

Fundamentals of Buddhism

Four Lectures

by

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Contents

I. The Essence of Buddhism (Radio Lecture, Colombo, 1933)

II. Kamma & Rebirth (Lecture, Ceylon University, 1947)

III. *Paṭicca-Samuppāda*: Dependent Origination (Second Lecture under the Dona Alphina Ratnayaka Trust, University College, Colombo, 1938)

IV. Mental Culture (Based on a lecture delivered in Tokyo, 1920)

About the Author

I.

The Essence of Buddhism

I shall give a short exposition of the essence of the genuine teaching of the Buddha, such as we still find it in the Buddhist scriptures handed down to us in the Pali language.

There are many among the listeners who are not Buddhists, and to whom therefore, in many cases, the original teaching of the Buddha is a thing almost unknown. It goes without saying that it will not be possible for these, within the limits of the time allowed to my talk, to gain a thorough and full understanding of such a profound and wide subject. Yet some of you may pick up and take hold of certain ideas that appear important; and these may prove an inducement to further inquiry into this immensely profound world of thought. Even should these words have no other effect than to remove at least some of the many prejudices and false ideas about the Buddha's doctrine, it would be ample reward.

Does it not, for instance, appear ironical that this most sober of all the religious doctrines is still considered by many Westerners as some sort of idolatry or mysticism? Did not the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, already long years ago, understand and lay stress upon this *absolute soberness* and clearness of Buddhism when he said:

Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity. It has entered upon the inheritance of objectively and coolly putting problems. It came to life after several hundred years of philosophical development. The notion of "God" is done away with as soon as it appears. Prayer is out of the question. So is asceticism. No categorical imperative. No coercion at all, not even within the monastic community. Hence it also does not challenge to fight against those of a different faith. Its teaching turns against nothing so impressively as against the feeling of revengefulness, animosity and resentment.

Now, before beginning with the exposition of the Buddha's teaching, we should get acquainted in a few words with the personality of the Buddha. The term "Buddha" literally means the "Enlightened One." It is a name won by the Indian sage Gotama on his enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree at Buddhagaya in India. He was born as the son of an Indian king on the borders of modern Nepal, about 600 years before Christ. In his 29th year he renounced the worldly life and exchanged his princely career for that of a homeless mendicant. After six years of hard striving he at last attained his goal: deliverance from the round of rebirths, or Samsara. The Buddha describes this time in his own words as follows:

Bhikkhus, before I had attained to full enlightenment, myself being still subject to birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow and impurity, I too was seeking after that which is subject to birth, decay, disease, death, sorrow and impurity. And so, bhikkhus, after a time, while still young, a black-haired lad, in my youthful prime, just come to budding manhood's years, against the wishes of father and mother weeping and lamenting, I cut off hair and beard and, clad in the yellow robe, went forth from home to homelessness. Thus vowed to homelessness, I was striving after the highest good, the incomparable path to supreme peace.

At first the future Buddha learned under two great yogis who had attained to a high state of supernormal psychical powers and faculties. But neither of them could satisfy him, as their teachings did not lead to real everlasting peace and deliverance of mind. So he left them again after having fully realized their teaching. Thereafter he met five ascetics, who were practicing the severest forms of self-torture and mortification of the flesh, with the hope of gaining deliverance in this way. The future Buddha became one of their party. He subjected himself with utmost perseverance to extreme fasting and self-torture, till at last he looked like a mere skeleton. And utterly exhausted, he broke down and collapsed. He now came to understand that bodily mortification is vain and useless, and will never lead to peace of heart and to deliverance. He henceforth gave up fasting and bodily mortification and sought refuge in moral and mental development. And with calm and serene mind he began to look into the true nature of existence.

Wherever he turned his eyes, he found only one great reality: the law of suffering, the unsatisfactoriness of all forms of existence. He understood that the destiny of beings is not the outcome of mere blind chance, nor does it depend upon the arbitrary action of an imaginary creator, but that our destiny is to be traced back to our own former actions, or kamma. He beheld the sick and the leper, and he saw in their misery and suffering only the result of actions, or kamma, done in former lives. He beheld the blind and the lame, and he saw in their debility and helplessness only the painful harvest of seeds sown by themselves in former lives. He beheld the rich and the poor, the happy and the unhappy; and wherever he turned his eyes, there he saw this law of retribution, the moral law of cause and effect, the Dhamma.

This Dhamma, or universal moral law discovered by the Buddha, is summed up in the *Four Noble Truths*: the truths about the universal sway of suffering, about its origin, its extinction, and the path leading to its extinction.

- I. The first truth, about the universality of *suffering*, teaches, in short, that all forms of existence are of necessity subject to suffering.
- II. The second truth, about the origin of suffering, teaches that all suffering is rooted in selfish craving and ignorance, in taṇhā and avijjā. It further explains the cause of this seeming injustice in nature, by teaching that nothing in the world can come into existence without reason or cause; and

that not only all our latent tendencies, but our whole destiny, all weal and woe, results from causes which we have to seek partly in this life, partly in former states of existence.

The second truth further teaches us that the future life, with all its weal and woe, must result from the seeds sown in this and former lives.

III. The third truth, or the truth about the *extinction of suffering*, shows how, through the extinction of craving and ignorance, all suffering will vanish and liberation from this Samsara be attained.

IV. The fourth truth shows the way, or the means by which this goal is reached. It is the *Noble Eightfold Path* of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right bodily action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration of mind.

From these Four Noble Truths we shall pick out and clear up such points as are essential for a general knowledge of the Dhamma. In doing so, we shall at the same time refute a number of widespread prejudices concerning the Buddha's teaching.

Let us, however, first outline the Noble Eightfold Path, for it is this path of righteousness and wisdom that really constitutes the *essence of Buddhist practice* — the mode of living and thinking to be followed by any true follower of the Buddha.

1. The first stage of the Eightfold Path is, as already stated, *right understanding*, i.e. understanding the true nature of existence, and the moral laws governing the same. In other words, it is the right understanding of the Dhamma, i.e. of the Four Noble Truths.
2. The second stage of the Eightfold Path is *right thought*, i.e. a pure state of mind, free from sensual lust, from ill-will, and from cruelty; in other words, thoughts of self-renunciation, of goodness, and of mercy.
3. The third stage is *right speech*. It consists of words which are not false, not harsh, not scandalous, not frivolous, i.e. truthful words, mild words, pacifying words, and wise words.
4. The fourth stage is *right bodily action*, i.e. abstaining from intentional killing or harming of any living creature, abstaining from dishonest taking of others' property, abstaining from adultery.
5. The fifth stage is *right livelihood*, i.e. such a livelihood as does not bring harm and suffering to other beings.

6. The sixth stage is *right effort*. It is the fourfold effort which we make in *overcoming* old and *avoiding* fresh bad actions by body, speech and mind; and the effort which we make in *developing* fresh actions of righteousness, inner peace and wisdom, and in *cultivating* them to perfection.
7. The seventh stage is *right mindfulness*, or alertness of mind. It is the ever-ready mental clarity whatever we are doing, speaking, or thinking and in keeping before our mind the realities of existence, i.e. the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and phenomenality (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*) of all forms of existence.
8. The eighth stage is *right concentration* of mind. Such a kind of mental concentration is meant, as is directed towards a morally wholesome object, and always bound up with right thought, right effort and right mindfulness.

Thus the Eightfold Path is a path of morality (*sīla*), of mental training (*samādhi*), and of wisdom (*paññā*).

Morality therein is indicated by right speech, right bodily action, and right livelihood. *Mental training* is indicated by right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration of mind. And *wisdom* is indicated by right understanding and right thought.

Thus this liberating Eightfold Path is a path of inner culture, of inner progress. By merely external worship, mere ceremonies and selfish prayers, one can never make any real progress in righteousness and insight. The Buddha says: “Be your own isle of refuge, be your own shelter, seek not for any other protection! Let the truth be your isle of refuge, let the truth be your shelter, seek not after any other protection!” To be of real effect, to ensure an absolute inner progress, all our efforts must be based upon our own understanding and insight. All absolute inward progress is rooted in right understanding, and without right understanding there is no attainment of perfection and of the unshakable peace of Nibbāna.

Belief in the moral efficacy of mere external rite and ritual (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) constitutes, according to the Buddha’s teaching, a *mighty obstacle to inner progress*. One who takes refuge in mere external practices is on the wrong path. For, in order to gain real inner progress, all our efforts must necessarily be based on our own understanding and insight. Any real progress is rooted in right understanding, and without right understanding there will be no attainment of unshakable peace and holiness. Moreover, this blind belief in mere external practices is the cause of much misery and wretchedness in the world. It leads to mental stagnation, to fanaticism and intolerance, to self-exaltation and contempt for others, to contention, discord, war, strife and bloodshed, as the history of the Middle Ages quite sufficiently testifies. This belief in mere externals dulls and

deadens one's power of thought, stifles every higher emotion in man. It makes him a mental slave, and favors the growth of all kinds of hypocrisy.

The Buddha has clearly and positively expressed himself on this point. He says: "The man enmeshed in delusion will never be purified through the mere study of holy books, or sacrifices to gods, or through fasts, or sleeping on the ground, or difficult and strenuous vigils, or the repetition of prayers. Neither gifts to priests, nor self-castigation, nor performance of rites and ceremonies can work purification in him who is filled with craving. It is not through the partaking of meat or fish that man becomes impure, but through drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deceit, envy, self-exaltation, disparagement of others and evil intentions — through these things man becomes impure."

"There are two extremes: addiction to sensual enjoyment, and addiction to bodily mortification. These two extremes the Perfect One has rejected, and discovered the *Middle Path* which makes one both to see and to know, which leads to peace, to penetration, enlightenment and liberation. It is that Noble Eightfold Path leading to the end of suffering, namely right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration of mind."

Inasmuch as the Buddha teaches that all genuine progress on the path of virtue is necessarily dependent upon one's own understanding and insight, all *dogmatism is excluded* from the Buddha's teaching. *Blind faith* in authority is *rejected* by the Buddha, and is entirely opposed to the spirit of his teaching. In the Kalama Sutta the Buddha says:

Do not go merely by hearsay or tradition, by what has been handed down from olden time, by rumours, by mere reasoning and logical deductions, by outward appearances, by cherished opinions and speculations, by mere possibilities, and do not believe merely because I am your master. But when you yourselves have seen that a thing is evil and leads to harm and suffering, then you should reject it. And when you see that a thing is good and blameless, and leads to blessing and welfare, then you should do such a thing.

One who merely believes or repeats what others have found out, such a one the Buddha compares with a blind man. One who desires to make progress upon the path of deliverance must experience and understand the truth for himself. Lacking one's own understanding, no absolute progress is possible.

The teaching of the Buddha is perhaps the only religious teaching that requires *no belief in traditions*, or in certain historical events. It appeals solely to the understanding of each individual. For wherever there are beings capable of thinking, there the truths proclaimed by the Buddha may be understood and realized, without regard to race, country, nationality or station in life. These truths are universal, not bound up with any particular country, or any particular epoch. And in everyone, even in the lowest, there lies latent the capacity for seeing and

realizing these truths, and attaining to the Highest Perfection. And whosoever lives a noble life, such a one has already tasted of the truth and, in greater or lesser degree, travels on the Eightfold Path of Peace which all noble and holy ones have trod, are treading now, and shall in future tread. The universal laws of morality hold good without variation everywhere and at all times, whether one may call oneself a Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or Muslim, or by any other name.

It is the *inward condition* of a person and his deeds that count, not a mere name. The true disciple of the Buddha is far removed from all dogmatism. He is a *free thinker in the noblest sense of the word*. He falls neither into positive nor negative dogmas, for he knows: both are mere opinions, mere views, rooted in blindness and self-deception. Therefore the Buddha has said of himself. “The Perfect One is *free from any theory*, for the Perfect One *has seen*: Thus is *corporeality*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is *feeling*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus is *perception*, thus it arises, thus it passes away; thus are the *mental formations*, thus they arise, thus they pass away; thus is *consciousness*, thus it arises thus it passes away.”

I. This important truth of the *phenomenality* and emptiness of all existence can be, and ought to be, understood by everyone for oneself.

According to the Buddha’s teaching, our so-called individual existence is in reality nothing but a *mere process of physical and mental phenomena*, a process which since time immemorial was already going on before one’s apparent birth, and which also after death will continue for immemorial periods of time. In the following we shall see that the above five *khandhas*, or *groups of existence*, in no way constitute any real ego-entity, or *attā*, and that no ego-entity exists apart from them, and hence that *the belief in an ego-entity is merely an illusion*.

That which we call our physical body is merely a name for a combination of manifold component parts, and in reality constitutes no entity, no personality. This is clear to everyone without further argument. Everybody knows that the body is changing from moment to moment, that old cells are continually breaking down and new ones arising; in brief, that the body will be quite another body after a few years, that nothing will have remained of the former flesh, bones, blood, etc. Consequently, the body of the baby is not the body of the school boy, and the body of the young man is not the body of the gray-haired old man. Hence the body is not a persisting something, but rather a continually changing process of arising and passing away, consisting of a perpetual dying out and arising anew of cells. That, however, which we call our mental life is a continually changing process of feeling, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness. At this moment a pleasant feeling arises, the next moment a painful feeling; this moment one state of consciousness, the next moment another. That which we call a being, an individual, a person does not in itself, as such, possess any independent abiding reality. In the absolute sense (*paramattha*) no individual, no

person, is there to be found, but merely perpetually changing combinations of physical states, of feelings, volitions and states of consciousness.

What we call “chariot” has no existence apart from and independent of axle, wheels, shaft, etc. What we call “house” is merely a convenient name for stone, wood, iron, etc., put together after a certain fashion, so as to enclose a portion of space, but there is no separate house-entity as such in existence.

In exactly the same way, that which we call a “being,” or an “individual,” or “person,” or by the name “I” or “he,” etc., is *nothing but a changing combination of physical and mental phenomena*, and has no real existence in itself.

The words “I,” “you,” “he,” etc., are merely terms found useful in conventional or current (*vohāra*) speech, but do not designate realities (*paramattha-dhamma*). For neither do these physical and mental phenomena constitute an absolute ego-entity, nor yet does there exist, outside these phenomena, any ego-entity, self, or soul, who is the possessor or owner of the same. Thus, when the Buddhist scriptures speak of persons, or even of the rebirth of persons, this is done only for the sake of easier understanding, and is not to be taken in the sense of ultimate truth. This so-called “being,” or “I,” is in the absolute sense nothing but a perpetually changing process. Therefore also, to speak of the suffering of a “person,” or “being,” is in the absolute sense incorrect. For it is *not a “person,” but a physico-mental process* that is subject to transiency and suffering.

In the absolute sense there are only numberless processes, countless life-waves, in this vast ever-surging ocean of bodily states, of feelings, perceptions, volitions and states of consciousness. Within these phenomena there exists nothing that is persistent, not even for the brief span of two consecutive moments.

These phenomena have merely momentary duration. They die every moment, and every moment new phenomena are born; a perpetual dying and coming to birth, a ceaseless heaving of waves up and down. All is in a state of perpetual flux; “*panta rhei*” — *all things are flowing* — says the Greek philosopher Heraclitus. The old forms fall to pieces, and new ones are born. One feeling disappears, another appears in its place. One state of consciousness exists this moment, another the following moment. Everywhere is found a perpetual change of material and mental phenomena. In this way, moment follows upon moment, day upon day, year upon year, life upon life. And so this ceaselessly changing process goes on for thousands, even aeons of years. An eternally surging sea of feelings, perceptions, volitions and states of consciousness: such is existence, such is Samsara, the world of arising and passing away, of growing and decaying, a world of sorrow, misery, lamentation and despair.

Without a real insight into this phenomenality, or *egolessness (anattā)* or *impersonality* of all existence, it will be impossible to understand the Four Noble Truths rightly.

II. In this connection let us come back to the second noble truth, the origin of suffering, rooted in selfish craving and ignorance (*taṇhā* and *avijjā*). In order to understand this truth better, it will be necessary to speak of a doctrine which so often is wrongly interpreted and misunderstood. It is the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth (see Chapter II). With regard to this teaching, Buddhism is often accused of self-contradiction. Thus it is said that Buddhism on the one hand denies the existence of the soul, while on the other hand it teaches the transmigration of the soul. Nothing could be more mistaken than this. For *Buddhism teaches no transmigration at all*. The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth — which is really the same as the *law of causality* extended to the mental and moral domain — has nothing whatever to do with the brahman doctrine of reincarnation, or transmigration. There exists a fundamental difference between these two doctrines.

According to the brahmanical teaching, there exists a soul independently of the body which, after death, leaves its physical envelope and passes over into a new body, exactly as one might throw off an old garment and put on a new one. Quite otherwise, however, is it with the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. Buddhism does not recognize in this world any existence of mind apart from matter. *All mental phenomena are conditioned* through the six organs of sense, and without these they cannot exist. According to Buddhism, *mind without matter is an impossibility*. And, as we have seen, the mental phenomena, just as all bodily phenomena, are subject to change, and no persisting element, no ego-entity, no soul, is there to be found. But where there is no real unchanging entity, no soul, there one cannot speak of the transmigration of such a thing.

How then is rebirth possible without something to be reborn, without an ego, or soul? Here I have to point out that even the word “rebirth,” in this connection, is really not quite correct, but used as a mere makeshift. What the Buddha teaches is, correctly speaking, the *law of cause and effect* working in the moral domain. For just as everything in the physical world happens in accordance with law, as the arising of any physical state is dependent on some preceding state as its cause, in just the same way must this law have universal application in the mental and moral domain too. If every physical state is preceded by another state as its cause, so also must *this present physico-mental life be dependent upon causes anterior to its birth*. Thus, according to Buddhism, the present life-process is the result of the craving for life in a former birth, and the craving for life in this birth is the cause of the life-process that continues after death.

But, as there is nothing that persists from one moment of consciousness to the next, so also no abiding element exists in this ever changing life-process that can pass over from one life to another.

Nothing transmigrates from this moment to the next, nothing from one life to another life. This process of continually producing and being produced may best be compared with a wave on the ocean. In the case of a wave there is not the smallest quantity of water that actually travels over the surface of the sea. The

wave-structure that seems to hasten over the surface of the water, though creating the appearance of one and the same mass of water, is in reality nothing but a continued rising and falling of ever new masses of water. And the rising and falling is produced by the transmission of force originally generated by wind. Just so the Buddha did not teach that it is an ego-entity, or a soul, that hastens through the ocean of rebirth, but that it is in reality merely a life-wave which, according to its nature and activities, appears here as man, there as animal, and elsewhere as invisible being.

III. There is another teaching of the Buddha which often gives rise to serious misunderstanding. It is the teaching of *Nibbāna*, or *the extinction of suffering*. This third noble truth points out that, through the cessation of all selfish craving and all ignorance, of necessity all suffering comes to an end, to extinction, and no new rebirth will take place. For if the seed is destroyed, it can never sprout again. If the selfish craving that clutches convulsively at life is destroyed, then, after death, there can never again take place a fresh shooting up, a continuation of this process of existence, a so-called rebirth. Where, however, there is no birth, there can be no death. Where there is no arising, there can be no passing away. Where no life exists, no suffering can exist. Now, because with the extinction of all selfish craving, all its concurrent phenomena, such as conceit, self-seeking, greed, hate, anger and cruelty, come to extinction, this freedom from selfish craving signifies *the highest state of selflessness, wisdom and holiness*.

Now this fact — that after the death of the Holy One, the Arahant, this physico-mental life-process no longer continues — is erroneously believed by many to be identical with annihilation of self, annihilation of a real being, and it is therefore maintained that the goal of Buddhism is simply annihilation. Against such a misleading statement one must enter an emphatic protest. How is it ever possible to speak of the annihilation of a self, or soul, or ego, where no such thing is to be found? We have seen that in reality there does not exist any ego-entity, or soul, and therefore also no “transmigration” of such a thing into a new mother’s womb.

That bodily process starting anew in the mother’s womb is in no way a continuation of a former bodily process, but merely a result, or effect, caused by selfish craving and clinging to life of the so-called dying individual. Thus one who says that the non-producing of any new life-process is identical with annihilation of a self, should also say that abstention from sexual intercourse is identical with annihilation of a child — which, of course, is absurd.

Here, once more, we may expressly emphasize that without a clear perception of the phenomenality or egolessness (*anattā*) of all existence, it will be impossible to obtain a real understanding of the Buddha’s teaching, especially that of rebirth and *Nibbāna*. This teaching of *anattā* is in fact *the only characteristic Buddhist doctrine*, with which the entire teaching stands or falls.

IV. A further reproach, so often heard against Buddhism, that it is a gloomy and “pessimistic” teaching, proves entirely unfounded by the statements already made. For, as we have seen, the Buddha not only discloses and explains the fact of misery, but he also shows the way to find total release from it. In view of this fact, one is rather entitled to call *the Buddha’s teaching the boldest optimism ever proclaimed to the world.*

Truly, Buddhism is a teaching that *assures hope, comfort and happiness*, even to the most unfortunate. It is a teaching that offers, even to the most wretched of criminals, prospects of final perfection and peace, and this, not through blind belief, or prayers, or asceticism, or outward ceremonies, rites and rituals, but through walking and earnestly persevering on that Noble Eightfold Path of inward perfection, purity and emancipation of heart, consisting in right understanding, right thought, right speech, right bodily action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration and peace of mind.

The Noble Eightfold Path

Right Understanding	<i>Wisdom</i>
Right Thought	
Right Speech	<i>Morality</i>
Right Bodily Action	
Right Livelihood	
Right Effort	<i>Concentration</i>
Right Mindfulness	
Right Concentration	

II. Kamma and Rebirth

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

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

According to Buddhism, no organic entity, physical or psychical, can come into existence without a previous cause, i.e. without a preceding congenial state out of which it has developed. Also, no living organic entity can ever be produced by something altogether outside of it. It can originate only out of itself, i.e. it must have already existed in the bud, or germ, as it were. To be sure, besides this cause, or root-condition, or seed, there are still many minor conditions required for its actual arising and its development, just as the mango tree besides its main cause, the seed, requires for its germinating, growth and development such further conditions as earth, water, light, heat, etc. Thus the true cause of the birth of a being, together with its character and destiny, goes back to the kamma-volitions produced in a former birth.

According to Buddhism, there are three factors necessary for the rebirth of a human being, that is, for the formation of the embryo in the mother's womb. They are: the female ovum, the male sperm, and the karma-energy (*kamma-vega*),

which in the Suttas is metaphorically called “*gandhabba*,” i.e. “ghost,” or “soul.” This kamma-energy is sent forth by a dying individual at the moment of his death. The father and mother only provide the necessary physical material for the formation of the embryonic body. With regard to the characteristic features, the tendencies and faculties lying latent in the embryo, the Buddha’s teaching may be explained in the following way: The dying individual, with his whole being convulsively clinging to life, at the very moment of his death sends forth kammic energies which, like a flash of lightning, hit at a new mother’s womb ready for conception. Thus, through the impinging of the kamma-energies on ovum and sperm, there appears just as a precipitate the so-called primary cell.

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

Hence we may say that the present life-process (*upapatti-bhava*) is the objectification of the corresponding pre-natal kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*), and that the future life-process is the objectification of the corresponding present kamma-process. Thus nothing transmigrates from one life to the next. And what we call our ego is in reality only this process of continual change, of continual arising and passing away. Thus follows moment after moment, day after day, year after year, life after life. Just as the wave that apparently hastens over the surface of the pond is in reality nothing but a continuous rising and falling of ever new masses of water, each time called forth through the transmission of energy, even so, closely considered, in the ultimate sense there is no permanent ego-entity that passes through the ocean of Samsara, but merely a process of physical and psychical phenomena takes place, ever and again being whipped up by the impulse and will for life.

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

At all times, and in probably all the countries on earth, the belief in rebirth has been held by many people; and this belief seems to be due to an intuitional

instinct that lies dormant in all beings. At all times many great thinkers too have taught a continuation of life after death. Already from time immemorial there was taught some form of metempsychosis, i.e. “transformation of soul,” or metamorphosis, i.e. “transformation of body,” etc., thus by the esoteric doctrines of old Egypt, by Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato, Plotinus, Pindaros, Vergil, also by some African tribes. Many modern thinkers too teach a continuation of the life-process after death.

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

Peoples with culture and acquaintance with science, such as the old Egyptians and wise Indians, acted and lived in accordance with this belief. They lost this belief only after the rise of the naively realistic and rationalistic Hellenism and Judaism. For this reason it would be better, concerning this problem, not to assume the bloodless attitude of modern sham-civilization, but rather adopt a reverential attitude in trying to solve this problem and grasp it in its profundity.

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

Professor James (whose words I here retranslate from the German version) says: “Many achievements of genius have here their beginning. In conversion, mystical experience, and as prayer, it co-operates with religious life. It contains all momentarily inactive reminiscences and sources of all our dimly motivated passions, impulses, intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions; in short, all our non-rational operations result therefrom. It is the source of dreams, etc.”

Jung, in his *Soul Problems of the Present Day*, says: “From the living source of instinct springs forth everything creative.” And in another place: “Whatever has been created by the human mind, results from contents which were really unconscious (or subconscious) germs.” And: “The term ‘instinct’ is of course

nothing but a collective term for all possible organic and psychic factors, whose nature is for the greater part unknown to us.”

The existence of the subconscious life-stream, or *bhavaṅga-sota*, is a necessary postulate of our thinking. If whatever we have seen, heard, felt, perceived, thought, experienced and done were not, without exception, registered somewhere and in some way, either in the extremely complex nervous system (comparable to a phonograph record or photographic plate) or in the subconscious or unconscious, we would not even be able to remember what we were thinking at the preceding moment; we would not know anything of the existence of other beings and things; we would not know our parents, teachers, friends, and so on; we would not even be able to think at all, as thinking is conditioned by the remembrance of former experiences; and our mind would be a complete *tabula rasa* and emptier than the actual mind of an infant just born, nay even of the embryo in the mother’s womb.

Thus this subconscious life-stream, or *bhavaṅga-sota*, can be called the precipitate of all our former actions and experiences, which must have been going on since time immemorial and must continue for still immeasurable periods of time to come. Therefore what constitutes the true and innermost nature of man, or any other being, is this subconscious life-stream, of which we do not know whence it came and whither it will go. As Heraclitus says: “We never enter the same stream. We are identical with it, and we are not.” Just so it is said in the *Milindapañha*: “*na ca so, na ca añño*; neither is it the same, nor is it another (that is reborn).” All life, be it corporeal, conscious or subconscious, is a flowing, a continual process of becoming, change and transformation. No persistent element is there to be discovered in this process. Hence there is no permanent ego, or personality, to be found, but merely these transitory phenomena.

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

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

In the ultimate sense, there do not even exist such things as mental states, i.e. stationary things. Feeling, perception, consciousness, etc., are in reality mere passing processes of feeling, perceiving, becoming conscious, etc., within which and outside of which no separate or permanent entity lies hidden.

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

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

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

And while the deeds and their results
Roll on and on, conditioned all,
There is no first beginning found,
Just as it is with seed and tree...

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

In the *Milindapañha* the King asks Nagasena:

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

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

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

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

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

Similarly we read in the *Milindapañha*:

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

“Yes, O King.”

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

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

“No, Venerable Sir.”

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

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

Whosoever has no clear idea about death and does not know that death consists in the dissolution of the five groups of existence (i.e. corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness), he thinks that it is a person, or being, that dies and transmigrates to a new body, etc. And whosoever has no clear idea about rebirth, and does not know that rebirth consists in the arising of the five groups of existence, he thinks that it is a person, or being, that is reborn, or that the person reappears in a new body. And whosoever has no clear idea about Samsara, the round of rebirths, he thinks that a real person wanders from this world to another world, comes from that world to this world, etc. And whosoever has no clear idea about the phenomena of existence, he thinks that the phenomena are his ego or something appertaining to the ego, or something permanent, joyful, or pleasant. And whosoever has no clear idea about the conditional arising of the phenomena of existence, and about the arising of kammic volitions conditioned through ignorance, he thinks that it is the ego that understands or fails to understand, that acts or causes to act, that enters into a new existence at rebirth. Or he thinks that the atoms or the Creator, etc., with the help of the embryonic process, shape the body, provide it with various faculties; that it is the ego that receives the sensuous impression, that feels, that desires, that becomes attached, that enters into existence again in another world. Or he thinks that all beings come to life through fate or chance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is perhaps quite true that a direct proof for rebirth cannot be given. We have, however, the authentic reports about children in Burma and elsewhere, who sometimes are able to remember quite distinctly (probably in dreams) events of their previous life. By the way, what we see in dreams are mostly distorted reflexes of real things and happenings experienced in this or a previous life. And

how could we ever explain the birth of such prodigies as Jeremy Bentham, who already in his fourth year could read and write Latin and Greek; or John Stuart Mill, who at the age of three read Greek and at the age of six wrote a history of Rome; or Babington Macaulay, who in his sixth year wrote a compendium of world history; or Beethoven, who gave public concerts when he was seven; or Mozart, who already before his sixth year had written musical compositions; or Voltaire, who read the fables of Lafontaine when he was three years old. Should all these prodigies and geniuses, who for the most part came from illiterate parents, not already in previous births have laid the foundations to their extraordinary faculties? “*Natura non facit saltus*: nature makes no leaps.”

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

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

In Majjhima Nikaya 135 a brahman raises the problem:

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

The Blessed One gave the reply:

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

In Anguttara Nikaya III,40 it is said: “Killing, stealing, adultery, lying, backbiting, harsh speech and empty prattling, practiced, cultivated and frequently

engaged in, will lead to hell, the animal world or the realm of ghosts.” Further: “Whoso kills and is cruel, will either go to hell, or if reborn as a human, will be short-lived. Whoso tortures other beings, will be afflicted with disease. The hater will be hideous, the envious will be without influence, the stubborn will be of low rank, the indolent will be ignorant.” In the reverse case, a person will be reborn in a heavenly world; or, if reborn as a human being, will be endowed with health, beauty, influence, riches, noble rank and intelligence.

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

Whoso, devoid of compassion can kill men, or even animals, carries deep within himself the inclination to shorten life. He finds satisfaction, or even pleasure, in the short-livedness of other creatures. Short-lived germs have therefore some affinity for him, an affinity which makes itself known after his death in the grasping of another germ, which then takes place to his own detriment. Even so, germs bearing within themselves the power of developing into a deformed body, have an affinity for one who finds pleasure in ill-treating and disfiguring other.

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

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

Here I should like to rectify several wrong applications of the term “kamma” prevailing in the West, and to state once for all: Pali *kamma*, comes from the root *kar*, to do, to make, to act, and thus means “deed, action,” etc. As a Buddhist technical term, kamma is a name for wholesome and unwholesome volition or will (*kusala-* and *akusala-cetanā*) and the consciousness and mental factors associated therewith, manifested as bodily, verbal or mere mental action. Already in the Suttas it is said: “Volition (*cetanā*), monks, do I call kamma. Through volition one does the kamma by means of body, speech or mind” (*cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi; cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā*). Thus kamma is volitional action, nothing more, nothing less.

From this fact result the following three statements:

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

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

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

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

If we practice unselfishness and liberality, greed and avarice will become less. If we practice love and kindness, anger and hatred will vanish. If we develop wisdom and knowledge, ignorance and delusion will more and more disappear. The less greed, hatred and ignorance (*lobha, dosa, moha*) dwell in our hearts, the less will we commit evil and unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. For all evil things, and all evil destiny, are really rooted in greed, hate and ignorance; and of these three things ignorance or delusion (*moha, avijjā*) is the chief root and the primary cause of all evil and misery in the world. If there is no more ignorance, there will be no more greed and hatred, no more rebirth, no more suffering.

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

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

In this connection I have to state that, according to Buddhism, it is merely the last kammical volition just before death, the so-called death-proximate kamma, that decides the immediately following rebirth. In Buddhist countries it is therefore the custom to recall to the dying man’s memory the good actions performed by him, in order to rouse in him a happy and pure kammical state of mind, as a preparation for a favorable rebirth. Or his relations let him see beautiful things which they, for his good and benefit, wish to offer to the Buddha, saying: “This, my dear, we shall offer to the Buddha for your good and welfare.” Or they let him hear a religious sermon, or let him smell the odor of flowers, or give him sweets to taste, or let him touch precious cloth, saying: “This we shall offer to the Buddha for your own good and welfare.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the Commentary to Majjhima Nikaya 135, generative kamma is compared with a farmer sowing the seeds; supportive kamma, with irrigating, manuring, and

watching the field, etc.; counteractive kamma, with the drought that causes a poor harvest; destructive kamma, with a fire that destroys the whole harvest.

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

Note

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

III.

Paṭicca-Samuppāda:

Dependent Origination

It is rather with some hesitation that I dare to speak to you on that profoundest of all Buddhist doctrines, *paṭicca-samuppāda*, “dependent origination,” that is to say, the conditional arising of all those mental and physical phenomena generally summed up by the conventional names “living being,” or “individual,” or “person.” Thus, being well aware of the great difficulty of speaking on this most intricate subject before an audience perhaps only little acquainted with Buddhist philosophy, I shall try my utmost to avoid, as far as possible, all the highly technical or confusing details. I shall use very plain and simple language, so that any one of you may be able to follow my explanations. At the same time I shall not lose sight of the real goal and purpose for which the Buddha taught this doctrine to the world. Thus I would beg you to listen carefully and give my words full and undivided attention. And I further beg you to try to retain in mind those very few technical terms in Pali and English which in the course of my talk I shall be repeatedly using.

You may not be aware that, up to this day, the real significance and purpose of *paṭicca-samuppāda* are practically unknown to Western scholars. By this, however, I do not mean to say that nobody in the West has ever written or spoken on this doctrine. No, quite the contrary is the case. For there is no other Buddhist doctrine about which Western scholars, and would-be scholars, have written and discussed so much — but understood so little — as just this doctrine of *paṭicca-samuppāda*. If you wish to get a fair idea of those mostly absurd and immature speculations and fanciful interpretations, often based on mere imagination, you may read the Appendix to my *Guide through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*.¹ It seems that scarcely one of those Western authors and lecturers has ever put to himself the question, for what earthly reason the Buddha ever should have thought it necessary to teach such a doctrine. It was surely not for the sake of mental gymnastics and dialectics. No, quite to the contrary! For *paṭicca-samuppāda* shows the causes and conditions of all the suffering in the world; and how, through the removal of these conditions, suffering may rise no more in the future. P.S. in fact shows that our present existence, with all its woe and suffering, is conditioned, or more exactly said caused, by the life-affirming volitions or kamma in a former life, and that again our future life depends on the present life-affirming volitions or kamma; and that without these life-affirming volitions, no more future rebirth will take place; and that thereby deliverance will have been found from the round of rebirths, from the restless cycle of Samsara. And this is the final goal and purpose of the Buddha’s message, namely, deliverance from rebirth and suffering.

I think that after what you have heard just now, it will not be necessary to tell you that P.S. is not intended, as various scholars in the West have imagined, as an explanation of the primary beginning of all things; and that its first link, *avijjā* or

ignorance, is not to be considered the causeless first principle out of which, in the course of time, all physical and conscious life has evolved. P.S. simply teaches the conditionality, or dependent nature, of all the manifold mental and physical phenomena of existence; of everything that happens, be it in the realm of the physical or the mental. P.S. shows that the sum of mental and physical phenomena known by the conventional name “person” or “individual” is not at all the mere play of blind chance; but that each phenomenon in this process of existence is entirely dependent upon other phenomena as conditions; and that therefore with the removal of those phenomena that form the conditions for rebirth and suffering, rebirth and therewith all suffering will necessarily cease and come to an end. And this, as already stated, is the vital point and goal of the Buddha’s teaching: deliverance from the cycle of rebirth with all its woe and suffering. Thus P.S. serves in the elucidation of the second and third noble truths about the origin and extinction of suffering, by explaining these two truths from their very foundations upwards, and giving them a fixed philosophical form.²

In the discourses of the Buddha, P.S. is usually expounded by way of twelve links arranged in eleven propositions. They are as follows:

1. *Avijjāpaccayā saṅkhārā*: “Through ignorance the rebirth-producing volitions, or kamma-formations, are conditioned.”
2. *Saṅkhārā-paccayā viññāṇam*: “Through the kamma-formations (in the past life, the present) consciousness is conditioned.”
3. *Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpam*: “Through consciousness the mental and physical phenomena (which make up our so-called individual existence) are conditioned.”
4. *Nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*: “Through the mental and physical phenomena the six bases (of mental life, i.e. the five physical sense-organs and consciousness as the sixth) are conditioned.”
5. *Saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso*: “Through the six bases the (sensory and mental) impression is conditioned.”
6. *Phassa-paccayā vedanā*: “Through (the sensory or mental) impression feeling is conditioned.”
7. *Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*: “Through feeling craving is conditioned.”
8. *Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*: “Through craving clinging is conditioned.”
9. *Upādāna-paccayā bhavo*: “Through clinging the process of becoming (consisting of the *active* and the *passive* life-process, that is to say, the rebirth-producing kammic process, and as its result, the rebirth-process) is conditioned.”
10. *Bhava-paccayā jāti*: “Through the (rebirth-producing *kammic*) process of becoming rebirth is conditioned.”
11. *Jāti-paccayā jarāmaṇaṃ*, etc.: “Through rebirth, decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are conditioned. Thus arises this whole mass of suffering (in the future).”

This is in brief the whole P.S. or dependent origination. Now let us carefully examine the eleven propositions one by one.

Our first proposition was: *Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā*: “Through ignorance the kamma-formations are conditioned.”

Avijjā,³ also called *moha*, is delusion, infatuation: regarding fleeting things as permanent, miserable things as enjoyment, and egoless things as a self or ego. *Avijjā* is ignorance, not understanding that all our existence is merely an ever-changing process of mental and physical phenomena; it is not understanding that these phenomena, in the ultimate sense, do not form any real permanent entity, or person, or ego; and that there does not exist any permanent entity in, or behind, these fleeting physical and mental phenomena; that therefore what we call “I,” or “you,” or “he,” or “person,” or “Buddha,” etc., does not, in the ultimate sense (*paramattha*), possess any reality apart from these ever-changing physical and mental phenomena of existence. *Avijjā*, or *moha*, is the primary root-condition underlying all moral defilement and depravity. In *avijjā* are rooted all the greed, hatred, conceit, envy and misery in the world. And the overcoming and extinction of *avijjā*, and therewith of all evil and misery, is the final aim of the Buddha’s teaching, the ideal for any true Buddhist. And it is for these reasons that *avijjā* is mentioned first in the formula of P.S.

By *saṅkhārā*, lit. “formations,” are here meant the rebirth-producing, kammically unwholesome or wholesome volitions (*cetanā*), or volitional activities. Let us therefore remember *saṅkhārā* as kamma-formations, or simply as kamma.⁴

Now, all such evil volitions manifested by body, speech or mind, as above alluded to, are called *akusala* or unwholesome kamma-formations, as they bring unhappy results, here and in the after-life. *Kusala* or wholesome kamma-formations, however, are such volitions, or *cetanā*, as will bring happy and pleasant results, here and in the after-life. But even these wholesome kamma-formations are still conditioned and influenced by *avijjā*, as otherwise they would not produce future rebirth. And there is only one individual who no longer performs any wholesome or unwholesome kamma-formation, any life-affirming kamma. It is the Arahant, the holy and fully enlightened disciple of the Buddha. For through deep insight into the true nature of this empty and evanescent process of existence, he has become utterly detached from life; and he is forever freed from ignorance together with all its evil consequences, freed from any further rebirth.

Avijjā is to all unwholesome kamma-formations, or volitional activities, an indispensable condition by way of its presence and simultaneous arising. For example, whenever an evil manifestation of will, an evil kamma-formation, arises, at that very same moment its arising is conditioned through the simultaneous arising and presence of *avijjā*. Without the co-arising of *avijjā*, there is no evil kamma-formation. When, for example, an infatuated man, filled with greed or anger, commits various evil deeds by body, speech or mind, at that time these evil kamma-

formations are all entirely conditioned through the *co-arising* and *presence* of *avijjā*, or ignorance. Thus if there is no *avijjā*, there are no evil kamma-formations. Therefore it is said that *avijjā* is to its associated kamma-formations a condition by way of *co-nascence*, or simultaneous arising (*sahajāta*). Further, as there is no evil kamma-formation without the presence of *avijjā*, and no *avijjā* without the presence of evil kamma-formations, therefore both are at any time, and under all circumstances, also *mutual conditions* to each other (*aññam-añña-paccaya*); and thus *avijjā* and the evil kamma-formations are inseparable. In so far as *avijjā* is an ever-present root of all evil kamma-formations, we say that *avijjā* is to the unwholesome kamma-formations an indispensable condition by way of *root* (*hetu*).

But there is still another and entirely different way in which *avijjā* may be a condition to unwholesome kamma-formations, that is, as *inducement*. For example, if a man, being filled with greed or anger, is induced by his infatuation and delusive thoughts to commit various crimes, such as murder, theft, adultery, etc., in that case *avijjā* is the direct inducement and driving power for the subsequent arising of all those bad manifestations of will, i.e. of all those unwholesome kamma-formations. In other words, those bad unwholesome kamma-formations are conditioned by a preceding state of *avijjā* as a *direct inducement* (*pakat' upanissaya-paccaya*).

There is still another way in which *avijjā* may become an inducement to unwholesome kamma-formations, namely, as object of thinking. Suppose somebody remembers some evil and foolish pleasure once enjoyed by him; and while he is pondering over that former foolish state, he finds delight in it and becomes again filled with infatuation and greed for it; or he becomes sad and despondent that he cannot enjoy it any more. In consequence of wrongly brooding over such a foolish object, over such a state of ignorance, many evil, unwholesome states arise in his mind. In such a way, *avijjā* may be to unwholesome kamma-formations a condition by way of *inducement as object* (*ārammaṇ' upanissaya-paccaya*).

Here I have to point out that for a detailed understanding of P.S., we should have to know at least something about those twenty-four different modes in which mental or physical phenomena may be the condition to other mental and physical phenomena. The entire *Paṭṭhāna*, the last book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, which fills six bulky volumes, treats exclusively of these twenty-four conditions, or *paccaya*, which it first describes and then applies to all the innumerable mental and physical phenomena of existence.⁵ Here we shall consider only those most prominent ones, which we have already alluded to and applied to *avijjā*, namely: *hetu-paccaya*, root condition; *sahajāta-paccaya*, condition by way of co-nascence, i.e. co-arising; *aññam-añña-paccaya*, condition by way of mutuality; *upanissaya-paccaya*, condition by way of either direct inducement (*pakat' upanissaya*), or inducement through object (*ārammaṇ' upanissaya*). Here, it may be mentioned that all these translations of technical Pali terms are only very inadequate makeshifts, and should be taken as such. I am therefore giving those technical terms repeatedly in both languages, in English as well as in Pali.

The *Paṭṭhāna* Commentary compares the *hetu-paccaya*, or *root condition*, to the root of a tree. The tree rests on its roots; and it has life only as long as these roots are

not destroyed. In the same way, all kammically wholesome and unwholesome kamma-formations are at any time conditioned through the presence and co-nascence, or simultaneity, of their respective wholesome or unwholesome roots. The three unwholesome roots are *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*, i.e. greed, hate and delusion. The three wholesome roots are *alobha*, *adosa*, *amoha*, i.e. non-greed, or unselfishness; non-hate, or kindness; non-delusion, or knowledge.

Let us now consider *sahajāta-paccaya*, the condition by way of co-nascence. *Sahajāta*, literally means: “arisen together” or “arising together,” hence our term “co-nascence,” or simultaneous arising. This condition of co-nascence applies, above all, to consciousness and its concomitant mental phenomena, such as feeling, perception, volition, sense-impression, attention, etc. For consciousness and all these mental phenomena are mutually conditioned through their simultaneous arising. One cannot arise or exist without the other. All are inseparably associated. Thus if we say that feeling is to consciousness a condition by way of co-nascence, we mean to say that without the simultaneous arising of feeling, consciousness will never be able to arise. In exactly the same way it is with all the other mental phenomena.

Once a well-known Buddhist author, in a discussion with me, to my greatest surprise positively declared that there may be painful feeling without consciousness, for example during a painful operation whilst being under chloroform. This indeed is a most extraordinary blunder. How will it ever be possible to feel pain without being conscious of it? Painful feeling is a mental phenomenon and as such inseparable from consciousness and the other mental phenomena. If we do not perceive pain, and are not conscious of pain, how can we feel pain? Thus consciousness, feeling, perception and all the other mental phenomena are mutually conditioned by way of co-nascence.

Now let us consider *upanissaya-paccaya*, the condition by way of *inducement*. This condition is of various kinds, and it forms combinations with certain other conditions.⁶ It applies to a very wide field, in fact to anything whatsoever. We shall treat this condition here only in a very general way, without making any distinctions. Anything past or future, physical or mental, real or imaginary, may become an inducement to the arising of mental phenomena, or of actions, or occurrences.

So, for example, the Buddha and his Dhamma had been a condition for my coming to the East. So were the Pali scholars whose translations I had read. So was the first Buddhist lecture I had heard in Germany in 1899. Or Nibbāna, as object of our thinking, may become an inducement to our joining the Order, or living a pure life, etc. Also all those past thinkers, scientists and artists were by their works and activities an inducement to the developed culture of later generations. Money, as object of our desire, may become an inducement to our making the necessary exertions to get it; or it also may become an inducement to theft and robbery. Faith, knowledge, mental concentration, etc., may be a direct inducement to various noble and unselfish actions. Good or bad friends may be a direct inducement to good or bad conduct. Suitable or unsuitable climate, food, dwelling, etc., may be an inducement to physical health or ill-health; physical health or ill-health to mental

health or ill-health. Thus all these things are conditioned through other things by way of inducement.

Now we shall consider *ārammaṇa-paccaya*, the condition by way of object. The object may be either one of the five sense-objects, as visible object, sound, smell, taste, or bodily impression; or it may be any object of the mind. Anything whatever may become the object of mind, be it physical or mental, past, present or future, real or imaginary. Thus the visible object, consisting in differences of color, light and dark, is called the object-condition to eye-consciousness, or the visual sense. Similar it is with the four other senses. Without a physical sense-object no sense-consciousness ever will arise. Further, past evil deeds, through being the object of our thinking, may, as we already have seen, become an inducement, or *upanissaya*, to repeat the same evil deeds; or they may arouse our disgust or repentance. Thus past evil deeds, by wrong thinking about them, may become an inducement to an immoral life by way of object; and by right thinking about them, the same past evil deeds may become an inducement to a moral life. In a similar way, good deeds, by right thinking about them, may become an inducement to further noble deeds; but by wrong thinking about one's own good deeds, they may become an inducement to self-conceit and vanity, and many other unwholesome states.⁷

Hence, also such an immoral thing as *avijjā* may become a condition to noble and wholesome kamma-formations. To show this, let us return to our first proposition: "Through *avijjā* are conditioned the kamma-formations." How may such an evil state as *avijjā* become a condition to noble and wholesome kamma-formations? It may become so in two ways, either by way of direct inducement, or inducement as mental object. I shall illustrate this statement by an example. At the Buddha's time many a heretic, induced by mere vanity and delusion, went to the Buddha and tried by dialectics to defeat the Master. However, after a short controversy he was converted: he became a virtuous follower and life-long supporter of the Blessed One, or even attained Arahantship. Here, all these virtuous actions, even the attainment of Arahantship of the new convert, were conditioned by his former *avijjā* as an inducement; had this delusive idea of defeating the Buddha not arisen in his mind, he perhaps might have never in his life even visited the Blessed One. Thus *avijjā* was to his noble and wholesome kamma-formations a condition by way of direct inducement (*pakat'-upanissaya*). Further, suppose we take *avijjā* as object of our contemplation, considering it as something evil and rejectable, as the root-cause of all misery in the world, then we thereby may produce many noble and wholesome kamma-formations. In this case, *avijjā* is to these wholesome kamma-formations a condition by way of inducement as object (*ārammaṇ' upanissaya*).⁸

Before proceeding to the second proposition, I wish to call your attention to the fact that *avijjā*, or ignorance, though the main condition for kamma-formations, is in no way the only condition for them; and so are the kamma-formations to consciousness, etc. Each of the conditionally arising phenomena of P.S. is dependent on various conditions besides those given in the formula, and all may be interrelated and interdependent in manifold ways.

You may have noticed that nearly always I speak only of *conditions*, and rarely have I used the word “cause.” This word “cause” is often used in a very vague or wrong sense. “Cause” refers really to that thing which — if all the necessary conditions are present — by inner necessity is in time followed by another thing as its “result,” so that already in the cause the future result is lying latent, as it were, just as in the mango seed the future mango tree lies latent.

And just as from the mango seed only a mango tree may result, never an apple tree nor any other tree, just so may a cause result only in just one single thing of a similar character, never in various things nor in things of a different character. If, for example, a man grows furious on being scolded, people generally would say that the scolding man was the cause of the fury. But this is a very vague statement. The cause of the man’s fury really lies in himself, in his own character, not in the person scolding him. The scolder’s words were merely an inducement to the manifestation of his latent fury. The word “cause” signifies only one of the many kinds of conditions, and it should, in Buddhist philosophy, be reserved for kamma, i.e. the rebirth-producing volitional activities bound up with wholesome or unwholesome roots (*hetu*), constituting the cause of rebirth, and resulting in rebirth as their effect, or *vipāka*.

2

Herewith we come to the second proposition: *San̄khārā-paccayā viññāṇaṃ*: “Through the kamma-formations consciousness is conditioned.” In other words: through kamma, or the volitional activities, in the past birth, the conscious life in this present birth is conditioned.

Here the following has to be stated: The five links — consciousness, mental and physical phenomena, the six bases of mental life, impression, and feeling (*viññāṇa, nāma-rūpa, saḷāyatana, phassa, vedanā*) — refer here only to kamma-resultant (*vipāka*), neutral phenomena, thus representing the “passive” side of life. However, the five links — ignorance, kamma-formations, craving, clinging, and kammical life-process (*avijjā, saṅkhārā, taṇhā, upādāna, kamma-bhava*) — constitute kamma, thus representing the “active” side of life.⁹ Hence the five passive links, as consciousness, etc., are to be considered the five results (*vipāka*), and the five active links, as *avijjā*, etc., the five causes. Thus the life-affirming will, or volition (*cetanā*), manifested in these five kammic causes, is the seed from which all life has sprung, and from which it will spring again in the future. Our second proposition therefore shows that our present conscious life is the result of our kamma-formations produced in the past life, and that without these prenatal kamma-formations as the necessary cause, no conscious life would ever have sprung up in our mother’s womb.

Hence, the kamma-formations are to the rebirth-consciousness of the embryonic being, at its conception in the mother’s womb, a condition by way of *kamma*, or cause. And so are the kamma-formations to all the morally neutral elements of

consciousness. Hence, also the five kinds of sense-consciousness with desirable and agreeable objects are the result, or *vipāka*, of the prenatal wholesome kamma-formations; and those with undesirable and disagreeable objects are the result of unwholesome kamma-formations.¹⁰

3

Now we come to the third proposition, namely: *Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*: “Through consciousness the mental and physical phenomena are conditioned.” The meaning of this proposition can be inferred from the Mahanidana Sutta (DN 15), where it is said: “If *consciousness (viññāṇa)* were not to appear in the mother’s womb, would the *mental and physical phenomena (nāma-rūpa)* arise?”¹¹

The *mental* phenomena (*nāma*) refer here to those seven universal mental phenomena inseparably bound up with all kamma-resultant consciousness, even with the five kinds of sense-consciousness. These seven inseparable universal mental phenomena are: feeling, perception, impression, volition, vitality, attention, concentration; in kamma-resultant mind-consciousness they are increased by three or four further phenomena. The *physical* phenomena (*rūpa*) refer to this body and its various organs, faculties and functions.¹²

Now, how are the mental phenomena, or *nāma*, conditioned through consciousness? And how the physical phenomena, or *rūpa*?

Any state of *consciousness*, as already explained, is to its concomitant *mental* phenomena, such as feeling, etc., a condition by way of *co-nascence*, or simultaneous arising (*sahajāta-paccaya*). Consciousness cannot arise and exist without feeling, nor feeling without consciousness; and also all the other mental phenomena which belong to the same state of consciousness are inseparably bound up with it into a single unit, and have no independent existence. These mental phenomena are, as it were, only the different aspects of those units of consciousness which, like lightning, every moment flash up and immediately thereafter disappear forever.

But how may *consciousness (viññāṇa)* be a condition for the various *physical (rūpa)* phenomena?

In planes of existence where both matter and mind exist, e.g. in the human realm, at the moment of conception consciousness is an absolutely necessary condition for the arising of organic physical phenomena; it is a condition by way of *co-nascence*. If there is no consciousness, no conception takes place, and no organic material phenomena appear. During life-continuity, however, consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is to the already arisen physical phenomena (*rūpa*) a condition by way of *post-nascence*, or later-arising (*pacchājāta-paccaya*), and also by way of *nutriment (āhāra)*, because consciousness forms a prop and support for the upkeep of the body. Just as the

feeling of hunger is a condition for the feeding and upkeep of this already arisen body, just so is consciousness to this already arisen body a condition and support by its post-nascence, or later arising. If consciousness would rise no more, the physical organs would gradually cease their functioning, lose their faculties, and the body would die. In this way we have to understand the proposition: *viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ*: “Through consciousness the mental and physical phenomena are conditioned.”

4

Now, we come to the fourth proposition: *Nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ*: “Through the mental and physical phenomena the six bases of mental life are conditioned.” The first five of these bases are the five physical sense-organs, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body; the sixth base, the mind base (*manāyatana*), is a collective term for the many different classes of consciousness, i.e. for the five kinds of sense-consciousness and the many kinds of mind-consciousness. Hence five bases are physical phenomena, namely, eye, ear, etc., and the sixth base is identical with consciousness.

In which way, now, are the mental and physical phenomena a condition for the five physical bases, or sense-organs, and how for the sixth base, or consciousness? Here we really get four chief questions:

The first question is: How are the mental phenomena (*nāma*) a condition for the five physical bases (*āyatana*), or sense-organs? The seven inseparable mental phenomena associated with sense-consciousness, such as feeling, perception, etc., are to the five physical bases, or sense-organs, a condition by way of post-nascence, and in other ways. The mental activity during life, namely, is a necessary support to the five physical bases, or sense organs, already produced at birth, as explained before.

The second question is: How are mental phenomena a condition to the mind-base (*manāyatana*) or consciousness? The mental phenomena, as feeling, perception, volition, etc., are at any time to the mind-base, or consciousness, a condition by way of simultaneous arising, or co-nascence (*sahajāta-paccaya*).

You will remember that I repeatedly said that consciousness cannot arise without the co-arising of feeling and the other phenomena, because consciousness and all its mental concomitants are inseparably bound up together, and mutually dependent upon one another. Thus I have shown how the mental phenomena are a condition to the five physical bases or sense-organs, as well as to the mind-base or consciousness (*manāyatana*).

Now we come to the third question: How are the physical (*rūpa*) phenomena a condition for the five physical bases (*āyatana*), or sense-organs? The four primary physical elements, i.e. the solid, fluid, heat, and motion, are to any of the five physical bases, or sense-organs, at the very moment of their first coming into existence, a condition by way of simultaneous arising (*sahajāta-paccaya*); but during life these four physical elements are to the five bases, or sense-organs, a condition by way of foundation (*nissaya*) on which the sense-organs are entirely dependent. Further, the physical phenomenon “vitality” (*rūpa-jīvit’ indriya*) is to the five bases, or sense-organs, a condition by way of presence (*atthi-paccaya*), etc.; in other words, the five bases, or sense-organs, depend on the presence of physical life, without which the five sense organs could not exist.

The physical phenomenon “nutrition” (*āhāra*) is to the five physical bases a condition by way of presence, because the five sense-organs can only exist as long as they get their necessary nutriment. Thus I have shown how the physical phenomena, or *rūpa*, are a condition for the five physical bases, or *āyatana*.

There remains only the fourth question: How are the physical phenomena (*rūpa*) a condition for the mind-base (*manāyatana*), or consciousness? The five physical phenomena, as eye, ear, nose, etc., are to the five kinds of sense-consciousness, i.e. to seeing, hearing, etc., a condition by way of foundation (*nissaya*) and by way of pre-nascence, presence, etc. These five kinds of sense-consciousness, during life, cannot arise without the pre-arising (*purejāta*) of the five physical sense-organs as their foundation (*nissaya*); therefore without the pre-arising and presence of the eye, no seeing; without the pre-arising and presence of the ear, no hearing, etc.; so that, if these five sense-organs are destroyed, no corresponding sense-consciousness can arise any longer.

In a similar way is the physical organ of mind the condition for the various stages of mind-consciousness.¹³ In the canonical books no special physical organ is mentioned by name as the physical foundation of the mind-consciousness, neither the brain nor the heart, though the heart is taught as such by all the commentaries, as well as by the general Buddhist tradition. I think it is my Burmese friend Shwe Zan Aung who first made this fact known in his *Compendium of Philosophy*.¹⁴ For the Buddhist it matters little whether it is the heart or the brain or any other organ that constitutes the physical base of mind.

Thus we have seen how the physical (*rūpa*) phenomena are a condition to the mind-base (*manāyatana*), or consciousness. And herewith we have settled the meaning of the proposition: “Through the mental and physical phenomena the six bases of mental life are conditioned.”

Now we come to the fifth proposition: *Salāyatana-paccayā phasso*: “Through the six bases sense-impression is conditioned.”¹⁵ In other words: Conditioned through the physical eye is visual impression, conditioned through the ear sound impression, conditioned through the nose smell impression, conditioned through the tongue taste impression, conditioned through the body bodily impression, conditioned through the mind-base or consciousness (*manāyatana*) mental impression.

The five physical bases (*āyatana*) are to their corresponding sense-impressions (*phassa*) a condition by way of foundation (*nissaya*) and by way of pre-nascence (*purejāta*) and in other ways besides. The five sense-organs are not only the foundation for consciousness, as we have seen, but also for all its mental concomitants, hence also for sense-impression. And as these five bases, or sense-organs, have already come into existence at birth, they are called a pre-nascent condition (*purejāta-paccaya*) to the later arising five sense-impressions.

The mind-base or consciousness is at any time to its concomitant sensory or mental impression a condition by way of simultaneous arising or co-nascence, etc. In other words, eye-consciousness arises simultaneously with visual impression, ear-consciousness with sound impression, etc., and mind-consciousness with mental impression.

Also the external physical bases — the five sense-objects, as the visual object, sound, smell, etc. — these too are an indispensable condition to the arising of sense-impression. So visual impression could never arise without the pre-arising of the visible object, sound impression never without the pre-arising of the sound-object, etc. Hence the arising of the five sense-impressions (*phassa*) depends on the pre-arising of the visual object, the sound-object, etc. Therefore the arising of the five sense-impressions depends just as much on the pre-arising and presence of the five physical sense-objects as on the pre-arising of the five sense-organs, as already stated. Thus sense-impression is also conditioned through the five external physical bases, i.e. through the five sense-objects.

Further, as all the physical sense-objects may also become objects of mind-consciousness, therefore they are also a condition for mind-consciousness as well as for its concomitant phenomena, such as mental impression (*phassa*), etc. Thus without physical sense-organ and physical sense-object there is no sense-impression; and without mind and mind-object no mental impression. Therefore it is said: “Through the six sense bases sense-impression is conditioned.”

6

Thereafter follows the sixth proposition: *Phassa-paccayā vedanā*: “Through impression feeling is conditioned.” There are six kinds of feeling: feeling associated with visual impression, feeling associated with sound impression, feeling associated with smell impression, feeling associated with taste impression, feeling associated with bodily impression, and feeling associated with mental impression. *Bodily* feeling may be either agreeable or disagreeable, according to whether it is the result of wholesome or unwholesome kamma. *Mental* feeling may be either agreeable, i.e. joy, or disagreeable, i.e. sadness; or it may be indifferent. The feelings associated with visual, sound, smell and taste impression, are, as such, always indifferent, but they may have either desirable or undesirable objects, according to the kamma in a previous life. Whatever the feeling may be — pleasant or painful, happy or unhappy or indifferent, whether feeling of body or of mind — any feeling is conditioned either through one of the five sense-impressions or through mental impression. And these impressions (*phassa*) are a condition to their associated feeling (*vedanā*) by way of co-nascence or simultaneous arising, and in many other ways.

Here you will again remember that all the mental phenomena in one and the same state of consciousness, hence also impression (*phassa*) and feeling (*vedanā*), are necessarily dependent one upon another by their simultaneous arising, their presence, their association, etc. But to any feeling associated with the different stages of mind-consciousness following upon a sense-impression, the preceding visual or other sense-impression is an inducement by way of proximity (*anantar’ upanissaya-paccaya*). In other words, the preceding sense-impression is a decisive support, or inducement, to any feeling bound up with the succeeding mind-consciousness.

Thus we have seen how through sensory and mental impression, or *phassa*, feeling, or *vedanā*, is conditioned.

7

Now comes the seventh proposition: *Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*: “Through feeling craving is conditioned.”

Corresponding to the six senses, there are six kinds of *craving* (*taṇhā*), namely: craving for visible objects, craving for sounds, craving for odors, craving for tastes, craving for bodily impressions, craving for mind-objects. If the craving for any of these objects is connected with the desire for sensual enjoyment, it is called “sensuous craving” (*kāma-taṇhā*). If connected with the belief in eternal personal existence (*sassata-diṭṭhi*), it is called “craving for existence” (*bhava-taṇhā*). If connected with the belief in self-annihilation (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) at death, it is called “craving for self-annihilation” (*vibhava-taṇhā*).

Any (kamma-resultant and morally) neutral feeling (*vedanā*), whether agreeable, disagreeable or indifferent, whether happy or unhappy feeling, may be to the subsequent craving (*taṇhā*) a condition either by way of simple inducement, or of inducement as object. For example, conditioned through pleasurable feeling due to the beautiful appearance of persons or things, there may arise craving for such visible objects. Or conditioned through pleasurable feeling due to pleasant food, craving for tastes may arise. Or thinking of those feelings of pleasure and enjoyment procurable by money, people may become filled with craving for money and pleasure. Or pondering over past pleasures and feelings of happiness, people may again become filled with craving and longing for such pleasures. Or thinking of heavenly bliss and joy, people may become filled with craving for rebirth in such heavenly worlds. In all these cases pleasant feeling (*vedanā*) is to craving (*taṇhā*) either a condition by way of simple inducement, or inducement as object of thinking.

But not only agreeable and happy feeling, but even disagreeable and unhappy feeling may become a condition for craving. For example, to a man being tormented with bodily pain or oppressed in mind, the craving may arise to be released from such misery. Thus, through feeling unhappy and dissatisfied with his miserable lot, a poor man, or a beggar, or an outcast, or a sick man, or a prisoner, may become filled with longing and craving for release from such a condition. In all these cases unpleasant and miserable feeling (*vedanā*) of body and mind forms for craving (*taṇhā*) a condition by way of inducement, without which such craving might never have arisen. Even expected *future* feeling of happiness may, by thinking about it, become a mighty incentive, or inducement, to craving. Thus, whatever craving arises depends in some way or other on feeling, be it past, present, or even future feeling. Therefore it is said: *Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*: “Through feeling craving is conditioned.”

8

Now we have reached the eighth proposition: *Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*: “Through craving clinging is conditioned.” *Upādāna*, or clinging, is said to be a name for developed or intensified craving. In the texts we find four kinds of clinging: sensuous clinging, clinging to wrong views, clinging to faith in the moral efficacy of mere outward rules and rituals, and clinging to the belief in either an eternal or a temporary ego-entity.¹⁶ The first one, sensuous clinging, refers to objects of sensuous enjoyment, while the three other kinds of clinging are connected with wrong views.

Whenever clinging to views or rituals arises, at that very moment also craving must arise; without the simultaneous arising of craving, there would be no such attachments to these views and rituals. Hence craving, or *taṇhā*, is for these kinds of clinging, or *upādāna*, a condition by way of co-nascence (*sahajāta-paccaya*). But besides this, craving may be to such kind of clinging also a condition by way of inducement (*upanissaya-paccaya*). Suppose a fool, who is craving for rebirth in heaven, thinks that by following certain outward moral rules, or by mere belief in a

creator, he will attain the object of his desire. So he firmly attaches himself to the practice of mere outward rules and rituals, or to the belief in a creator. In this case, craving is for such kind of clinging a condition by way of inducement, or *upanissaya-paccaya*.

To sensuous clinging, or *kāmuṇāpādāna*, however, craving may only be a condition by way of direct inducement. The craving for sense-objects itself gradually develops and turns into strong sensuous clinging and attachment, or *kāmuṇāpādāna*. For example, craving and desire for objects of sensual enjoyment, for money, food, gambling, drinking, etc. may gradually grow into a strong habit, into a firm attachment and clinging.

Thus I have shown how craving is the condition for clinging. As it is said: *Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*: “Through craving clinging is conditioned.”

9

Next we come to the ninth proposition: *Upādāna-paccayā bhavo*: “Through clinging the process of becoming is conditioned.” Now this process of becoming or existence really consists of two processes: (1) the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*), i.e. the kammically *active* side of life; and (2) the kamma-resultant rebirth-process (*upapatti-bhava*), i.e. the kammically *passive* and morally neutral side of life. The kammically active side of this life-process is, as we have seen, represented by five links, namely: ignorance, kamma-formations, craving, clinging, kamma-process (*avijjā, saṅkhārā, taṇhā, upādāna, kamma-bhava*). The passive side of life is represented by five links, namely: consciousness, mental and physical phenomena, the six bases, impression, feeling (*viññāṇa, nāma-rūpa, saḷāyatana, phassa, vedanā*). Thus the five *passive* links, as consciousness, etc., refer here only to kamma-resultant phenomena, and not to such as are associated with active kamma. The five *active* links, as ignorance, etc., are the causes of the five *passive* links of the future, as kamma-resultant consciousness, etc.; and thus these five passive links are the results of the five active links. In that way, the P.S. may be represented by twenty links: five causes in the past life, and five results in the present one; five causes in the present life, and five results in the future one.¹⁷

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

Five causes were there in the past,
Five fruits are found in present life;
Five causes which are now produced,
Five fruits are reaped in future life.

Let me here recall to you my definition of the term “cause” as “that which by inner necessity is followed in time by its result.” There are twenty-four modes of conditioning, but only one of them should be called *cause*, namely, kamma.

Though this kammic cause is in time followed by its result, it nevertheless may depend on (but not be produced by) a preceding kamma-result as its inducement condition. Thus for example, feeling, within the P.S., is a kamma-result; but still, at the same time, it is an inducement-condition to the subsequent arising of craving, which latter is a kamma cause.

Now, let us return to our proposition: *upādāna-paccayā bhavo*:”Through clinging the process of becoming is conditioned,” that is, (1) the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*), and thereafter, in the next life, (2) the kamma-resultant rebirth-process (*upapatti-bhava*). The kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*) in this ninth proposition is, correctly speaking, a collective name for rebirth-producing volition (*cetanā*) together with all the mental phenomena associated therewith; while the second link, “kamma-formations” (*saṅkhārā*), designates as such merely rebirth-producing volition. But in reality both links amount to one and the same thing, namely kamma.

Clinging, or *upādāna*, may be an inducement to all kinds of evil and unwholesome kamma. Sensuous clinging, or attachment to sense-objects and sensual enjoyment, may be a direct inducement to murder, robbery, theft, adultery, to envy, hatred, revenge; to many evil actions of body, speech and mind. Clinging to the blind belief in mere outward rules and rituals may lead to self-complacency, mental torpor and stagnation, to contempt of others, presumption, intolerance, fanaticism and cruelty. In all these cases, clinging (*upādāna*) is to the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*) a condition by way of inducement, and is a direct inducement to evil volitional activities of body, speech or mind. Moreover, clinging is to any evil kamma-process also a condition by way of simultaneous arising.

Thus I have shown how clinging (*upādāna*) is the condition of the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*). Now I shall show how the kamma-process (*kamma-bhava*) is the condition for the kamma-resultant rebirth-process (*upapatti-bhava*). Here we come to the tenth proposition.

10

Bhava-paccayā jāti:”Through the process of becoming (here kamma-process) rebirth is conditioned.” That means: the kamma-process dominated by the life-affirming volitions (*cetanā*) is the cause of rebirth. Rebirth includes here the entire embryonic process which in the human world begins with conception in the mother’s womb and ends with parturition. Thus kamma volition is the seed from which all life germinates, just as from the mango seed germinates the little mango plant, which in the course of time turns into a mighty mango tree. But how does one know that the

kamma-process, or kamma volition, is really the cause of rebirth? The *Visuddhimagga* (XVII) gives the following answer:

Though the outward conditions at the birth of beings may be absolutely the same, there still can be seen a difference in beings with regard to their character, as wretched or noble, etc. Even though the outward conditions, such as sperm, or blood of father and mother, may be the same, there still can be seen that difference between beings, even if they be twins. This difference cannot be without reason, as it can be noticed at any time, and in any being. It can have no other cause than the pre-natal kamma-process. As also for the life of those beings which have been reborn, no other reason can be found, therefore that difference must be due to the pre-natal kamma-process. Kamma, or volition, indeed, is the cause for the difference among beings with regard to their character, as high, low, etc. Therefore the Buddha has said: “kamma divides beings into high and low.” In this way we should understand that the kammic process is the cause of rebirth.

Thus, according to Buddhism, the present rebirth is the result of the craving, clinging and kamma volitions in the past birth. And the craving, clinging and kamma volitions in this present birth are the cause of future rebirth. But just as in this ever-changing mental and physical process of existence nothing can be found that passes even from one moment to the next, just so no abiding element can be found, no entity, no ego, that would pass from one birth to the next. In this ever repeated process of rebirth, in the absolute sense, no ego-entity is to be found besides these conditionally arising and passing phenomena. Thus, correctly speaking, it is not myself and not my person that is reborn; nor is it another person that is reborn. All such terms as “person” or “individual” or “man” or “I” or “you” or “mine,” etc., do not refer to any real entity; they are merely terms used for convenience sake, in Pali *vohāra-vacana*, “conventional terms”; and there is really nothing to be found beside these conditionally arising and passing mental and physical phenomena. Therefore the Buddha has said:

To believe that the doer of the deed will be the same, as the one who experiences its result (in the next life): this is the one extreme. To believe that the doer of the deed, and the one who experiences its result, are two different persons: this is the other extreme. Both these extremes the Perfect One has avoided and taught the truth that lies in the middle of both, that is: Through ignorance the kamma-formations are conditioned; through the kamma-formations, consciousness (in the subsequent birth); through consciousness, the mental and physical phenomena; through the mental and physical phenomena, the six bases; through the six bases, impression; through impression, feeling; through feeling, craving; through craving, clinging; through clinging, the life-process; through the (kammic) life-process, rebirth; through rebirth, decay and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus arises this whole mass of suffering.

This phenomenality and egolessness of existence has been beautifully expressed in two verses of the *Visuddhimagga*:

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

No god nor Brahma can be called
The maker of this wheel of life:
Empty phenomena roll on,
Dependent on conditions all.

In hearing that Buddhism teaches that everything is determined by conditions, someone might come to the conclusion that Buddhism teaches some sort of fatalism, or that man has no free will, or that will is not free. Now, with regard to the two questions: (1) “Has man a free will?” and (2) “Is will free?” the Buddhist will say that both these questions are to be rejected for being wrongly put, and therefore unanswerable.

The first question “Has man a free will?” is to be rejected for the reason that, beside these ever-changing mental and physical phenomena, in the absolute sense no such thing or entity can be found that we could call “man,” so that “man” as such is merely a name without any reality.

The second question “Is will free?” is to be rejected for the reason that “will” is only a momentary mental phenomenon, just like feeling, consciousness, etc., and thus does not yet exist before it arises, and that therefore of a non-existent thing — of a thing which is not — one could, properly speaking, not ask whether it is free or unfree. The only admissible question would be: “Is the arising of will independent of conditions, or is it conditioned?” But the same question would equally apply also to all the other mental phenomena, as well as to all the physical phenomena, in other words, to everything and every occurrence whatever. And the answer would be: Be it “will,” or “feeling,” or any other mental or physical phenomenon, the arising of anything whatsoever depends on conditions; and without these conditions, nothing can ever arise or enter into existence.

According to Buddhism, everything mental and physical happens in accordance with laws and conditions; and if it were otherwise, chaos and blind chance would reign. But such a thing is impossible and contradicts all laws of thinking.

11

Now we have reached the eleventh and last proposition: *Jāti-paccayā jara-maraṇaṃ*: “Through rebirth decay and death are conditioned.” Without birth there cannot be decay and death. If we had not been born, we would not have to die, and would not be exposed to all sorts of misery. Thus rebirth is a necessary condition for decay and

death, and for all other forms of misery. Hence it was said: “Through rebirth decay and death are conditioned.”

Herewith the explanation of the eleven propositions of the *paṭicca-samuppāda* formula has been brought to a close. From my explanations you will have seen that the twelve links of the formula are distributed over three successive lives, and that they may be applied to our past, present and future lives. The first two links, *avijjā* and kamma-formations, represent the kamma causes in the past life; the next five links, consciousness, etc., represent the kamma-results in the present life; the following three links, craving, clinging and kamma-process, represent the kammic causes in the present life; and the two last links, rebirth, and decay and death, represent the kamma-results in the future life.

You ought, however, to remember that the full kammic causes are five, namely: ignorance, kamma-formations, craving, clinging, kamma-process existence, and that thus we really get five causes in the past and five results in the present; five causes in the present and five results in the future. Therefore it was said:

Five causes were there in the past,
Five fruits are found in present life.
Five causes which are now produced,
Five fruits are reaped in future life.

Now, if there had been no ignorance and no kamma-formations or life-affirming volitions in the past life, no consciousness and new life would have sprung up in our mother’s womb, and our present birth would not have taken place. However, if by deep penetration and deep insight into the evanescent nature and the egolessness of all existence, one becomes fully detached from all forms of existence, and freed from all ignorance, craving and clinging to existence, freed from all those selfish kamma-formations or volitions, then no further rebirth will follow, and the goal taught by the Buddha will have been realized, namely, deliverance from rebirth and suffering.



The following diagram show at a glance the relationship of dependence between

Dependent Origination		
3 periods	12 Factors	20 Modes & 4 Groups
Past	1. Ignorance 2. Kamma-formations	Past causes 1, 2, 8, 9, 10
Present	3. Consciousness 4. Mentality-&-corporeality 5. Six sense bases 6. Impression 7. Feeling	Present effects 5: 3-7
Future	8. Craving 9. Clinging 10. Existence 11. Rebirth 12. Decay-&-death	Present causes 5: 8, 9, 10, 1, 2 Future effects 5: 3-7

three successive lives.

Three Connections

1. Past causes with present effects (between 2 & 3)
2. Present effects with present causes (between 7 & 8)
3. Present causes with future effects (between 10 & 11)

Three Rounds:

1. Round of defilements: 1, 8, 9
2. Round of kamma: 2, 10 (part)
3. Round of results: 3-7, 10 (part), 11, 12

Two Roots:

1. Ignorance: from past to present
2. Craving: from present to future

Notes

1. Published by the BPS (1983).
2. For a detailed exposition of the Four Noble Truths, see Nyanatiloka, *The Word of the Buddha* (BPS, 1981).
3. Literally “not-knowing.”
4. Thus the Pali word *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*) designates in Buddhist philosophy only rebirth-producing or rebirth-influencing wholesome or unwholesome action, i.e. volition (*cetanā*) manifested by body, speech, or mind. In no way, however, does *kamma* ever signify the *result* of action (*kamma-vipāka*), as the Theosophists and many Western Buddhists wish this term to be understood.
5. Of this gigantic and very important, but most complicated of all the Abhidhamma works, not a single line had hitherto been translated into any of the modern languages. Even of the Pali text, only one sixth, partly in form of an abstract, has been published by the PTS, London. Mrs. Rhys Davids in her preface to the *Paṭṭhāna* text says: “... the text remains very difficult and obscure to the uninitiated Western mind and I am far from pretending to solve any one of its problems.” For a full synopsis of it see my *Guide through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, VII. (Ed.: Two volumes of the *Paṭṭhāna* have since been published by the PTS in English translation under the title *Conditional Relations*.)
6. The three classes of *upanissaya-paccaya* are: (1) *pakat’ upanissaya*, simple or direct inducement; (2) *ārammaṇ’ upanissaya*, inducement by way of object; (3) *anantar’ upanissaya*, inducement by way of proximity. About the latter see *Guide through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, 2nd ed., pp. 119, 131, 139.
7. In the *Guide* (p. 137) are given the following examples of how “a wholesome phenomenon may be to an unwholesome phenomenon a condition by way of object.” This happens e.g., if after having given alms, etc., one indulges and delights in this act, and thereby arises greed, evil views, doubt, restlessness, or sadness (“either to oneself, or to others” says the Comy.). Or, if one indulges and delights in good deeds done formerly, and thereby arises greed, etc. Or, if after rising from the *jhānas*, one indulges and delights in this attainment, and thereby arises conceit, etc. Or if, while regretting that the *jhāna* (which one had attained) has vanished, sadness springs up.
8. For details of the twenty-four conditions, see Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (BPS, 1988): *paccaya*.
9. Cf. diagram p. 57.
10. It is really the quality of the five sense-objects allotted to each being that, in the main, decides the degree of his worldly happiness or unhappiness.
11. All such translations of *nāma-rūpa* as “name and form,” etc., are totally out of place. *Nāma-rūpa* = *nāmañ ca rūpañ ca* (Majjh. Nik. No. 9), i.e. “the mental and the physical,” apart from its application in the *paṭicca-samuppāda*, is a name for the five groups of existence, namely: the four *nāma-kkhandhas* or mental groups (feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness), and the *rūpa-kkhandha*, or corporeality group. Here, in the *paṭicca-samuppāda*, *nāma* stands only for the three mental groups: feeling, perception, mental formations, whilst consciousness is singled out, in order to show that all mental and physical life of beings is dependent on it.
12. In the canonical texts only twenty-seven physical phenomena are mentioned, whilst in the commentaries this number is increased by the physical seat of mind (lit. ‘heart-base’; see pp. 45-46).

13. *Mano-viññāṇa*, or mind-consciousness, does not depend upon the simultaneous function of any of the five physical sense-organs, although visible objects, sounds, etc. may nevertheless reappear as mental objects therein. Of this fact, dream-consciousness furnishes a vivid illustration.

14. Shwe Zan Aung, *Compendium of Philosophy* (London, 1910), pp. 277f.

15. The literal and usual translation of *phassa* as “contact” is very ambiguous and misleading. *Phassa* does not denote a physiological function, but a purely mental phenomenon. It is heading the list of those fifty phenomena which in Buddhist classification are summed up in the group of mental formations (*saṅkhārā-kkhandha*). See Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (BPS, 1988), Table II: The Formations Group.

16. *Kāmapādāna; diṭṭhupādāna; silabbatupādāna; attavādupādāna.*

17. The past kamma-process (1-2) and the present kamma-process (8-10), though here represented by different links, are nevertheless throughout identical, and both therefore include the five kammic causes. In the same way, the two links (11-12) represent the five kamma-results (3-7). See diagram on p. 57.

IV. Mental Culture

The whole of the Buddha's teachings may be summed up in three words: morality, mental concentration, and wisdom, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. This is the threefold division of the Noble Eightfold Path leading to deliverance from the misery of Samsara. And of this Eightfold Path, right speech, action and livelihood are included in morality, or *sīla*; right effort, mindfulness and concentration in mental concentration, or *samādhi*; right understanding and thought in wisdom, or *paññā*.

Of these three stages, morality constitutes the foundation without which no real progress along the Eightfold Path to purity and deliverance is possible. The two higher stages, concentration and wisdom, are brought to perfection by that which in the West usually, but rather ambiguously, is called "meditation." By this latter term, the Buddhist Pali term *bhāvanā* is usually translated.

The word *bhāvanā* is a verbal noun derived from the causative of the verb *bhavati*, to be, to become, and therefore literally means "the bringing into existence," i.e. producing, development. Thus the development of mind is twofold:

1. Development of mental concentration (*samādhi-bhāvanā*), or tranquillity (*samatha-bhāvanā*);
2. Development of wisdom (*paññā-bhāvanā*), or clear insight (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*).

In this popular exposition I only wish to give a general idea of the authentic method of this twofold mental culture, and I shall not be going much into details. It is to be regretted that in Sri Lanka one very rarely meets with laymen, or even monks, who are earnestly devoting themselves to these two higher stages of Buddhist life. In Burma and Siam, however, the other two strongholds of original Buddhism, we still find quite a number of monks and hermits, who are living in the solitudes of deep forests or in caves, and who, detached from all worldly wishes and anxieties, are striving for the goal set forth by our Master, and are training themselves in tranquillity and insight. Undoubtedly, for the real development of higher life, solitude, at least temporarily, is an absolute necessity.

Though the concentration exercises may serve various preliminary purposes, their ultimate object is to reach that unshakable tranquillity and purity of the mind, which is the foundation of insight leading to deliverance from the cycle of rebirth and misery. The Buddha has said: "Now what, monks, is Nibbāna? It is the extinction of greed, hate and delusion (*lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*). And what, monks, is the path leading to Nibbāna? It is mental tranquillity and insight.

Mental tranquillity (*samatha*) is the unshakable state of mind gained through the persevering training in mental concentration. Tranquillity, according to the

Commentary *Saṅkhepavāṇṇanā*, bestows a threefold blessing: auspicious rebirth, bliss in this very life, and mental purity and fitness for insight.

Insight (*vipassanā*) is a name for the flashing forth of the light of wisdom and insight into the true nature of existence, i.e. into the impermanency, suffering and egolessness (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*) of all corporeality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.

1.

For the development of concentration and mental tranquillity, there exist many different exercises. In the *Visuddhimagga* (III-XI) forty such concentration-exercises are enumerated and minutely explained, namely: ten kasina exercises, ten cemetery meditations, ten reflections — on the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha; on morality, liberality, heavenly beings; further, on death, the body, in-and-out breathing, and the peace of detachment. Further, the development of the four divine abodes (all-embracing kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, equanimity); the four immaterial states; the perception of the filthiness of food; and the analysis of the four elements.

Before entering into a discussion of some of these forty concentration exercises, I have first to deal with the three grades of intensity of concentration, and further to speak of those higher states of mind called *jhānas*, or mental “absorptions,” which may be attained by a great number of these exercises.

The three grades of intensity of concentration are:

1. Preliminary concentration (*parikamma-samādhi*);
2. Neighborhood concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*);
3. Attainment concentration (*appanā-samādhi*).

(1) *Preliminary concentration* is present whenever one directs one’s mind to any of the various objects of concentration.

(2) *Neighborhood concentration* is that grade of concentration which approaches, or comes near, the first *jhāna*, and is in many exercises marked by a mentally visible pure and unshakable mental image, the so-called reflex-mark, of which we shall speak later.

(3) *Attainment concentration* is that grade of concentration which is present during the *jhānas*.

By the *jhānas* are meant supersensual states of perfect mental absorption, in which the fivefold sense activity is suspended. The *jhānas* can only be attained in

absolute solitude and by unremitting perseverance in the development of concentration. No visual or audible impressions arise at such a time, no bodily feeling is felt. In this state the monk appears to the outside world as if dead. But though all the outer sense-impressions, such as seeing, hearing, etc., have disappeared, the mind still remains active, perfectly alert and fully awake.

1. The first jhāna is a stage of peace, ecstasy and joyful bliss, yet “thought conception and discursive thinking” (*vitakka-vicara*), i.e. the so-called “inner speech” or “verbal activities of the mind” (*vacī-saṅkhārā*), are still at work.
2. As soon as these verbal activities of the mind have ceased, one has attained the second jhāna, which is a state of highest “rapture and joyful bliss” (*pīti*), free from thinking and pondering.
3. After the fading away of rapture and ecstasy, the third jhāna is reached, marked by “equanimous joy” (*upekkhā-sukha*).
4. After the complete fading away of joy, a state of perfect equanimity (*upekkhā*) abides, called the fourth jhāna.

The mind, after emerging from the fourth jhāna, is again and again described in the suttas as “serene, pure, lucid, stainless, devoid of evil, pliable, able to act, firm and imperturbable.”

Let us now deal separately with some of the concentration exercises. Amongst those forty exercises described in the *Visuddhimagga*, the ten kasina exercises resemble somewhat certain methods of inducing hypnotic sleep, etc., by gazing at bright objects. Therefore, in order to avoid such an outcome, one must beware of sleepiness and strive to keep the mind ever alert.

There are four color kasinas, four element kasinas, space kasina, and light kasina. In the color kasina, a blue, yellow, red or white disk may serve as the object at which to gaze, or flowers, cloth, etc. of these colors. In the earth kasina exercise the object of our gazing may be a plowed field seen from a distance, or a circular piece of earth prepared for this purpose. In the water kasina exercise we may gaze at a pond seen from a higher elevation, or at water contained in a vessel. Similar it is with the fire kasina and wind kasina.

As an example how to practice such an exercise, let us consider the blue kasina exercise. For this purpose let us prepare a round disk made of paper or cloth, and fix it to the wall of our room. Then seated before the disk, we fix our whole attention upon this “preliminary mark” (*parikamma-nimitta*) and so produce “preliminary concentration” (*parikamma-samādhī*). Now, while constantly gazing at this blue disk, we must strive to remain mentally alert and steadfast, in order not to fall into hypnotic sleep, as already pointed out. At the same time we must keep from our mind all outside impressions and thoughts on other objects, as well as all those disturbing and often dangerous mental visions and hallucinations that may arise. While exclusively fixing our eyes and thoughts on the blue disk as our sole object,

the things around the disk seem, as it were, to disappear, and the disk itself seems to become more and more a mere mental phantom. Now, whether the eyes are opened or closed, we perceive the mentalized kasina disk, which more and more assumes the appearance of the bright orb of the moon. This is the “acquired mark” (*uggahanimitta*) which, though apparently seen by means of our physical eyes, is nevertheless produced and perceived only by our mind, independently of the sense activity of the eye. As soon as this mentally produced image becomes steady and vanishes no longer, but remains safely fixed in the mind, we should (according to the *Visuddhimagga*) move to another place and there continue our exercise. In fixing our mental eye more and more upon the mentally produced image or light, it becomes continually steadier and brighter, till at last it may assume the appearance of the bright morning star, or something similar. Herewith the mental “reflex mark” (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) is attained, and along with it “neighborhood concentration” (*upacāra-samādhi*).

Already during this stage all mental hindrances (*nivāraṇa*) have, at least temporarily, disappeared and do not arise. No sensual lust (*kāmacchanda*) arises in such a state. No ill-will (*vyāpāda*) can irritate the mind. All mental stiffness and dullness (*thīna-middha*) is overcome. No restlessness and anxiety (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and no wavering doubt and scepticism (*vicikicchā*) can any more divert the mind. As long as there is a possibility for the arising of these five mental hindrances, so long there can be no lasting tranquillity of the mind. By tenaciously fixing our mind to the reflex mark we eventually reach the attainment concentration (*appanā-samādhi*) and thereby enter into the first jhāna. And by becoming more and more absorbed, and by the gradual vanishing, one by one, of thought conception and discursive thinking, of rapture and joy, we consecutively pass through the three remaining jhānas, as described before.

Next let us touch upon the “cemetery contemplations.” The goal of these exercises is to create a concentrated and tranquil state of mind by arousing disgust for the carnal desires and detachment from them. The objects of the cemetery contemplations, being either real or imaginary, are: a putrified corpse, a corpse gnawed by wild animals or by worms, a skeleton, scattered bones, bones crumbled to dust, etc.

Of the remaining concentration exercises, I intend to speak only of the four “divine abodes” (*brahmā-vihāra-bhāvanā*): all-embracing kindness, compassion altruistic joy and equanimity (*mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*).

The development of all-embracing kindness (*mettā-bhāvanā*) is, according to the *Visuddhimagga*, to be practiced somewhat as follows:

First one should think of oneself: “May I be happy! May I be free from suffering!” Thus, beginning with oneself, one should then in the same way extend loving and benevolent thoughts to one’s teacher, then to one’s friends and companions, then to all persons living in and around the same house, then to the inhabitants of the nearest street, then by and by to the whole village or town, then to the whole country; and making not the slightest difference between friend and

enemy, blood relation and stranger, good people and bad people, one should finally pervade the whole world with all-embracing kindness. And not only human beings, but also animals down to the tiniest insects, all should be embraced with kindness. Identifying ourselves with all that lives, we should pervade the whole world with all-embracing kindness, above, below, to all sides, and should rouse in our innermost heart the fervent wish: “O, that all beings may be happy! That all beings may be freed from greed, hate and delusion! That all beings may find deliverance from Samsara!”

By developing all-embracing kindness and goodwill, the heart will become purified of ill-feeling and anger, and filled with tranquillity, steadfastness and peace. During this exercise the mind may eventually reach the ecstasy of the first jhāna, and even gradually pass through the first three jhānas. In a more or less similar way compassion (*karuṇā*) and altruistic joy (*muditā*) are to be developed.

In the Suttas we again and again find the stereotype words:

There, O monks, the monk with all-embracing kindness... or with compassion... altruistic joy... equanimity... pervades first one direction, then the second, then the third, then the fourth, above, below, round about, in every quarter. And identifying himself with all, he pervades the entire universe with all-embracing kindness, with heart grown great, wide, deep, boundless, free from wrath and anger...

In the fourth divine abode, the “development of equanimity” (*upekkhā-bhāvanā*), all persons and things are regarded with perfect equanimity and disinterestedness. With unshakable equanimity the mind looks upon wealth and poverty, happiness and misery, free from agitation, free from inclination and aversion, steadfast and unmoved, beyond love and hatred, beyond joy and sorrow.

It may here be mentioned that concentration does not reach the same degree of intensity in each of the forty exercises. For example, in some of them only neighborhood concentration may be reached, as in the reflections on the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, etc. The cemetery contemplations may induce entrance into the first jhāna. The first three divine abodes may induce the first three jhānas. The ten kasina exercises, however, as well as the exercise of equanimity and the attention on in-and-out breathing may induce all the four jhānas.

With regard to the nature, or temperament, of the person practicing concentration, it should be noted that the four color kasinas are particularly suited to an angry nature, while for an unsteady nature the kasina disk should be of small size.

2.

We have already stated that all the concentration exercises, as such, serve only the purpose of developing mental tranquillity (*samatha*). Mental tranquillity, however, is the fundamental and indispensable condition for the successful development of insight (*vipassanā*). And this insight alone possesses the power to confer immediate entrance to the four stages of holiness, and thus to free us forever from the ten fetters (*samyojana*) that bind beings to the ever-turning wheel of existence.

Therefore our Master has said: “May you develop mental concentration, O monks. For whoso is concentrated in mind, sees things as they really are.” Concerning insight (*vipassanā*) we read in the *Milindapañha*: “Just as when a man brings a lamp into a dark chamber, the lamp produces light and renders all things visible, just so does insight, as soon as it arises, dispel the darkness of ignorance and bring forth the light of knowledge; and sending out its rays of wisdom, it renders clearly visible the Four Noble Truths. And thus the earnestly striving monk, with clear and bright insight, beholds the impermanence, suffering and egolessness of all existence.” And in the *Puggalapaññatti*: “Just as a man in a dark and gloomy night, at the sudden flash of lightning, may with his eyes clearly recognize objects; even so one may through deep insight, perceive all things as they really are: ‘This is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the extinction of suffering, this is the path leading to the extinction of suffering.’ “

Hence, just as morality (*sīla*) forms the indispensable foundation for the successful development of mental tranquillity and concentration, just so, supported by morality, mental tranquillity and concentration forms the necessary foundation for the development of wisdom and insight. And insight is the immediate condition for the entrance into the four stages of holiness.

For the successful development of insight, however, it is not an absolute necessity to have gained the jhānas. The attainment of neighborhood concentration is sufficient for this purpose. Moreover, during the jhānas the development of insight is not possible, as the initial practice of this exercise requires abstract thinking and analyzing, while in the first jhāna abstract thinking is already weak, and totally absent in the three higher jhānas.

Insight, as already said, is induced by means of analysis and intense contemplation on all the phenomena of existence, i.e. on corporeal phenomena, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness; by the contemplation on their impersonality, futility, emptiness and unsubstantiality; by contemplating the fact that in reality, neither inside nor outside these fleeting phenomena, is there to be found any ego-entity (*attā*), and that “I” or “self” or “person,” etc., are nothing but conventional names. Really, this teaching of unsubstantiality and egolessness (*anattā*), together with the teaching of the conditionedness of all phenomena of existence, are the only specific doctrines of Buddhism, and without insight into these profound truths nobody can ever rightly grasp the Four Noble Truths or enter the path.

All the other teachings of our Master may also be found in other philosophies or religions. The jhānas have already been attained before, and independently of, the Buddha. Love was preached by some other religions. Likewise the impermanency and miserable nature of existence was taught by others. But the liberating truths of *impersonality* and *conditionedness* of all existence have, of all religious teachers, been taught and revealed in full clarity only by the Buddha. And these are the only specific doctrines on which the whole Buddhist structure rests.

Hence, as the understanding of egolessness and conditionedness of existence is the indispensable condition for a real understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and for deliverance from Samsara, one may rightly say that none but the Enlightened One has shown the right method of mental culture, and therewith the right way to deliverance.

The exercises for developing insight (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*) given in the *Visuddhimagga* (XIV-XXII) are extremely varied. Anyhow, I shall here briefly indicate the most essential ones. Before, however, the monk begins with developing his insight, he at first should acquire a thorough knowledge of the Dhamma and know that the only true or actual elements in this evanescent existence are the five groups of existence: corporeal phenomena, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness. And he should think of their impermanence, their unsatisfactoriness, their empty and conditioned nature, as well as of their twofold division into a mental and corporeal process (*nāma-rūpa*).

Thus, after attaining and rising again from one of the jhānas, the monk may analyze the just experienced state of jhāna. And while doing so, he will realize that this mental state, called jhāna, is nothing but a heap of rising and passing phenomena: thought conception, discursive thinking, joy, concentration, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. And pondering over these phenomena, he will find that this entire mental process is dependent on corporeality, and that again corporeality is a name for the four physical elements and the corporeality depending on them, as e.g. the sense-organs, objects, etc.

Another monk may divide this mental-corporeal process into its eighteen elements, i.e. the six sense-organs, six objects, and six kinds of consciousness, as: eye, visible object, eye-consciousness; ear, sound, ear-consciousness... mind, mind-object, mind-consciousness. And he will understand thus: “Mere mental and physical phenomena are there, but no being, no personality, can be found.”

When certain things we find combined,
We speak of chariot, speak of car.
Just so, when these five groups appear,
We use the designation “being.”

Or just as after building up walls and roof with various materials, the enclosed space is called a house, just so this bodily structure built up by bones, flesh, sinews, etc., is called “body.”

Or just as a wooden swivel-doll is empty, lifeless and inactive, but may, by means of a pulling device, move or stand and appear to be full of life and activity, just so are mind and body as such something empty, lifeless and inactive; but through the mutual influence of mind and body upon one another, this psycho-physical structure may move or stand and appear full of life and activity.

As with the help and aid of ships
Men move across the mighty sea,
Just so conditioned by this body
The mental group is moving on.

As with the help and aid of men
Ships move across the mighty sea,
Just so conditioned by the mind
The body-group is moving on.

Thus the monk contemplates the conditionality of this psycho-physical process. And he understands how all those bodily and mental phenomena come to decay and dissolution. And he perceives the conditioned nature of the bodily and mental groups with regard to their dependent origination, namely: “Among the phenomena, old age and death can take place only if there is birth; birth only if there is the prenatal kamma-process, the kamma-process only if there is attachment to life... the kamma-formations only if there is ignorance and delusion.” In this way, all doubts vanish in the monk, such as: “Have I been in the past?” or: “Have I not been in the past?” etc.

Everywhere, in all the forms of existence, the monk sees only an ever-changing mental and bodily process, kept going through the concatenation of causes and effects and other conditions. No doer does he see beside the deed (kamma), no receiver of the kamma-result. And he rightly understands that it is only by way of conventional language (*vohāra-vacana*) that the wise with regard to a deed speak of a “doer,” or with regard to the kamma-result (*vipāka*) of a “receiver” of it.

The monk considers thus: “The kamma-produced five groups (corporeality, feeling, etc.) of the past have become extinguished then and there, but conditioned through the past kamma (actions) other groups have arisen in this existence; yet from the past existence nothing has passed over to this existence. Also the present groups produced through the past kamma, will become extinguished here, but conditioned through the present kamma other groups will arise in the future; yet from this existence nothing will pass over to the next existence.

“Whatever there is of corporeality... feelings... perceptions... mental formations... consciousness, whether past, present or future... one’s own or external... gross or subtle... lofty or low... far or near: all these phenomena of existence are impermanent... unsatisfactory... non-self. For whatever is non-self is unsatisfactory and unable to ward off its own impermanence or oppression due to its arising and disappearing. How could these things ever assume the role of a feeler, an agent, an experiencer of consciousness, an abiding personality?”

All these things the monk considers as conditioned, subject to dissolution and disappearance.

All life and all existence here,
With all its joy and all its pain,
Depends all on a state of mind,
And quick passes that moment by.

The life-groups that have passed away,
At death as well as during life,
Have all alike become extinguished,
And never will they rise again.

Out of the unseen did they rise,
Into the unseen do they pass.
Just as the lightning flashes forth,
So do they flash and pass away.

Also in the external world the monk may observe the three characteristics. The shoot of the *asoka* tree is at first light-red, then after two or three days it becomes deep-red. Then it gets the appearance of a young sprout, then of a ripe sprout, then of a light-green leaf, then of a blue-green leaf. From this time, continually depending upon a similar physical continuity, it becomes after one year a yellow leaf, and detaching itself from the stalk, it drops to the ground. Thus each time, before the next following stage has appeared, the former stage dies off.

Further, by means of the eighteen kinds of insight the monk overcomes the wrong conceptions through their opposites, namely:

1. Through developing the contemplation on impermanence (*aniccānupassanā*), he overcomes the wrong idea of permanence.
2. Through developing the contemplation on unsatisfactoriness (*dukkhānupassanā*), he overcomes the wrong idea of real happiness.
3. Through developing the contemplation on non-self (*anattānupassanā*), he overcomes the wrong idea of self.
4. Through developing the contemplation on turning away (*nibbidānupassanā*), he overcomes affection.
5. Through developing the contemplation on detachment (*virāgānupassanā*), he overcomes greed.
6. Through developing the contemplation on cessation (*nirodhānupassanā*), he overcomes the arising.
7. Through developing the contemplation on giving up (*paṭinissaggānupassanā*), he overcomes attachment.
8. Through developing the contemplation on dissolution (*khayānupassanā*), he overcomes the wrong idea of something compact.
9. Through developing the contemplation on disappearance (*vayānupassanā*), he overcomes kamma-accumulation.

10. Through developing the contemplation on changeableness (*vipariṇamānupassanā*), he overcomes the wrong idea of something immutable.
11. Through developing the contemplation on the signless (*animittānupassanā*), he overcomes the conditions of rebirth.
12. Through developing the contemplation on the desireless (*appaṇihitānupassanā*), he overcomes longing.
13. Through developing the contemplation on the void (*suññatānupassanā*), he overcomes clinging.
14. Through developing higher wisdom and insight (*adhipaññādhmma vipassanā*), he overcomes the wrong idea of something substantial.
15. Through developing the true eye of knowledge (*yathābhuta ñāṇadassana*), he overcomes clinging to delusion.
16. Through developing the contemplation on misery (*ādīnavānupassanā*), he overcomes clinging to desire.
17. Through developing the reflecting contemplation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassanā*), he overcomes thoughtlessness.
18. Through developing the contemplation on the standstill of existence (*vivattānupassanā*), he overcomes being entangled in fetters.

Having thus, by means of the eighteen kinds of insight, understood the phenomena with regard to their three characteristics, he has penetrated the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and egolessness of all existence.

1. Contemplation on arising and disappearing (*udayabbayānupassanā*): Further, the monk trains himself in insight with regard to the arising and disappearing of things: “All the physical and mental phenomena, without having been previously, come to arise, and arisen they disappear again. Through the arising of the pre-natal ignorance, craving, kamma, and nutriment, there is conditioned the arising of corporeality; and through the extinction of these four causes, the extinction of corporeality takes place.”

All life is like a dew drop that dissolves as soon as the sun rises. Life is like an empty bubble, or like a furrow drawn on the water which immediately disappears again. Life is something unsubstantial, unreal, an illusion, a mirage, a phantom, like a fire-wreath called forth by the circular swinging of a firebrand, or like a ghost-land, or foam, or a banana-stem (consisting of mere sheaths).

2. Contemplation on dissolution (*bhaṅgānupassanā*): Now, while knowing that all these formations of existence, once arisen, will soon again come to extinction, there arises in him the contemplation on dissolution. As consciousness is conditioned through the physical or mental objects, he considers it as impermanent. He turns away from it, no longer delights in it. He detaches himself from it, no longer has greed for it. He brings it to extinction, does not let it rise again. He lets it go, and no longer adheres to it. And considering it as transient, he overcomes the idea of something permanent.

The groups of life become dissolved,
There is no ego to be found.
The dissolution of the groups:
That's what most people would call death.

3. Knowledge consisting in awareness of terror (*bhayat' upatthāna-ñāṇa*): Whoso knows how in the past all formations of existence have become extinguished, how the present ones are coming to extinction, and how also all the future ones will become extinguished, to him there arises on that occasion the knowledge consisting in awareness of terror.

4. Contemplation on misery (*ādīnavānupassanā*): "The arising of existence is a terror": such knowledge consisting in awareness of terror, is called the knowledge of misery. "The continuity of existence... the course of rebirth... the entering into existence... old age, disease, death, sorrow... lamentation... despair are a terror": such knowledge consisting in awareness of terror, is called the knowledge of misery.

5. Contemplation on turning away (*nibbidānupassanā*): While the disciple in this way understands that all formations of existence are misery, his mind turns away from all formations, is weary of them, no longer delights in them.

6. Knowledge of the wish for deliverance (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*): Now, while finding no delight in the formations of existence, he wishes to get rid of them, seeks for escape from them.

7. Reflecting contemplation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassanā*): In order to find deliverance from all the formations of existence, he reflects on them and determines their three characteristics.

All formations he understands as impermanent (*anicca*) for their being without duration, persisting only for a short while, being limited by their arising and disappearance, perishable, transient, frail, unsteady, subject to change, without substance, unreal, conditioned, subject to death.

All formations he considers as unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) for their being again and again oppressed, their being hard to endure, and their being the root of all suffering.

All formations he considers as non-self (*anattā*) for their being something alien, unreal, void, empty, without owner, without master, without controller: "Empty are all formations, void are they of any self and of anything pertaining to a self... I am not anything to anyone, nor does anything belong to me in any regard." Just as a reed is hollow and without pith, so also are corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness empty, void, impersonal, without master, unfree, something uncontrollable, impotent and alien.

8. Knowledge consisting in equanimity with regard to all formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*): While the monk is thus grasping all the formations by considering them as empty, and determining their three characteristics, he gives up

fear and anguish and abides in equanimity with regard to all the formations, no more concerns himself about them, and no longer conceives the idea of “I” and “mine.”

Whoever considers the formations of existence as impermanent (*anicca*), to him they appear as a passing away. Whoever considers them as unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), to him they appear as terror. Whoever considers them as non-self (*anattā*), to him they appear as empty.

9. Adaptation knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*): “Now the path will reveal itself”: thus thinking, the monk’s mind reflects with equanimity on all the formations of existence as impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*) and thereupon his consciousness sinks into the subconscious stream (*bhavaṅga-sota*). Immediately thereafter arises awareness at the mind-door, taking as objects all phenomena just as before, regarding them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self. Thereafter, in following up again the interrupted continuity of consciousness, the three impulsive moments (*javana*), known as the preliminary, access and adaptation moment (*parikamma, upacāra, anuloma*), flash up one after the other, with the same phenomena as object. One speaks of “adaptation” because this knowledge adapts itself to the preceding eight kinds of insight knowledge performing the same functions, and to the following elements of enlightenment immediately thereafter.

Adaptation knowledge has the same functions, because it arises through contemplation of the formations of existence together with their three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and egolessness. The adaptation knowledge, however, forms the conclusion for those kinds of insight that have the formations as object, and are leading to the “ascent,” i.e. to the path.

Maturity knowledge (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*): immediately thereafter follows maturity knowledge, which consists in the turning of the mind to the supramundane path of “stream-entrance” (*sotāpatti*). At that moment the mind is no longer driving towards all those phenomena, no longer clinging to them, no longer captivated by them; and transcending the sphere of the worldling, it enters the sphere of the noble ones. Just as in the cloudless sky the moon shines pure and bright, just so, as soon as the darkness of ignorance veiling the truth is dispersed, maturity knowledge beholds the purity of Nibbāna.

Path knowledge (*magga-ñāṇa*): Now, following as immediate continuation upon adaptation knowledge, path consciousness arises by dispersing and demolishing, forever and all time, the three fetters of personality belief, sceptical doubt and clinging to rules and rituals (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi, vicikicchā, sīlabbataparāmāsa*).

Fruition knowledge (*phala-ñāṇa*): immediately upon this path consciousness there arise, as results, those supramundane states of consciousness known as the fruits (*phala*) of the path, which during the life-time may be repeated innumerable times.

The corresponding process also takes place on attaining the three higher stages of holiness, of which the highest one is identical with perfect holiness, or Arahantship.¹

Herewith we have arrived at the highest and final goal of the Buddha's teaching. I should, however, like to warn you of the wrong conclusion, as if, according to the Buddha's teaching, it would be necessary, for the realization of the paths, to be ever conscious of all those intricate workings of our mind. This is by no means the case. Let me tell you that in many places in the investigations contained in the *Visuddhimagga* the point is rather to give a scientific explanation of the whole process of gradual development on the path to deliverance. We have here mostly to do with theoretical knowledge and hypotheses gained by abstract reasoning, partly perhaps also with real knowledge gained through intuition by some extraordinary seers or mystics. In any case, deliverance may, under favorable circumstances, sometimes be realized already after a very short time, and with no previous knowledge.

At the conclusion of our subject, therefore, I should like to summarize the more popular and more intelligible exposition of the twofold development as given in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and its commentary:

There is only one way to the realization of deliverance, namely, the four foundations of mindfulness, i.e. the attentive contemplation of body, feeling, mind, and mind-objects.

For that purpose the monk retires to a solitary place; and sitting down and directing his whole attention in front of himself, he watches attentively his in-and-out breathing, and attains thereby mental concentration and the *jhānas*.

Or: In going, standing, sitting or lying down, he is well aware and knows that there is no living entity, no real ego, that moves about, but that it is a mere conventional mode of speaking, if one says: "I go, I stand," etc.

He is full of attention and clearly conscious in going and coming, looking forward and backward, in bending and stretching his body, in eating, drinking, speaking and keeping silent. Thus in all outer activities, he is clearly conscious of purpose, utility, duty and truth.

Further: He contemplates the manifold parts of the body, as hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, etc.

Further: He analyzes the body with regard to the four elements, i.e. the solid, liquid, heat and motion.

Further: Just as if he would see a corpse thrown to the burial ground, swollen, blue-black in color, he draws the conclusion: "Also this my body has the same nature, will become so, cannot escape it." Or: Just as if he would see a corpse, a framework of bones, stripped of flesh, bespattered with blood... bones disconnected and scattered in all directions... bones bleached and resembling shells... bones heaped together... bones weather-worn and crumbled to dust, he draws the conclusion: "Also this my body has the same nature, will become so, cannot escape it." Thus he contemplates his own body, other bodies, and both. He sees how these bodily

phenomena are arising and passing away. And he understands that only corporeality is there to be found, but no ego-entity.

In contemplating the feelings, he notices the agreeable feeling, the disagreeable feeling, the indifferent feeling, he sees how these feelings are arising and passing away, and does not find any ego-entity within or without the feelings.

In contemplating the mind, he notices when it is filled with greed, or hate, or delusion, or when it is free from these things; he notices when the mind is cramped or scattered, concentrated or not. And he sees how these states of mind are arising and passing away, and knows that there is no ego-entity to be found.

In contemplating the mind-objects, he notices when one of the mental hindrances is present, or not present, how it arises, and how it is overcome. He contemplates the six sense-organs and the corresponding objects, and the mental fetters conditioned through them; contemplates the five groups of existence, their arising and passing away, the seven links of enlightenment, and the Four Noble Truths.

Thus he contemplates all the phenomena, sees how they arise and pass away, and how nowhere any ego-entity can be found.

The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta closes with the encouraging words that one who in this way practices the four foundations of mindfulness, sometimes even for only seven days, may find deliverance from all suffering.

Note

1. About the four stages of holiness, see Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (BPS, 1988): *ariya-puggala*.

About the Author

Ven. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera (1878-1957) was the first Continental European in modern times to become a Buddhist monk and one of the foremost Western exponents of Theravada Buddhism in the twentieth century. Born in Germany, he developed a keen interest in Buddhism in his youth and came to Asia intending to enter the Buddhist Order. He received ordination in Burma in 1903. The greatest part of his life as a monk was spent in Sri Lanka, where he established the Island Hermitage at Dodanduwa as a monastery for Western monks. His translations into German include the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the *Visuddhimagga*, and the *Milindapañha*. Ven. Nyanatiloka passed away in Colombo in 1957.

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