diabetes is not a secret. Many people who don't know anything about diabetes give me advice about the treatment of diabetes. I am not talking about doctors giving me health advice. These are ordinary lay people. One person said Chinese acupuncture was the best treatment, while another recommended homeopathy.

The mind starts listening to these things and then, in the same way anger arose when I was a child and mother forced me to eat disgusting food, I get angry. I don't have infinite patience. I can tolerate advice for a few minutes. When advice continues for half an hour, I lose my temper and feel like asking, "Are you a doctor?" or "Are you a diabetes specialist?" Of course, I never ask these questions because that would be rude. Instead, I say to myself, "Patience is a good thing." Then, I remain listening to their advice, which makes me feel faint and I start to yawn. I try to finish off the banter. These situations are common and I just have to put up with it, be patient. I have to realize that it is out of concern for me that they tell me about these various treatments. What's more, I have a doctor who takes good care of me. She prescribes the medications that control my diabetes. And I do eat well and do get ample exercise walking up and down and around this centre all day long. Let my doctor lay down the necessary health interventions. It's not even my concern. I am not a doctor. So, why should someone else concern himself or herself with my health? It is okay for them to try out various treatments; they need not tell everyone else. Some of these people get angry when they discover that I haven't followed their advice.

*I have some good friends who get angry far too often and it's not good for anybody. Should I feel sorry for them?*

To be without harmful bhavas, like anger, is the practice of meditation. If you get angry every time I get angry, then that only makes matters worse and no development takes place. It is

within you to avoid fighting and avoid saying anything that makes your friends even angrier. It is within you to use patience and intelligence. Anger is a mental sickness that needs to be treated with kindness, carefully. When you feel sorry for your friends, you develop mettā for them. We can't judge people all at once, have to give them a chance. And be patient with your friends, as you can be openly kind to them at no more than the 10% level; otherwise your friends will be suspicious. Then, over the years you can develop your kindness to 100% of what you have to offer. Angry people generally only come out of anger when they experience a strong blow, are in dire need of help, and no one is willing to help. At difficult times, say a brush with death, many angry people gain insight into the nature of things and are cured of anger. To have one of your angry friends in our community would be a good thing because we could clearly see our defilements.

## Kindness

A great many Sri Lankans practise mettā. Yet, I will be scolded if I suggest sending mettā to the leader of the LTTE, "May Prabhakaran be free from sickness. May he be well, happy and peaceful." Prabhakaran was at war with the government. What if we had gone to the North and asked Prabhakaran what he needed? What if we could have offered him food and medicine? Do you think that would have been possible?

*It would be difficult.*

Shortly before dying, our friend Creon said to me, "You talk about mettā, but you don't have enough mettā to go to Jaffna and give a big dana to the LTTE." Creon had an exceptional level of mettā. We should all have a lot of mettā for Prabhakaran because it is only this life he was fighting and killing. If kamma-phala is true, there is no saying where Prabhakaran will end up in his next lives. He will definitely be in lower states at some point.

Prabhakaran, now there was an occasion for mettā. Developing mettā is more important than worrying about race and religion. When I was a child, I spent many a day with two of my great uncles who were Catholic priests. They did good works and I helped them as much as possible. I helped because they needed help, not because I was related to them. And I had no problem helping them. It didn't even cross my mind not to help them because they were Christians, as there were no divisions by religion in my family. Father gave us the freedom to pursue any religion and any career. Indeed, I spent so much time with my Christian uncles, they thought I'd be a Christian monk someday. A person's religion doesn't matter. Most of the people who come here are Buddhists. You are Christian. Religion makes no difference. Just reading and talking about mettā doesn't help. So, forget religion and instead help the mentally sick with their anger.

*You have been exceptionally kind to me and to hundreds of other people. You teach meditation and built a meditation centre. Why bother? I thought you wanted to be free.*

If a teacher lights a lamp, he or she must supply the oil. I bother with teaching because I am able to teach and there are students who want to study. I am of some use. Maybe not much use, but some. Sri Lankans and foreigners alike enjoy the life of Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana and enjoy listening to my dhamma talks, which is why they come here. Immediately after I finish giving a talk, there are always two or three people who want to clarify this or that point. I'd say 15% of the people who come here benefit in a genuine way. However, I wonder if I'm saying the right things in my talks because the remaining 80 to 90% do not benefit. Very few change their behaviour for the better. Maybe while staying here or while listening to one of my talks, they get relief from their troubles. Then again, it's hard to say who benefits and who doesn't, as I recently discovered there

are people who are learning things from me that I am not deliberately teaching them. How we learn the dhamma is not simply an accumulation of knowledge. When I read the suttas, thoughts come to me and I express these thoughts in my talks. These thoughts are not my thoughts. They are based on my limited understanding of what the Buddha taught. The dhamma is not mine, not any more than the wind can be mine.

Does wind exist? Are Buddha's teachings true? And what about nibbāna? If wind exists, then what's its shape and colour? If I say wind doesn't exist and dhamma is nonsense, then I am a fool. There are any number of phenomena in the world without shape and colour. We know the wind exists because we see leaves rustling in the trees and feel a force against our bodies. We say it's a foul wind that carries the smell of a carcass. When wind comes from the direction of a fire, we say the wind is hot. From a snowy mountain area, it's a cold wind that blows. Similarly, we know the Buddha's teachings are true because, when we're honest with ourselves, we see the lobha, dosa, and moha blowing in our minds. We see anicca, dukkha, and anattā in all that arises out of causes. When wind cuts across a field of flowers in bloom, we say it's a fragrant wind that blows. Even on calm days when we don't see leaves rustling or feel a force against our bodies we accept that the wind is out there, somewhere. And by the same token even if we're blind and don't see any kāma-rāga, ill-will, jealousy, restlessness, or envy within ourselves, the Buddha's teachings are true.

*And nibbāna?*

We can only talk about objects that contact our minds. Whatever arises out of causes can be contacted. At the point our minds do not contact lobha, dosa, moha, nor do our minds contact non-lobha, non-dosa or non-moha—that is nibbāna. This dhamma is difficult to perceive; it is not within the sphere of logic.

*This meditation centre helps people.*

As for this meditation centre, Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana isn't turning out the way I had hoped. This centre was built for the benefit of meditators, not for my benefit. Out of ignorance, I thought more meditators would be open and sincere, and would develop human qualities. I thought more would train properly in both samatha and vipassanā. Far too many of the people who come here are struggling with sincerity. There is a conflict between what they show to the outside world and what they are within themselves. They talk a great deal about right views and right effort and good human qualities, such as abstaining from killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and slander. They know that wholesome bhavas are based in non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion. And yet, despite knowing the dhamma well, they merely play the part of meditators, as if they were actors on a stage, and don't make the effort to develop human qualities within themselves. And since they don't have human qualities well established within themselves, they don't see the good human qualities in others and don't make any progress in meditation.

Some people who call themselves meditators even criticize the good deeds of others. I am regularly criticized for helping those in need. It is extremely difficult for me to teach people who are closed and insincere, and who have more of the animal qualities. When meditators are the same towards the world as they are within themselves, I can easily teach them and they will make rapid progress in their practices. What I know of the Buddha's teachings is of great value and I do not teach it to everyone. It is rare that I teach meditators thoroughly. Meditators must have the right attitude, some wisdom, and at least try to take pleasure in doing what is kusala. If meditators exert an honest effort, it is possible for them to get somewhere. If they develop tolerance, patience, and understanding, meditators can easily attain jhāna and path. Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana has everything that meditators need to practise properly.

*It's a wonderful meditation centre.*

It is indeed. Whenever meditators cling, upādāna, they create bhavas that lead to the arising of birth. Clinging to the wholesome, kusala, they create bhavas that lead to birth in one of the better and higher worlds—as a deva, a brahma, or again as a human. Whereas, when they cling to the unwholesome, akusala, they create bhavas that lead to birth in one of the lower worlds—as an animal, ghost, demon, or hell being. There are these two types of bhavas, the kusala and the akusala, which take meditators respectively to either the sugati, the happy courses of being and to the jhāna states, or take them to the apāyas, the unhappy courses of being. Discussing the dhamma, as we're doing right now, creates wholesome bhavas and avoids the creation of unwholesome bhavas.

*How do bhavas affect us from one life to the next?*

David, at the end of your previous birth, some form of being clung strongly to a wholesome thought and your birth as a human took place. Your last life could have been as a dog, and the dog did something good, which came into operation at the dog's death to make you, a human. Now in your current human form, you are creating billions of bhavas and, when you die, one of them will be the basis for your next birth. Say you live to the ripe old age of eighty. One kusala or akusala bhava goes forward. You often cling strongly to acts of kindness, thereby creating many kusala-bhavas. I've seen you feel for others and go out of your way to be helpful. If you cling to one of these deva bhavas at the moment of your death, you will be born as a deva in the fine-material world. Clinging was there in the samatha you achieved. If at your death you cling strongly to one of these brahma bhavas, then you will be born a brahma. Some of the bhavas you create allow for birth as a hungry ghost, others for birth again as a dog. Even the small number of acts you performed without clinging, say while practising the



Satipaṭṭhāna properly for a few days, can bring about a human birth. From these causes, out of all these various bhavas, one single bhava will generate the background necessary to take another birth. One bhava goes beyond.

You spend much of your time transcribing our dhamma discussions and editing selections for publication as books. You find dhamma useful and want to share it with others. With that wholesome activity, kusala-bhava, you have the potential to take a human birth in a Canadian mother's womb, an Indian mother's womb, or a Sri Lankan mother's womb. No kidding. If you keep up with all this writing, you might be writing dhamma books in your next life. Your writing can also lead to the taking of a deva birth. But writing about dhamma isn't a strong enough bhava to take you to the brahma worlds. Writing won't lead to birth as a brahma. Mettā-bhāvanā when done sincerely leads to a brahma birth. In any event, writing certainly won't lead you into a lower birth. The same scenario is true for me. With this bhava that is happening right now, by teaching dhamma, I can expect a human or deva birth.

*This fits with Christian cosmology. Good folks are off to heaven when they die, and bad folks are off to an awful place called hell. With this in mind, I do my best to be as kind as possible. Is the moment of my death important?*

I don't say so. We have to correct ourselves now, not think about death. If there is hell and we don't do anything bad, we don't go to hell. And if hell doesn't exist and we don't do anything bad, then that's okay too. If there is heaven and we are kind, then our good actions should lead to our births in heaven. Doesn't matter. Even if heaven doesn't exist and we are kind, our good actions here and now are still beneficial for the here and now in this world. In other words, there is no point thinking too much about what's on the other side of death. We might as well be good right now because we will die someday, regardless what we do. If we

think of rebirth, that becomes a headache. I don't speculate about the future. I do what I feel is good and let go of what I feel is bad. That's all. I know I will die. I know I will be reborn.

*You once aspired to be an arahat.*

In my teenage years, I did aspire to be an arahat. I don't aspire to be an arahat now. Am I crazy? Do you think I'm a lunatic? There is death and there is rebirth. I accept both. What arises, comes up and passes away. I only try to do good. Other than that, if I am thinking of rebirth, then the concept of soul comes into play and I would have to prepare myself for having a soul. I am telling you my ideas. What do you will think?

*Well, I don't think you're a lunatic, and I don't think I'll be a dog anytime soon. Of course, there is always more to the world than meets the eye. And what about your next life?*

Given that I am creating a mixed bag of bhavas, I am putting together the conditions for a mixed bag of births. Whatever conditions come up at my death, I go to that place. If the conditions are there for me to take birth as a dog, I don't care. I will be a dog and I will accept birth as a dog. If the conditions are there for birth as a deva, I will accept birth as a deva. If the conditions lead to birth as a human, then a human I shall be. If I don't have the conditions for another birth, which means no bhava coming forward at the end of my life, I will accept that too.

*Can there be no bhava?*

Arahat.

*And what about those dogs and devas?*

Yes, scolding workers can lead to birth as some sort of animal. Then again, pitying and helping those in need might lead to birth as a deva. I sometimes give mettā. At the moment, I see causes and effects. I also know there is no tangible self. No attā. No satta. If the knowing of no-self comes up as my last thought,

there will be no rebirth.

## Knowing Kusala and Akusala Bhavas

We are not in the stream to arahatship, which means we are at all times subject to clinging and thus at all times subject to creating a wide range of bhavas—from extremely bad and greedy and angry to extremely good and kind and compassionate, from animal and hell being to human, and sometimes to deva and brahma. Akusala and kusala bhavas are to be found in our thoughts, words and actions, when we look honestly at ourselves.

*Many of my thoughts are disturbing. I generally respect and help my aging father, and then there are those times when I wish he would drop dead and get the hell out of my life. Is there something wrong with me?*

No, nothing wrong with you. Animal thoughts are completely normal for human beings. If you remember anything from this talk, remember there are only two sorts of bhavas: akusala and kusala. Bhavas are either based in greed, hatred and delusion, or based in generosity, kindness, and wisdom. What's important here is to know the nature of your bhavas. Are they harmful or beneficial? This is a simple and practical training. Sometimes, the animal thoughts come. That's okay. Be aware. Know you're creating akusala bhavas and know these bhavas are harmful. Sometimes, the human thoughts come. That's okay too. Know you're creating kusala bhavas and know kusala bhavas are beneficial. We all have thoughts that take us down to the worlds of the hell beings and thoughts that take us up to the worlds of the devas. Whatever our thoughts, words and actions, we need to know their nature. Are we allowing akusala bhavas to give

rise to something harmful or are we building on kusala bhavas to give rise to something beneficial? Akusala isn't necessary in our lives; we don't need it. We need the kusala.

*Bhavas are still mysterious.*

Wherever we cling with craving, conceit and views, we create bhavas and bhavas lead to births. When you ask about bhavas, you create bhavas, in this case kusala bhavas.

*At least I'm creating wholesome bhavas.*

By all means, creating kusala bhavas that lead to birth as a human or a deva is better than creating akusala bhavas that lead to birth as an animal or a hell being. Yet, isn't life as a human weighed down with suffering? Even life as a deva has its drawbacks. When you ask a question about the dhamma, you create kusala bhavas and kusala bhavas can lead to the births of humans and devas. Birth as a human and birth as a deva are sources of suffering, and that means when you ask a question about dhamma you can create a source for suffering. The potential for suffering is there. If you know at the time of asking the question that you are creating kusala bhavas and know that kusala bhavas can lead to suffering, you would be creating a bhava of right intention, sammā-saṅkhappa. The wisdom would be on top of your question.

*Maybe I shouldn't ask so many questions.*

It's good to ask questions, as the asking of questions and the hearing of answers clarifies doubts about the practice and purifies views. You ask a question and then, based on my answer, you ask more questions—that's the nature of questioning. Some of your questions are challenging and not easily answered. Some of your questions are philosophical speculation and need to be avoided. Did you get any answers today?

*I have more questions.*

And I have a human bhava coming, a good way to end today's talk.



*On one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Alavi at the Aggalava Shrine. There he addressed the monks: “Monks, remember Hatthaka of Alavi as being endowed with seven amazing, astounding qualities. Which seven? Monks, Hatthaka of Alavi is endowed with conviction. He is virtuous. He has a sense of conscience. He has a sense of concern. He is learned. He is generous. He is discerning. Remember Hatthaka of Alavi as being endowed with these seven amazing, astounding qualities.”*

Hatthaka of Alavi Sutta<sup>78</sup>

## 17. Clinging → Bhava—part 2

**Pemasiri Thera:** Progress on the path to nibbāna comes about gradually and requires sati-sampajañña. Sati-sampajañña is a free and clear state of mind. For meditators who train properly, sati-sampajañña becomes a habit and they relentlessly note the creation of bhavas. When creating kusala bhavas, meditators know they are creating kusala bhavas and know these kusala bhavas lead to birth in one of the better and higher worlds as a deva, brahma or human. Similarly, when creating akusala bhavas, meditators know they are creating akusala bhavas and know these akusala bhavas lead to birth in one of the more difficult and lower worlds as an animal, hungry ghost, or hell being. With sati-sampajañña, there is clear comprehension of what is happening, and this brings about wisdom. Sati-sampajañña and wisdom never get mixed up with ignorance and delusion.

*David: I'd be pleased to meet a wise and beautiful deva.*

Meditators don't usually see devas as they practice, nor do they see brahmas, hungry ghosts or hell beings. Meditators are

humans living in the world of humans and animals. They see humans and animals. Although not seeing beings in other worlds, meditators do see mental states within themselves that correspond to the mental states of beings in other worlds. Devas are generous and compassionate, brahmas are pure and divine, and humans can be kind. Some animals are known to be angry, while the hungry ghosts are greedy, and the hell beings are hateful. Though meditators do not see devas and brahmas, they see from time to time generosity and purity within their own minds. And though not seeing hungry ghosts and hell beings, meditators see greed and hate within.

The quality of our minds is of great consequence, as 90% of each bhava we create has an immediate impact on our current lives and the remaining 10% of each bhava can quite possibly determine the world in which we spend our future lives. From high quality kusala-bhavas, there are immediate high quality impacts and future possibilities. And without a doubt from low quality akusala-bhavas, there are immediate low quality impacts and future possibilities. Don't confuse bhava with birth. The bhavas we create give rise to birth. We must know whether our bhavas are beneficial and high quality, or harmful and low quality. Are they kusala or akusala? Whatever we think, say or do, are we giving rise to something wholesome and good, or are we giving rise to something unwholesome and bad? Recognize bhava with sati-sampajañña, and you'll understand why you need sīla.

*I'm working on restraint.*

And appreciate the danger of akusala. If you are careless, you might take rebirth as a pig, and that would be unfortunate. See dangers in anger and greed and conceit, let them all go and cultivate kusala. With practise, akusala will not arise in your mind and you'll be left with just kusala. Because no akusala arises, there will be a type of voidness, the suññatā. Base your

life solely on kusala.

## Deva Bhavas

Discovering what is akusala and what is kusala is as relevant to us today as it was to the Bodhisatta Siddhārtha Gautama some 2,000 years ago. Deva bhavas are kusala. To create a deva bhava means creating the conditions necessary to be a deva. You think humans are meditating in the hall. In fact, we have devas in the hall, as the thoughts and feelings, the bhavas, of good meditators are those of devas. Countless high quality kusala types of bhava lead to birth as a deva. You'll find this group of qualities leading to noble development in the fives of the Aṅguttara Nikāya<sup>79</sup> and also in the Mahānāma Sutta:<sup>80</sup>

- Confidence, *saddhā*
- Discipline, *sīla*
- A good deal of learning, *bahussuta*
- Generosity, *cāga*
- Wisdom, *paññā*

Saddhā means faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and it is compared to a gem. When gems capture rays of the sun, they shine brightly. Saddhā is the purest of gems and its light shines the brightest. When people have faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, that faith lights up the path, and chases away the darkness of ignorance and delusion. Then they can make some headway, take a few steps forward.

One day the evil one Mara in the guise of the Buddha paid a



visit to an upāsaka who had attained to sotāpatti. Mara did not know the upāsaka was a sotāpanna and said, “I have come to see you today because I made a few mistakes in my teachings. I said all conditioned things have the characteristic of anicca. That’s false. There are a few things that are nicca—permanent and everlasting. And I said all conditioned things have the characteristic of dukkha. Again that’s false, as not everything is dukkha. I also said all conditioned things have the characteristic of anattā. Simply false—there is atta. I am sorry. Please accept my apologies for teaching you incorrectly.” The upāsaka said, “Whoever you are, you are definitely not the Buddha because he is firm and steadfast in his knowledge and would never change his teachings. The Buddha would not deceive me.” Defeated, realizing the upāsaka’s faith was unwavering, Mara vanished.

*I take faith to mean trusting in God and generally believing a lot of stuff that can’t be proven.*

The way a child blindly accepts without questioning is not faith, is not saddhā. Faith as we’re discussing it is based in personal experience and understanding. The word confidence might sit better with you than the word faith. Call it faith or confidence, saddhā grows out of practising the teachings of the Buddha. When you meditate properly and experience results, you are uplifted. This is a path of gradual training, of improving your practice, and of a ripening of results. Saddhā purifies your heart and mind, gradually. If you attain to sotāpatti, your saddhā, your confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, would be firmly established and it would never at any time waver.

Sakka, king of the gods, thought to test the saddhā of a poor leper who had just that day attained to sotāpatti after listening to a discourse from the Buddha. Dressed as a wealthy businessman, Sakka said to the leper, “You live in a gloomy shack and beg for food. This is a miserable life you are leading and I would be happy to help you escape it. As a matter

of fact, I will give you anything your heart desires, on one condition: You must say the Buddha is not the sammā-sambuddha. You must admit that the Buddha is not the perfectly enlightened one.” The leper said to Sakka, “Well, you will have to keep all your wealth. I will never say the Buddha is not the sammā-sambuddha because he is the sammā-sambuddha. Keep your wealth.” Sakka was overjoyed. That is the nature of saddhā.

*I like these down-to-earth stories.*

Those who have confidence in the teachings of the Buddha and are sincerely walking towards path can be reckoned as noble and exceptionally good friends, even if they haven’t as yet attained path. People with saddhā always speak pleasantly and kindly to you, and never intentionally hurt your feelings. You’ll find no better friends. And people with saddhā are obedient to their teachers and accept advice with the greatest of respect. That said, teachers don’t need to give a great deal of advice to people with saddhā, definitely no need to advise them in the way parents advise children, “Don’t take what belongs to others, don’t lie, and don’t tell tall tales.” Teachers need only keep people with saddhā on track, explain the dhamma, and let them know what their future holds if they do this or do that. Whatever duties have to be performed, people with saddhā do them with interest and skill; they derive great joy out of studying the dhamma and out of meditating. And they possess sammā-vāyāma.

*Noble effort.*

With a little help from teachers, people with saddhā avoid letting fresh defilements take hold and cultivate the good qualities that are not as yet within themselves. Though slipping on this path and sometimes falling, people with saddhā are full of energy and don’t easily give up. After falling, they pick themselves up, take another step forward, and before long attain all four jhānas. People with saddhā will not own defeat. Then through the jhānas, they attain knowledge of past births, looking

possibly at one birth and then at many births. With divine eye, people with saddhā can see beings usually unseen, and can see beings dying and see beings taking on new births. The abhiññas are cultivated. In due course and by their own knowledge, people with saddhā destroy defilements and experience the joy of no defilements in their lives. A person who has saddhā is also a person who has sīla.

Sīla begins with the discipline of the five precepts—abstaining from killing, stealing, sensual misconduct, lying, and the use of intoxicants. When our sīla is good, we recognize and suppress the hindrances—excitement of sensual pleasures, ill-will, sloth and torpor, doubt, restlessness and worry, which strengthens and develops the spiritual faculties—saddhā, viriya, sati, samādhi, and paññā. As a result of good sīla, we attain samādhi. We have to become very simple to attain good and strong samādhi—that’s not for argument. And when our samādhi is good, we attain paññā and through paññā we recognize and understand all the mental factors, cetasikas. Sīla means restraining body and speech, while samādhi means restraining mind, and paññā means restraining the saṅkhārās, the formations. Sīla, samādhi, and paññā—the three divisions of the noble eightfold path act in accordance with the process of dependent origination.

*Living a simple life should ease some of my restlessness.*

Only arahats are free from restlessness. Sīla is not practised to cure restlessness, nor is sīla practised to have a good birth. Sīla helps you recognize the restlessness in your mind and helps you purify your mind, right now in this current birth. Read the story of the modest young man Hatthaka of Alavi in the Aṅguttara Nikāya.<sup>81</sup> A man of few wishes, Hatthaka lived a simple life and properly developed his sīla. When you lack the discipline of the five precepts, when sīla is poor, you’re only living with confusion and samādhi will never arise, let alone any paññā. Far

too many people have no qualms at all about stealing, lying and adultery. This is a path that starts with sīla, starts by restraining the body and speech—that's the most basic level of discipline.

In the Sekha Sutta,<sup>82</sup> Ānanda gives Mahānāma and other Sakyans of Kapilavatthu a teaching on higher levels of discipline, and he mentions the deva-dhammas of hiri and ottappa. The Sekha Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya as well as the Subhūti Sutta<sup>83</sup> in the Book of the Elevens in the Aṅguttara Nikāya are important suttas for those who are training in higher levels of discipline, especially important for bhikkhus. Hiri and ottappa translate as shame and fear of wrongdoing. They are the guardians of our communities. People with hiri and ottappa are ashamed of akusalas committed and are afraid of committing new akusalas. They avoid the smallest amount of errors. Not only is their sīla brilliant, they respect parents and elders, obey teachers, and perform needed duties. People with hiri and ottappa express gratitude to those who are kind to them and care for the members of their communities. When shame and fear of wrongdoing decline, the wellbeing of communities declines. People who brazenly indulge in bad behaviour destroy the goodness, compassion and friendliness in our communities, and there is no possibility for anyone to practise higher levels of discipline and to cultivate higher good. In a community that doesn't care, there is only cruelty.

*I know a Canadian Christian priest who is in jail because he sexually assaulted children. It's discouraging.*

The whole world, including Sri Lanka, is in a bad state. But the problems in the world will become still worse unless each of us does his or her best to correct the erroneous views and actions of those members of our communities who are out of control. With patience and understanding, we must assert the importance of discipline to maintain the health of our communities. A man or woman without shame and without fear of wrongdoing is no

better than an animal. Animals do not respect their parents. They do not express gratitude. Although to be fair to the animals, it appears now and then that animals are the beings who have the hiri and ottappa and humans are the beings who do not. I heard of a faithful dog that stopped eating after its owner died. The dog simply slept under the owner's bed until it also died. And a woman who visits our centre told me a story about a tusker elephant. Ten years ago, her father sold the tusker to a man who lived quite a distance away, maybe twenty miles from her home. Then just recently, the tusker and its new mahout were working about two miles from the woman's home, and the tusker, against the demands of the mahout, stopped working and started walking towards her home. Since the mahout knew nothing of the tusker's previous life, he was puzzled and did everything possible to stop the tusker from walking towards the woman's home. Yet, there was no changing the tusker's mind and it just kept on walking. And once at the woman's home, the tusker would not leave.

*Why did the elephant go to the woman's home?*

The tusker returned to its previous home and owner. The tusker didn't know it was sold.

*And what does this story have to do with shame and fear of wrongdoing?*

In their own ways, both the dog and the tusker appear to have hiri and ottappa. They remembered acts of kindness. They remembered the people who did them a service. I'm not saying this dog and this tusker have any deep sense of shame or are afraid of committing akusalas. Animals don't think that way. I am only saying the dog and tusker had hiri and ottappa in the sense of showing respect and gratitude. At the very least, they remembered their owners. Elephants never forget, even after thirty, forty or fifty years.

Bahussuta, a good deal of learning especially in dhamma, is another high quality type of bhava that leads to birth as a deva. Bahussuta people create countless deva-bhavas. Not only do they enjoy listening to the teachings of the Buddha, bahussuta people remember and make use of what they've heard. And they reflect on the teachings, discuss the teachings and ask questions when something is unclear. As is often stated in the suttas, the people for whom the teachings of the Buddha are part of their lives and not something apart from their lives see dhamma as beautiful in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Bahussuta people are always seeing the true nature of things and not falling into any views held by the world because they have experience with the teachings, have realized dhamma through wisdom. If asked about the teachings, they can explain with great eloquence and with the correct words this noble eightfold path that leads to the end of saṃsāra. Bahussuta people know the teachings well.

*Studying the Buddha's teachings is a deep black hole where I am losing my whole life and, to make matters worse, I don't feel I understand anything at all. This can't be satisfying for you.*

There are various reasons why you understand only a fraction, maybe 5%, of my teachings. No need to worry. You benefit and I'm satisfied with your progress. I am a teacher. You are a student. It is my task to teach you. And learning what the Buddha taught is almost always a lifetime project. No one ever fully grasps the dhamma by reading a few suttas, going to the temple every day, and observing sil. I spent the better part of twenty-five years with my teacher, Sumathipāla Na Himi. If you look at dhamma as a deep black hole, the Buddha's teachings will be difficult for you to understand, and teachings will go deeper and deeper and become increasingly more complex. Your studies will be endless with that approach. What the

Buddha taught is difficult to understand only for those whose level of defilement is high, while anyone with little defilement understands the dhamma easily and quickly. Anyone who is honest immediately sees the Buddha's teachings as simple and practical. You needn't know everything; you only need to know the right amount.

The Buddha had students who attained arahatship upon hearing just a few of his words. Long ago I knew a young man who was a good meditator and was determined to take temporary ordination for three months. As is proper for Sri Lankans, he first asked his mother for permission. She approved and he ordained as sāmaṇera Polpipigama Dhammajiva. Near the end of his three months in robes, the rains retreat was about to start and Dhammajiva wanted to stay on as a sāmaṇera. He again asked his mother for permission. "Yes," said his mother, "I will wait another three months for you to come home." Dhammajiva died the next day. Every so often, advanced minds are born into our world, this sense-sphere human world of ours, and it's natural for them to meditate properly.

*What is it again that distinguishes people with advanced minds?*

Saddhā, confidence; sīla, discipline; bahussuta, a good deal of learning; cāga, generosity; and paññā, wisdom—when we meditate properly and act like devas, we create deva bhavas. An act of giving performed with the bhava of cāga is performed at a higher level of development than ordinary giving, as the craving, the expectations of future results, and the feeling mind's liking for sensuality are all playing minor roles. An act of giving performed with cāga is divorced from self-interest. You sometimes cover the costs of the main meal for our meditation centre and there can be over fifty people at that meal, which means it costs you quite a bit of money and effort. You also recently bought cellphone cards for bhikkhus and bought a

lawnmower to cut the grass. Giving to others is a beneficial way of experience, kusala-cchanda.

And though it seems you are being generous, we can't say your acts of giving are at the level of cāga because tañhā and expectations are readily seen. You want to be happy in the moment, want the meal to go according to your wishes, and want the bhikkhus to appreciate the cellphone cards. And that lawnmower better be used and maintained properly. When things don't go according to your wishes, say the lawnmower is neglected, you get angry. If you could offer the lawnmower and other gifts without any craving or expectations, you wouldn't get angry when the gifts aren't used according to your wishes and then we could say you are performing your acts of giving with the bhava of cāga, generosity. You're not alone. Almost everyone performs good actions with craving and expectations and sinks into the experience of giving, indulges in the excitement of sensuality, kāma-cchanda. Sense desires and involvement of self play a major role in almost everyone's acts of giving. Some people offer dānas to bhikkhus to decrease their chances of birth in a lower world and to increase their chances of birth in the human world, preferably as a human with wealth and health.

*The lawnmower is ruined.*

If there is to be any chance of realizing nibbāna, we must try to perform good actions without thinking of future results.

*At least giving makes amends for some of my past wrongs.*

Giving dānas, covering the costs of meals at our centre or buying gifts for bhikkhus—the volition to perform kusala does not destroy or exhaust that same degree of akusala, and does not destroy the potential for birth in a lower world. All those previous and nasty bhavas remain. Over so many lifetimes through saṃsāra, you have done countless terrible actions and created countless of the bad lower world bhavas within you.



There is no hope of attaining nibbāna by exhausting all the results of all those unwholesome actions. On top of being an endless task, exhausting akusala is difficult because we have a strong liking for sensuality, kāma-cchanda, and we continue to indulge in kāma. No need to think too much about the wrongs you have done in the past. Let them be.

*Many people come right out and ask me for stuff.*

It is not becoming of bhikkhus, not the quality of good bhikkhus, to ask you for cellphone cards and money. I don't like it. Bhikkhus get what they need. If I ask you for this and that and the other, you won't have any peace of mind. It is much better for you and for me that I lead a simple life. Only if someone asks will I go to see them. I don't go out of my way to trouble anyone and I definitely shouldn't trouble you with requests to buy things for me. Whatever you do and wherever you go know that people all belong to one category. A chair is a chair whether it is made one way in Sri Lanka or another way in Canada. We cannot judge a person by his or her clothes or by appearance or by nationality. As time goes on, we come to know a person's true character by association.

*Teaching must be an act of generosity.*

No, that's not a good example of cāga because I expect you to learn something and I enjoy teaching. Ha! Of course, those aren't the sole reasons why I teach, and you are interested in learning.

Sumathipāla Na Himi was generous, never asked anything of anyone and was never any trouble to anyone. Not only generous, he had many fine qualities, such as maintaining a clean meditation centre. If he saw a nail sticking out of a board, he scolded the worker who had left it that way. And he encouraged his students to be clean at all times, to have few things, and to act pleasantly with everyone. When I was young, the hair on my head was thick, the strands were like nails, and it was painful to

shave. If I was lazy and didn't shave for ten or fifteen days, Sumathipāla Na Himi showed his toughness and shouted at me. I took a vacation from shaving while meditating in the jungle, but I made sure to clean myself up before returning to Kanduboda. I think openness and friendliness were Sumathipāla Na Himi's greatest qualities. Small children liked him very much. Looking for candy, they time and again entered his kuti without asking permission and he wouldn't say anything at all about the intrusion. Even when children made a mess in his room he wouldn't scold them. No one, neither child nor adult, was frightened to go near Sumathipāla Na Himi. During periods of group meditation, he also meditated in his room. And he knew when people at the meditation centre were sick and made sure they received the appropriate care. Sumathipāla Na Himi was a fine person and a fine teacher, and I have always tried to conduct myself according to his wishes.

*Did he teach any Westerners?*

You can be proud of the Canadian nun Dhammadinnā. She started samatha meditation with Hindu teachers in India who taught her the blue kasiṇa, jhāna, and spiritual powers. She became extremely advanced in samatha. Eventually however, Dhammadinnā wanted to learn vipassanā and, looking through her kasiṇa nimitta for a teacher, Sumathipāla Na Himi and Sri Lanka came to her mind. After arriving in Sri Lanka, she again looked through her nimitta to see who could bring her in contact with Sumathipāla Na Himi. This time, Dhammadinnā saw Bhante Sīvalī's mother in her mind's eye. Dhammadinnā then met Sīvalī's mother, who told Dhammadinnā of her son Sīvalī. Dhammadinnā's powers were strong, as Sīvalī was living with Sumathipāla Na Himi at the time. Early the next morning Dhammadinnā and Sīvalī's mother went to Kanduboda, where Dhammadinnā met Sumathipāla Na Himi. He was sweeping the leaves of a mango tree at the time. I also met Dhammadinnā at

Kanduboda. She was sixty years of age and I was twenty-six. She was strong, tall, and—fat! And equally, she was kind and compassionate.

Fortunately, both Sumathipāla Na Himi and Dhammadinnā spoke Hindi, and Sumathipāla Na Himi could instruct her in vipassanā. As soon as Dhammadinnā got into the satipaṭṭhāna practice, she lost all her spiritual powers and could not make the nimittas arise or attain jhāna. Dhammadinnā started crying and wanted to stop meditating, as she was ordinary and just like everyone else. Sumathipāla Na Himi somehow persuaded her to continue. At the end of three to four months of vipassanā, with her still grieving the loss of her spiritual powers, Sumathipāla Na Himi asked Dhammadinnā to try her old practice again. And this time, the spiritual powers returned with twice their earlier strength—her nimittas arose with twice the brightness. Dhammadinnā was an inspiration to many of the bhikkhus who were meditating according to Sumathipāla Na Himi's instructions.

### *And after Sri Lanka?*

Before she got out of Sri Lanka, she was robbed of her great mass of luggage at the bus stand in Pettah. Of course she did not care about getting robbed. After Sri Lanka, Dhammadinnā first went to Perth, Australia, where she built a temple, and then she returned to Canada where she built some kutis. Her son lived in Canada. I have not seen one other foreigner as highly developed as Dhammadinnā. Even while living in Canada, she used her spiritual powers to see what Sumathipāla Na Himi needed at his meditation centre. Sumathipāla Na Himi did not have proper robes. She sent robes and dye. There was at one time a sugar shortage here in Sri Lanka. Dhammadinnā sent sugar. These are things I have seen with my own eyes. Her mind was established in kasiṇa nimitta. At the time Dhammadinnā was dying in a Canadian hospital, she wrote to Sumathipāla Na Himi, telling

him how the vipassanā practice helped to relieve her suffering. Some bhikkhus thought Dhammadinnā must have been a sakadāgāmī, a once-returner. She certainly was a good meditator and she got a good teacher.

*Me too.*

If you stay long enough in this work, a teacher whose mother tongue is English will come about.

*I have no plans to give up the work.*

Paññā, wisdom, is our fifth type of high quality bhava that leads to birth as a deva. Paññā you know as the first division of the noble eightfold path and it consists of sammā-diṭṭhi and sammā-saṅkappa. Sammā-diṭṭhi means in essence understanding the process of dependent origination, paṭiccasamuppāda, as all of the Buddha's teachings, with the exception of nibbāna, fall within and act in accordance with the process of dependent origination. The four noble truths, kamma, the three characteristics—all the Buddha's teachings fall within paṭiccasamuppāda. Sammā-saṅkappa means right thought; some translate sammā-saṅkappa as right intention. And isn't saṅkhappa bhava? Yes, that happening and doing part of our lives, each thought and intention, has to be bhava.

*I'm still bewildered. Is bhava a verb or a noun?*

Bhava is an active process, the instant where kusala-kamma or akusala-kamma happens.

*Are you saying thoughts, bhava and kamma are all pretty much the same? I am going around in circles. If saṅkappa means thought, then saṅkappa must be a form of saṅkhara because much earlier you said thoughts are saṅkharas. This is dizzying.*

It takes time to grasp why bhava, kamma, saṅkhāra, and saṅkappa are treated separately. In The Great Forty Sutta,<sup>84</sup> there

is a helpful explanation of sammā-saṅkappa. There is sammā-saṅkappa that is subject to clinging and sammā-saṅkappa that is not subject to clinging. For our sammā-saṅkappa to be free from clinging, we would have to be in the stream to arahatship. We are not in the stream to arahatship. Our thinking is subject to clinging and thus our thinking creates bhavas that shape the types of births that arise. If you have effort and reject wrong thoughts and intentions, reject what as a Christian you call sin, you're creating kusala-bhavas. If you know the process of hetu-phala, know you are creating bhavas and working towards eliminating bhavas and births, you would be creating total kusala-bhavas. Sammā-saṅkhappa is kusala-kamma for us, the non-arahats. Out of the vast array of akusala and kusala-bhavas that we create, only three types of bhava are based in sammā-saṅkhappa:

- Thoughts of non-ill will, *avyāpāda-saṅkappa*
- Thoughts of non-cruelty, *avihiṃsā-saṅkappa*
- Thoughts of renunciation, *nekkhamma-saṅkappa*

All our mentality-materiality is produced by kamma and by mind. Our whole being is nothing more than dependently originated phenomena. We start with renunciation and sīla, start with restraining the ill will and cruelty, then throw in a little generosity and this adds up to kindness and compassion. Our renunciation and sīla is a dāna, a generous offering, to others. The whole practice of meditation comes down to developing kindness and compassion.

## Compassion

Compassion, karunā in Pali, means understanding the suffering of others and feeling a need to alleviate it. We understand the suffering that animals endure. The mangy dogs on our streets are

hungry, disease ridden, and their skins are peeling off. And those beautiful dogs, the ones that look like powder puffs, may well suffer when locked inside their owners' homes. They want to get outside. One person has neither food nor shelter. Another has both food and shelter, but no education. A third person has food and shelter and education, but can't travel. We can differentiate these levels of suffering. A fourth has food and shelter and education and can also travel, but his or her body ages and decays. Extremely wealthy people age and die. And as people age, society rejects them. Everyone experiences dukkha. Some people fear death; some fear rebirth in a bad state. We could be healthy today and sick tomorrow.

Compassion starts close to home and is extended outwards. Mothers, for instance, develop compassion by first seeing the suffering of their own children and then extending this compassion to seeing the suffering of children in general. Used by the Buddha, the compassion that good mothers have for their children is the yardstick by which we measure our own compassion. You could develop your compassion by first seeing the suffering of your brother who has schizophrenia, and then extend that compassion to seeing the suffering of brothers in general, or to seeing the suffering of everyone who has schizophrenia. Training raises the level of compassion. You might first see the suffering of your pet snake and then see the suffering of snakes in general or of all pets. Or you may well see the suffering of meditators here at our centre and then extend that compassion outwards to seeing the suffering of all meditators. When developed to its highest level, compassion is indistinguishable from sammā-saṅkappa, the second factor of the eightfold path.

Dukkha and compassion come in an infinite variety of forms. We see someone suffering one way or another and want to help. And we do help, regardless of whether we think he or she is a good or bad person. While working for two months on a tsunami

project down on the south-west coast, you helped construct new homes for families whose homes were destroyed, you visited mothers and fathers whose children were washed off to sea and drowned, and you gave cigarettes to smokers. The compassion you showed by constructing homes differed from the compassion you showed by visiting grieving parents, which again differed from the compassion you showed by giving out cigarettes. Dukkha is wide-ranging, a well-matched form of karunā arises, and we simply do what is needed. We help without making distinctions based on race or religion, help wealthy and poor, help healthy and sick, help well-off and beggar children, help animals as well as humans, and help without expectations of getting anything in return. Compassion is free of ulterior motives—that is karunā's fundamental feature. We care for those mangy street dogs and we care for the powder puff dogs.

*Who told you about the cigarettes?*

That's a secret!

*How am I suffering?*

As we're now discussing it, compassion means understanding how others are suffering and wanting to alleviate their suffering, not your's. Compassion is directed outwards. Understanding and wanting to alleviate your own suffering is a separate issue and is dealt with separately. Even so, compassion for others and compassion for yourself are complementary, as understanding and alleviating the suffering of others helps you understand and alleviate your own suffering. At least you arouse compassion within yourself when you have compassion for others, and that's a good thing. You thought you were doing nothing more than helping the tsunami victims. You were in fact helping yourself.

*I don't get it. I really only wanted to help construct a few homes and clean up the mess.*

Sammā-diṭṭhi, right understanding, is the base for compassion. Read The Great Forty Sutta;<sup>85</sup> it's an important sutta. Sammā-diṭṭhi means understanding wrong intention as wrong intention and understanding right intention as right intention. The understanding of suffering and having the desire to alleviate suffering is crammed full of right intention, which overcomes your wrong intentions. Clearly, wholesome intentions, those based in non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion, will each time conquer unwholesome intentions, those based in greed, hatred and delusion. In general however we don't see how our efforts in compassion for others are linked to compassion for ourselves. There are strong factors. The tsunami was a massive tragedy and you felt a deep desire to help. You could show compassion for victims precisely because you had already been showing compassion to yourself. People who don't have any karuṇā for anyone else don't care at all about themselves. If we developed a lot more compassion for others, we would fly like arrows, hit the target, and finish there. The fact that we haven't reached the target reveals a lack of compassion for ourselves.

### *Target? Enlightenment?!*

To the depth we understand suffering, to that same depth we can have compassion. Views won't suffice. No, we must penetrate suffering. Views are what we think about any given situation, and they're based on intellectual knowledge gathered from parents, schools, teachers, friends, and books. With views on suffering and compassion, we have discussions, write, and teach. With views from the world, we live in this world. In contrast, understanding suffering is based on personal experience and realization, without involvement of the world and all its views. Reading a few suttas doesn't go far enough. The Buddha's teachings must be experienced by oneself, paccatta. Realization is personal. Alone. When you understand the nature of suffering for yourself, your old views on suffering are destroyed.



*That makes sense. I have to know what's wrong with someone before I can do anything to help them. Understanding comes first. Desire to help comes second.*

The Buddha-Dhamma is about minimizing problems now, not about achieving uncertain future or after death results or about remembering lots of facts. Falling into views about the Buddha-Dhamma only binds us in saṃsāra.

*And how about the Buddha's compassion?*

The understanding of worldly suffering and feeling a need to alleviate it—hunger, worry, failure, sickness, abuse, and so on—are all taken as a group within the primary level of compassion. To go slightly beyond the primary level, we have to come to terms with the suffering linked to saṃsāra. If through countless manifestations these life-cycles of birth, old age, and death are continuing all the time, then that's a much deeper mess. A bodhisatta practises compassion at the secondary level. He or she understands the dukkha linked to saṃsāra and is working to alleviate it. A teacher understands a student's level of suffering and teaches accordingly. The Buddha practised a level of karuṇā that was unique, unreachable and hard to explain. Our compassion doesn't come anywhere near that level. The compassion of any noble person is hard for us to understand because we are on the worldly side of path knowledge and can only understand the primary and secondary levels of compassion. Though we differentiate levels of suffering within one birth and perhaps differentiate between suffering incurred during one birth and suffering incurred during multiple births, the men and women who have attained path knowledge differentiate suffering according to four levels of path knowledge.

*How does right understanding lead us to practise compassion?*

Just as water needs a proper container, say a bottle or jug,

compassion needs a proper container. The proper container for karunā is sammā-diṭṭhi. The Buddha had the compassion; Devadatta—no container. Almost no one in the world understands dukkha to the depth required to receive the full amount of compassion that exists in the world. Sammā-diṭṭhi means understanding the true nature of objects of contact and taking them in the right way. Because we don't have right understanding, we take objects of contact, especially pleasant ones, in the wrong way. We're blind to the drawbacks and dangers, the ādinava, that always accompany pleasant conditions. Sammā-diṭṭhi, I mentioned a moment ago, also means understanding that some right intentions are subject to clinging and some right intentions are not subject to clinging. There are two types of sammā-saṅkhappa. Because we don't have right understanding, we don't see the clinging, upādāna, in our intentions. Though we employ right intentions to overcome wrong intentions, the best of our intentions are subject to clinging and thus have effects, hetu-phala. We're creating kusala-bhavas. We are using one poison to overcome another poison. Kusala-kamma is still bhava.

*Yes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.*

At some point, we must reach a state that is not arising out of causes and effects, which means it is free from upādāna and bhava.

*And what is that state?*

Situated in conventional reality and using conventional views, we are trying to talk about something that is beyond conventional reality and beyond conventional views. Not easy. To go beyond the conventional, we gradually develop our understanding about the nature of things to the point of seeing one of the three characteristics—anicca, dukkha, or anattā. Though counter intuitive, we must be solidly placed in conventional reality to experience ultimate reality. One of the

three characteristics could, for example, be realized in throwing away a bhikkhu's robe.

*The robes are often on my mind.*

Our understanding about the nature of conditioned objects is lacking. I sometimes get angry at you for using teachings in ways that I don't like. You believe that you existed in the past.

*I am quite certain that I existed in the past.*

The detachment from the view of a permanent self comes when you realize that the same conditions in life leading to the arising of pleasure, the assāda, also lead to the arising of pain. Conditions leading to the arising of pain—the drawbacks, dangers, and misery in pleasurable conditions—are called ādīnava in Pali. Looking honestly over your fifty-plus years in this life, you can see there have always been ādīnavas connected to assādas. You have suffered. I too have suffered. Everyone has suffered. Since pain was always connected to pleasure in your past, pain must be connected to pleasure right now and be connected to pleasure in the future. Seeing the sorry and pathetic circumstances in which you are living, stuck in the middle between past and future pains, you can't help but have some compassion and stop chasing pleasure.

*Why is it so hard to stop chasing after pleasures?*

All our problems arise out of holding onto the view of a permanent self. When you detach yourself from the view of a permanent self, you'll stop the problems. Any wise person has a degree of compassion. Understanding suffering and feeling a need to alleviate it, he or she stops doing anything that reinforces and creates the self, and moves towards equanimity regarding all objects of contact. In ultimate reality, there are just phenomena—merely causes and effects, actions and reactions.

# Brahma Bhavas

To create a brahma bhava means creating the conditions necessary to be a brahma. When jhāna arises within the mind of the meditator, he or she creates brahma bhavas. These brahma bhavas of the jhāna are extremely strong kusala bhavas that lead to birth as a brahma in the brahma loka; we'll take the brahma loka to mean rūpa and arūpa loka. It is a human being who creates brahma bhavas. To gain jhāna, the meditator might take mettā as the object of meditation. He or she makes four efforts:<sup>86</sup>

- Restrain unarisen akusala states, *saṁvarappadhāna*
- Abandon arisen akusala states, *pahānappadhāna*
- Develop unarisen kusala states, *bhāvanāppadhāna*
- Maintain arisen kusala states, *anurakkhaṇappadhāna*

I won't talk at length about jhāna meditation. Almost as soon as the meditator starts practising with sufficient effort and guidance, kusala states of mind, such as jhāna, start arising. A meditator gaining first jhāna, for example, temporarily experiences a state of mind comparable to the state of mind of an anāgāmī. The akusala is not to be seen. The meditator abandons akusala and gains kusala quickly in his or her current life because the meditator gained kusala in his or her past lives. In the long journey through saṁsāra, the meditator had already gained jhāna and had already been a brahma living in the brahma loka. Jhāna is not new. It is a previously arisen kusala state to develop once again, not an unarisen kusala state to develop for the first time. All of us have gained jhāna at some point in saṁsāra and all of us have been brahmas living in the brahma loka. We have also been cows and pigs and other

animals. For now, we have given up the ways of cows and pigs and come to the ways of humans. There is no need for you to make too much effort in developing jhāna, as the jhāna state of mind will arise easily when conditions are suitable.

*Many teachers stress the importance of jhāna.*

The best kind of clinging is to the jhāna. Even if you gain jhāna, that in itself is not a problem. The jhāna is fine and good. However, the brahma bhavas of the jhāna are strong and they lead to birth in the brahma loka, and taking birth in the brahma loka does not make an end to saṃsāra. If the factors of jhāna—vitakka, vicāra, pīti, sukha, and citt'ekaggatā—are there in your mind at the breakup of your body, then rebirth will take place in the brahma loka. On the other hand, if your aspiration is to make an end to saṃsāra, it is more important to turn your mind towards vipassanā.

## *Sati and Wisdom*

Many years ago, I told you a story of a man who was disturbed by a pile of garbage laying on the path where he went for his daily walks. There were bits of broken glass, rotting food, and shards of metal. The man hid the garbage under a few shovelfuls of soil and resumed his daily walks. Then the rains came, washed away the soil, and the garbage was once again visible and disturbing as well as dangerous. The man realized hiding garbage wasn't enough. He dug into the garbage and hauled it away. His path was clear and he walked undisturbed. Samatha meditation practices, without any vipassanā, just hide our garbage, simply cover over our ignorance and delusion.

At the beginning of today's talk, I mentioned a few things that never get mixed up with ignorance and delusion. Do you remember them?

*Sati and wisdom.*

Yes. Good vipassanā meditators have lots of sati-sampajañña and wisdom. They dig into their garbage and haul it away, a difficult and unpleasant task.

*Ah good. I guessed right.*

We practise vipassanā meditation to overcome worldly bhava and attain nibbāna. Both akusala and kusala bhava are worldly and both lead to birth, in either pleasant or unpleasant worlds. Sense-sphere world, kāma-loka; fine-material world, rūpa-loka; and non-material world, arūpa-loka—it's all worldly. Practising vipassanā to overcome worldly bhava does not fall into craving sensuality, kāma-taṇhā; craving existence, bhava-taṇhā; or craving annihilation, vibhava-taṇhā. Vipassanā is kusala-cchanda, an aspiration for the wholesome and beneficial. It is a kusala action leading to freedom from coveting, abhijjhā, and freedom from grieving, domanassa. Proper vipassanā is non-worldly bhava.

Some strictly samatha meditators strive to attain nibbāna by getting rid of worldly bhava. This is vibhava-taṇhā. Believing in the existence of a self, vibhava-taṇhā meditators crave annihilation of the self. They want no bad results from actions, want nothing to happen at their deaths. No rebirth. Death is the end. Vibhava-taṇhā is a wrong and can be a dangerous view, as good and bad results will come. Rebirths happen. Death isn't the end. We don't practise vipassanā with the idea of getting rid of bhava, nor can we attain nibbāna by getting rid of bhava. From morning until night, we are subjected to millions upon millions of worldly bhavas. How can anyone expect to get rid of bhava? The process of kamma is happening constantly—every moment.

*What's the difference between getting rid of bhava and overcoming bhava?*

The difference lies in views on the existence of bhava and the existence of a permanent self. If meditators are trying to get rid of

bhava, they must believe bhava exists, which means they must also believe in the existence of a permanent self. If bhava and self exist now, then bhava and self will exist in the future. If David is here now, David will be there in the future, and David can't hope to overcome bhava. On the other hand, if meditators are overcoming bhava, they have accepted to some degree that both bhava and self are insubstantial. These meditators see bhava and self with sati-sampajañña and wisdom, and are discovering both to be a process of cause and effect that is continually taking place. If bhava and self are insubstantial now, then bhava and self must be insubstantial in the future. If David is not here now, then David cannot be there in the future. We must realize what is happening in our lives right now, in this very moment, is only a process and nothing but a process.

*If I learn vipassanā meditation, what can I expect in the long run?*

Having any expectations of results is clinging. We must try to avoid thinking about the future and avoid thinking about the past. Many meditators have many expectations and practise for jhāna or deva birth or nibbāna. They are clinging to the causes. If meditators expect particular results, they won't get those particular results. The moment meditators start expecting jhāna, they won't get jhāna. And when they expect a deva birth, they won't get a deva birth. Some meditators expect to attain nibbāna—they won't get that result either. Having no expectations of results, people who practise vipassanā properly find nibbāna at the point their minds do not contact greed, hatred or delusion. And nibbāna is not the clinging to non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. Nibbāna is not any of those. On the path to nibbāna, vipassanā meditators let go of all their craving, coveting and greed, let go of all that conceit, grief and hate and let go of divisive views, measuring and delusion, which leads their minds to the point of non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.

You will only attain nibbāna by practising to attain nibbāna, without any expectations of attaining nibbāna.

*Then I'll try to have no expectations of results.*

Even when practising without expectations, the results will come. Akusala and kusala bhava happen in one shape or another. Thus, when meditators see akusala bhava happening, they suppress it. When they see kusala bhava, they develop it. If meditators manage to suppress all akusala bhava, they experience something like nibbāna. This state is not nibbāna, only similar. On the other hand, though more advanced meditators must also suppress akusala bhava, they develop kusala bhava with the goal of strengthening and bringing their sati-sampajañña and wisdom to maturity. They develop wholesome attention, yoniso-manasikāra, towards the four foundations of mindfulness of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta<sup>87</sup>—body, feelings, states of mind, and mind-objects—and discover that akusala and kusala bhava are conditions present within them and discover that anicca, dukkha, and anattā are not separate from akusala and kusala bhava. It is with sati-sampajañña and wisdom that the tendency to bhava is shattered—that would be the cause for seeing nibbāna.

*Bhava is shattered? You just said bhava is constantly happening. Is bhava happening or is it shattered?*

We can't do things too quickly, nor do we want to do them too slowly. The path to nibbāna is steady and gradual. In all four foundations of mindfulness, vipassanā meditators work to be free from coveting, abhijjhā, and work to be free from grieving, domanassa. There is awareness of any craving or aversion, or any expectations in the mind, and there is effort made to keep the mind free from them. Sati-sampajañña and wisdom need to arise.

For example, through our eyes and ears, we see and hear.



Then naturally, based on our clinging to sights and sounds, we create countless akusala and kusala bhavas. Seeing and hearing is an ordinary everyday experience. We think about the good and bad and act accordingly. Good vipassanā meditators chip away at this natural tendency of their minds to cling to sense objects and create countless bhavas. When contact is made through eyes and ears, good meditators remind themselves of the true nature of what they see and hear—anicca, dukkha, and anattā. By knowing the three characteristics to be inherent in all sense objects and all that comes through sense doors, meditators decrease clinging and create very few bhavas. They minimize thinking of good and bad. To the ascetic Bāhiya, the Buddha said, “There must be in what is seen, just the seen. In the heard, just the heard.”<sup>88</sup>

*I can't imagine not grieving or living without good and bad. Look at the trauma caused by the tsunami and the earthquakes in China, Pakistan and Haiti. And just recently, BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Millions of people and animals were affected. How can I not grieve? How can I not think these events horrific?*

Arguing about the nature of bhava will not decrease bhava—it has to be experiential. You know people who have strong confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, and know people who have lots of energy and sati. When your confidence, energy and sati are lacking, seek out those who have confidence, energy and sati. You know people have good samādhi and deep wisdom. By associating with these people, your spiritual faculties, indriya-dhammas, will develop. Read the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, The Fruits of the Homeless Life, in the Dīgha Nikāya.<sup>89</sup> Also read the Satipaṭṭhānaśamyutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya.<sup>90</sup> It's not possible to overcome bhava and attain nibbāna all at once. More training leads to more results.

# No worldly Bhavas

Akusala and kusala bhavas lead to birth, as well as decay and death. Sati-sampajañña and wisdom are enemies to worldly bhava. Though akusala and kusala bhavas happen, bhavas are noted with sati right in early stages of creation and dismissed. For example, if you note, “Yes, I am understanding what Pemasiri is saying.” At that point, clinging, upādāna, is low and the creation of worldly bhava might not happen. A person who never practices meditation will have instances where bhava doesn’t happen. However, if conceit comes through, “I understand Pemasiri better than most people.” At that point, upādāna is high and the creation of worldly bhava has certainly happened. When you see the difference between these two ways of thought, your practice is at an acceptable level. An arahat’s mind is ultimate right thought, sammā-saṅkappa. It is non-worldly bhava and doesn’t create any possibility for birth. He or she knows well the point where there is no worldly bhava, but there is compassion. And for non-worldly bhava not to happen, even sammā-saṅkappa has to end—that’s when all bhava ends.

*Many people think they are enlightened.*

Read the Kosambi Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya<sup>91</sup> and the Sariputta Sutta in the Aṅguttara Nikāya.<sup>92</sup> Most everyone who claims to have attained path knowledge is putting on airs. What I know about path comes from Sumathipāla Na Himi. Path is a state of sati-sampajañña and wisdom without any coveting, abhijjhā, and without any grieving, domanassa. Path means putting away the four types of clinging<sup>93</sup>—to sensuality, kāmupādāna; to views, diṭṭhupādāna; to rites and rituals, sīlabbatupādāna; and to personality view, atta-vādupādāna. This is difficult. Not at all easy. I cannot accept on hearsay that so and

so has attained. To be completely free from anger, people must attain to the stage of anāgāmi, and that would be genuine.

*That sounds really hard to achieve.*

Seeing the point where no worldly bhavas are being created is a feasible step towards path knowledge, magga-ñāṇa. By continuously noting and dismissing the various akusala and kusala bhavas that arise, you would gradually decrease clinging, which in turn gradually decreases the number of worldly bhavas that are created. Little by little, with sati-sampajañña and wisdom growing, you eventually come to a non-worldly place. In this place, there is no clinging to any object or experience or idea or concept, and there is no creating of worldly bhavas. You see something new is being created, but what is created is apart from akusala and kusala and it does not lead to birth. Without upādāna, there is no room for bhava.

*And path knowledge?*

When sati-sampajañña and wisdom are perfect and prolonged from at first momentary then to minutes, then to hours, good vipassanā meditators abide seeing causes and effects, and purify views about the nature of things. They have direct experience with paṭiccasamuppāda. With the arising of this, that arises. They understand the process of dependent origination. With the cessation of this, that ceases. Because of seeing causes and effects, meditators see the way of release from causes and effects, and turn their lives towards the attaining of nibbāna. When one's view is sufficiently pure, a moment of path knowledge arises, which destroys potential to engage in akusala. By the power of that first moment of path knowledge, the potential for birth in the lower worlds of animals, ghosts, demons, or hell beings is destroyed.

Siddhārtha searched long and hard to discover what is akusala and what is kusala. Though studying with Ālāra Kālāma and

Uddaka Rāmaputta, attaining the sphere of nothingness and the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, Siddhārtha wasn't satisfied, as he saw misery and drawbacks even in arūpa-jjhāna states. These states are also conditioned, subject to birth, decay, and death. Siddhārtha wanted something beyond worldly suffering. He left his two great teachers, continued searching, and eventually fully realized the truth of dependent origination. Siddhārtha discovered non-worldly bhava, that only when he was removed from clinging, upādāna, was he removed from creating akusala and kusala, and thus released from creating the various linked births. We could just as well say Siddhārtha discovered that removing himself from the process of creating worldly bhavas released him from creating birth, decay and death. Siddhārtha discovered an escape from suffering and became the Buddha.

### *Was the Buddha human?*

In the Aṅguttara Nikāya,<sup>94</sup> there is a story of the brahmin Dona who was walking on the same path as the Buddha had walked upon earlier in the same day. Seeing the footprints left by the Buddha, which were marked with marvelous patterns, Dona didn't think these beautiful footprints had been made by any normal human being. A short time later, Dona caught up to the Buddha, who was sitting cross-legged under a tree. Dona was impressed and asked, "Dear sir, are you a brahma?" To which the Buddha said, "No, I am not a brahma." Dona asked, "Are you some kind of deva?" The Buddha said, "No, I am not a deva." Dona asked, "Are you a human?" Buddha said, "No, I am not human." Dona asked, "An animal?" Buddha said, "No, I am not an animal." Dona asked, "A ghost, demon, or hell being?" Buddha said, "No, I'm no ghost, demon, or hell being."

*Dona must've been shaking his head.*

Yes, then the Buddha explained, "Because I have no clinging that

leads to birth as a ghost, demon, or hell being, I am not a ghost, demon, or hell being. Because I have no clinging that leads to birth as an animal, I am not an animal. I also have no clinging that leads to birth as a human, deva or brahma or leads to birth as a being of any world that arises out of causes. I am not a human, deva or brahma. A lotus is born in mud and water, and then grows out of the mud and water. The lotus stands free of the mud and blooms, with a fragrance for everyone. In spite of birth in a human womb, I experienced that which is without causes and transcends the human. Brahmin, know me as enlightened.”



. It is wonderful indeed, sir! It is amazing indeed, sir! Now who here won't be a stream-enterer when the Blessed One has declared Sarakāṇi the Sakyan after he died to be a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as his destination? Sarakāṇi the Sakyan was too weak for the training; he drank intoxicating drink!

When a lay follower has gone for refuge over a long time to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, how could he go to the nether world? For if one speaking rightly were to say of anyone: 'He was a lay follower who had gone for refuge over a long time to the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Saṅgha,' it is of Sarakāṇi the Sakyan that one could rightly say this. Sarakāṇi the Sakyan had gone for refuge over a long time to the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, so how could he go to the nether world?

The Buddha addresses the Sakyan's doubts—Sarakāṇi Sutta<sup>95</sup>

## 18. Bhava → Birth

**Pemasiri Thera:** Dependent on bhava, birth arises. Bhava means there is clinging to a type of being, while birth is the arising of that being. The Pali terms for birth and being are jāti and satta. Jāti is the arising of a satta. For example, at the end of your last life, maybe as a dog living comfortably with humans, you clung to the human type of being. The human satta consists of the five human aggregates of clinging, the pañc'upādānakkhandhā—human feelings, human perceptions, human mental formations, human consciousness, and human materiality. Your clinging to human aggregates at the end of your last life led to the arising of your current birth as a human.

Whatever their type, all beings are clinging to aggregates and

giving rise to birth. You and I have this clinging to aggregates too; we create bhava and birth in various ways. Sometimes we cling to wholesome and beneficial aggregates, which leads us to births as humans, devas, and brahmas. Sometimes, we cling to unwholesome and harmful aggregates, which leads us to births as vipers and hell beings. At the end of this life, your current one, if you cling to an act of kindness, your next life will likely be human. The Bodhisatta Siddhārtha Gautama clung to the Bodhi, which led to Buddhahood.

## A Few Types of Birth

*David: Mothers and crying newborns come to mind when I think of birth.*

We look at birth of beings from micro and macro points of view. In the ultimate reality of dependent origination, birth, *jāti*, is a momentary event that takes place before and after death. If there is birth, there has to be death. In accordance with the bhava, each and every moment there is a new birth, which is followed by death. Then another birth takes place, which is followed again by death. This birth-death-birth aspect of bhava takes a billionth of a second. We are constantly experiencing new and different moments of birth; new births are repeatedly arising. Every moment in our lives is totally separate from every other moment in our lives. When we put together the causes, the bhava, for birth of a being in one moment, we experience the birth of that being in the next moment.

In contrast, the macro birth of conventional reality is a protracted event and practically the same as what is commonly known as life. Birth starts with the first appearance of any type of living being in any world and it continues for the duration of that

being's lifespan. Your birth as a human started at the instant of conception in your mother's womb. There was a coming together of your mother's egg, your father's sperm, and a re-linking consciousness. Your birth continued as you developed into a foetus, continued as you came forth into this world as a baby, and continues today as you develop as an adult. A mosquito also starts its life as an egg. A larva then hatches from the egg, which develops into a pesky mosquito. These changes for you and the mosquito are stages of development within the same birth. A butterfly begins its birth as an egg and out hatches a caterpillar. Later on, the caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon, undergoes metamorphoses and emerges as a butterfly. These changes all occur within a single birth.

### Moisture, Egg, Womb and Spontaneous

The first appearance of any being, any satta, takes place either in moisture, in an egg, in a womb, or spontaneously. There are beings born wherever there is moisture. For example, despite sterilization and refrigeration, milk is home for numerous moisture born beings. We all know hundreds of types of egg born and womb born beings. And we know a mother and father must come together for the birth of egg born and womb born beings. Devas and brahmas are spontaneously born beings, and as such start their lives without the coming together of a mother and father. If you cling to the form of a deva in the last moment of this life of yours, if an act of compassion is the bhava that arises during your last breath, you will have a spontaneous birth as a deva in the fine-material world. Caution. A deva still undergoes changes within its birth as a deva. Like all beings, devas are subject to decay and death and rebirth.

*Can humans be born in all these ways?*

Yes. When necessary causes and conditions connect, humans are moisture born, egg born, and spontaneously born. Critics will



say, “Pemasiri is crazy. Such events never take place in the world.” There is a well documented case of an egg born man, who had a human looking bird for a mother and a normal human for a father. In due course, the man took higher ordination and attained enlightenment. The Pacceka Buddha Mahāpaduma was born in a lotus. And of princess Padumavati’s 500 sons, one was a usual womb born being and 499 were moisture born beings, that arose out of her placenta.<sup>96</sup> The birth of moisture born beings must happen in present times. But the placenta is discarded and moisture born beings have no chance to develop. And the courtesan Ambapālī was spontaneously born. She looked to be fourteen years old when she first appeared. Spontaneously born beings always arise at a more advanced stage of development than moisture born, egg born, and womb born beings. Why are you laughing?

*A spontaneous birth sounds like a fairytale.*

Spontaneously born does not mean a being arises without causes and conditions. No. Just as there are specific causes and conditions for egg born, womb born, and moisture born, there are specific causes and conditions for spontaneously born. In the context of paṭiccasamuppāda, the spontaneous birth of a being is the same as any other birth of a being. Dependent on bhava, birth arises.

*Do you honestly think I could be born as a viper or hell being?  
What’s hell like?*

My only notion of hell comes from reading the suttas. Since I know the Buddha’s teachings are true, I accept what is said in the suttas about the lower worlds, apāyas. Nibbāna is also true. I don’t believe physical hell beings are slashing each other with swords and razor blades. I see hell as a mental state devoid of pleasant feelings. If there are hell beings, they are mind created. Hell and other worlds may or may not be real.

There are two distinct orders of dhamma: the dhamma of our world, diṭṭha-dhamma, and the dhamma of states after our deaths, samparāyika-dhamma. Diṭṭha-dhamma is a dhamma of the present, which is visible and easy to verify. Living as humans in the world of sensuality, the kāma-loka, we see the worlds of humans and animals. We see causes and effects in the present. Samparāyika-dhamma, in contrast, is a dhamma of the future, which is invisible and difficult to verify. As humans, we don't see the lower worlds of hell beings, nor do we see the higher worlds of devas and brahmas. We simply don't know where we will go when we die. The future is unseen. Nibbāna is also unseen. And though we don't immediately see other worlds, to the extent of our confidence in the Buddha's teachings, we accept to the same extent that other worlds are real and birth in them after our deaths is a real possibility.

*I've always been a little afraid of going to hell.*

Like you and most children, I had well-meaning relatives who put the fear of hell into me at an early age. I also heard about heaven and other worlds and rebirth. It was hard to believe these stories because I didn't see any evidence of other worlds or rebirth. When I asked to see evidence, relatives said, "Heaven and hell exist. Rebirth is a fact. Don't ask so many questions."

Then I heard humans could take birth as animals and I started watching the animals in our home. We had a big black cat, which nobody liked because it was forever catching rats and bringing them home to eat. Could I be born as a cat or a rat? Animals live in fear. They are suffering. We also had one big dog and one small dog. Both the big dog and the small dog liked to curl up in the same living room chair. When at home, the big dog got that chair and the small dog got the floor. To win the chair, the small dog tricked the big dog into leaving the chair. The small dog raced around our home as if there was a stranger creeping about. The small dog barked and barked and barked, even though there

was nothing to bark at. The big dog got up to investigate the commotion and the small dog won the chair. The small dog pulled this trick once too often. Very angry, the big dog viciously attacked the small dog and nearly mangled it to death.

Seeing dogs act like humans, I made a connection between the animal and human worlds. I gradually came around to believing humans could be born as animals, and came around to believing I could be born as an animal. These days, I have no doubts about the trueness of kamma-vipāka. Good actions definitely lead to good results and bad actions lead to bad results. Birth as a cat, rat or dog is a bad result. Then again, animals are time and again more human than humans. As a rule, mongooses and cobras are deadly enemies. I've seen mongooses and cobras living in harmony. And I've heard of tigers protecting deer. If animals can live in peaceful co-existence, then why not humans?

### Visible and Invisible

We know precious little about the nature of things. After my grandmother on mother's side died, a bhūta looking exactly like grandmother took up residence in her former house. Friends and neighbours regularly met the bhūta and most believed it to be grandmother. Few had any suspicions, as the bhūta looked normal. It wore the same sari as grandmother had previously worn and it sat quietly in the same armchair used by grandmother. It was just there in the living room. My relatives definitely knew that grandmother was long dead, and knew that the being who had taken possession of the house was not grandmother. And there were also a few villagers who knew this being couldn't possibly be grandmother. It was a difficult situation. My relatives eventually gave up grandmother's house and they moved into another house. They simply left, just gave the house over to the imitation grandmother bhūta. About six years ago, a crew tore down the house and to date no one has

built a new house. Only the land is there on that site. I recently asked a neighbour about the presence of the bhūta and was told it is not there. The bhūta must have gone somewhere else to live.

### *What are bhūtas?*

Bhūta has many meanings. I am using the term now to mean beings outside our normal range of experience like devas, brahmas and hungry ghosts. In the Mighty Gathering Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya,<sup>97</sup> the Buddha describes seeing hundreds of normally invisible beings from dozens of worlds. There were yakkas, naggas, garuda birds, asuras, green devas, and red devas in attendance at the gathering, as well as many more. Though real and living, bhūtas manage to survive without breathing air. We need air to survive. Bhūtas do not need air. And many of them live in the midst of our world, on the earth, deep inside the earth, at the bottom of the sea, and in volcanoes. There is a ghost on the River Nile. People who worship devas are more often than not worshipping the lower level type of devas, the ones proficient in jhāna.

An invisible being once helped me find my way. It was late in the day while walking with a fellow bhikkhu through dense jungle, and we managed to get turned around. We knew our trail ran back to the main road, but there was a fork in the trail and didn't know to go left or right. Darkness was approaching and we went to the left. Almost immediately, both of us heard a voice from the top of a tree, "Venerable sirs, go the other way." We followed the being's advice and walking to the right soon hit the main road, which ran to the hermitage. Humans rarely see or hear this forest type of being. Its help was strange, and wonderful.

Another invisible being spoke to me six months after the death of Sumathipāla Na Himi. I was the abbot at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre, and we were just beginning construction on a

new kitchen. The lumber was on site and stacked. While in bed one night, I hear from above me the voice of Sumathipāla, “Get up! Why are you sleeping? People are stealing your lumber.” That familiar voice got me going. I jump out of bed, run over to the construction site, and find people stealing lumber. And I see smoke rising from the chimney of the old kitchen. Why did the being speak to me? And why was smoke rising from the chimney of the old kitchen? It was the middle of the night, no reason for cooking or smoke. I don’t believe Sumathipāla spoke to me, as that means he took birth as a deva. Though many people see devas as high level beings and aspire for deva birth, I see devas as low level beings when compared to anāgāmīs and the attaining of full enlightenment. Sumathipāla should be at a higher level than a deva.

If you tell a psychiatrist of seeing or hearing beings from other worlds and other dimensions, the psychiatrist will say you are mentally sick, that you are hallucinating or delusional. He or she might lock you up. More professional research is needed into the nature of beings that are normally invisible.

*My brother Donald has been locked up for years at a time in various psychiatric hospitals. He has schizophrenia, and sees and hears many out of the ordinary things.*

Some people diagnosed as mentally sick do on occasion see bhūtas, and some people accepted as mentally sound can also now and again see bhūtas. If you see a bhūta, it is in a familiar form. A bhūta can resemble a close friend or family member.

While living at Lanka Vipassana Meditation Centre, I held a daily 4 p.m dhamma class and an army general regularly attended. I remember the general arriving late one day. After paying respects to me, the general excused himself to meditate in the small hall. He felt meditating was more important that day than attending class. A few minutes later, the general’s bodyguard also arrived at our class. He needed to talk with the

general. I told the bodyguard that the general was meditating in the small hall at the back of the main hall, and that it was fine to meet with the general there. No problem. The bodyguard left for the small hall, but returned a few minutes later. He said the general was not in the small hall. Assuming the general to be doing walking meditation, I told the bodyguard to look on the grounds surrounding the main hall. The bodyguard went outside, but again returned in a few minutes. He said the general wasn't anywhere on the grounds. I suggested looking in the washroom. And the sequence repeated, with the bodyguard returning in a few minutes. The general was not in the washroom. Nothing odd so far, a bit annoying.

An hour after class finished, I was outside getting exercise and taking in a breath of fresh air. You know the area. I was near the main entrance to Lanka Vipassana, where the large iron gates are located. And what do I see? The general is arriving in his car with his entourage of staff and security. In those days, the general always had a chauffeur and he was heavily guarded by soldiers in other cars and on motorcycles. The general got out of his car and was as usual happy to see me. I mentioned his earlier visit. The general was puzzled, as he had been in a conference for the entire day, and this was his first opportunity to get away. It was a puzzle for me too. There were half a dozen students in class that day and they all remember seeing the general and seeing the bodyguard. Though I can think of no logical explanation for a being imitating the general, a being did imitate the general. There are bhūtas in our world. I still remember the imitation general's shirt and trousers.

*Not knowing if someone is real throws a wrench into the works. Was the bodyguard imitation too? A bit scary.*

No need to be afraid, as bhūtas always appear in familiar forms. There is a Lanka Vipassana Meditation Centre board member I have known very well for twenty years; we often discussed

centre business. One day, I mentioned some business we had discussed on the previous day. She had no recollection of our discussion and it had been a week since she visited the centre. Apparently, I discussed the centre's business with a being that looked just like her. Some things are a mystery. You might be the real David or you might be a bhūta imitating David. Now, are you the real David?

*Yes.*

Listen well to what I am asking. Are you the true David?

*Yes, certainly.*

Sri Lankan families seldom talk about unpleasant experiences with bhūtas because it reveals their deceased relatives went to a bad destination. My grandmother's birth was unfortunate, and shameful.

## Subject To Fear or Not Subject To Fear

Bhūtas are subject to fear or not subject to fear. They have either: (1) confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha; (2) attained path, or (3) wrong views. The bhūtas with wrong views and fear are in the majority. If a bhūta was ready to listen, as in the Mangala Sutta,<sup>98</sup> the Buddha explained the benefits of the Triple Gem. He taught a wide variety of beings about happiness, prosperity, and liberation. All types of beings in all the worlds of birth fall into one of these two all-encompassing categories—subject to fear or not subject to fear. Religion and culture are irrelevant. No different than beings in Buddhist cosmology, all the beings in all of Christendom and all of Islam are also either afraid or fearless. They have either: (1) confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha; (2) attained path, or (3) wrong views. The majority of humans, just like bhūtas, have wrong views and are subject to fear. There are humans who perform many acts of kindness, humans who are noble, and humans who rarely perform acts of

kindness. Instead of papaya seeds, they use pepper seeds.

*Papaya? Pepper seeds? I'm curious enough, and ready to learn.*

The Buddha explains the practice of loving-kindness in the Karaniya Metta Sutta.<sup>99</sup> We send mettā to long beings, such as cobras and pythons; and send mettā to big beings, such as sharks, elephants and whales. There are elephants without tusks and elephants with tusks. Ah, the tuskers! Mettā goes to middle-sized beings, the oxen, cows, and horses. Monkeys are short beings and not easy to see. Pigs are fat beings. Our wishes of wellness, safety, and freedom from fear and suffering go to beings with few bones, the turtles and fish; and our good wishes go to beings visible and beings invisible. There are beings living far away and beings living nearby. Many live in the sea. Yet when a ship approaches, they disappear. Asuras are in the sea. Some beings breathe air and others do not. We send mettā to every imaginable type of being, especially to the humans who are full of anger and hate.

While living in the Aran Kale forest hermitage, I saw the harsh realities of the food chain at work. Every day, animals killed animals. I sent mettā to predators and prey. No shortage of suffering and fear for animals in the forest jungle. Trying my best to be kind, I once tried to save the life of a tarantula. Little flies were attacking it. And the squirming tarantula, a victim of countless stings, was losing the battle for its life. I sent lots of mettā to the flies, then brushed them off the tarantula with a branch. Normally, this type of fly does not attack and sting humans. I was the exception. Ignoring my mettā, the flies attacked and stung me. I stopped meddling and the flies got their meal. What a mess of troubles arose all because I tried to save the life of a tarantula. Over the course of ten years, a hard lump developed where the flies stung me and I underwent an operation to remove it. My mettā didn't work on the flies.



And mettā didn't stop a bhūta from disturbing residents of the Maliya-Deva cave in Aran Kale. Wanting to meet the bhūta, I moved into the Maliya-Deva cave and made a determination to stay permanently. I shared the cave with beautiful and friendly snakes. No trouble at all. Back then, it was my routine to meditate continuously in a cross-legged position for four to five hours at a stretch. The cave contained a rock slab with the image of an odd looking creature carved into it. The force or energy or whatever creature that lived in the cave wasted no more than a few days to reveal itself. After one of the centre's noonday meals, I returned to the cave and straight away sat on the slab to meditate. Around 4 p.m., the cave turned upside down and I was thrown outside! What was going on? Still calm and composed, I opened my eyes. The cave was alright. It looked the same. However, my heart was racing, there was a bump on my head, and I was laying on the ground two metres away from the cave. The bhūta had thrown me out.

Did I make a mistake in wanting to stay permanently in the Maliya-Deva cave? Perhaps the bhūta had a sense of ownership and I was trespassing. Its behaviour was then understandable. If a strange man walks into your home in Canada and declares he is staying permanently, you chase him away. And if the strange man doesn't go away, you call the police. Likewise, the bhūta chases away bhikkhus who declare they will stay permanently in the Maliya-Deva cave. I took the hint and moved my belongings to another cave. The next day, I returned to the Maliya-Deva cave and for four hours sat on the rock slab to meditate. Nothing unusual happened. I spent my days of meditation in the Maliya-Deva cave and my nights of rest in the other cave. Apparently, the bhūta allows bhikkhus to use the cave for meditating and forbids them from taking up permanent residency. Once I gave up the idea of staying permanently in the Maliya-Deva cave, the bhūta ignored me. Accept what you can of these stories, and forget the rest.

*I won't forget this story.*

We need not read too much into peculiar phenomena. The bhūta was possibly bored, and threw me out for fun.

## The Kammās of Birth

*If I could see my past lives, would I recognize myself? And would I have the same personality?*

Yes, you would recognize yourself, even if you were a dog. The skill of recognizing personality types, however, requires training. For example, if an intellectual type of person employs knowledge to see past lives, he or she wouldn't likely recognize the personality types of beings in those past lives. Past life beings may have an angry type of personality, have a saddhā type of personality, or any of a dozen other types of personality. In a past life, you may or may not have the same personality as you do right now. Saddhā beings have confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Only a Buddha knows at once a being's personality type.

At some point in the not-too-distant future, your friend George will die. You will be sad and think your friend's death is a problem. Let's say George first takes birth as a deva. Then he takes a later birth as a human, with an angry personality, in America. His parents call him Oliver and as a youth he gets involved with drugs and crime. Where is the George who has the saddhā personality and is staying at our meditation centre? Where is the deva? I then die. Again, you are sad and think my death is a problem. Oh, my teacher Pemasiri is dead. Then you die and take birth as a human in Australia. Your new parents call you Peter. As Peter, you know nothing about this current birth as

the Canadian David. Many years later, Oliver and Peter meet at a meditation centre in Burma. Oliver has turned his life around. Peter does not recognize Oliver, and Oliver does not recognize Peter. And neither remembers ever meeting Pemasiri at Kanduboda. George is a meditating Australian. A nameless being is a deva. Oliver is an angry American. David is a Canadian. Peter is another Australian. Pemasiri is the Sri Lankan. Each is a separate being. Continuously creating births is the biggest of all problems. You need to stop creating births. Finish off saṃsāra. A Buddhist can be born in a Christian womb.

*What of my past lives is coming through into my present life?  
And what of my present life carries through into my future  
lives? Since there is a David now, what is there of David in the  
future?*

When I was child, I asked my parents similar questions. What will happen when I die? How can I be born again? Will I be the same person or someone different? Father said, "Whether you're born again or not born again, you need to do something worthwhile now. Give whatever you have to people who are in need. Share and do good things." I asked mother the same questions. She said, "What did your father say?" I told her about sharing and doing good things with my life. Mother answered indirectly, "Do as father says." After a lifetime of meditation, I now understand my parents. Being a good person is of primary importance.

*What about seeing my future lives?*

Only a Buddha can see future lives.

*Your father knew he was about to die.*

Seeing future lives and seeing the immediate future are separate abilities. Seeing future lives correctly is an ability unique to Buddhas; it is sometimes given to bodhisattas who aspire to Buddhahood. In contrast, seeing the immediate future is

commonplace.

Seeing future lives and seeing the immediate future are both conclusions based on available information. If circumstances are like this now, then in all likelihood such and such events will come to pass. Though no one took my father seriously, he was dying and he knew he was dying. He died a few hours after stating he would soon be dead. Many dying people correctly predict the time of their deaths. A few years ago, you participated in the Bodhi Tree planting ceremony at our meditation centre. Based on what you know about Bodhi Tree seedlings, you can conclude the seedling will be cared for properly and grow into a big healthy Bodhi Tree. Seeing your immediate future is similar to seeing the Bodhi Tree's future. When meditators have good sati, they see events that will happen days or years later.

Because more variables interact over a much longer period of time, possibly eons, seeing future lives is far more complicated than seeing what will happen tomorrow or next year. A being's path through saṃsāra is like a bird's nest with strands of causes and effects coming and going in every possible direction, as I said before. This is at the core of the teachings on dependent origination. There is a mix of predestination and freewill. Kamma is full of twists and turns. Thus, accurately recognizing all the good and bad qualities of a being and predicting how all those good and bad qualities interact and surface over that being's future lives requires unparalleled clarity of vision, only possessed by Buddhas. The births of famous Sri Lankan bhikkhus were predicted. And Gautama Buddha predicted Devadatta's eventual attainment to Pacceka Buddha state, even though Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha. Trying to kill a Buddha is a heavy kamma leading to birth in a hell. And yet, the Buddha saw Devadatta had also developed many good qualities. And after the effects of bad qualities wear off in the hell, Devadatta's good qualities must surface and lead to

Pacceka Buddha.

You study with me because you trust me. And with this trust, I must with mettā and karunā do whatever possible to help you. It's my duty to instill the gravity of right thought, sammā-saṅkappa, and the gravity of wrong thought, micchā-saṅkappa. Once you appreciate the link between thoughts and births, you will adjust your way of thinking and adjust your way of life to steer clear of animal and hell births. Greed, hatred, anger and fear go by the wayside. You don't have to be angry about patience, kindness, and compassion. Good thoughts along with good actions at meditation centres, even if done with conceit, lead to birth as a deva in the heavenly worlds. Good thoughts and good actions may or may not lead to attaining to sotāpatti. That is neither here nor there. Deva birth is better than animal or hell birth. And attaining to sotāpatti is possible and the sotāpanna's subsequent birth could be deva. Read about sammā-saṅkappa in the Great Forty Sutta,<sup>100</sup> and avoid the animal and hell births.

## Function

*Is it my kamma to be born as a human?*

Where there is birth, there is kamma. Every type of being has the kamma to take birth as that type of being, doesn't matter if it is a human, dog, or bhūta. Why are you asking about the kammas of birth?

*My Hungarian friend is interested in the subject.*

Have to walk a long way to answer questions about kamma. One classification of kamma is according to function:

- Birth producing kamma, *janaka kamma*
- Supporting kamma, *upatthambhaka kamma*

- Frustrating kamma, upapīlaka kamma
- Destroying kamma, *upaghātaka kamma*

There was janaka kamma at work producing your fortunate birth as a human into a middle-class Canadian family, and there was upatthambhaka kamma supporting developments earlier in your life, such as studying engineering at university, finding a good job, and then leaving Canada to study meditation in Sri Lanka. Your father supported you financially. This is all good kamma. The birth producing kamma and the supporting kamma work together. Right now there is kamma at work producing each and every new moment of birth in your life, and right now kamma is supporting the new developments in your life, each and every moment. My birth producing and supporting kammās are slightly different. I'm Sri Lankan. But again, my human birth is fortunate and not to be wasted. We could have taken births as animals or demons. As humans who are healthy, we have a duty to help others.

Upapīlaka kamma frustrates good kamma. Without warning, you make a mistake with a power saw, lose a hand and cannot write or perform good deeds. This is the frustrating kamma. It is always bad, very bad. Disastrous, and it wipes out good supporting kamma. Perhaps your frustrating kamma comes into play as financial ruin. A dishonest broker embezzles your inheritance and you must beg in the streets to survive.

Occasionally, even when frustrating kamma is strong, supporting kamma is stronger. Just yesterday, a Buddhist scholar and international lecturer was meditating here at our centre. This young and intelligent woman was present at two terrorist bomb blasts where dozens of people were killed and injured. Buildings collapsed around her. Beautiful girls disfigured. Limbs lost. Awful scenes, though remarkably she was physically unharmed. Yes, of course there was the shock

wave of the blast and the sight of corpses, and after the blast she had to sit down in a chair to regain her composure. In those days, she had a good meditation practice and knew for a long time. Her supporting kamma was the strongest kamma at work and the frustrating kamma fell short.

Upaghāta is the completely destroying kamma. Though your birth producing and supporting kammas are strong, you die a sudden death. I had a decades long association with a multi-millionaire, who often engaged in meritorious actions, kusala kammas. An exceptionally kind person, she bought many a cow from the butcher to save them from slaughter. Nonetheless, despite all her good kamma, during the time of conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, she failed to stop at an army check-post and was killed by soldiers. Coincidentally, the car she was driving matched the description of a car used by the LTTE. The soldiers manning the check-post were suspicious and they ordered her to stop. For reasons unknown, she decided against stopping. Alerted and unable to get a clear look at her face, the soldiers shot to kill. All who knew this kind and generous multi-millionaire were stunned by her violent death, as it went against their understanding of kamma. Why was a person with obviously good kamma shot and killed? The destroying kamma prevailed.

*There are a lot of sad stories from those times.*

### Priority of Result

A second classification of kamma is according to priority of result:

- Heavy kamma, *garu kamma*
- Habitual kamma, *bahula* or *āciṇṇaka kamma*
- Close-to-death kamma, *maraṇāssana kamma*

- In-reserve kamma, *kaṭattā kamma*

Garu is the heavy kamma. It overrides the effects of other kammās and fixes destiny. Killing a parent, killing an arahat, hurting a Buddha, and causing splits in the Sangha—these heavy bad kammās lead to birth in a hell. Since Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha and caused a split in the Sangha, he took birth in a hell. The Buddha said prince Ajātasattu had the potential to be an arahat. Ajātasattu killed his father, and fixed his destiny. Heavy kammās are also for good. Sotāpatti, sakadāgāmi, anāgāmi, arahatta—path knowledge attainments are heavy good kammās that end suffering. And the fine-material absorptions, rūpa-jhānas, and the non-material absorptions, arūpa-jhānas, lead respectively to births in the fine-material world, rūpa-loka, and the non-material world, arūpa-loka.

For rūpa-jhānas and arūpa-jhānas to lead to birth in the rūpa-loka and the arūpa-loka, the meditator must have full control of the jhānas. While no one can be in jhāna at all times, the meditator has jhāna-samāpatti, which means he or she can attain jhāna at will and can maintain the jhāna. Say after a full day of physical work around our meditation centre, the meditator sits down in the hall and suppresses cravings for sensuality. He or she leaves the kāma-loka behind and enters into the rūpa-loka and then the arūpa-loka. With skill, the meditator fully settles his or her mind down in the state of samādhi.

*Is it a heavy garu kamma to incite hatred?*

No. But clinging strongly with views that reject the truth of kamma is close to garu kamma. Clinging with views, diṭṭhi-upādāna, includes the uselessness of offering alms and helping others; no short or long-term results of good and bad actions; no results of meditation; no need to show respect and gratitude to parents; no worlds besides the human and animal; animals never take birth as humans; humans never take birth as animals, as



devas, or as hell beings; nothing before this current birth and nothing after this birth, only annihilation; and no such thing as spontaneous birth. These are wrong and dangerous views.

*Surely liars, torturers, and racists go to hell.*

Bahula or āciṇṇaka kamma is the action we perform over and over again, our habitual kamma. Not surprising, many wrong actions and indulging in memories of wrong actions connect with hell, frustration, sadness and worry. More of a surprise, however, wrong actions and memories of wrong actions also connect with happiness and joy. As a child, I often chased chameleons, as it was great fun to see them change colour from green to yellow to red. I didn't torture chameleons. I made them angry. When chameleons get angry, their necks get red, much like humans. There was a deep pit in my family's backyard and one time in the rainy season it filled up with water. As usual, I was running around chasing chameleons, and of course I wasn't thinking about the pit. I fell right into it. Not able to swim, I sank two or three times below the surface. I was drowning and each time I came up—gasping for air—all I saw in my mind was the image of a chameleon. At that moment, the world was black to me, except for the chameleon. My older brother fortunately came along and hauled me out of the pit.

*Why did you see a chameleon when you were drowning?*

Anyone who is near death gets a sign of the next birth, the gati-nimitta. My habitual kamma was the chasing and thinking of chameleons. Though this action brought me lots of joy, it led to the arising of the image of a chameleon as the sign of my next birth. If I had drowned at that moment, I was definitely on my way to birth as a chameleon. We have to be careful about the actions we perform over and over again.

*My thinking about the girls must have its consequences.*

Another story about habitual kamma. In the early years of my

meditation studies, Sumathipāla Na Himi sent me to live, at an affiliated temple, with the sick and paranoid bhikkhu Susila. Sumathipāla wanted to teach me about patience. Bhikkhu Susila was formerly Susila Thera and formerly the abbot of the temple. As a thera and an abbot, he was treated with respect by lower ranking bhikkhus. But abbot Susila Thera wanted a higher position within the Sangha than abbot of a local temple. When a higher position didn't materialize, he disrobed. The layman Susila soon became disgusted with lay life. He ordained again and returned to the temple. Roles reversed. The newly ordained bhikkhu Susila was now the junior bhikkhu at the temple. Bhikkhus who once treated him with respect as abbot Susila Thera were now his seniors, and didn't bother treating him with much respect. Living as a junior bhikkhu amongst senior bhikkhus was a problem for Susila. He didn't like it. Old, sick and friendless, Susila needed help.

I stayed with Susila for a year. He was a pain in the neck. Obnoxious. Difficult. Paranoid. Susila thought everyone was trying to kill him. He shouted at people. He criticized people, to their faces and behind their backs. If I ate my rice before Susila ate his rice, he said I had no respect. If I waited to eat my rice till after Susila ate his rice, he thought the rice was poisoned. Susila was terribly paranoid. If I just looked at his rice, he said I was trying to poison him. Living with Susila was a challenge. He spent the whole of his day reading light material, cutting charms, and chasing demons. Susila's health eventually deteriorated to the point where he needed hospitalization. Sumathipāla paid Susila a visit in those last days, while Susila was dying in a hospital bed. Susila was seeing demons coming at him and was constantly chasing them away.

A few days after Susila's death, I was staying at his previous temple. The hairs on my arm stand up on end when I think about what happened. I went to sleep on a mat as usual. In the middle of the night, I am jolted from sleep by the touch of an ice cold

hand on my foot. Aiyo! I keep my eyes closed, then feel the touch of the same ice cold hand on my stomach. I open my eyes and it's bhikkhu Susila born as a demon. It was the same face and same robe. Susila's robe was recreated exactly, and the demon wore the robe exactly as Susila wore the robe. This is no dream. I really saw a demon. Its touch was icy cold. I turned the other way and went back to sleep. It's a true story. I saw actions and reactions, hetu-phala. Since bhikkhu Susila acted like a demon all day of every day, a demon became the sign for his next birth. Susila's actions could lead him nowhere but to birth as a demon.

*Did the time spent with Susila improve your patience?*

I like to think it improved somewhat.

Ranking third in priority of result, maraṇāssana is the close-to-death kamma. In the Buddha's time, Tambadāṭhika worked as king Kosala's executioner.<sup>101</sup> He skillfully removed the heads of the king's enemies, the heads of thieves and the heads of criminals. He carried out the king's orders faithfully and cleanly—off went the head with one slice from Tambadāṭhika's sword. Time though took its toll on Tambadāṭhika. After fifty-five years as executioner, he was old and weak. And instead of removing a man's head with one slice of the sword, Tambadāṭhika needed two or three slices of the sword. People complained and king Kosala dismissed him. Tambadāṭhika left the king's palace, returned to his original home and tried to come to terms with a life of killing. He was ill at ease. One day precisely as Tambadāṭhika was to sit down for a meal of milk rice, arahat Sāriputta arrives on the doorstep. Tambadāṭhika as you would expect invites Sāriputta into his home. After the meal, Sāriputta gives a dhamma talk and asks the former executioner, "Did you want to kill all those people or were you following the king's orders?" Though Tambadāṭhika killed hundreds of people, he never wanted to kill anyone. He followed orders. Sāriputta's teachings calm the former executioner's mind and then the

teachings change his heart. Minutes after Sāriputta departs, Tambadāṭhika goes for a walk and a bull gores him to death. The Buddha said Tambadāṭhika took birth as a deva. A good close-to-death kamma determined Tambadāṭhika's good birth.

*Am I working for good close-to-death kammās?*

Don't think about a future moment of death, as I said before. Correct yourself now. Develop some viriya, momentum. In Sri Lanka, we focus too much on close-to-death kammās, and make little effort on the heavy and habitual kammās. We take the Buddha's teachings, about the kammās of birth, for granted for the first sixty or seventy years of our lives. Some people never do anything worthwhile. Others perform a few meritorious actions here and there. It took a tsunami for you to spring into action on a relief project. Far too often, we practise sincerely, are extra good and helpful, only in the last years of our lives when death is to be expected.

*I am most proud of finding a psychiatrist and a decent home for my mentally ill brother.*

That good action may arise at the time of your death. Sri Lankans remind a relative, who is days away from certain death, of good actions performed over the course of his or her lifetime. The dying person's previous good deeds are brought up time and time again. And bhikkhus are invited into the home of the dying person. The relatives offer the eight requisites to the bhikkhus, and the bhikkhus chant pirit. My father chanted the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta for his mother. Minutes before death, she took the five precepts. Then she died peacefully and I believe took a fortunate birth. The practice of reminding a dying person of previously performed good actions works well when the dying person performed many good actions.

*Do you think about your next birth?*

I only think of today. I do not think of not dying. Whenever

possible, I help others and avoid creating problems.

*You don't think of not dying?*

A half dozen close calls with death hasn't brought me any closer to understanding the real death. I don't know the dukkha of death. One smashup on a rock left me unconsciousness for hours, and as good as dead. Mother found me and brought me home.

*Does a dying person's environment have an effect on the next birth? Noisy versus peaceful? Secular versus religious? I worked with Mother Teresa's nuns in the Kalighat hospice in Calcutta and they sought to save the souls of the sick and dying.*

Religious close-to-death karmas are good for people who are firmly established in a religious tradition. Well before breathing their last breaths, they lived wisely, developed their minds, and prepared themselves for death. People who always enjoyed and appreciated religious chanting, teachings, and rituals during their lives will enjoy and appreciate religious chanting, teachings, and rituals at the end of their lives. And it is good to support them in religious actions. Read the Gilana Sutta in the Sotāpattisaṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.<sup>102</sup> By no means, however, impose religious actions on dying people who are against religion. If they never bothered to develop their minds and are fighting death, religious actions only serve to make them angry, "David is trying to send me to heaven! Stop that!" Then, with anger as object in the last moments of life, they may go to the lower worlds.

*I read passages from the Bible to my step-mother when she was dying. The church and Christ's teachings played an important role in her life.*

That's fine.

If a heavy, habitual or close-to-death kamma fails to determine your next birth, a kaṭattā kamma determines your next birth. Kaṭattā is the in-reserve kamma. It too goes back to an action performed previously in your lifetime, but only produces its result later on at the time of your death. In-reserve kamma is like a rancher's stubborn old cow. The rancher's whole herd of 100 head of young and old beef cows spends its days out in the pasture. At the end of each day, the rancher makes a trip out to the pasture, rounds up the herd, and drives most of the herd into the stockade for the night. The rancher has no problem driving his young cows into the stockade, but has lots of problems driving the old cows into the stockade. Nothing more stubborn than old cows. They stop right at the gates to the stockade and refuse to go inside. Not wanting to use force, the rancher lets the old cows spend the night resting outside the stockade. And staying outside works fine for the old cows and the rancher, as the old cows are safe and won't run off. In the morning, the old cows lead the rest of the herd back to the pasture. In a manner, you are a rancher with a herd of various types of kammas. Your in-reserve kamma is the stubborn old cow type of kamma that stops short of producing results during your lifetime. Later, at the time of your death, an in-reserve kamma comes forward and leads the way to your next birth. In-reserve kammas determine the rebirths for most people.

*Then the next birth must be in the hands of destiny.*

That's wrong view, as you are constantly sowing new seeds of kamma. Don't think your next birth is out of control. Even small seeds produce big results when conditions are suitable. Banyan tree seeds are so small you can hardly see them. And yet, when a banyan seed gets good soil, water and sunshine, it grows into a huge tree. Those old cows, the weakest cows in the herd, lead the young cows back to the pasture. And an in-reserve kamma might get its start in a seemingly insignificant deed and yet determine

your next birth.

Small deeds often lead to big results. King Dutugemunu is Sri Lanka's most famous king of the ancient times. Not only is he credited with constructing the Brazen Palace and other impressive structures in the city of Anuradapura, he supported the Sangha well and every day offered food to bhikkhus, even when doing so was difficult. It is said in the chronicles that one time, while fleeing danger, he and minister Tissa found themselves suffering extreme hunger. Tissa somehow got hold of a small meal, which the king divided into four portions. Tissa asked, "Why four portions? There are only two of us." King Dutugemunu said, "One portion of food is for our elephant; one portion is for you; and one portion is for me. I hope to offer the fourth portion of food to a bhikkhu." An arahat soon comes by and king Dutugemunu offers the small meal. Some reports have the king offering the whole meal to the arahat, not just a quarter portion. Either way, Tissa wasn't impressed.

King Dutugemunu lived a long and exceptionally productive life, with feats in architecture, affairs of state, and warfare. But great feats didn't determine his next birth. According to eye-witness accounts, as the king lay in his deathbed, he forgot all about his great feats and instead remembered one small deed—offering the meal to the bhikkhu. Although seemingly insignificant, that in-reserve kamma appeared in the king's mind and led to rebirth in the Tusita Heaven. King Dutugemunu was lucky to meet the arahat.

### Time of Result

A third classification of kamma is according to time of its result:

- Result-experienced-here-and-now kamma, *diṭṭha-dhamma-vedanīya kamma*

- Result-experienced-in-next-birth kamma, *upapajja-vedanīya kamma*
- Result-experienced-in-later-births kamma, *aparāpariya-vedanīya kamma*
- Result-ineffective kamma, *ahosi kamma*

Diṭṭha-dhamma-vedanīya is the result-experienced-here-and-now kamma. Not so powerful, its results are experienced during our current lives. It can, dependent on whether our actions are good or bad, produce good and bad results right now. If result-experienced-here-and-now kamma lapses without producing its result in our current lives, it is known as ahosi kamma, the result-ineffective kamma. There was no result and never will be a result. The result-experienced-here-and-now kamma doesn't affect future births.

Upapajja-vedanīya is the result-experienced-in-next-birth kamma. Again not so powerful, its results are experienced in our very next birth, not some later birth. It also produces good and bad results, dependent on the nature of our actions. If the result-experienced-in-next-birth kamma lapses without producing its result in the next birth, it is another result-ineffective kamma. There was no result and never will be a result.

Aparāpariya-vedanīya is the result-experienced-in-later-births kamma. Unlike the previous two types of kamma, result-experienced-in-later-births kamma is powerful. It never lapses and seeks for a time to produce its result. Saṃsāra is limitless. When conditions are suitable, the result-experienced-in-later-births kamma produces its result. Do you remember how arahat Mahā Moggallāna died?

*He was beaten to death.*

In a previous life, Mahā Moggallāna murdered his parents. Not only a result-experienced-in-later-births type of kamma,



murdering parents is one of the garu kammās. Mahā Moggallāna committed a monstrous crime and experienced the results.

*I killed two house cats. At the time I thought it was the responsible thing to do. Will I pay for killing them?*

Both good kusala and bad akusala kammās require support of suitable conditions to produce their results. Good kammās require wisdom; bad kammās, ignorance. If you live wisely, many of your weaker bad kammās, ones with a limited lifespan, will lapse without producing unwelcome results, and your powerful bad kammās will lie dormant for an extended period of time, as was the case for Mahā Moggallāna. Previously performed bad kammās don't disappear without explanation. But performing lots of good actions and restraining the senses suppresses and reduces bad kammās. Develop right view. Develop the eightfold path. And then attain to sotāpatti, as attaining is a heavy good kamma that suppresses bad kammās deep below the surface. Wisdom is a ladder. Use your energy to skip a rung or two.

One side in life is bad and one side in life is good. About sixty years ago, this Kanduboda area property where our meditation centre is now located was 100 acres of coconut plantation. It was a time of national land reform. The Sri Lankan government of the day promised to give land to the people. Allowing few exemptions, the government divided large parcels of land into many small parcels, and distributed the small parcels amongst local residents. In order to save the coconut plantation, the owners brought in Sumathipāla Na Himi and other bhikkhus. The owners started a meditation centre and then sought an exemption from land reform based on religious grounds. The government granted the exemption. Kanduboda area residents were furious. Many blamed Sumathipāla and his meditation centre of stealing land that was rightfully theirs.

Kanduboda in those days had a reputation as a mean, rough

and low village. A man had killed his father, then ate his father's stomach and intestines. Outsiders rarely visited Kanduboda; they thought everyone in the area must be cruel and callous. In the meditation centre's first years of operation, a few local troublemakers did their best to disrupt and close down the centre. The centre's original buildings, with the exception of the concrete and brick dining hall, were made of coconut fronds. Troublemakers burned down several coconut frond buildings. I was young at that time, but understood there were security issues. To deal with troublemakers, Sumathipāla turned to the Kanduboda butcher for help, as he was rougher and tougher than the men who were burning down the centre's buildings. The butcher didn't kill two cats; he killed cows on a daily basis. Most everyone in Kanduboda feared the butcher. The butcher agreed to help Sumathipāla with security. Under his watchful eye, troublemakers dared not venture onto meditation centre property, though many still talked of closing it down.

Sumathipāla Na Himi subsequently put the butcher in charge of managing daily operations of the dining hall and later in charge of managing daily operations of the entire meditation centre. The butcher became the centre's strongest supporter. At the appropriate time, Sumathipāla put him onto meditation. There were times of joy, "I have seen the Buddha!" There were times of sorrow, "I did so many bad things." Sumathipāla said, "Yes, you did bad things. You must do more meditation." Any small thing happened, the butcher cried. He meditated hard, "Now, I do not need anything. I want to ordain." The butcher repeatedly requested ordination. Sumathipāla in time granted novice ordination. I shaved his head and helped him put on the robe for the first time. The butcher did not, however, achieve higher ordination. Sumathipāla offered higher ordination. The butcher could not take it though, for some reason. Not sure why. As a novice, the butcher was strong in sīla, lived a good life and taught meditation. Local people respected and treated him well.

All fear of him gone.

## Blessings

In the Mangala Sutta,<sup>103</sup> the Buddha lists dozens of blessings that are conducive to happiness and liberation. Sumathipāla Na Himi was a priceless blessing for the butcher and many others of the Kanduboda area. The butcher led a bad life because no one showed him how to lead a good life. With Sumathipāla's help, the butcher gave up the bad side of life and developed the good side of life. He associated with bhikkhus, meditated and ordained. The butcher fortunately found a wise and true friend, a kalyāṇa-mitta. Sumathipāla was also my kalyāṇa-mitta. When the butcher died, the community honored him with a funeral ceremony worthy of a Maha Nayake Thero. Kanduboda now has a reputation as a kindhearted and good village.

*Sometimes when meditating I see faces of dead cats. Some cats look like devils, with horns on their heads.*

Cats and faces. Don't lead yourself into thinking about killing cats. Many images come to meditators in many ways to distract them—upakkilesas. Killing and breaking other precepts does not harm the dhamma. Killing harms the person who does the killing. In the time of the Buddha, the bandit Angulimāla harmed himself greatly by killing scores of people. Nonetheless, the Buddha helped Angulimāla understand his life and change it for the better. Angulimāla, a notorious and feared killer, became an arahat. Previously performed bad akusala kammās need not obstruct the path. Read the Conch Blower Sutta<sup>104</sup> and the Sivaka Sutta<sup>105</sup> in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. Many people in the time of the Buddha committed horrific akusala kammās. And yet, once they

heard the dhamma, they turned their lives around and attained arahatship.

Fools who realize they are acting foolishly are wise, to that extent. Fools who think they are acting wisely are bona fide fools, to be sure. And who are the most dangerous fools? They are the ones who think, talk, and walk in ways that harm the dhamma. Fools could be bhikkhus who deliver eloquent dhamma talks. Associate with the wise and avoid the fools. And read chapter five, the Fool, of the Dhammapada. Angulimāla and the butcher were not fools.

*It is difficult to find a wise and strong teacher of meditation who speaks English.*

If you stay in this work long enough, such people will come about. Recently at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre there was Bhante Sīvalī. He was ten years older than me, and two years senior in ordination. Though Sīvalī was Sri Lankan and fluent in Sinhala, his mother tongue was English. Sīvalī's teaching of the English speaking foreigners was one reason why the Kanduboda Meditation Centre became famous far and wide. I believe no other English speaking meditation teacher in Sri Lanka and possibly anywhere in the world was comparable to Sīvalī, as he had a vast knowledge of the dhamma, was exceptionally virtuous, and expressed himself well. In a pleasant and correct way, he taught meditators what they needed to know. Bhante Sīvalī would have been the ideal teacher for you, but he died young.

*Finding a teacher, taking birth as a human, taking birth as a dog, health, education and job, time and way of death—it's hard to believe so much of my life is due to kamma.*

I think you believe in kamma-vipāka, that good actions lead to good results and bad actions lead to bad results. You do all this good kamma because you believe in it, and that is good. If you

didn't believe at all in kamma, you wouldn't bother with works of good kamma. Few of us believe in kamma 100% and live accordingly. Certainly, the paranoid bhikkhu Susila did not believe acting like a demon would lead him to birth as a demon. And Devadatta could not have believed trying to kill the Buddha and splitting the Sangha would lead him to birth in a hell. If I fully understood the kamma of actions and reactions, I would never scold anyone. I would go into the forest and live alone. At time of death, most everyone believes strongly in kamma. Many declared atheists look to God and the afterlife. Vibhava-taṇhā people, the ones who believe there was nothing before their current births and will be nothing after their current births, start questioning their views about life ending in annihilation. Criminals fear consequences of bad deeds. Susila and Devadatta believed in kamma in their last moments of life, when it was too late.

*What's the difference between bhava and kamma?*

Venerable Narada wrote clearly and extensively about bhava, kamma, and birth. Best to read his books, and read the Abhidhamma. When you are ready, really ready, we will continue our discussion.



*Indeed, brahmans, you are feeble old men, aged, advanced in years, having come to the last stage of life, 120 years old. And you have done no admirable deeds, no skillful deeds, no deeds that allay your fears. This world is on fire with aging, sickness, & death. With the world thus on fire with aging, sickness, & death, any restraint of body, speech, & intellect practiced here will be one's shelter, cave, island, & refuge after death in the world beyond.*

The Buddha—The Two People Sutta<sup>106</sup>

## 19. Birth → Decay, Aging and Death

**Pemasiri Thera:** We started our discussion on the twelve factors of dependent origination with ignorance and are ending it with decay, aging, and death. The Buddha follows this forward order in numerous suttas of the Nidāna Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya:<sup>107</sup>

1. Dependent on ignorance, formations arise; *avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*
2. Dependent on formations, consciousness arises; *saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ*
3. Dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality arises; *viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*
4. Dependent on mentality-materiality, the six sense bases arise; *nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*
5. Dependent on the six sense bases, contact arises;

*saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso*

6. Dependent on contact, feeling arises; *phassa-paccayā vedanā*
7. Dependent on feeling, craving arises; *vedanā-paccayā tañhā*
8. Dependent on craving, clinging arises; *tañhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*
9. Dependent on clinging, bhava arises; *upādāna-paccayā bhavo*
10. Dependent on bhava, birth arises; *bhava-paccayā jāti*
11. Dependent on birth, decay and aging and death arise; *jāti-paccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ*

Though discussing the factors in this forward order, we understand the factors in the reverse order—starting with understanding decay, aging and death and ending with understanding ignorance. The Buddha follows the reverse order in the Mahānidāna Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Did you come to meditate at our centre because you saw ignorance, or because you saw decay and death?

*David: I travelled to Sri Lanka shortly after my divorce.*

No one goes to a meditation centre because he or she sees ignorance, avijjā. If we could see ignorance, we would not need to talk about it or go to a meditation centre. People come to our centre because they see decay and death or other ways of suffering in the world.

Siddhārtha saw decay and death and suffering while he was living a life of luxury and comfort in the palace; seeing ignorance came much later. Doctors treated the sick and dying, and healthy people disliked the sick, as if they never got sick. His father the king punished many people in the kingdom. His father aged.

His father's skin wrinkled; his father's hair turned grey and fell out. No one liked old age, sickness, or death. Servants died. Young people were proud to be young. Healthy people were proud to be healthy. People were proud just to be alive and, expecting to live a long time, behaved badly. Siddhārtha saw countless old, sick and dying people. He regularly saw corpses. Much of palace life was distressing for our bodhisatta.

Despite also having pride in his youth, health, and life, the adolescent Siddhārtha regularly reflected on old age, sickness and death. Regular reflections on old age, sickness and death gradually, over the course of many years, reduced Siddhārtha's pride in his youth, health, and life. Overcoming his intoxication with sense pleasures was a lengthy and gradual process. He was living a comfortable householder's life in the palace, and at the same time reflecting on life's unpleasantness. Long before leaving the palace, Siddhārtha searched for answers to life's problems. By twenty years of age, the young adult Siddhārtha's pride was negligible and he wondered, "How can I escape old age, sickness, and death?" He asked, "Why is there decay?"

And Siddhārtha often thought of living in the way of wandering ascetics, but there was no way of leaving the palace, not at that time.

Many years passed before the moment was right for Siddhārtha to leave the palace. And although difficult to leave, Siddhārtha knew searching for an escape from decay and death and other forms of suffering was the most compassionate endeavour he could undertake for his family. And he knew his search wasn't compatible with holding onto the kingdom. Siddhārtha had to leave the palace and become a wandering ascetic. He first went to his father's spiritual teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, as he thought they lived in the correct way. They had no wealth or land, and it was said they had found a state beyond suffering. Siddhārtha practised the



rūpa-jjhānas and arūpa-jjhānas with these two great teachers, but failed to find a state beyond suffering. He found decay and death, even in the refined states of the rūpa-jjhānas and arūpa-jjhānas. Siddhārtha then went to the five ascetics, because they too were searching for an end to suffering. Siddhārtha practised self-mortification with the five ascetics. Siddhārtha suffered greatly.

Eventually, he realized self-mortification was also not leading to escape from decay and death, and he gave it up. Once Siddhārtha gave up the self-mortification practice, he realized all types of beings, could be dog, human or deva, experience decay and death. Thoughts came to Siddhārtha that there had to be some type of being somewhere for there to be decay and death; thus, birth of a being must be the cause for decay and death. Then Siddhārtha, as all who will become a Buddha, started looking deeply at the disadvantages of birth and looking for the causes of birth. He knew firsthand that extreme self-mortification practices were not about to stop the process of birth, nor stop decay and death. Making himself suffer was not ending suffering.

Siddhārtha's search began with the question, "Why is there decay and death?" After finding birth to be the cause for decay and death, he asked, "Why is there birth?" He found bhava to be the cause for birth. After finding bhava to be the cause for birth, he asked, "Why is there bhava?" Siddhārtha's search for an escape from suffering did not begin with the question, "Why is there ignorance?"

*Did you try self-mortification?*

Like many newly ordained bhikkhus, I got into self-mortification practices. Self-mortification means making your body suffer as much as possible with the idea of escaping decay and death. You go without eating and drinking. In 1964, I met Ñāṇavimala Thera, when he was in his fifties and I was in my twenties. He

looked like a skeleton and I wanted to follow his example. I was living in a cave in Arane Kale District. I wore an old robe, and let my hair and beard grow. My feet were split from walking barefoot. My skin was black and peeling from the sun. I rarely looked for food, eating maybe one meal every two days. What little rice I came across, I ate up till the last grain. I also drank little water; it was scarce in the forest.

There are five spiritual faculties—confidence, saddhā; energy, viriya; mindfulness, sati; concentration, samādhi; and wisdom, paññā. My effort, viriya, was out of balance with the other four spiritual faculties. It was way beyond them. Because of low food intake, my joints became stiff, my bowels stopped working properly and I too looked like a skeleton. I was happy to look like a skeleton. I got Malaria. It's a sickness few people contract in the Arane Kale District. I was happy about suffering with Malaria! My body was weak and I thought I would die. And I almost did die. I passed out while going to the toilet in the outhouse.

Two days later, my supporters found me, still laying unconscious in the outhouse. They carried me back to their home where I regained consciousness. They gave me water and a drink of terrible tasting traditional medicine. It was very bitter. Aiyo! They also brought in a doctor who told me to drink king coconut water and to take a bath. Good advice, though there were no king coconuts in the area for drinking and there was little water for bathing. I started eating one meal every day instead of eating one meal every two days, and gradually regained some strength. The food wasn't nutritious. Then I was hit with another bout of Malaria. I came to the conclusion self-mortification was useless, as nothing was growing in my head. I was too weak to sit in meditation for hours. I didn't have the strength to walk to the well for a bath, let alone the strength to raise a bucket of water above my head and pour it over my body. I was not making any progress. I started eating two meals every day, even took

Nestomalt, and survived.

## Conventional Decay, Aging, and Death

Dependent on birth, the decay, aging and death arise. Decay and aging is jarā in Pali, while death is maraṇa. The most fun in life is the understanding of jarā-maraṇa.

*It's fun to understand decay and death?*

Yes! Yes!

It is difficult for young people to understand anything about decay and aging because their eyes and other sense doors are working quite well. I was seven years of age at the time I noticed my aunt using spectacles to read the newspaper. It seemed odd, as mother had no difficulty reading the newspaper without spectacles. I asked mother, “Why does auntie wear spectacles?” Mother said, “My sister’s eyesight is failing. Her eyes are weak.” At seven years of age, I could not understand what it meant to have weak eyes. I thought something had gone wrong with auntie. As a teenager at Kanduboda Meditation Centre back in the 1950s, I sometimes memorized suttas at night in complete darkness. Sumathipāla Na Himi scolded, “Don’t read in the dark. You’ll ruin your eyes.” I often thought about Sumathipāla’s words, but couldn’t understand what it meant to ruin my eyes. Sumathipāla sometimes pointed out leaves in the trees and I could see each leaf. I threaded sewing needles easily. I enjoyed reading.

By fifty years of age, I began to understand decay and aging. My eyesight started failing and I started using spectacles. These days, I completely understand what it means to have weak eyes, as everything is blurry without spectacles. When I look at a tree,

the leaves are all in one bunch, though I know there are many leaves in the tree. And I understand that my body is subject to decay and aging—white hair, loose teeth, lost teeth, physical weakness, wrinkled skin, and black spots on my skin. I also understand what it's like to have diabetes; a disease I will have for the rest of my life. I check my blood-sugar every day. The Buddha ordered bhikkhus to reflect on food before eating, that food is not for beautification or entertainment. Bhikkhus are to eat to maintain the body, nothing else. Although plenty of delicious food is offered at our centre, I no longer need to reflect on food before eating because I can only eat food suitable for a diabetic. The jarā-dukkha of a body aging took me fifty years to understand. It's now difficult to thread a sewing needle and difficult to read suttas.

*What about the mind aging? My memory was far better forty years ago.*

Conventional aging applies to the body, not to the mind. We cannot put an age to the mind. Indeed, my mind seems to be getting younger all the time. I feel in my dreams that I am an eighteen-year-old boy. I rarely have dreams with me as a sixty or seventy year old man. Read the Jarā Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya<sup>108</sup> and the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya.<sup>109</sup> A tree's power to produce fruit decreases with age. Similarly, the mind's power to produce activity decreases with age. The mind remains the same, just the activity decreases. Some healthy old trees produce fruit till they die. If you purify your mind, it will be active till you die.

*I have my share of health problems.*

Fully penetrating the truth of decay and aging is rare. We might think about aging when we see an old person. At seven or eight years of age, I asked my elder sister, "Why is auntie getting old?" My elder sister pulled my ear, "Don't be flippant." I didn't

like seeing old people. If I met an old man on my way to school, I couldn't study. I know old people who dislike seeing other old people.

We rarely see decay and aging because we are asleep. Imagine going to bed tonight and having the deepest of sleeps. No dreaming. Around 2 a.m., there is a terrific monsoon storm— heavy rain, high winds, lightening strikes. In the morning, you wake up to discover water everywhere, branches on the ground, trees blown over, tiles missing from the roof of your home, and the windows are shattered. It's a complete surprise. Seeing the damage, you conclude there must have been a storm the night before, but you didn't see the storm while it smashed your home to pieces.

Decay and aging is the raging storm we sleep through for most of our lives. After fifty or more years, we wake a little to discover our eyes failing, our bodies weak, and our hearing poor. Old age takes us by surprise. By seventy or eighty years of age, we suddenly see death coming. We slept through the process of death too. Are you waking up? To whatever extent you wake up, you understand jarā-maraṇa to the same extent. Can you hear the rain beating on the roof of your home? Can you hear the winds howling? Lightening can strike at any time.

*I see a few grey hairs when I look in the mirror.*

It is hard for you to see decay and aging clearly because your sense doors are fairly good. You are sleeping. I'm not saying you know nothing at all of the dhamma, only saying more experience is needed with vipassanā meditation. A fifteen year old who is well advanced in vipassanā sees jarā-maraṇa far more clearly than a seventy or eighty year old who never meditates. The fifteen year old is awake. The seventy or eighty year old is sleeping. Most people stop doing vipassanā when they start seeing decay and aging. They don't want to see the true nature of things. I am slightly more awake than you because I am older.

My body is certainly decaying. Death is coming. We have to cultivate vipassanā in our minds for vipassanā to grow.

*What is death?*

I often ask myself that same question. Our family home was located next to a cemetery, and I regularly saw corpses, cremations, burials and skeletons. I picked up a human skull one day and brought it home. Mother said, “You’re not bringing that into the house!” I hid the skull in a nearby tree. It is very difficult to understand what is death. We can talk about death in gross terms, that your mother died of a stroke when she was fifty-six years of age. Both of us can say our mothers are dead, but can we go into any greater detail about their deaths? We see the surface of death in the break-up of the aggregates, khandhas. Death can be quick; you might die in a bomb blast. It can be slow; you die after a long sickness. Death is common for everybody. This is an important question. A bad automobile accident may leave you in a coma, and you die while in the coma.

*Your death would be a great loss for many of us.*

Use intelligence and interract properly when with a teacher. Until death, I have to live. I cannot die right now. Because we cling strongly to our bodies, we connect death with the suffering of our bodies decaying and aging. The suffering of bodily decay and aging is not death. Jarā-dukkha is the dying process that happens before death, before the maraṇa-dukkha. People are afraid of the pain associated with dying, not afraid of death. No one should be afraid of death or being dead, as it’s an unknown. I also do not know what is death. By looking at the deaths of others, I have seen maraṇa-dukkha and suspect the experience of death lasts for only two seconds and is not at all painful. I will know the maraṇa-dukkha soon enough. The same for you and everyone. We will understand death on the day we die.

*We talked about spontaneous birth. Is there spontaneous*

*death?*

A lot of people disappear. I knew a man who, without obvious causes, burnt to death in his own bed. I saw the scorched bed. Everything born gradually comes to destruction and dies. Devas have spontaneous deaths at the end of their lives.

*What about death by suicide?*

Last night, I was discussing suicide with a gentleman who has life-threatening heart disease. He will die if he stops taking his medication or eats too much rich food. However, the medication leaves him nauseous and tired, and he misses the rich foods. Feeling life is not worth living in this way, he plans to give up the medication and eat more of the food he enjoys. At once, I didn't say to the gentleman, "Don't do that!" Instead, little by little, I explained we have no right to destroy this human being. It has its own way of living, own lifespan and does not belong to us. We have no right to kill this being.

*Doctor assisted suicide is hotly debated in Canada. We have comfortable lives and want comfortable deaths.*

A human life is comparable to a stone flying through the air. The stone's flight begins with a throw. If your throw is strong with lots of energy, the stone flies through the air for seventy or eighty metres before hitting the ground. If your throw is weak, the stone travels two or three metres then hits the ground. The nature of the throw determines the stone's flight. A human life begins with kamma. If the kamma at birth is strong, the human life goes for seventy or eighty years. The nature of the kamma determines the human life. After you throw the stone into the air, you just sit back for a few moments and watch it flying through the air. Similarly, with sati and sampajañña, we watch the unfolding of kamma.

Committing suicide is like hitting the stone in mid-flight. Instead of sitting back and watching the stone fly, you pick up a

second stone and throw it at the first stone. While the first stone is still flying through the air, the second stone hits it, and changes everything. The first stone flies off in a new direction and hits the ground prematurely. Hit in mid-flight, the first stone is prevented from flying through the air as was intended with the initial throw. With suicide, a human life is prevented from unfolding as was intended with the kamma at birth. We should not destroy the kammās of birth. The Buddha laid down rules against suicide.

*Not unlike many people, I often feel there's not much to live for. Ending problems once and for all sure looks attractive. Don't worry, I'm not about to kill myself anytime soon.*

No need to think of suicide. You might be murdered! Even arahat Mahā Moggallāna was murdered. No, your life doesn't have to be useless. As a student of dhamma, your motivation is freedom from saṃsāra, to break free of decay, aging and death. The Buddha praised reducing the bad kammās that lead to birth in a hell and lower worlds, and praised increasing the good kammās. You can incorporate positive thinking into your life—to be an arahat, to maintain the energy for a good rebirth, to develop spiritual faculties. Other kammās, such as the taking of life? No, don't include suicide in your thinking.

Some people have good careers, good health and everything material in life, and yet have a hard time finding happiness. They don't find anything of value in the five senses, and don't believe in philosophy or religion. No Buddha. No Christ. On the verge of death, they start believing in kamma-vipāka, that good actions lead to good results and bad actions lead to bad results. Believing in kamma-vipāka, however, on the verge of death is of no use. Soldiers fight and kill and die. They too understand the dukkha of kamma-vipāka in their last moments, and again it's too late. The Buddha is the only teacher who spoke of breaking the chains of saṃsāra. In the world, teachers of other



philosophies and religions never spoke of breaking free of decay, aging and death.

*My father is ninety years old, in palliative care, and I expect will soon die. Like many Christians, he has his doubts about the existence of heaven. Father has always been a generous person and I'd like to help him as best I can. Is there any point in telling my father about the Buddha's teachings?*

There is no need to explain kamma-vipāka to your father. Remind him of his youth when he worked hard to support family and community. Tell him stories of kindness and generosity that bring up memories of his own acts of kindness and generosity. Make him happy. Have some fun. Fill your father with positive ideas, which necessarily requires you to be overflowing with kindness and compassion. Feed that process. If you can remind your father of his good deeds and fill him with positive ideas, you will help him greatly in his last days and his future will be fine.

*Thank you.*

We must live as if we're dying. I've had a few deaths over my life that were hard to understand. My elder sister's son fell off a train and died at the age of twenty-two. I used to go to school with him when we were children. On the morning he died, I gave him money for his train ticket. My nephew's death was a great shock for my elder sister and mother. I didn't feel much emotion and didn't understand why I didn't feel emotion. I did feel a sense of loss when Bhante Sīvalī died in Honolulu in 1982. His relics were shipped to Kanduboda for burial in a newly constructed ash vault. Sumathipāla Na Himi died just a few weeks after Bhante Sīvalī died. Again, I didn't feel or think much of anything at the time of Sumathipāla's death, except thinking I must be missing the suitable mental factor, cetasika.

I always had a great deal of confidence in Sumathipāla Na

Himi. The manner in which he died, however, substantially increased my confidence in him. In the weeks leading up to his death, Sumathipāla was gravely sick, yet never showed any outward signs of sickness. He behaved as if he was healthy, and most people didn't know he was sick. That was his way. Just one day before he died, Sumathipāla supervised construction of Bhante Sīvalī's ash vault. He told the mason, "You'll need to build a second ash vault because a second person will soon die." The mason was surprised, "You must be joking." Sumathipāla did sometimes joke around, putting on a serious expression and pretending to be a strict teacher—just to make people laugh.

The following morning, Sumathipāla Na Himi inspected the two new ash vaults, returned to his kuti, placed the box containing Bhante Sīvalī's relics under his bed, and then went into the hall to give his midday dhamma talk. Sumathipāla suffered a heart attack while giving the dhamma talk and was taken to his kuti. When I saw him, he was lying in bed. Sumathipāla said, "Massage my legs." I massaged his legs and I felt an icy coldness; his legs were already dead. He said, "I must go to the hospital, and I won't be returning to Kanduboda. Do your best for the meditation centre." His last words were similar to the Buddha's last words, "Don't be concerned about me. Be concerned about yourselves. Strive on with diligence." At 1 p.m., Sumathipāla was taken to the hospital and, by 6 p.m., he was dead. Sumathipāla Na Himi died the day after he told the mason to build the second ash vault.

Sumathipāla Na Himi was given a fine funeral. The robe covering his body had been given to him by Mahasi Sayadaw. The robe covering the coffin was a high quality robe given to me when I was in Thailand. That robe was special and I rarely wore it. I used to keep it under my pillow. After the cremation of Sumathipāla's body, I checked Sumathipāla's kuti for important articles. I thought he must have a few important possessions stuffed away in a suitcase. I found nothing. He lived on the

requisites.

Not many months after the deaths of Bhante Sivalī and Sumathipāla Na Himi, my mother died. Mother died the day after the rains ended. I was abbot at Kanduboda Meditation Centre at the time. A big shot. Mother died in the night and was taken to the cemetery the next day. I told you some of this account earlier. I was without emotion for mother's funeral, right until her body rolled into the furnace of the crematorium. Something came up from my past and I cried. A man from the meditation centre saw me crying and asked, "Why are you crying?" I didn't have a good answer. I was a big shot meditator and the abbot.

*I sometimes cry over my father's death, and he is still alive.*

With ignorance and craving operating, we can't possibly understand death. We can accept intellectually that all objects in nature die, but we don't truly accept death. I cried at my mother's funeral because I lost something that was mine. I took an object of the past and brought it into the present. I was a meditating bhikkhu and occasionally reflected on the nature of my mother. She was old and frail. It was the appropriate time for her to die. All the same, a memory from my youth came up when her body rolled into the furnace and I cried. We're forever running after things. The day we understand death, we will stop running. Even sotāpannas do not understand death. Visakha, a disciple of the Buddha, was quite upset when one of her children died.

*Would seeing corpses help me understand death?*

Possibly. Nearly all doctors who see corpses don't make any spiritual progress from seeing corpses. In the cemetery section of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, <sup>110</sup> you'll find a reflection on corpses, that our bodies are subject to death, bloating, and rotting. We look closely at the break-up of the body after death. Take care,

you might need psychiatric help if reflecting on corpses goes astray.

A twenty-five-year-old German woman who stayed at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre in the 1980s was curious to see a corpse. She also wanted to understand death. I took her to see the corpse of one of our bhikkhunis. The German woman was disappointed, “Bhikkhuni looks like she is sleeping.” She didn’t get the perception of death from seeing the bhikkhuni’s corpse. The German woman stayed for one year at Kanduboda and again her wish to see a corpse arose. I took her to my mother’s funeral and she saw my mother’s lifeless body. Fruitless. No results. The German woman felt she hadn’t seen death. I gave up trying to show her death.

A group of us went on a trip to Anuradapura and I left the German woman in charge of the women’s quarters for a few days. When I returned to Kanduboda, she was crying and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She had saved a Mynah bird chick from hungry crows and she took the chick back to her kuti. The chick did well for two days. Wanting the chick to grow big and fat, the German woman fed it lots of milk rice. She fed the chick too much milk rice. It couldn’t digest all the rice and it died, right in the German woman’s hands. She was tremendously distressed over the chick’s death. She was confused and unstable, even started talking to trees.

It was one thing to see the corpses of the bhikkhuni and my mother at a distance, quite another to have the Mynah bird chick die in her hands. The German woman found death where she wasn’t looking for it. She didn’t want to bury the chick.

## Inheritance

Because of ignorance, people see decay, aging, and death as problems. My ninety-year-old granny always claimed to be fifty years of age; she never went beyond fifty. A bhikkhuni at the

Kanduboda Meditation Centre needed a government identity card. Not for anything would she reveal her age to anyone. How is it possible for such a person to attain nibbāna? David, your mother died young and there was lots of sorrow. Your cries for your mother are with the understanding that you are not going to die. A fetus dies in the womb. The child is stillborn. Mothers cry because they think children are not dying.

Those affected by jarā-maraṇa often look for solace in performing good works, giving alms, or sitting for meditation. Sitting practice doesn't work well in times of great sorrow. There was little sorrow when my mother died, as she was old, sick and in a lot of pain. Mother didn't benefit us as much as she did when she was young and healthy. When people fall sick, and everyone does, there are changes in the mind. People think one way when they are well and think in quite a different way when they are sick. Thinking differently is common to all types of sicknesses. Which mental states do you associate with sickness?

*I guess anger mostly. While riding a bicycle in 1979, I crashed into an automobile and shattered a disc in my neck. I'm angry with myself for not wearing a helmet and for riding recklessly. If I'd only been more careful, I wouldn't be in chronic pain now and could do hard physical labour without difficulty. I'm also sad that father has Alzheimer's and sad that my brother has schizophrenia. These sicknesses are devastating my family.*

Whatever the sickness, shades of similar emotions come up—sadness, distress, sorrow, aversion, anger. It's a familiar tale. We expect our bodies to be healthy. But with sickness, as well as with aging and death, our bodies are falling short of our expectations and we get angry, which we aim at ourselves and all too often aim at others. A self-loathing can develop out of sickness. Conflicts with friends and family are routine for the old and dying. To the degree that anger about aging, sickness and death arises, to the same degree anger towards others arises. I

am old and sick, and can no longer work as I could when I was a young man. I scold, fight, and find fault with people. Sometimes, I expect others to look after me!

We have a bad habit of blaming others for our unhappiness. Many children put the blame for troubles on their parents, and many parents put the blame on their children. The wife scolds her husband; the husband yells at his wife. We get upset with society as a whole, or upset with the government. I know a five year old boy whose father recently died of a heart attack. When the boy asked why father wasn't home, his aunt said, "Your father is staying at grandmother's house." The boy is now mad at his grandmother for not letting father come home. From the first day of marriage, the wife thinks, "My husband will care for me." Similarly, the husband is thinking, "I now have a wife to care for me." And when one partner falls short of expectations, the other partner gets excited. The blaming of others only makes matters worse.

*I don't see any connection between arguments and not accepting aging, sickness and death. Really?*

Yes, that's right, because with anger, you are creating the self. Regardless of all the best of intentions, studying the suttas and efforts in meditation, you are reluctant to accept responsibility for aging, sickness, and death—that is your inherent ignorance. You want little more than a pleasant feeling from meditation. Are you aware that your mind and body are summed up by the five aggregates of clinging, pañc'upādānakkhandhā? There are the aggregates of feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness, and materiality. If you only do sitting and walking meditation and never reflect on the truths of life, you are deceiving yourself and living on the surface of this world. Progress in meditation, reducing anger and reaching jhāna, requires making a fundamental shift in your way of thinking. Realize that anger takes its toll on you and others.

*You said earlier that kindness stops anger.*

Kindness is the opposite of anger, and it prevents anger from developing into hatred and cruelty. When my teachings are too difficult, take a seat in the meditation hall, and do the mettā practice, “May I be free from sickness, and free from suffering. May I live happily.” However, if you are fighting a serious sickness, the practice of mettā serves no purpose because you are not free of sickness and not free from suffering.

*And not living happily.*

There are two sides to the wisdom division of the eightfold path: sammā-diṭṭhi, right understanding of the four noble truths; and sammā-saṅkappa, right thoughts and intentions. Sammā-diṭṭhi is the vipassanā side of wisdom and it helps destroy defilements. Sammā-saṅkappa is the samatha side of wisdom and it suppresses defilements. Sammā-saṅkappa includes the practice of mettā, loving-kindness; as well as includes karuṇā, compassion; and nekkhama, renunciation. If the path is to grow, you must develop both sides of wisdom. If you only do a samatha practice of mettā, the path goes to the fetters and won’t grow. You are far more likely to reduce anger and self-loathing through vipassanā. Do the sitting practice of mettā when you need a rest from working hard at vipassanā.

## Basic truths of life

In the Upajjhatthana Sutta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya,<sup>111</sup> the Buddha recommends that everyone whether they be bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, lay men, or lay women reflect on five basic truths of life:

- We are subject to aging
- We are subject to sickness

- We are subject to death
- We are subject to losing everything that is dear
- We are subject to our kammās

Just as your mother left you money for an inheritance, your kammās leave you birth together with decay, aging, sickness and death for an inheritance. You are the heir to your good and bad kammās; mentality and materiality is born of your kammās. In the process of dying, mentality and materiality creates anew. When did jati-jarā-maraṇa start happening?

*Not sure.*

There is no answer to that question.

*I damaged my neck in 1979.*

To reduce the anger, reflect on this dhamma again and again, “Was I born with a guarantee that I wouldn’t age? No, I am not free of aging, even if I like to be free from aging. And I sometimes fall sick. It is not that I am free from sickness, even if I want to be free. No, I am subject to sickness. Was I born not to die? No, I was definitely born to die.”

*Nothing like the healing powers of reflecting on sickness and death! The more friends and relatives I have, the more time I spend in hospitals and the more funerals I attend. It’s brutal. Life certainly has its share of problems.*

We need not see jarā-maraṇa as a problem. Your hair is turning grey. My hair also. No one likes their hair to turn grey. Very well, go ahead and dye your hair! With the aging process to be expected, what then is there to complain about? In the time of the Buddha, men and women adorned themselves far more than today. You live with a shattered disc in your neck. I have diabetes. At present, the discs in my neck are in good physical shape and I do my best to live without shattering them. Even so,



the discs in my neck have the potential to shatter. They are delicate and vulnerable to breakage. If I get into an automobile accident tonight and also shatter a disc, where is the problem? What can I say about a shattered disc? It's okay because that disc in my neck always had the potential of shattering, which is why it shattered. Say I fall sick with the flu. From the first day of my birth, I had the potential of falling sick with the flu.

Can you find someone who never ages and never falls sick? No one escapes aging and sickness. And even if you live to be 100 years of age, the end is death. Like the bit of dirt on top of mushrooms that pop out of the ground, there is always the decay, aging, sickness and death in our lives. At weddings, do grooms promise to protect brides from decay, aging, sickness and death, or do brides promise to protect the grooms from jarā-maraṇa? No, of course not. You will never find a wife who can protect you from jarā-maraṇa. Doesn't matter, you might get married, and you will live happily as long as you avoid finding fault with her. Avoid expectations of your wife. In any case, I understand what it means to grow old, both of us understand what it means to fall sick, but neither you nor I understand the dying moment of death. Before you grow old, try to appreciate what it means to grow old.

*Would I take birth as a deva if I died in jhāna?*

No birth, not even for the time to snap your fingers, is worth living. You are aware that some aspects of human life are unsatisfactory. You haven't as yet understood that the whole of any birth as any type of being in the kāma-loka, rūpa-loka, or arūpa-loka is totally unsatisfactory. Better than you, I can say life is unsatisfactory. You are not thinking in this way. Meditation means understanding the basic truths of life, means understanding you are heir to your kammās, and means letting go of every worldly form—leave this life before you die. I'm not saying start liking jarā-maraṇa. However, only after clearly

seeing the suffering, seeing the jarā-maraṇa, you'll make an honest effort to cross over to nibbāna.

*I definitely don't like sickness and death.*

Do you have control over your father's Alzheimer's? Can you cure your brother of schizophrenia? What about my diabetes? Old age? Death? Does jarā-maraṇa happen willingly or unwillingly?

*I can't stop the aging. Doctors are treating the Alzheimer's and schizophrenia.*

Once we accept that jarā-maraṇa is beyond our control, we stop seeing it as a problem, and stop blaming ourselves and others. I would no longer get angry with dogs, relatives, workers, or any of my students, and I would no longer expect others to look after me. If you don't look after me, I have no grounds for finding fault with you. No, you are not responsible for my diabetes or my old age. Out of a sense of duty and compassion, you once suggested seeing a diabetes specialist and getting the best possible medicine; that is a different matter altogether. Feelings of compassion arise in people who are practising meditation and using their knowledge.

I have not gone beyond jarā-maraṇa-dukkha. This is my inheritance. I must accept it, and not get angry with this state of affairs. What is the point of getting angry? Khaya means wasting away; vāya is the end of the wasting away. With our bodies wasting away, what is there to cling to? Nothing. The person who understands decay and aging, sickness, and death isn't getting angry. He or she has no worries, is patient and content.

In my life, I have only met three or four people who were always patient and content, a quality known as khanti in Pali. Bhikkhu Dhammadassi, fourth senior to me, was one such person. Dhammadassi had a high degree of discipline, followed the eightfold path correctly, and fully developed sati and khanti.

Among Sumathipāla Na Himi's students, Dhammadassi was the patient and content one. Whatever object was thrown at him, it just slipped off. You could feel Dhammadassi's khanti and feel his level of development. Because of a maturity of sati, there was no lobha, dosa, or moha—this is tadanga-pahāna. I never once saw him angry.

Bhikkhu Dhammadassi was a pilot and a first-class mechanic in his lay life. As a bhikkhu, he sometimes lived in the forest and sometimes at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre. He walked many miles. Whatever he received, he was content with that. If given galumpasa drink or not given galumpasa, he wasn't concerned. If offered a fine robe or a rough robe, or offered good alms or no alms—he didn't care. For shelter, he never worried about getting a kuti or not getting a kuti. If he didn't get any place at all to stay, then fine. No problem. His lifestyle was simple. When Dhammadassi visited Kanduboda, he was welcome to use my kuti. And he often practiced walking meditation from 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. In the middle of one all-night session, I gave him a galumpasa drink. He accepted the drink and said, "No need to bring galumpasa on another day."

Bhikkhu Dhammadassi used to fetch water from the well of the meditation centre and fill the water pots at all the kutis. I told him, "I can fetch water for you. I can fill the water pots." He smiled, did not say a word, and continued fetching water and filling the pots. Dhammadassi kept to himself. In all the time I lived with him, I never saw friends or relatives visit him. People practising dhamma in the way Dhammadassi practiced don't have friends or relatives. That said, he did at times teach English to the young novices who wanted to learn English. Dhammadassi enjoyed teaching English. He also asked me if I wanted to learn English.

*You didn't take him up on his offer.*

This dhamma is for the patient and contented person, not for the

impatient and discontented. To develop the eightfold path correctly, you must associate with people who are developing the eightfold path correctly. Recognize who has right sati. Identify who is humble, patient and content, and associate with him or her. Dhammadassi was one of the most developed people I have ever met, and I was fortunate to have his association. If you live continuously in a way similar to Dhammadassi, it is possible to attain path knowledge.

In the latter part of his life while living in Kurunegala district, Dhammadassi was struck with paralysis and, not understanding his nature, no one in Kurunegala district could care for him properly. We built a kuti at Kanduboda specifically designed to meet the needs of a sick and dying bhikkhu, then brought Dhammadassi down from Kurunegala to live in it. Dr. Jayawardene gave him the best of care. An Austrian woman and I also cared for him.

Death happens quickly or slowly. With a quick death, both materiality and mentality die off simultaneously. With a slow death, materiality dies off first and mentality dies off second. Our legs turn icy cold and blue. We're no longer able to smell, see or hear well. Nonetheless, our mentality lives on for weeks and months. Dhammadassi died a slow death. Struck with paralysis, much of his materiality died before his mentality died. No problem. He remained totally coherent and until the end of his days patient and content.

Only a few minutes before dying, Dhammadassi asked to see me, "Pemasiri, I will soon close my eyes. Please take all my possessions." I asked, "What do you have to give me?" Dhammadassi said, "Hold out your hand." I held out my hand. He tapped the palm of my hand once and said, "One." Tapped my palm again and said, "Two." Tapped a third and fourth time, saying, "Three. Four." After some seconds, I asked, "And what are these four?" Dhammadassi said, in the way of an arahat, "The

four foundations of mindfulness. These four satipaṭṭhānas I give to you as an inheritance.” Dhammadassi closed his eyes and died.

*As a Christian, I have an immortal soul in a mortal body and at death my soul leaves the body and goes either to heaven or hell, or perhaps goes temporarily to the in-between state of purgatory where purification must be completed before entering heaven. Will my whole life flash before my eyes at death?*

You arose in your mother’s womb with a particular consciousness, viññāṇa. From birth through till your approaching death, there is a running continuum called bhavaṅga, and into this bhavaṅga you have been adding kusala and akusala-kammas. You have good habits and bad habits. You kept precepts and broke precepts. Say you live for eighty years. Sometime before the final breath, you experience a kamma-nimitta based on a few of those kusala and akusala-kammas you added into the bhavaṅga over the course of your lifetime. Based on a past object, the viññāṇa arises. An akusala-kamma you performed decades before your death could come forward as the kamma-nimitta at the time of your death.

The kamma-nimitta, which is comparable to a dream, can arise in your mind in various ways—as the kamma itself, as the people and places associated with the kamma, or as the objects used in performance of the kamma. The kamma-nimitta could be any sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or thought associated with the kamma performed. For instance, in 2005, you worked on a tsunami relief project. At the time of death, your kusala kamma-nimitta might take the form of seeing yourself working on the tsunami relief project, or of seeing your fellow tsunami relief workers, or of seeing newly constructed homes. Possibly you see the Sri Lankan coastal village where you worked or see the relief project’s shovels, chainsaws, or trucks.

Whatever happened at the time of the kamma can arise as the kamma-nimitta in your mind. In 1998, you meditated well at the Lanka Vipassana Meditation Centre in Colombo. You might relive some of those strong kusala experiences, or see fellow meditators, or see the Lanka Vipassana building, or see your room at the centre in Colombo. When I die, an image of me teaching dhamma here at the Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana could arise in my mind. Possibly I see students, or see the Senasun Arana grounds or see its buildings. The kamma-nimitta is just like a dream. When I was a child and drowning in the pit, I had the chameleon appearing as a nimitta in my mind and I was on my way to taking birth as a chameleon.

*It's challenging to connect dreams, tsunami work, and chameleons with death.*

With doubts about kamma and the results of kamma, it is hard to believe in the kamma-nimitta. There are countless trustworthy reports of dying people seeing kamma-nimittas, and seeing gati-nimittas. Gati-nimitta is the sign for the next birth.

*Many Christians expect to suffer great agony before death, as a last purification, helping to burn away the remnants of sin.*

Signs of previously performed akusala and kusala kammās can arise intermittently in your mind up to a year before death. Initially, it is all the painful and agonizing akusala kammās of your life coming forward. In your final weeks or days, though, one either akusala or kusala kamma-nimitta prevails and it alone starts arising constantly. Once one specific kamma-nimitta becomes constant in your mind, you create aggregates based on that one specific kamma-nimitta. Eventually, the gati-nimitta arises and it leads the way to your next birth.

*Good and bad kammās parallel Christian purity and sin, to an extent. Where does the bhava come into play?*

The five aggregates of clinging, the pañc'upādānakkhandhā, are

constantly created according to the presence of upādāna, clinging. Could be the rūpa, materiality, and the vedanā, feeling, of a dog are at work with your kamma-nimitta. You feel like a dog. Your experience and perceptions are that of a dog. If you die with upādāna to the feelings, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness, and materiality of a dog, then that clinging yields rebirth as a dog. David the human becomes David the dog.

*David the dog doesn't sound all that great.*

The being who dies is not same being who takes rebirth. Everything is different. Your last moments as David will be something you create in your current life. Your last moments will not be something that you bring forward from an earlier time in your current life. No, in your last moments as David the human, you create entirely new causes for an entirely new birth. At that time, the gati-nimitta, the sign for your birth destination, conditions your next birth, punabbhava.

*You didn't answer my question about dying in jhāna. And what happens if I attain path knowledge? Would these be the most important achievements in my life?*

Those are garu kammās, the heavy kusala kammās. There are also heavy akusala kammās—killing of parents, and the rest. Not everything is kamma. Read the Sivaka Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. <sup>112</sup>

*And what if I am unconscious while dying? Many people slip from life into death in a state of medicated stupor.*

An unconscious dying person will always be with the kamma-nimitta. With attaining the first level of path knowledge, the sotāpanna, you would not create any aggregates that could take you to the lower worlds, the apāyas. With attaining the third level of path knowledge, the anāgāmī, you would not create aggregates that take you to the kāma-loka. The arahat does not

have a kamma-nimitta.

## Momentary Decay, Aging and Death

At the end of each being's lifetime, his or her body decays, ages and dies—conventional jarā-maraṇa is easy to see. There is also decay, aging, and death taking place all the way through each being's lifetime. Every day, every hour, and every moment, there is decay, aging and death of all mentality, nāma-jarā-maraṇa, and there is decay, aging and death of all materiality, rūpa-jarā-maraṇa. In contrast to conventional jarā-maraṇa, momentary jarā-maraṇa is difficult to see. If you are wise, you will learn to see momentary jarā-maraṇa. After every thought, there is death.

Think about the beginning of this dhamma class. Think about what was happening forty-five minutes ago. I walked over from Dhammika's kuti and sat down on a mat. You were waiting for me and sitting on a chair. Can you remember how you sat down on your chair?

*No.*

I can't remember how I sat down, and I must have adjusted my body fifty times since I sat down. You also have shifted around a bit. Our moving about has nothing to do with the mat or chair. Natural to bodies, there is change and feeling. These two heaps of materiality, one sitting on a mat and the other sitting on a chair, are a certain length, shape, weight, and colour. Sitting on a mat or sitting on a chair, change is inherent in that rūpa, these saṅkhāras, we call our bodies. Are we the same people who sat down forty-five minutes ago? No, we are not the same people who sat down forty-five minutes ago.

Another example. You decide to go swimming in the fast



moving Mahaveli River. You lay your shirt and shoes on its bank and step into the river. The body of water you step into is not the same body of water you saw from the river's bank. With that first step into the river, your foot contacts a distinct and separate body of water. You swim in the river for forty-five minutes and climb up the bank. In those forty-five minutes, the body of water your foot contacted when you first stepped into the river has travelled miles downstream. You see yourself as swimming in one place in the river. You did not swim in one place. The river changed. In the same way, this world in which we live is constantly changing and decaying. It is a fast moving world of illusion.

Because of ignorance, we take our world to be one that is real and does not change and decay, a perception which leads to arguments and petty acts of jealousy. Instead of thinking to help others, we do our utmost to amass more and more possessions. We live as though jarā-maraṇa never happens. We really don't have a good understanding of our minds, our bodies, or the world around us.

Jarā-maraṇa is happening. The whole of your long drawn out life has always depended upon momentary decay, aging and death. Ten seconds after conception, you were decaying, aging and dying. One minute later, you had decayed, aged and died a great deal. By week's end, an immeasurable amount of decaying, aging and dying had taken place. From the first instant of conception in your mother's womb until this moment, you have been doing nothing but undergoing jarā-maraṇa. If I had said to your parents that baby David was decaying and dying, your parents would have said, "This Pemasiri fellow is wacky!" All parents see their babies as beautiful and growing because their babies are alive, healthy and breathing. No parent sees his or her baby as decaying and dying. No parent relates birth of a child to the process of decay, aging and death. If I say you are falling to pieces, old and decaying, you'll be upset and not talk to me.

What do you think? Are you dying?

*I see decay and aging well enough. Death seems far-away.*

You are constantly dying and in the process of dying you are creating the conditions for a new mind and a new body. This series of events is happening every moment.

A human body consists of countless unit bundles of minute particles called rūpa-kalāpas. At the start of life, you were physically growing because the number of rūpa-kalāpas was increasing. For example, if you had one million rūpa-kalāpas arising and dying ten seconds after conception, you might have had two million rūpa-kalāpas arising and dying one minute after conception. Then an hour later, possibly three hundred million rūpa-kalāpas were arising and dying. By week's end, four billion rūpa-kalāpas could be arising and dying each moment. On a momentary basis, all 100% of your rūpa-kalāpas arise and die, but the net number of rūpa-kalāpas arising and dying is on the increase during the time of your life when you are growing. By the time you were thirty years of age, maybe five or six trillion rūpa-kalāpas were arising and dying.

Now in your fifties, you are closer to the end of life than to the start of life. The number of rūpa-kalāpas is decreasing and you are physically declining. If four trillion rūpa-kalāpas are arising and dying today, probably three trillion rūpa-kalāpas will arise and die in five years. By sixty, perhaps you will have only two trillion rūpa-kalāpas arise and die. Though my time is soon over, I want you to live long! By eighty years of age, could be that a mere one trillion arise and die. There will come a time in your life when no new rūpa-kalāpas arise, and that will be your conventional death.

*That example seems reasonable.*

People who fully experience the triple gem with help from a kalyāṇa-mitta will reach path knowledge at death. However,

reaching path knowledge requires more than going to the temple once a month. Without community oriented physical work and without the precepts, no one makes any progress. You have to fully experience the triple gem to avoid taking a downward birth into a hell or animal world.

*David the dog and now David the hell being.*

I have few examples for jati-jarā-maraṇa because I don't understand death. What is death? And how to understand it? We can say without difficulty conventional saṃsāra is the birth and death of a being called I. We have names in this lifetime. If I ask for David, you say, "That's me." If you cry out for Pemasiri, then I say, "Hey, I'm over here!" We could have been given other names. When we die, we will be born again as devas, humans, animals, or hell beings and we will have new names. We are continually creating beings who are dying, who are definitely going to die, and then die. And when we die, we have already created other beings who are also going to die.

With momentary saṃsāra, we find no David or Pemasiri, nor any me or mine or I. We only find moment after moment of jati and jarā and maraṇa, which goes against this concept of me and mine and I. There is no David and there is no Pemasiri, merely two heaps of mentality and materiality having to accept these facts of life.

*I see death as the loss of my life.*

My right to life is my death. For there to be a new birth, there has to be death. If I am not dying, I have no right to be alive. To put it another way, life is death. Your cup must be empty for Ratnayaka to pour the tea. Death is the requirement for life. If your cup is full to the brim with tea, can Ratnayaka pour the tea? No. On the day death is not there, I have achieved my objective. The cup is broken! No more tea.

*Cup?*

Ratnayaka brought you a cup of tea. You add milk and sugar, and are enjoying the experience of drinking the tea. To have a second cup of tea, you have to drink your first cup of tea.

*I'm the cup?*

Yes! Yes! Over and over, we fill our cups to their brims, empty our cups, and then fill our cups again. Out of good karmas, we live. And also out of bad karmas we live. Filling our minds with thoughts, we create life anew as we die. You daydream of women. I think about managing diseases such as diabetes. Everything we search for is subject to decay and death. And though creating and experiencing alone, we have a bad habit of involving many other people. We bring along, bring forward, likes and dislikes from birth, and feed on that measuring for the duration of our lives. We tell each other stories to fill the emptiness that death imposes.

The harmful excitement of sensuality, akusala-kāma-cchanda, leads here and now to the hell and animal worlds. If you have sati and paññā at 90%, you move away from kāma-cchanda and do beneficial work on the dhamma; the kusala-dhamma-cchanda is the path to liberation. Sati and paññā at 90% puts together wholesome karmas sufficient to take birth right now as a human, as a deva, or maybe even as a brahmā. If you have sati and paññā at 100%, both the good and bad karmas move away from your life. You would still be performing good and beneficial works, but the result of taking birth as a human, deva, or brahmā is cut away from that work. We call it the purest vipassanā. Arahats do good works with a neutral detachment, kattu-kamyatā-cchanda.

*I'll study vipassanā and jhāna. I'd sure like to get the jhāna.*

It is very difficult for a meditator to stay in the vipassanā side of the path. And do not look into how developed you are. Do you sincerely want vipassanā when you can have samatha? The bliss?

The joy? If you have books on vipassanā and jhāna, bring them to me. I'm short of firewood! Do not separate samatha from vipassanā. Do not even think about these terms, as thinking of them is a hindrance. The less you know the better. If you don't understand what is samatha and what is vipassanā, then good! When your kusala qualities are developed, you can live a life of giving up many things. A simple life, a mental happiness. The meditator who is practicing correctly gives up the idea of doing vipassanā. Drop that word from your mind. Drop views. Can't walk this path by talking or reading. No, only through practical experience.

## Arahats

Rather than searching for experiences that are subject to decay and death, you should be searching for what is not subject to decay and death. Search for viveka. Search for nibbāna. "Viveka," said the Buddha, "is an emptiness of defilements." The arahat's cup is empty. The emptying of your cup of its defilements and the finding of a way to cross the ocean of saṃsāra should be your main concerns in life. Not samatha. Not vipassanā. Not jhāna. Right now, you can't handle an empty mind. You can't tolerate a still mind. The real viveka—a mind free of craving, conceit, and views—is very hard to take for most people, be they Sri Lankans or Canadians.

*I thought I was aiming for path knowledge. And I'm not sure what to do if I drop vipassanā. Weren't you always stressing the importance of vipassanā?*

To attain to sotāpatti and beyond, you need the tools of sati and paññā. Practice with the goal of strengthening and bringing your sati-sampajañña and wisdom to maturity. Above all develop the

two sides to the wisdom division of the eightfold path—the sammā-diṭṭhi and sammā-saṅkappa—to a high level. Sammā-diṭṭhi means understanding the four noble truths, which includes understanding jarā-maraṇa. Sammā-saṅkappa means right thoughts and intentions, and these include loving-kindness, compassion, and renunciation. Once the sammā-diṭṭhi and sammā-saṅkappa reach a high level, even after returning to your Christian culture in Canada, you proceed without my help. Indeed, progress on the path of wisdom depends upon proceeding alone, without help from any other person.

In your home in Canada, you will be surrounded by sense objects of attachment—family, friends, career, land, food, clothing, money. Because of sammā-diṭṭhi, sammā-saṅkappa arises. In other words, as understanding of jarā-maraṇa grows, so grows renunciation of sense objects. Renunciation is the kindest and most compassionate thing you can do for yourself. Renunciation is based on lay life and yet renunciation is hard in lay life. Over the next few years, try to gradually reduce your attachment to sense objects. It is difficult to let go of attachments. I am not saying getting over jarā-maraṇa is easy.

*I've had one career failure after another back in Canada. Work as an engineer was a disaster and I never seem to have enough money.*

Instead of loving-kindness and compassion, renunciation is sometimes done with anger. We dislike some of the sense objects we find in lay life, even hate them, and want to escape. This is not proper renunciation. No. Or we fight the process of jarā-maraṇa. Proper renunciation only ever arises out of sati and paññā. Develop right understanding, and have some kindness and compassion for yourself. And read the Noble Search Sutta in the Majjhima Nikāya.<sup>113</sup>

*Then I got divorced. What a mess of a life.*

The arahat sees jati-jarā-maraṇa properly, sees death each and every moment, and finally, there is no death for him or her—that's the ultimate experience. He or she understands the dying moment of death. Understands maraṇa-dukkha. And since the arahat understands the true nature of death, there is no suffering at his or her final moment of death. For the arahat, there is no sadness or aversion in jarā-maraṇa. No anger. The arahat is the only being who has no death, amata. And if there is no death, there is no birth. Siddhārtha fully realized this truth of dependent origination and became the Buddha.

*Have you met any arahats?*

These days, all I expect to achieve is death. I don't like getting old and don't want another birth. Nonetheless, thus far I don't mind to die. Yes, I want to achieve no death, but no death isn't happening.

I think Venerable Chandravimala must have been an arahat. No defilements were to be seen. He was always happy and always smiling, just like a child. And though blind, he never gave the impression to anyone that he was blind. Many people are bitter about losing their sight. Not so for Chandravimala. Blindness was not a source of bitterness. Till his last breath at the remarkable age of 100 years, Chandravimala remained happy and sharp-witted. A moment or two before dying, he said, "This will be my last breath."

Over the past few weeks, I have been giving talks on the process of dependent origination and other topics, and you have been listening to these talks. If we really understood the truth of birth, decay, aging, sickness and death, we would have altogether different mental states, and we would alter our lives. You would not be listening to my talks and I would not be giving any talks. Neither you nor I would foolishly while away our time for many hours. I am trying hard to explain aspects of the Buddha's teachings to you that I haven't as yet experienced;

that is my inherent ignorance. Even if I too live for 100 years, I will probably never understand jati-jarā-maraṇa properly. I must stop for now.

*We can resume tomorrow.*

Will we be alive tomorrow? Since we haven't seen death, we think of putting things off until tomorrow. We have no right to talk of tomorrow.





*At Sāvattthi. Then, the Venerable Sāriputta approached the Blessed One. Having approached, he paid homage to the Blessed One, sat down to one side, and said to him, ‘Venerable sir, this is the entire holy life, that is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.’*

*Good, good, Sāriputta! This is the entire holy life, Sāriputta, that is, good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship.*

The Buddha and Venerable Sāriputta—Sāriputta Sutta<sup>114</sup>

## Epilogue

**Pemnasiri Thera:** In the Causation Sutta,<sup>115</sup> Venerable Ānanda declares, “The process of dependent origination is clear. I understand it.” The Buddha scolds Ānanda, “Do not say you understand dependent origination. This process is deep and complex. Because of not understanding dependent origination, beings continue to suffer in saṃsāra.”

*David: Is dependent origination logically circular? Should I say because there is decay, aging and death, there is ignorance?*

Another good question. The process of dependent origination is far from logically circular. It proceeds in forward order, reverse order, and to the casual observer no order. Any of the twelve factors can be the cause for the arising of any other factor. The Buddha taught the twelve factors of dependent origination in the forward order—beginning with ignorance and ending with decay, aging, and death—to make the process easy to understand. Otherwise, we’d get into an awful mess and never understand anything about this law of causation.

The process of dependent origination is deep. When you think about how beings are entangled in saṃsāra, the twelve factors are coming and going in every possible direction, much like the strands of a bird's nest. This complexity of inter-relatedness between factors—sometimes causes and sometimes effects—makes the process of dependent origination difficult to approach intellectually. Do you remember the relationship between consciousness and mentality-materiality? Dependent on mentality-materiality, consciousness arises; and dependent on consciousness, mentality-materiality arises. Venerable Sāriputta compares these two factors to reeds leaning against each other, one supporting the other.

*I don't have to take it in the normal order?*

No. You can look at the twelve factors of dependent origination from many different angles. Because of the six sense bases, there is contact. And because of contact, there is feeling. The feeling that arises in you could be a pleasant feeling or it could be a painful feeling. Then, according to the feeling that arises, you accumulate either kusala or akusala kammās. There is even the situation where kusala goes through directly as a result of ignorance. All our kammās prolong our journey in saṃsāra. The arahat doesn't accumulate either kusala or akusala kammās.

Take the order of the twelve factors in a way that helps end suffering. Maybe seeing that sense bases, contact, feeling, and craving lead to ignorance is helpful. Or you might see that ignorance leads to the arising of formations, leads to the arising of consciousness, leads to the arising of mentality-materiality, and leads to the arising of contact, and then see that these four factors themselves lead to the arising of more ignorance. You could look backwards from decay, aging and death towards birth. Then you could look further backwards to bhava, and then backwards to clinging, and finally back to your craving.

Don't forget feelings, the contact, or the sense bases. And of

course mentality-materiality is always in play. Use the twelve factors as a framework for breaking the chains of saṃsāra. And yes, to answer your question, you can say because there is decay, aging and death, there is ignorance. You could also say because of ignorance, there is decay, aging and death. Read the Thorough Investigation Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. <sup>116</sup>

*Sounds as if there's an infinite number of possibilities.*

The Buddha's teachings on suffering can be summed up in two words: ignorance and clinging.

*Ah good, I can remember two words.*

All of us far too often go straight from ignorance directly to clinging, from avijjā to upādāna. Because of ignorance, there is clinging. And because of clinging, there is suffering. We really don't understand the true nature of the material and immaterial objects, the ārammaṇas, we contact through our sense doors. For the arahat, there is no dependent origination, not in any usual sense, because there is no clinging. For the rest of us, the process of dependent origination is ignorance, clinging and suffering.

*And what again is ignorance?*

There is nothing in the world called ignorance. You won't find ignorance if you go looking for it. I told you earlier that ignorance is not knowing, and I asked you to reflect on what it is you do not know. In the context of enlightenment, ignorance is not knowing the nature of death. With knowing the nature of death comes the destruction of ignorance. The arahat knows death. He or she experiences the no death, amata. Since there is no ignorance for the arahat, there is no death for him or her. And if there is no death, there is no birth. The reverse is true as well. If there is no birth, there is no death and no ignorance. Any being who destroys ignorance has no fear of death. However, if ignorance is strong, there also appears to be no fear of death.

*Does dependent origination operate inside or outside of time?*

From a conventional perspective, the process of dependent origination operates inside of time. From an ultimate perspective, the process operates outside of time. Dependent origination, saṃsāra, and time are all linked to the concept of self—the me and mine and I. When a being realizes no self, there is no-time; his or her experience is outside of time. If someday you realize non-self, anattā, dependent origination will cease to operate and no-time will start to operate. Come around to thinking of dependent origination operating outside of time. Anattā is beyond time. Understand this truth. Experience it. All three characteristics of conditioned things—anicca, dukkha, and anattā—are ultimately outside of time.

*Dependent origination then operates inside and outside of time. Sure lots of Buddhist information to learn.*

When I was a child, father told me I could follow any religion. He gave me the Koran, the Bible, and the Tipiṭaka. Later, he gave me the Bhagavad Gita. I studied all these teachings, and I studied various schools of philosophy. There have been great teachers over the years—Lao Tse, Ālāra Kālāma, Uddaka Rāmaputta, Confucious, Jesus Christ, Mohammed and many more. Jesus was a sincere explorer of the mind. He was murdered and his teaching ended. The prophet Mohammed had worthwhile things to say. Whatever the teachings and wherever you find them, simply take the kusala.

*I do not want religion.*

And I do not believe in religion. Without understanding, religious knowledge leads to endless analyzing, to measuring and to critical judgements, all of which are a hindrance to sati-paṇṇā. Without experience, religious knowledge is worldly and fuels clinging with views, diṭṭhi-upādāna. If you merely build up a collection of facts, you understand nothing of what was said

by great teachers; information without experience is useless. I believe in the Buddha.

*Is knowledge separate from understanding and experience?*

At the beginning of the path, we use worldly knowledge to attain worldly experiences. Once an experience is attained, we better understand the knowledge that led to the experience. For example, you studied surveying in your engineering program at university and then worked as a surveyor in the field on pipeline construction. Because you worked as a surveyor, you now understand surveying quite well, much better than you did while reading survey textbooks at university. Knowledge supports experience; experience supports understanding; and understanding supports knowledge—all three must interact with each other for there to be progress. Hands on practical experience deepens the knowledge derived from books and other sources.

This is a path walked in light, not in darkness. Draw on your knowledge of the Buddha's teachings to gain experience and understanding. By reading about *sīla* in the suttas, and then practising *sīla*, you come around to understanding why you need *sīla*. Read about *samādhi*, experience *samādhi*, and then maintain the *samādhi*. Practice according to instruction. The *paññā* starts with a little knowledge of *paññā*, and then gradually with experience the understanding of wisdom grows. *Sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*—one day, all three will be balanced, and you will experience the true nature of things.

*When will I have enough knowledge? Or have read enough suttas? I feel overwhelmed by the large quantity of teachings.*

Practising the dhamma need not be overwhelming. To the clever, the Buddha taught only the four noble truths and the eightfold path. To the not so clever, he also taught the process of dependent origination.

We are planning on going on a trip next week to the ancient city of Anaradapura. It may happen that you and I go on that trip. We don't know. You may be dead before then. I may be dead. Our knowledge, experience and understanding of anicca are at a worldly level. Everything also has the characteristics of dukkha and anattā. We must live deepening our knowledge, experience and understanding of the three characteristics of conditioned things. Try to always be with one of the three characteristics.

Put your knowledge of dhamma into action. Be who you really are, and abandon defilements. While living in the world be as kind and compassionate as possible. Beyond intellect, you can extinguish suffering and experience nibbāna. You won't find agitation or defilements in nibbāna; it is the unconditioned, asaṅkhata. As the Buddha told Bāhiya, "See what is actually happening, bhava-sati." Arahats are flying in the empty space known as nibbāna.

*I have confidence in your teachings because you've had many extraordinary experiences, more than any other meditator I have ever met. And you are unbelievably knowledgeable about meditation.*

Nibbāna is not a place, a world, a feeling, or a mirage. Nor is nibbāna something to be attained in a future birth. We search for nibbāna now. We escape defilements now.

My knowledge is of limited use to you. My experiences are absolutely of no use to you or anyone else. If I have jhāna, then what value is that to you? None. If I have path knowledge, does that mean you somehow have path knowledge? No. And if I experience nibbāna, are you guaranteed to experience nibbāna? There is no connection between my experiences and your experiences. You must experience what the Buddha taught for yourself. My sīla, samādhi, paññā differ from your sīla, samādhi, paññā.

*Seems to me that having a teacher who has experienced jhāna, path knowledge and nibbāna would be priceless.*

Knowledge doesn't change. The knowledge I found in the suttas as a child is the same knowledge I now find in the suttas. My experiences over the years changed my understanding of the knowledge found in the suttas. I live in a virtuous way, practising sīla, to the degree of my samādhi and paññā. Let's say I go to the meditation hall tonight, follow the Buddha's advice, and fully penetrate the true nature of things. I gain insight, dassana, and fully experience nibbāna. I attain enlightenment! What happens to my knowledge?

*You gain some new knowledge. The third century B.C.E. Greek scientist Archimedes discovered a method for determining the purity of gold and cried out, "Eureka!"*

Eureka! Dassana! No, I do not gain new knowledge. The knowledge I have now of nibbāna is the same knowledge I would have tomorrow. Before and after experiencing nibbāna, the knowledge remains the same.

*Then what changes?*

Experience deepens understanding of knowledge. If I attained, my knowledge of nibbāna would be ten times clearer. It's only my understanding of dhamma that is of value to you, not any of the peculiar experiences I've had over the years. If my understanding of the knowledge was deeper, I could better help you and others.

*You've helped me a good deal.*

Since the Buddha had the deepest possible understanding of suffering and the end of suffering, he helped listeners in the best possible way. He personalized his teachings, related them closely to the life and mind of the listener. The Buddha's advice was always practical and always within the listener's ability to

follow. He didn't dazzle a listener with esoteric teachings that were outside the listener's daily life experience. The Buddha never spoke in abstract hypothetical terms. He gave teachings that were to be put into action in the everyday activities of life. To a farmer, the Buddha gave a teaching about farming. To a tradesman, the Buddha talked about trade. To a physician, the Buddha spoke in terms of medicine. Farmer, tradesman, physician—each gained insight into the nature of nibbāna by listening to teachings well suited to their lifestyle. Since your background is science and engineering, I taught you in a way suited to scientists and engineers.

*I'm not looking forward to re-entering the workforce back in Canada. Life is a constant battle.*

There are men and women amongst us who have experienced nibbāna. Their understanding is deep and their knowledge clear. Though living in the world, these men and women are free of conflicts, free of accumulating money, and free of measuring. With wisdom, you too can see the spectacle of an agitated mind arising, and die without clinging.

It is now the moment for us to stop.

*You have been generous with your time. I hope we meet again one day.*

I leave you with Sumathipāla Na Himi's last words, "Don't be concerned about me. Be concerned about yourself, and strive on with diligence."

*Thank you.*

Theruwān Saranai. <sup>117</sup>





# Endnotes

## Abbreviations & Numbering Method

AN	Āṅguttara Nikāya (Book/Chapter/Sutta)
DN	Dīgha Nikāya (Chapter)
Dhp	Dhammapada (Verse)
MN	Majjhima Nikāya (Chapter)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya (Part/Chapter/Section/Sutta)
Snp	Sutta Nipāta (Chapter/Sutta)
Ud	Udāna (Chapter/Exclamation)

## Notes

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10. SN V.II.I.3(3); Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), page 1572
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17. SN I.X.\*.1; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), page 305
18. SN II.I.VI.51 (1); Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2000), page 586-594
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<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.04>.
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59. MN 26; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 1995), page 253
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117. Theruwan Saranai means may the blessings of the Triple Gem be with you.



# About the Author



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