

HANDBOOK FOR MANKIND

BUDDHADASA BHIKKHU



Printed By

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

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International Buddhist Conference on

the United Nations Day of Vesak

May 18 - 20, 2548/2005

THAILAND

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the United Nations Day of Vesak
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THAILAND



การประชุมชาวพุทธนานาชาติ
เนื่องในวันวิสาขบูชาโลก ประจำปี ๒๕๔๘
ณ ประเทศไทย

ระหว่างวันที่ ๑๘ - ๒๐ พฤษภาคม พ.ศ. ๒๕๔๘

PREFACE

The International Buddhist Conference on the United Nations Day of Vesak is held at the Buddhamonthon Conference Hall, Nakhon Pathom, and at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok from 18 to 20 May 2548/2005. This is the most significant event for all Buddhists, not just in Thailand, but also all over the world.

It is a matter of great privilege that, with the permission of the government of the Kingdom of Thailand, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU) has the opportunity to organize this tremendously important gathering of the international Buddhist leaders and scholars to commemorate the Day of Vesak, on which falls the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment and Passing Away.

As a complementary to this conference, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University has published *Handbook for Mankind*, by the Most Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, "the religious genius of Thailand", to promote the words of the Buddha to the world.

May all be happy and peaceful and free from suffering through the power of the great wisdom and compassion of the Lord Buddha.

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

18 May 2548/2005

FOREWORD

The number of books on Buddhist topics produced by monks in Thailand is quite considerable ; but for anyone lacking a knowledge of the Thai language this great volume of literature is, unfortunately, inaccessible. In order to remedy this situation some of the most important works in Thai are now being translated into English.

The present volume is one in a series of works by Venerable Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu of Chaiya, South Thailand. It is particularly suited to the reader who wishes to get a complete outline of Buddha-Dhamma expressed in straightforward language.

The Ven. Buddhadāsa is well known for the readiness with which he gives non-literal interpretations to the Buddhist texts. Giving more weight to meditative experience and everyday observation than to philology, he finds meaning in many otherwise obscure points of doctrine. He does not hesitate to reject as naive a word-for-word interpretation that has no bearing on real life.

Particularly valuable in the present work are the author's thoughts on *samsara*, *karma*, and *re-birth*, subjects completely misunderstood by most western students of Buddhism.

To anyone hoping to find in Buddha-Dhamma a guide to life rather than just an object of scholarly study, this **"Handbook"** is strongly recommended

Buddha - Nigama
Chieng Mai
Thailand.

"Although someone may say there is Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc., when he has penetrated to the essential nature of his religion, he will regard all religions as being the same."

Venerable Buddhādāsa

PREFACE

In this book the Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has made the point that the whole Buddha-Dhamma is nothing but the teaching dealing with **"what is what."**

It is a remarkable fact that in this book the Ven. Buddhadasa has explained the meaning of one topic, thereby covering the spirit of the whole of the Buddhist teaching or the *Tipitaka*. He says that Buddhism is the religion which teaches one to know just this much : "what is what." All the chapters in this book dealing with five aggregates, the four kinds of attachment, intuition in a natural way (chapter VII), intuition by methodical practice (chapter VIII), and other topics all point to **"what is what."**

The expression "what is what" seems to be rather easy to understand, as though it were pointless to think about its meaning. But this appears to be the standpoint of the layman or of those who take the materialist's view. When thinking in the language of Dhamma, however, (for details see the 'Two Kinds of Language' by the same author recently published in English) the knowledge of "what is what" signifies to 'know things as they **really are**', in Pali '*yathabhuta nanadassana*', i.e. penetrating the Three Marks of everything existent (*tilakkhana*); the understanding of **"what is what"** may further be taken in the sense of

knowing '*assada, adinava, and nissarana*' of all conditioned things, i.e. satisfaction derived from them, the inherent disadvantages, and final emancipation; *finally "what is what is directly pointing at Enlightenment.*

May the genuine '*loving-kindness*' in your minds grow; may it arise in the minds of all beings in the world.

The Sublime Life Mission.

"In the past centuries there have been many learned Teachers who have laid down various paths to show the Truth. Among these, Buddhism is one, and according to my opinion is that except for the differences in the names and forms of the various religions the Ultimate Truth is the same."

The Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso

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I LOOKING AT BUDDHISM

If we open any recent book on the origins of religion, we find that there is one point on which all authors are in agreement. They agree that religion arose in the world out of fear. Primitive man feared thunder and lightning, darkness and storm, and various things about him that he was unable to understand or control. His method of avoiding the danger he saw in these phenomena was to demonstrate either humility and submission or homage and reverence, depending on which he felt was most appropriate.

Later, as man's knowledge and understanding developed, this fear of the forces of nature changed into a fear of phenomena more difficult to apprehend. Religions based on deference to objects of fear such as natural phenomena, spirits and celestial beings, came to be looked down upon as unreasonable and ridiculous. And then man's fear became still more refined into a fear of suffering, suffering of the sort that cannot be alleviated by any material means. He came to fear the suffering inherent in birth, aging, pain, and death, the disappointment and hopelessness which arise out of desire, anger, and stupidity, which no amount

of power or wealth can relieve. Long ago in India, a country well provided with thinkers and investigators, intelligent people dispensed with all paying of homage to supernatural beings. They started seeking instead the means of conquering birth, aging, pain, and death, the means of eliminating greed, hatred, and delusion. Out of this search arose Buddhism, a higher religion based on insight, a means of conquering birth, aging, pain, and death, a method for destroying the mental defilements. Buddhism has its origins in fear of this last kind, just as do all religions based on intelligence. The Buddha discovered how to conquer absolutely what man fears : he discovered a practical method, now called Buddhism, for eliminating suffering.

"Buddhism" means "the Teaching of the Enlightened One." A Buddha is an enlightened individual, one who knows the truth about all things, one who knows just "what is what," (knows things just as they are) and so is capable of behaving appropriately with respect to all things. Buddhism is a religion based on intelligence, science, and knowledge, whose purpose is the destruction of suffering and the source of suffering. All paying of homage to sacred objects by means of performing rites and rituals, making offerings, or praying is not Buddhism. The Buddha rejected the celestial beings, then considered by certain groups to be the creators of things, and the deities supposed to dwell, one in each star, in the sky. Thus we find that the Buddha made such

statements as these :

"Knowledge, skill, and ability are conducive to success and benefit and are auspicious omens, good in their own right, regardless of the movements of the heavenly bodies. With the benefits gained from these qualities, one will completely outstrip those foolish people who just sit making their astrological calculations." and : "If the water in rivers (such as the Ganges) could really wash away sins and suffering, then the turtles, crabs, fish and shellfish living in those sacred rivers ought by now to be freed of their sins and sufferings too." And : "If a man could eliminate suffering by making offerings, paying homage, and praying, there would be no one subject to suffering left in the world, because anyone at all can pay homage and pray. But since people are still subject to suffering while in the very act of making obeisances, paying homage, and performing rites, this is clearly not the way to gain liberation."

To attain liberation, we first have to examine things closely in order to come to know and understand their true nature. Then we have to behave in a way appropriate to that true nature. This is the Buddhist teaching; this we must know and bear in mind. Buddhism has nothing to do with prostrating oneself and deferring to awesome things. It sets no store by rites and ceremonies such as making libations of holy water, or any externals whatsoever, spirits and

celestial beings included. On the contrary, it depends on reason and insight. Buddhism does not demand conjecture or supposition; it demands that we act in accordance with what our own insight reveals and not take anyone else's word for anything. If someone comes and tells us something, we must not believe him without question. We must listen to his statement and examine it. Then if we find it reasonable, we may accept it provisionally and set about trying to verify it for ourselves. This is a key feature of Buddhism, which distinguishes it sharply from other world religions.

Now a religion is a many sided thing. Seen from one angle it has a certain appearance; seen from another angle, it has another. Many people look at religion from the wrong angle, and Buddhism is no exception. Different individuals looking at Buddhism with different mental attitudes are bound to get different views of it. Because each of us naturally has confidence in his own opinions, the truth for each of us coincides with our own particular understanding and point of view. Consequently, "the Truth" is not quite the same thing for different people. They all penetrate questions to varying depths, by varying methods, and with varying degrees of intelligence. A person does not recognize as true, according to his own ideas of the Truth, anything that lies beyond his own intelligence, knowledge, and understanding. And even though he may outwardly go along

with other people's ideas as to what is the truth, he knows in himself that it is not the truth as he himself sees it. Each person's conception of the truth may change and develop with the day by day increase in his degree of intelligence, knowledge, and understanding, until such time as he arrives at the ultimate truth; and each of us has different ways of examining and testing before believing. So if Buddhism is viewed with differing degrees of intelligence, differing pictures of it will be seen, simply because it can be viewed from any aspect.

As we have said, Buddhism is a practical method for liberating oneself from suffering by means of coming to realize, as did the Buddha himself, the true nature of things. Now any religious text is bound to contain material which later people have found occasion to add to it, and our Tipitaka is no exception. People in later ages have added sections based on then current ideas, either in order to boost people's confidence, or out of excessive religious zeal. Regrettably even the rites and rituals which have developed and become mixed in with the religion are now accepted and recognized as Buddhism proper. Ceremonies, such as setting up trays of sweets and fruit as offerings to the "soul" of the Buddha in the same way as alms-food is offered to a monk just do not fit in with Buddhist principles. Yet some groups consider this to be genuine Buddhist practice, teaching it as such and keeping to it very strictly.

Rites and ceremonies of this kind have become so numerous that they now completely obscure the real Buddhism and its original purpose. Take for example the procedure of becoming ordained a monk. There has come into existence the ceremony of making gifts to the newly ordained bhikkhu. Guests are invited to bring food and to watch proceedings, and as a result, there is much drunkenness and noise. Ceremonies are performed both at the temple and in the home. The new bhikkhu leaves the Order only a few days after having been ordained, and may become an even stronger temple hater than he was before. It must be borne in mind that there was none of this at the time of the Buddha. It is a later development. Ordination at the time of the Buddha meant simply that some individual, who had obtained his parent's consent, renounced home and family. He was a person who was able to close accounts at home and go off to join the Buddha and the Order of bhikkhus. On some convenient occasion he would go and be ordained, and perhaps not see his parents or family again for the rest of his life. Though some bhikkhus might go back to visit their parents again on suitable occasions, this was rare. There does exist a rule permitting a bhikkhu to go home when there is a good reason for doing so, but at the time of the Buddha this was not observed. Bhikkhus did not receive ordination with their parents in attendance, nor did they celebrate the event as a great occasion, only

to leave the Sangha after just a few days, no better off than before, as commonly happens in the present day.

All this presenting of gifts to newly ordained bhikkhus, this performing of ceremonies, including all sorts of celebration, these we are foolish enough to call Buddhism! Furthermore we choose to make much of them, thinking nothing of spending all our own money, or other people's on account of them. This "Neo-Buddhism" is so widespread as to be almost universal. The Dhamma, the genuine teaching that once was paramount, has become so overlaid by ceremony that the whole objective of Buddhism has been obscured, falsified and changed. Ordination, for instance, has become a face saving gambit for young men whom people have been pointing at for never having been ordained, or a prerequisite to finding a wife (as having been a monk is considered a sign of maturity), or is done with some other kind of ulterior motive. In some places an ordination is regarded as an opportunity for collecting money, for which job there are always people on hand to help. It is one way of getting rich. Even this they call Buddhism and anyone who goes and criticizes this is considered to be ignorant of Buddhism or opposed to it.

Another example is the presentation of kathina cloth. The Buddha's original intention was to have cloth for robes given to all the bhikkhus simultaneously so that they could

sew it together themselves with a minimum loss of time. If there was only one robe, it was allocated to some bhikkhu, not necessarily the most senior one, whom the group considered worthy of using that robe or in need of it, and was presented to him in the name of the entire order. The Buddha's intention was to avoid any bhikkhu having a high opinion of himself. On that day everyone, regardless of Seniority, had to humble himself and be one of the crowd. Everyone had to lend a hand cutting and sewing the cloth, boiling tree pith to make the dye, and doing whatever else was involved in getting the robes ready and finished the same day. Making the cloth into robes was a co-operative effort. That is how the Buddha intended it to be, an event not necessarily involving lay people at all. But nowadays it has become an affair involving ceremony, fun and games, loud laughter and money seeking. It is just a picnic and is devoid of all the desirable results originally intended.

This sort of thing is a tumour which has developed in Buddhism and thrived. The tumour takes hundreds of different forms too numerous to name. It is a dangerous, malignant growth which by degrees has completely overlaid and obscured the good material, the real pith of Buddhism, and quite disfigured it. One result of this has been the arising of many sects, some large, some insignificant, as offshoots from the original religion. Some sects have even become involved in sensuality. It is essential that we should

discriminate in order to recognize what is the real, original Buddhism. We must not foolishly grasp at the outer shell, or become so attached to the various rituals and ceremonies that the real objective becomes quite lost to view. The real practice of Buddhism is based on purification of conduct by way of body and speech, followed by purification of the mind, which in its turn leads to insight and right understanding. Don't go thinking that such and such is Buddhism just because everyone says it is. The tumour has been spreading constantly since the day the Buddha passed away, expanding in all directions right up to the present day, so that it is now quite sizable. The tumour in Buddhism must not be misidentified as Buddhism itself. It is also wrong for people of other religions to come and point at these shameful and disgraceful growths as being Buddhism. It is unjust, because these things are not Buddhism at all; they are excrescences. Those of us interested in furthering Buddhism, whether as a foothold for all people, or for our own private well being, must know how to get hold of the true essence of Buddhism and not just grab at some worthless outgrowth.

Now even the genuine Buddhism is many sided, a fact which may lead to a false grasp of true meaning. For instance, if looked at from the point of view of a moral philosopher, Buddhism is seen to be a religion of morality. There is talk of merit and demerit, good and evil, honesty,

gratitude, harmony, open - heartedness, and much more besides. The Tipitaka is full of moral teachings. Many newcomers to Buddhism approach it from this angle and are attracted to it on this account.

A more profound aspect is Buddhism as Truth, as the deep hidden truth lying below the surface and invisible to the ordinary man. To see this truth is to know intellectually the emptiness of all things; the transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood of all things; to know intellectually the nature of suffering, of the complete elimination of suffering and of the way to attain the complete elimination of suffering; to perceive these in terms of absolute truth, the kind that never changes and which everyone ought to know. This is Buddhism as Truth.

Buddhism as Religion is Buddhism as a system of practice based on morality, concentration, and insight, and culminating in liberating insight; a system which when practised to completion enables one to break free from suffering. This is Buddhism as Religion.

Then there is Buddhism as Psychology, as it is presented to us in the third section of the Tipitaka, where the nature of the mind is described in remarkable detail. Buddhist psychology is a source of interest and astonishment to students of the mind even in the present day. It

is far more detailed and profound than present day psychological knowledge.

Another aspect is Buddhism as Philosophy. Philosophical knowledge can be clearly seen by means of reasoned logical proofs but cannot be demonstrated experimentally. It contrasts with science, which is knowledge resulting from seeing something clearly, with our eyes, or through physical experimentation and proof, or even with the "inner eye" of intuition. Profound knowledge such as that of "emptiness" (impermanence) is just philosophy for a person who has not yet penetrated to the truth, and science for another who has done so, such as a fully enlightened individual, or *arahant*, who has seen it clearly, intuitively. Many aspects of Buddhism, in particular the Four Noble Truths, are scientific in so far as they can be verified by clear experimental proof using introspection. For anyone equipped with awareness and interested in studying and carrying out research, the cause - effect relationships are there just as in science. Buddhism is not just something obscure and vague, not just philosophy, as man made subjects are.

Some look on Buddhism as Culture. Anyone with a high regard for culture finds many aspects of Buddhist practice which are common to all cultures and also many that are characteristically Buddhist and far better and higher

than anything in other cultures.

Of all these various aspects, the one a real Buddhist ought to take most interest in is Buddhism as Religion. We ought to look on Buddhism as a direct practical method for gaining knowledge of the true nature of things, knowledge which makes it possible to give up every form of grasping and clinging, of stupidity and infatuation, and become completely independent of things. To do this is to penetrate to the essence of Buddhism. Buddhism considered in this aspect is far more useful than Buddhism considered as mere morality, or as truth which is simply profound knowledge and not really practical; and more useful than Buddhism considered as philosophy, as something to be enjoyed as an object of speculation and argument, but of no value in the giving up of the mental defilements; and certainly more useful than Buddhism considered simply as culture, as attractive behaviour, noteworthy from the sociological viewpoint.

At the very least, everyone ought to consider Buddhism as Art, as the Art of Living - in other words, as skill and competence in being a human being, living in a way that is exemplary and praiseworthy, which so impresses others that they automatically wish to emulate it. What we have to do is to cultivate the "Three Lustres," firstly developing moral purity, then training the mind to be tranquil and steady and fit to do its

job, and finally developing such an abundance of wisdom and clear insight into the nature of all things that those things are no longer able to give rise to suffering. When anyone's life has these Three Lustres, he can be considered to have fully mastered the art of living. Westerners are extremely interested in Buddhism as the Art of Living, and discuss this aspect more than any other. Penetrating so far into the real essence of Buddhism that we are able to take it as our guide to living induces spiritual good cheer and joy, dispersing depression and disillusionment. It also dispels fears, such as the fear that the complete giving up of spiritual defilements would make life dry and dreary and utterly devoid of flavour, or the fear that complete freedom from craving would make all thought and action impossible, whereas in reality a person who organizes his life in accordance with the Buddhist Art of Living is the victor over all the things about him. Regardless of whether these things be animals, people, possessions, or anything else, and regardless of whether they enter that person's consciousness by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, they will enter as losers, unable to becloud, defile, or perturb him. The victory over all these things is genuine bliss.

Buddha-Dhamma will enrapture a mind that has developed a taste for it. It can be considered an indispensable form of nourishment too. True, a person still controlled by the defilements continues to desire nourishment by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body and goes in search of it as suits

his nature. But there is another part of him, something deeper, that does not demand that sort of nourishment. It is the free or pure element in his mind. It wishes the joy and delight of spiritual nourishment, starting with the delight that results from moral purity. It is the source of contentment for fully enlightened individuals, who possess such tranquillity of mind that defilements cannot disturb them, who possess clear insight into the true nature of all things and have no ambitions with regard to any of them. They are, so to speak, able to sit down without being obliged to run here and there like those people to whom the Buddha applied the simile "smoke by night, fire by day."

"Smoke by night" refers to sleeplessness, restlessness. A sufferer from this complaint lies all night with hand on brow, planning on going after this and that, working out how to get money, how to get rich quickly and get the various things he desires. His mind is full of "smoke." All he can do is lie there until morning, when he can get up and go running off in obedience to the wishes of the "smoke" he has been holding back all night. This fervent activity is what the Buddha referred to as "fire by day." These are the symptoms of a mind that has not achieved tranquillity, a mind that has been deprived of spiritual nourishment. It is a pathological hunger and thirst induced by the defilement called craving. All night long the victim represses the smoke and heat, which in the morning becomes fire, and then blazes hot inside him all day. If a person is obliged, throughout his entire life, to suppress the "smoke by night,"

which then becomes "fire by day," how can he ever find peace and coolness? Just visualize his condition. He endures suffering and torment all his life, from birth up until he is placed in the coffin, simply for lack of the insight that could completely extinguish that fire and smoke. To treat such a complaint one has to make use of the knowledge provided by the Buddha. The smoke and fire diminish in proportion to one's degree of understanding of the true nature of things.

As we have said, Buddhism has a number of different aspects or sides. Just as the same mountain when viewed from a different direction presents a different appearance, so different benefits are derived from Buddhism according to how one looks at it. Even Buddhism has its origins in fear - not the foolish fear of an ignorant person who kneels and makes obeisance to idols or strange phenomena, but a higher kind of fear, the fear of perhaps never attaining liberation from the oppression of birth, aging, pain, and death, from the various forms of suffering we experience. The real Buddhism is not books, not manuals, not word for word repetition from the Tipitaka, nor is it rites and rituals. These are not the real Buddhism. The real Buddhism is the practice by way of body, speech, and mind that will destroy the defilements, in part or completely. One need not have anything to do with books or manuals. One ought not to rely on rites and rituals, nor anything else external, including spirits and celestial beings. Rather one must be directly concerned with bodily action, speech and

thought. That is, one must persevere in one's efforts to control and eliminate the defilements so that clear insight can arise. One will then be automatically capable of acting appropriately, and will be free from suffering from that moment right up to the end.

This is the real Buddhism. This is what we have to understand. Let us not go foolishly grasping at the tumour that is obscuring Buddhism, taking it for the real thing.

II THE TRUE NATURE OF THINGS

The word "religion" has a broader meaning than the word "morality." Morality has to do with behaviour and happiness, and is basically the same the world over. A religion is a system of practice of a high order. The ways of practice advocated by the various religions differ greatly.

Morality makes us good people, behaving in accordance with the general principles of community life and in such a way as to cause no distress to ourselves or others. But though a person may be thoroughly moral, he may still be far from free from the suffering attendant on birth, aging, pain, and death, still not free from oppression by the mental defilements. Morality stops well short of the elimination of craving, aversion, and delusion, so cannot do away with suffering. Religion, particularly Buddhism, goes much further than this. It aims directly at the complete elimination of the defilements, that is, it aims at extinguishing the various kinds of suffering attendant on birth, aging, pain, and death. This indicates how religion differs from mere morality, and how much further Buddhism goes than the moral systems of the world in general. Having understood this, we can now turn our attention to Buddhism itself.

Buddhism is a system designed to bring a technical knowledge inseparable from its technique of practice, an organized practical understanding of the true nature of things or "what is what." If you keep this definition in mind, you should have no difficulty understanding Buddhism.

Examine yourself and see whether or not you know "what is what." Even if you know what you are yourself, what life is, what work, duty, livelihood, money, possessions, honour, and fame are, would you dare to claim that you knew everything? If we really knew "what is what," we would never act inappropriately; and if we always acted appropriately, it is a certainty that we would never be subject to suffering. As it is, we are ignorant of the true nature of things, so we behave more or less inappropriately, and suffering results accordingly. Buddhist practice is designed to teach us how things really are. To know this in all clarity is to attain the Fruit of the Path, perhaps even the final Fruit, Nirvana, because this very knowledge is what destroys the defilements.

When we come to know "what is what," or the true nature of things, disenchantment with things takes the place of fascination, and deliverance from suffering comes about automatically. At the moment, we are practising at a stage where we still do not know what things are really like, in particular, at the stage of not yet realizing that all things are impermanent and do not have individual selves. We don't as yet

realize that life, all the things that we become infatuated with, like, desire and rejoice over, is impermanent, unsatisfactory and not a permanent self. It is for this reason that we become infatuated with those things, liking them, desiring them, rejoicing over them, grasping at them and clinging to them. When, by following the Buddhist method, we come to know things *aright*, to see clearly that they are all impermanent, unsatisfactory and not selves, that there is really nothing about things that might make it worth attaching ourselves to them, then there will immediately come about a slipping free from the controlling power of those things.

Essentially the Buddha's teaching as we have it in the Tipitaka is nothing but the knowledge of "what is what" or the true nature of things - just that. Do keep to this definition. It is an adequate one and it is well to bear it in mind while one is in the course of practising. We shall now demonstrate the validity of this definition by considering as an example the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth, which points out that all things are suffering (all things cause suffering), tells us precisely what things are like. But we fail to realize that all things are a source of suffering and so we desire those things. If we recognized them as a source of suffering, not worth desiring, not worth grasping at and clinging to, not worth at-

taching ourselves to, we would be sure not to desire them. The Second Noble Truth points out that desire is the cause of suffering. People still don't know, don't see, don't understand, that desires are the cause of suffering. They all desire this, that, and the other, simply because they don't understand the nature of desire. The Third Noble Truth points out that deliverance, freedom from suffering, Nirvana, consists in the complete extinguishing of desire. People don't realize at all that Nirvana is something that may be attained at any time or place, that it can be arrived at just as soon as desire has been completely extinguished. So, not knowing the facts of life, people are not interested in extinguishing desire. They are not interested in Nirvana because they don't know what it is.

The Fourth Noble Truth is called the Path and constitutes the method for extinguishing desire. No one understands it as a method for extinguishing desire. No one is interested in the desire extinguishing Noble Eightfold Path. People don't recognize it as their very point of support, their foothold something which they ought to be most actively reinforcing. They are not interested in the Buddha's Noble Path, which happens to be the most excellent and precious thing in the entire mass of human knowledge, in this world or any other. This is a most horrifying piece of ignorance. We can see, then that the Four Noble Truths are information telling us clearly just "what is what." We are told that if we play with desire, it will give rise to

suffering, and yet we insist on playing with it until we are brim full of suffering. This is foolishness. Not really knowing "what is what" or the true nature of things, we act inappropriately in every way. Our actions are appropriate all too rarely. They are usually "appropriate" only in terms of the values of people subject to craving, who would say that if one gets what one wants, the action must have been justified. But spiritually speaking, that action is unjustifiable.

Now we shall have a look at a stanza from the texts which sums up the essence of Buddhism, namely the words spoken by the Bhikkhu Assaji when he met Sariputta before the latter's ordination. Sariputta asked to be told the essence of Buddhism in as few words as possible. Assaji answered: "All phenomena that arise do so as a result of causes. The Perfected One has shown what the causes are, and also how all phenomena may be brought to an end by eliminating those causes. This is what the Great Master teaches." He said in effect: Every thing has causes that combine to produce it. It can not be eliminated unless those causes have been eliminated first. This is a word of guidance warning us not to regard anything as a permanent self. There is nothing permanent. There are only effects arising out of causes, developing by virtue of causes, and due to cease with the cessation of those causes. All phenomena are merely products of causes. The world is just a perpetual flux of natural forces incessantly interacting and changing. Buddhism points out to us that all things are devoid of any self entity. They are

just a perpetual flux of change, which is inherently unsatisfactory because of the lack of freedom. the subjection to causality. This unsatisfactoriness will be brought to an end as soon as the process stops; and the process will stop as soon as the causes are eliminated so that there is no more interacting. This is a most profound account of "what is what" or the nature of things, such as only an enlightened individual could give. It is the heart of Buddhism. It tells us that all things are just appearances and that we should not be fooled into liking or disliking them. Rendering the mind truly free involves escaping completely from the causal chain by utterly eliminating the causes. In this way, the unsatisfactory condition which results from liking and disliking will be brought to an end.

Let us now examine the Buddha's intention in becoming an ascetic. What motivated him to become a bhikkhu? This is clearly indicated in one of his discourses, in which he says that he left home and became a bhikkhu in order to answer the question: "What is the Good?" The word "good" (Kusala), as used here by the Buddha, refers to skillfulness, to absolutely right knowledge. He wanted to know in particular what is suffering, what is the cause of suffering, what is freedom from suffering. To attain perfect and right knowledge is the ultimate in skill. The aim of Buddhism is nothing other than this perfection of knowledge of "what is what" or the true nature of things.

Another important Buddhist teaching is that of the Three Characteristics, namely impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*), and non-selfhood (*anatta*). Not to know this teaching is not to know Buddhism. It points out to us that all things are impermanent (*anicca*), all things are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and all things are not selves (*anatta*).

In saying that all things are impermanent we mean that all things change perpetually, there being no entity or self that remains unchanged for even an instant. That all things are unsatisfactory means that all things have inherent in themselves the property of conducing to suffering and torment. They are inherently unlikable and disenchanting. That they are not selves is to say that in nothing whatsoever is there any entity which we might have a right to regard as its "self" (myself) or to call "its own" (mine.) If we grasp at things and cling to things, the result is bound to be suffering. Things are more dangerous than fire because we can at least see a fire blazing away and so don't go too close to it, whereas all things are a fire we can't see. Consequently we go about voluntarily picking up handfuls of fire, which is invariably painful. This teaching tells us what things are like in terms of the Three Characteristics. Clearly Buddhism is simply an organized practical system designed to show us "what is what."

We have seen that we have to know the nature of things. We also have to know how to practise in order to fit in with the nature of things. There is another teaching in the texts, known

as the Chief of all Teachings. It consists of three brief points: "Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind". This is the principle of the practice. Knowing all things as impermanent, worthless, and not our property, and so not worth clinging to, not worth becoming infatuated with, we have to act appropriately and cautiously with respect to them, and that is to avoid evil. It implies not to break with accepted moral standards and to give up excessive craving and attachment. On the other hand, one is to do good, good as has come to be understood by wise people. These two are simply stages in morality. The third, which tells us to make the mind completely pure of every kind of contaminating element, is straight Buddhism. It tells us to make the mind free. As long as the mind is not yet free from domination by things, it cannot be a clean, pure mind. Mental freedom must come from the most profound knowledge of the "what is what." As long as one lacks this knowledge, one is bound to go on mindlessly liking or disliking things in one way or another. As long as one cannot remain unmoved by things, one can hardly be called free. Basically we human beings are subject to just two kinds of emotional states: liking and disliking (which correspond to pleasant and unpleasant mental feeling). We fall slaves to our moods and have no real freedom simply because we don't know the true nature of moods or "what is what." Liking has the characteristic of seizing on things and taking them over; disliking has the characteristic of pushing things away and getting rid of them. As long as these two kinds

of emotional states exist, the mind is not yet free. As long as it is still carelessly liking and disliking this, that, and the other, there is no way it can be purified and freed from the tyranny of things. For this very reason, this highest teaching of Buddhism condemns grasping and clinging to things attractive and repulsive, ultimately condemning even attachment to good and evil. When the mind has been purified of these two emotional reactions, it will become independent of things.

Other religions would have us simply avoid evil and grasp at goodness. They have us grasp at and become attached to goodness, even including the epitome of goodness, namely God. Buddhism goes much further, condemning attachment to anything at all. This attachment to goodness is right practice at the intermediate level, but it just can't take us to the highest level no matter what we do. At the lowest level we avoid evil, at the intermediate level we do our utmost to do good, while at the highest level we make the mind float high above the domination of both good and evil. The condition of attachment to the fruits of goodness is not yet complete liberation from suffering, because, while an evil person suffers in a way befitting evil persons, a good person suffers also, in a way befitting good persons. Being good, one experiences the kind of suffering appropriate to good human beings. A good celestial being experiences the suffering appropriate to celestial beings, and even a god or Brahma experiences

the suffering appropriate to gods. But complete freedom from all suffering will come only when one has broken free and transcended even that which we call goodness to become an Ariyan, one who has transcended the worldly condition, and ultimately to become a fully perfected individual, an Arahant,

Now as we have seen, Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, and a Buddhist is one who practises according to the teaching of the Enlightened One. With regard to what was he enlightened? He simply knew the nature of all things. Buddhism, then is the teaching that tells us the truth about "what things are really like" or "what is what". It is up to us to practise until we have come to know that truth for ourselves. We may be sure that once that perfect knowledge has been attained, craving will be completely destroyed by it, because ignorance will cease to be in the very same moment that knowledge arises. Every aspect of Buddhist practice is designed to bring knowledge. Your whole purpose in setting your mind on the way of practice that will penetrate to Buddha - Dhamma is simply to gain knowledge. Only, let it be right knowledge, knowledge attained through clear insight, not worldly knowledge, partial knowledge, halfway knowledge, which for example clumsily mistakes bad for good, and a source of suffering for a source of happiness. Do try your utmost to look at things in terms of suffering, and so come to know, gradually, step by step. Knowledge so gained

will be Buddhist knowledge based on sound Buddhist principles.

Studying by this method, even a woodcutter without book-learning will be able to penetrate to the essence of Buddhism, while a religious scholar with several degrees, who is completely absorbed in studying the Tipitaka but doesn't look at things from this point of view, may not penetrate the teaching at all. Those of us who have some intelligence should be capable of investigating and examining things and coming to know their true nature. Each thing we come across we must study, in order to understand clearly its true nature. And we must understand the nature and the source of the suffering which it produces, and which sets us alight and scorches us. To establish mindfulness, to watch and wait, to examine in the manner described the suffering that comes to one - this is the very best way to penetrate to Buddha-Dhamma. It is infinitely better than learning it from the Tipitaka. Busily studying Dhamma in the Tipitaka from the linguistic or literary viewpoint is no way to come to know the true nature of things. Of course the Tipitaka is full of explanations as to the nature of things; but the trouble is that people listen to it in the manner of parrots or talking myna birds, repeating later what they have been able to memorize. They themselves are incapable of penetrating to the true nature of things. If instead they would do some introspection and discover for themselves the facts of mental life, find out first hand the properties of the mental defilements, of

suffering, of nature, in other words of all the things in which they are involved, they would then be able to penetrate to the real Buddha-Dhamma. Though a person may never have seen or even heard of the Tipitaka, if he carries out a detailed investigation every time suffering arises and scorches his mind he can be said to be studying the Tipitaka directly, and far more correctly than people actually in the process of reading it. These may be just caressing the books of the Tipitaka every day without having any knowledge of the immortal Dhamma, the teaching contained within them. Likewise, we have ourselves, we make use of ourselves, we train ourselves, and we do things connected with ourselves every day, without knowing anything about ourselves, without being able to handle adequately problems concerning ourselves. We are still very definitely subject to suffering, and craving is still present to produce more and more suffering every day as we grow older, all simply because we don't know ourselves. We still don't know the mental life we live. To get to know the Tipitaka and the profound things hidden within it is most difficult. Let us rather set about studying Buddha-Dhamma by getting to know our own true nature. Let us get to know all the things which make up this very body and mind. Let us learn from this life: life which is spinning on in the cycle of desiring, acting on the desires, and reaping the results of the action, which then nourish the will to desire again, and so on, over and over incessantly; life which is obliged to go spinning on in the circle of samsara, that sea of suffering, purely and simply because of ignorance as to the true nature of things

or "what is what."

Summing up, Buddhism is an organized practical system designed to reveal to us the "what is what." Once we have seen things as they really are, we no longer need anyone to teach or guide us. We can carry on practising by ourselves. One progresses along the Ariyan Path just as rapidly as one eliminates the defilements and gives up inappropriate action. Ultimately one will attain to the best thing possible for a human being, what we call the Fruit of the Path, Nirvana. This one can do by oneself simply by means of coming to know the ultimate sense of the "what is what."

III

THREE UNIVERSAL CHARACTERISTICS

We shall now discuss in detail the three characteristics common to all things, namely impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (suffering), and non-selfhood.

All things whatsoever have the property of changing incessantly; they are unstable. All things whatsoever have the characteristic of unsatisfactoriness; seeing them evokes disillusionment and disenchantment in anyone having clear insight into their nature. Nothing whatsoever is such that we are justified in regarding it as "mine." To our normally imperfect vision, things appear as selves; but as soon as our vision becomes clear, unobscured, and accurate, we realize that there is no self-entity present in any of them.

These three characteristics were the aspect of the teaching which the Buddha stressed more than any other. The entire teaching when summed up amounts simply to insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood. Sometimes they are mentioned explicitly, sometimes they are expressed in other terms, but fundamentally they aim at demonstrating the same single truth. The impermanence of all

things had been taught before the time of the Buddha, but it had not been expounded as profoundly as it was by the Buddha. Unsatisfactoriness, likewise, had been taught but not in its full depth. It had not been treated from the point of view of causation, and no directions had been given as to how it could be thoroughly and completely done away with. Earlier teachers had not understood its true nature as did the Buddha in his enlightenment. As for non-selfhood in the ultimate sense, this is taught only in Buddhism. This doctrine tells us that a person who has a complete understanding of the "what is what" or the nature of things will know that nothing whatsoever is a self or belongs to a self. This was taught only by the Buddha, who truly had a complete and thorough understanding of the "what is what" or the true nature of things.

The ways of practice designed to bring about insight into these three characteristics are numerous; but one single noteworthy fact is bound to be revealed once that perfect insight has been attained, namely the fact that nothing is worth grasping at or clinging to. There is nothing that we should want to get, to have, to be. In short: Nothing is worth getting. Nothing is worth being. Only when one has come to perceive that having anything or being anything is a delusion, a deception, a mirage, and that nothing at all is worth getting or worth being, has one achieved true insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood. A man may have been reciting the formula: "anicca, dukkha, anatta" morning and

evening hundreds and thousands of times and yet not be able to perceive these characteristics. It is just not in their nature to be perceptible through hearing or reciting.

Now intuitive insight, or what we call "seeing Dhamma," is not by any means the same thing as rational thinking. One will never come to see Dhamma by means of rational thinking. Intuitive insight can be gained only by means of a true inner realization. For instance, suppose we are examining a situation where we had thoughtlessly become quite wrapped up in something which later caused us suffering. If, on looking closely at the actual course of events, we become genuinely fed up, disillusioned, and disenchanted with that thing, we can be said to have seen Dhamma, or to have gained clear insight. This clear insight may develop in time until it is perfected, and had the power to bring liberation from all things. If a person recites aloud: "anicca, dukkha, anatta" or examines these characteristics day and night without ever becoming disenchanted with things, without ever losing the desire to get things or to be something, or the desire to cling to things, that person has not yet attained to insight. In short, then, insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood amounts to realizing that nothing is worth getting or worth being.

There is a word in Buddhism that covers this completely, the word *sunyata*, or emptiness, emptiness of

selfhood, emptiness of any essence that we might have a right to cling to with all our might as being "mine." Observation, which leads to the insight that all things are devoid of any essence that is worth clinging to is the real core of the religion. It is the key to Buddhist practice. When we have come to know clearly that everything of every kind is devoid of selfhood we can be said to know Buddha-Dhamma in its entirety. The single phrase "empty of self" sums up the words "impermanent (anicca), unsatisfactory (dukkha) and not self (anatta)." When something is perpetually changing, devoid of any permanent unchanging element, it can also be said to be empty. When it is seen to be overflowing with the property of inducing disillusionment, it can be described as empty of any entity that we might have a right to cling to. And when we discover on examination that it possesses no stable component whatever that could be its "self," that it is simply nature, changing and fluctuating in accordance with the laws of nature, which we have no right to call a self, then it can be described as empty of self. As soon as any individual has come to perceive the emptiness of all things, there arises in him the realization that it is not worth getting or being any of those things. This feeling of not desiring to get or to be has the power to protect one from falling slave to the defilements or to any kind of emotional involvement. Once an individual has attained this condition, he is

thenceforth incapable of any unwholesome state of mind. He does not become carried away by or involved in anything. He does not become in any way attracted or seduced by anything. His mind knows permanent liberty and independence, and is free from suffering.

The statement "Nothing is worth getting or being" is to be understood in a rather special sense. The words "get" and "be" refer here to getting and being with a deluded mind, with a mind that grasps and clings wholly and entirely. It is not suggested that one could live without having or being anything at all. Normally there are certain things one can't do without. One needs property, children, wife, garden, fields, and so on. One is to be good, one can't help being a winner or a loser, or having some status or other. One can't help being something or other. Why then are we taught to regard things as not worth getting or being? The answer is this: The concepts of getting and being are purely relative; they are worldly ideas based on ignorance. Speaking in terms of pure reality, or absolute truth, we cannot get or be anything at all. And why? Simply because both the person who is to do the getting and the thing that is to be got are impermanent, unsatisfactory (suffering), and nobody's property. But an individual who doesn't perceive this will naturally think "I am getting....., I have....., I am.....". We automatically think in these terms, and it is this very concept of getting and being that is the source of distress

and misery.

Getting and being represent a form of desire, namely the desire not to let the thing that one is in the process of getting or being disappear or slip away. Suffering arises from desire to have and desire to be, in short, from desire; and desire arises from failure to realize that all things are inherently undesirable. The false idea that things are desirable is present as an instinct right from babyhood and is the cause of desire. Consequent on the desire there come about results of one sort or another, which may or may not accord with the desire. If the desired result is obtained, there will arise a still greater desire. If the desired result is not obtained, there is bound to follow a struggling and striving until one way or another it is obtained. Keeping this up results in the vicious circle: action (karma), result, action, result, which is known as the Wheel of Samsara. Now this word *samsara* is not to be taken as referring to an endless cycle of one physical existence after another. In point of fact it refers to a vicious circle of three events: desire; action in keeping with the desire; effect resulting from that action; inability to stop desiring, having to desire once more; action; once again another effect; further augmenting of desire ... and so on endlessly. The Buddha called this the "Wheel" of *samsara* because it is an endless cycling on, a rolling on. It is because of this very circle that we

are obliged to endure suffering and torment. To succeed in breaking loose from this vicious circle is to attain freedom from all forms of suffering, in other words *Nirvana*. Regardless of whether a person is a pauper or a millionaire, a king or an emperor, a celestial being or a god, or anything at all, as long as he is caught up in this vicious circle, he is obliged to experience suffering and torment of one kind or another, in keeping with his desire. We can say then that this wheel of *samsara* is well and truly overloaded with suffering. For the rectifying of this situation morality is quite inadequate. To resolve the problem we have to depend on the highest principles of Dhamma.

We have seen that suffering has its origins in desire, which is just what the Buddha set down in the Second Noble Truth. Now there are three kinds of desire. The first kind is sensual desire, desiring and finding pleasure in things; in shapes and colours, sounds, scents, tastes, or tactile objects. The second kind is desire for becoming, desire to be this or that according to what one wants. The third kind is desire not to become, desire not to be this or that. That there are just these three kinds of desire is an absolute rule. Anyone is defied to challenge this rule and demonstrate the existence of a kind of desire other than these three.

Anyone can observe that wherever there is desire, there is distress too; and when we are forced to act on a

desire, we are bound to suffer again in accordance with the action. Having got the result, we are unable to put an end to our desire, so we carry right on desiring. The reason we are obliged to continue experiencing distress is that we are not yet free from desire, but are still slaves to it. Thus it can be said that an evil man does evil because he desires to do evil, and experiences the kind of suffering appropriate to the nature of an evil man; and that a good man desires to do good, and so is bound to experience another kind of suffering, a kind appropriate to the nature of a good man. But don't understand this as teaching us to give up doing good. It is simply teaching us to realize that there exist degrees of suffering so fine that the average man cannot detect them. We have to act on the Buddha's advice: if we are to break free from suffering completely, simply doing good is not sufficient. It is necessary to do things beyond and above the doing of good, things that will serve to free the mind from the condition of serfdom and slavery to desire of any kind. This is the quintessence of the Buddha's teaching. It cannot be bettered or equaled by any other religion in the world, so ought to be carefully remembered. To succeed in overcoming these three forms of desire is to attain complete liberation from suffering.

How can we eliminate desire, extinguish it, cut it out at its roots and put an end to it for good? The answer to this is simple: observe and take note of impermanence,

unsatisfactoriness (suffering) and non-selfhood until we come to see that there is nothing worth desiring. What is there worth getting or being? What is there such that when a person has got it or has become it, it fails to give rise to some kind of suffering? Ask yourself this question: What is there that you can get or be that will not bring distress and anxiety? Think it over. Does having a wife and children lead to lightheartedness and freedom or does it bring all sorts of responsibilities? Is the gaining of high position and title the gaining of peace and calm or is it the gaining of heavy obligation? Looking at things in this way, we readily see that these things always bring only burdens and responsibility. And why? Everything whatsoever is a burden simply by virtue of its characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood. Having got something, we have to see to it that it stays with us, is as we wish it to be, or is of benefit to us. But that thing is by nature impermanent, unsatisfactory, and nobody's property. It cannot conform to the aims and objectives of anyone. It will only change as is its nature. All our efforts, then, are an attempt to oppose and withstand the law of change; and life, as an attempt to make things conform to our wishes, is fraught with difficulty and suffering.

There exists a technique for coming to realize that nothing at all is worth getting or being. It consists in examining things deeply enough to discover that in the

presence of craving one has feelings of a certain kind towards getting and being; and that when desire has given way completely to insight into the true nature of things, one's attitude towards getting and being is rather different. As an easy example let us consider eating. One man's eating accompanied by craving and desire for delicious tastes must have certain features that distinguish it from another man's eating, which is accompanied not by desire, but by clear comprehension, or insight into the true nature of things. Their eating manners must differ, their feelings while eating must differ, and so must the results arising from their eating.

Now what we have to realize is that one can still eat food even though one lacks all craving for delicious tastes. The Buddha and Arahants, individuals devoid of craving, were still able to do things and be things. They were still able to do work, far more in fact than any of us can with all our desires. What was the power by virtue of which they did it? What corresponded to the power of craving, of desiring to be this or that, by virtue of which we do things? The answer is that they did it by the power of insight, clear and thorough knowledge of "what is what" or the true nature of things. We by contrast are motivated by desire, with the result that we are, unlike them, continually subject to suffering. They did not desire to get or possess anything, and as a result others were benefited thanks to their benevolence. Their wisdom told them to make it known

rather than remain indifferent, and so they were able to pass the teaching on to us.

Freedom from craving brings many incidental benefits. A body and mind freed from craving can look for and partake of food motivated by intelligent discrimination and not, as before; by desire. If we wish to break free from suffering, following the footsteps of the Buddha and the Arahants, then we must train ourselves to act with discrimination rather than with craving. If you are a student, then learn how to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, and verify that studying is the very best thing for you to be doing. If you have a job of some kind, then learn how to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, and satisfy yourself that that job is the best thing for you to be doing, and of benefit to all concerned. Then do it well, and with all the coolness and equanimity your insight provides. If, in doing something, we are motivated by desire, then we worry while doing it and we worry when we have finished; but if we do it with the guiding power of discrimination, we shall not be worried at all. This is the difference it makes.

It is essential, then, that we be always aware that, in reality, all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not selves, that is, that they are not worth getting or being. If we are to become involved in them, then let us do so with discrimination, and our actions will not be contaminated with

desire. If we act wisely, we shall be free of suffering right from beginning to end. The mind will not blindly grasp at and cling to things as worth getting and being. We shall be sure to act with wakefulness, and be able to proceed in accordance with tradition and custom, or in accordance with the law. For example, though we may own land and property, we need not necessarily have any greedy feelings about them. We need not cling to those things to the extent that they become a burden, weighing down and tormenting the mind. The law is bound to see to it that our piece of land remains in our possession. We don't need to suffer worry and anxiety about it. It isn't going to slip through our fingers and disappear. Even if someone comes along and snatches it from us, we can surely still resist and protect it intelligently. We can resist without becoming angry, without letting ourselves become heated with the flame of hatred. We can depend on the law and do our resisting without any need to experience suffering. Certainly we ought to watch over our property; but if it should in fact slip out of our grip, then becoming emotional about it won't help matters at all. All things are impermanent, perpetually changing. Realizing this, we need not become upset about anything.

"Being" is the same. There is no need to cling to one's state of being this or that, because in reality there is no satisfactory condition at all. All conditions bring about

suffering of one kind or another. There is a very simple technique, which we must have a look at later, known as *vipassana*, the direct practice of Dhamma. It consists of close introspection, which reveals that there is nothing worth being, or that there is really no satisfactory state of being at all. Have a look at this question yourself; see if you can discover any satisfactory condition or state of being. Being a son? a parent? husband? wife? master? servant? Is any of these agreeable? Even being the man with the advantage, the one with the upper hand, the winner—is that agreeable? Is the condition of a human being agreeable? Even the condition of a celestial being or a god—would that be agreeable? When you have really come to know the "what is what," you find that nothing whatsoever is in any way agreeable. We are making do with mindlessly getting and being. But why should we go risking life and limb by getting and being blindly, always acting on desire? It behoves us to understand things and live wisely, involving ourselves in things in such a way that they cause a minimum of suffering, or ideally, none at all.

Here is another point: we must bring to our fellow men, our friends, and particularly our relatives and those close to us, the understanding that this is how things are, so that they may have the same right view as we have. There will then be no upsets in the family, the town, the country, and ultimately in the whole world. Each individual

mind will be immune to desire, neither grasping at nor becoming wrapped up in anything or anyone. Instead everyone's life will be guided by insight, by the everpresent, unobscured vision that there is in reality nothing that we can grasp at and cling to. Everyone will come to realize that all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of any self-entity, that none of them are worth becoming infatuated with. It is up to us to have the sense to give them up, to have right views, in keeping with the Buddha's teaching. A person who has done this is fit to be called a true Buddhist. Though he may never have been ordained nor even taken the precepts, he will have really and truly penetrated to Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. His mind will be identical with that of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. It will be uncontaminated, enlightened, and tranquil, simply by virtue of not grasping at anything as worth getting or worth being. So a person can readily become a genuine, full-fledged Buddhist simply by means of this technique of being observant, perceiving impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and nonselfhood until he comes to realize that there is nothing worth getting or being.

The lowest forms of evil originate in and are powered by desire to get and to be; milder forms of evil consist of actions less strongly motivated by desire; and all goodness consists of action based on the finest, most tenuous sort

of desire, the desire to get or to be, on a good level. Even in its highest forms, good is based on desire which, however, is so fine and tenuous that people don't consider it in any way a bad thing. The fact is, however, that good action can never bring complete freedom from suffering. A person who has become completely free from desire, that is to say an *Arahant*, is one who has ceased acting on desire and has become incapable of doing evil. His actions lie outside the categories of good and evil. His mind is free and has transcended the limitations of good and evil. Thus he is completely free of suffering.

This is a fundamental principle of Buddhism. Whether or not we are able to do it or wish to do it, this is the way to liberation from suffering. Today we may not yet want it; some day we are bound to want it. When we have completely given up evil and have done good to our utmost, the mind will still be weighed down with various kinds of attenuated desire, and there is no known way of getting rid of them other than by striving to go beyond the power of desire, to go beyond the desire to get or be anything, bad or good. If there is to be *Nirvana*, freedom from suffering of every kind, there has to be absolute and complete absence of desire.

In short, to know "what is what" in the ultimate sense is to see everything as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and

devoid of selfhood. When we really know this, the mind comes to see things in such a way that it does not cling to get or to be anything. But if we have to become involved in things in the ways known as "having" and "being," then we become involved intelligently, motivated by insight, and not by desire. Acting thus, we remain free from suffering.

IV GRASPING AND CLINGING

How can we get away from and become completely independent of things, all of which are transient, unsatisfactory, and devoid of selfhood? The answer is that we have to find out what is the cause of our desiring those things and clinging to them. Knowing that cause, we shall be in a position to eliminate clinging completely. Buddhists recognize four different kinds of clinging or attachment.

1) Sensual attachment (Kamupanana) is clinging to attractive and desirable sense objects. It is the attachment that we naturally develop for things we like and find satisfaction in: colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, tactile objects, or mental images, objects past, present, or future that arise in the mind, and either correspond to material objects in the world outside or within the body, or are just imaginings. We instinctively find pleasure, enchantment, delight in these six kinds of sense objects. They induce delight and enchantment in the mind perceiving them.

As soon as an individual is born, he comes to know

the taste of these six sense objects, and clings to them; and as time passes he becomes more and more firmly attached to them. Ordinary people are incapable of withdrawing from them, so they present a major problem. It is necessary to have a proper knowledge and understanding of these sense objects and to act appropriately with respect to them, otherwise clinging to them may lead to complete and utter dereliction. If we examine the case history of any person who has sunk into dereliction, we always find that it has come about through his clinging fast to some desirable sense object. Actually every single thing a human being does has its origin in sensuality. Whether we love, become angry, hate, feel envious, murder, or commit suicide, the ultimate cause must be some sense object. If we investigate what is it that drives human beings to work energetically, or to do anything at all for that matter, we find it is desire, desire to get things of one kind or another. People strive, study, and earn what money they can, and then go off in search of pleasure - in the form of colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile objects - which is what keeps them going. Even merit making in order to go to heaven has its origins simply in a wish based on sensuality. Taken together, all the trouble and chaos in the world has its origin in sensuality.

The danger of sensuality lies in the power of sensual attachment. For this reason the Buddha reckoned clinging

to sensuality as the primary form of attachment. It is a real world problem. Whether the world is to be completely destroyed, or whatever is to happen, is bound to depend on this very sensual clinging. It behoves us to examine ourselves to find out in what ways we are attached to sensuality and how firmly, and whether it is not perhaps within our power to give it up. Speaking in worldly terms, attachment to sensuality is a very good thing. It conduces to family love, to diligence and energy in the search for wealth and fame, and so on. But if looked at from the spiritual point of view, it is seen to be the secret entrance for suffering and torment. Spiritually speaking, attachment to sensuality is something to be kept under control. And if all suffering is to be eliminated, sensual attachment has to be done away with completely.

2) Attachment to opinions (Ditthupadana). Clinging to views and opinions is not difficult to detect and identify once we do a little introspection. Ever since we were born into the world, we have been receiving instruction and training, which has given rise to ideas and opinions. In speaking here of opinions, what we have in mind is the kind of ideas one hangs on to and refuses to let go of. To cling to one's own ideas and opinions is quite natural and is not normally condemned or disapproved of. But it is no less grave a danger than attachment to attractive and desirable objects. It can happen that preconceived ideas and opinions to which

we had always clung obstinately come to be destroyed. For this reason it is necessary that we continually amend our views, making them progressively more correct, better, higher, changing false views into views that are closer and closer to the truth, and ultimately into the kind of views that incorporate the Four Noble Truths.

Obstinate and stubborn opinions have various origins, but in the main they are bound up with customs, traditions, ceremonies and religious doctrines. Stubborn personal convictions are not a matter of great importance. They are far less numerous than convictions stemming from long held popular traditions and ceremonies. Adherence to views is based on ignorance. Lacking knowledge, we develop our own personal views on things, based on our own original stupidity. For instance, we are convinced that things are desirable and worth clinging to, that they really endure, are worthwhile and are selves, instead of perceiving that they are just a delusion and a deception, transient, worthless, and devoid of selfhood. Once we have come to have certain ideas about something, we naturally don't like to admit later on that we were mistaken. Even though we may occasionally see that we are wrong, we simply refuse to admit it. Obstinacy of this sort is to be considered a major obstacle to progress, rendering us incapable of changing for the better, incapable of modifying false religious convictions and other longstanding beliefs. This is likely to be a problem

for people who hold to naive doctrines. Even though they may later come to see them as naive, they refuse to change on the grounds that their parents, grandparents, and ancestors all held those same views. Or if they are not really interested in correcting and improving themselves, they may simply brush away any arguments against their old ideas with the remark that this is what they have always believed. For these very reasons, attachment to opinions is to be considered a dangerous defilement, a major danger, which, if we are to better ourselves at all, we ought to make all efforts to eliminate.

3) Attachment to rites and rituals (Silabbatupadana).

This refers to clinging to meaningless traditional practices that have been thoughtlessly handed down, practices which people choose to regard as sacred and not to be changed under any circumstances. In Thailand there is no less of this sort of thing than in other places. There are beliefs involving amulets, magical artifacts, and all manner of secret procedures. There exist, for instance, the beliefs that on rising from sleep one must pronounce a mystical formula over water and then wash one's face in it, that before relieving nature one must turn and face this and that point of the compass, and that before one partakes of food or goes to sleep there have to be other rituals. There are beliefs in spirits and celestial beings, in sacred trees and all manner of magical objects. This sort of thing is completely

irrational. People just don't think rationally; they simply cling to the established pattern. They have always done it that way and they just refuse to change. Many people professing to be Buddhists cling to these beliefs as well and so have it both ways; and this even includes some who call themselves bhikkhus, disciples of the Buddha. Religious doctrines based on belief in God, angels, and sacred objects are particularly prone to these kinds of views; there is no reason why we Buddhists should not be completely free of this sort of thing.

The reason we have to be free of such views is that if we practise any aspect of Dhamma unaware of its original purpose, unconscious of the rationale of it, the result is bound to be the foolish, naive assumption that it is something magical. Thus we find people taking upon themselves the moral precepts or practising Dhamma, purely and simply to conform with the accepted pattern, the traditional ceremony, just to follow the example that has been handed down. They know nothing of the rationale of these things, doing them just out of force of habit. Such firmly established clinging is hard to correct. This is what is meant by thoughtless attachment to traditional practices. Insight meditation or tranquillity meditation as practised nowadays, if carried out without any knowledge of the rhyme and reason and the real objectives of it, is bound to be

motivated by grasping and clinging, misdirected, and just some kind of foolishness. And even the taking of the Precepts, five, eight, or ten, or however many, if done in the belief that one will thereby become a magical, supernatural, holy individual possessing psychic or other powers, becomes just misdirected routine, motivated simply by attachment to rite and ritual.

It is necessary, then, that we be very cautious. Buddhist practice must have a sound foundation in thought and understanding and desire to destroy the defilements. Otherwise it will be just foolishness; it will be misdirected, irrational and just a waste of time.

4) Attachment to the idea of selfhood (Attavadupadana).

This belief in selfhood is something important and also something extremely well concealed. Any living creature is always bound to have the wrong idea of "me and mine." This is the primal instinct of living things and is the basis of all other instincts. For example, the instinct to seek food and eat it, the instinct to avoid danger, the instinct to procreate, and many others consist simply in the creature's instinctive awareness of and belief in its own selfhood. Convinced first of all of its own selfhood, it will naturally desire to avoid death, to search for food and nourish its body, to seek safety, and to propagate the species. A belief in selfhood is, then, universally present in all living things.

If it were not so, they could not continue to survive. At the same time, however, it is what causes suffering in the search for food and shelter, in the propagating of the species, or in any activity whatsoever. This is one reason why the Buddha taught that attachment to the self-idea is the root cause of all suffering. He summed it up very briefly by saying: "Things, if clung to, are suffering, or are a source of suffering." This attachment is the source and basis of life; at the same time it is the source and basis of suffering in all its forms. It was this very fact that the Buddha was referring to when he said that life is suffering; suffering is life. This means the body and mind (five aggregates) which are clung to are suffering. Knowledge of the source and basis of life and of suffering is to be considered the most profound and most penetrating knowledge, since it puts us in a position to eliminate suffering completely. This piece of knowledge can be claimed to be unique to Buddhism. It is not to be found in any other religion in the world.

The most efficacious way of dealing with attachment is to recognize it whenever it is present. This applies most particularly to attachment to the idea of selfhood, which is the very basis of life. It is something that comes into existence of its own accord, establishing itself in us without our needing to be taught it. It is present as an instinct in children and the small offspring of animals right from birth. Baby animals such as kittens know how to assume a

defensive attitude, as we can see when we try to approach them. There is always that something, the "self" present in the mind, and consequently this attachment is bound to manifest. The only thing to do is to rein it in as much as possible until such time as one is well advanced in spiritual knowledge; in other words, to employ Buddhist principles until this instinct has been overcome and completely eliminated. As long as one is still an ordinary person, a worldling, this instinct remains unconquered. Only the highest of the Ariyans, the Arahants, has succeeded in defeating it. We must recognize this as a matter of no small importance; it is a major problem common to all living creatures. If we are to be real Buddhists, if we are to derive the full benefits from the teaching, it is up to us to set about overcoming this misconception. The suffering to which we are subject will diminish accordingly.

To know the truth about these things, which are of everyday concern to us, is to be regarded as one of the greatest boons, one of the greatest skills. Do give some thought to this matter of the four attachments, bearing in mind that nothing whatever is worth clinging to, that by the nature of things, nothing is worth getting or being. That we are completely enslaved by things is simply a result of these four kinds of attachment. It rests with us to examine and become thoroughly familiar with the highly dangerous and toxic nature of things. Their harmful nature is not

immediately evident as is the case with a blazing fire, weapons, or poison. They are well disguised as sweet, tasty, fragrant, alluring things, beautiful things, melodious things. Coming in these forms they are bound to be difficult to recognize and deal with. Consequently we have to make use of this knowledge the Buddha has equipped us with. We have to control this unskillful grasping and subdue it by the power of insight. Doing this, we shall be in a position to organize our life in such a way that it becomes free from suffering, free from even the smallest trace of suffering. We shall be capable of working and living peacefully in the world, of being undefiled, enlightened and tranquil.

Let us sum up. These four forms of attachment are the only problem that Buddhists or people who wish to know about Buddhism have to understand. The objective of living a holy life (*Brahmacariya*) in Buddhism is to enable the mind to give up unskillful grasping. You can find this teaching in every discourse in the texts which treat of the attainment of Arahantship. The expression used is "the mind freed from attachment." That is the ultimate. When the mind is free from attachment, there is nothing to bind it and make it a slave of the world. There is nothing to keep it spinning on in the cycle of birth and death, so the whole process comes to a stop, or rather, becomes world transcending, free from the world. The giving up of unskillful clinging is, then, the key to Buddhist practice.

V THE THREEFOLD TRAINING

In this chapter we shall examine the method to be used for eliminating clinging. The method is based on three practical steps, namely Morality, Concentration, and Insight, known collectively as the Threefold Training.

The first step is morality (*Sila*). Morality is simply suitable behaviour, behaviour that conforms with the generally accepted standards and causes no distress to other people or to oneself. It is coded in the form of five moral precepts, or eight, or ten, or 227, or in other ways. It is conducted by way of body and speech aimed at peace, convenience, and freedom from undersirable effects at the most basic level. It has to do with the members of a social group and the various pieces of property essential to living.

The second aspect of the threefold training is concentration (*Samadhi*). This consists in constraining the mind to remain in the condition most conducive to success in whatever one wishes to achieve. Just what is concentration? No doubt most of you have always understood concentration as implying a completely tranquil mind, as

steady and unmoving as a log of wood. But merely these two characteristics of being tranquil and steady are not the real meaning of Concentration. The basis for this statement is an utterance of the Buddha. He described the concentrated mind as fit for work (*kammaniya*), in a suitable condition for doing its job. Fit for work is the very best way to describe the properly concentrated mind.

The third aspect is the training in insight (*Panna*), the practice and drill that gives rise to the full measure of right knowledge and understanding of the true nature of all things. Normally we are incapable of knowing anything at all in its true nature. Mostly we either stick to our own ideas or go along with popular opinion, so that what we see is not the truth at all. It is for this reason that Buddhist practice includes this training in insight, the last aspect of the threefold training, designed to give rise to full understanding of and insight into the true nature of things.

In the religious context, understanding and insight are not by any means the same. Understanding depends to some extent on the use of reasoning, on rational intellection. Insight goes further than that. An object known by insight has been absorbed; it has been penetrated to and confronted face to face; the mind has become thoroughly absorbed in it through examination and investigation so sustained that there has arisen a non-rational but genuine

and heartfelt disenchantment with that thing and a complete lack of emotional involvement in it. Consequently the Buddhist training in insight does not refer to intellectual understanding of the kind used in present day academic and scholarly circles, where each individual can have his own particular kind of truth. Buddhist insight must be intuitive insight, clear and immediate, the result of having penetrated to the object by one means or another, until it has made a definite and indelible impression on the mind. For this reason the objects of scrutiny in insight training must be things that one comes into contact with in the course of everyday living; or at least they must be things of sufficient importance to render the mind genuinely fed up and disenchanted with them as transient, unsatisfactory, and not selves. However much we think rationally, evaluating the characteristics of transience, unsatisfactoriness and non-selfhood, nothing results but intellectual understanding. There is no way it can give rise to disillusionment and disenchantment with worldly things. It must be understood that the condition of disenchantment replaces that of desiring the formerly infatuatingly attractive object, and that this in itself constitutes the insight. It is a fact of nature that the presence of genuine, clear insight implies the presence of genuine disenchantment. It is impossible that the process should stop short at the point of clear insight. Disenchantment displaces desire for the object, and is bound to arise

immediately.

Training in morality is simply elementary preparatory practice, which enables us to live happily and helps stabilize the mind. Morality yields various benefits, the most important being the preparing of the way for concentration. Other advantages, such as conducing to happiness or to rebirth as a celestial being, were not considered by the Buddha to be the direct aims of morality. He regarded morality as primarily a means of inducing and developing concentration. As long as things continue to disturb the mind, it can never become concentrated.

Training in concentration consists in developing the ability to control this mind of ours, to make use of it, to make it do its job to the best advantage. Morality is good behaviour in respect of body and speech; concentration amounts to good behaviour in respect of the mind, and is the fruit of thorough mental training and discipline. The concentrated mind is devoid of all bad, defiling thoughts and does not wander off the object. It is in a fit condition to do its job.

Even in ordinary worldly situations, concentration is always a necessity. No matter what we are engaged in, we can hardly do it successfully unless the mind is concentrated. For this reason the Buddha counted concentration as one of the marks of a great man.

Regardless of whether a man is to be successful in worldly or in spiritual things, the faculty of concentration is absolutely indispensable. Take even a schoolboy. If he lacks concentration, how can he do arithmetic? The sort of concentration involved in doing arithmetic is natural concentration, and is only poorly developed. Concentration as a basic element in Buddhist practice, which is what we are discussing here, is concentration that has been trained and raised to a higher pitch than can develop naturally. Consequently, when the mind has been trained successfully, it comes to have a great many very special abilities, powers, and attributes. A person who has managed to derive these benefits from concentration can be said to have moved up a step towards knowing the secrets of nature. He knows how to control the mind, and thus has abilities not possessed by the average person. The perfection of morality is an ordinary human ability. Even if someone makes a display of morality, it is never a superhuman display. On the other hand the attainment of deep concentration was classed by the Buddha as a superhuman ability, which the bhikkhus were never to make a display of. Anyone who did show off this ability was considered no longer a good bhikkhu, or even no longer a bhikkhu at all.

To attain concentration necessitates making sacrifices. We have to put up with varying degrees of hardship, to train and practise, until we have the degree of

concentration appropriate to our abilities. Ultimately we shall gain much better results in our work than can the average man, simply because we have better tools at our disposal. So do take an interest in this matter of concentration and don't go regarding it as something foolish and old-fashioned. It is definitely something of the greatest importance, something worth making use of at all times, especially nowadays when the world seems to be spinning too fast and on the point of going up in flames. There is far more need for concentration now than there was in the time of the Buddha. Don't get the idea that it is just something for the people in temples, or for cranks.

Now we come to the connection between the training in concentration and the training in insight. The Buddha once said that when the mind is concentrated, it is in a position to see all things as they really are. When the mind is concentrated and fit for work, it will know all things in their true nature. It is a strange thing that the answer to any problem a person is trying to solve is usually already present, though concealed, in his very own mind. He is not aware of it, because it is still only subconscious; and as long as he is set on solving the problem, the solution will not come, simply because his mind at that time is not in a fit condition for solving problems. If, when setting about any mental work, a person develops right concentration, and insight that is, if he renders his mind fit for work, the solution

to his problem will come to light of its own accord. The moment the mind has become concentrated, the answers will just fall into place. But should the solution still fail to come, there exists another method for directing the mind to the examination of the problem, namely the practice of concentrated introspection referred to as the training in insight. On the day of his enlightenment the Buddha attained insight into the Law of Conditioned Origination, that is, he came to perceive the true nature of things or the "what is what" and the sequence in which they arise, as a result of being concentrated in the way we have just described. The Buddha has related the story in detail, but essentially it amounts to this: as soon as his mind was well concentrated, it was in a position to examine the problem.

It is just when the mind is quiet and cool, in a state of well-being, undisturbed, well concentrated and fresh, that some solution to a persistent problem is arrived at. Insight is always dependent on concentration though we may perhaps never have noticed the fact. Actually the Buddha demonstrated an association even more intimate than this between concentration and insight. He pointed out that concentration is indispensable for insight, and insight indispensable for concentration at a higher intensity than occurs naturally, requires the presence of understanding of certain characteristics of the mind. One must know in just which way the mind has to be controlled in order that

concentration may be induced. So the more insight a person has, the higher degree of concentration he will be capable of. Likewise an increase in concentration results in a corresponding increase in insight. Either one of the two factors promotes the other.

Insight implies unobscured vision and consequently disenchantment and boredom. It results in a backing away from all the things one has formerly been madly infatuated with. If one has insight, yet still goes rushing after things, madly craving for them, grasping at and clinging on to them, being infatuated with them, then it cannot be insight in the Buddhist sense. This stopping short and backing away is, of course, not a physical action. One doesn't actually pick things up and hurl them away or smash them to pieces, nor does one go running off to live in the forest. This is not what is meant. Here we are referring specifically to a mental stopping short and backing away, as a result of which the mind ceases to be a slave to things and becomes a free mind instead. This is what it is like when desire for things has given way to disenchantment. It isn't a matter of going and committing suicide, or going off to live as a hermit in the forest, or setting fire to everything. Outwardly one is as usual, behaving quite normally with respect to things. Inwardly, however, there is a difference. The mind is independent, free, no longer a slave to things. This is the virtue of insight. The Buddha called this effect

Deliverance, escape from slavery to things, in particular the things we like. Actually we are enslaved by the things we dislike too. We are enslaved insofar as we cannot help disliking them and are unable to remain unmoved by them. In disliking things, we are being active, we are becoming emotional about them. They manage to control us just as do the things we like, affecting each of us in a different way. So the expression "slavery to things" refers to the reactions of liking and disliking. All this shows that we can escape from slavery to things and become free by means of insight. The Buddha summed up this principle very briefly by saying: "Insight is the means by which we can purify ourselves." He did not specify morality or concentration as the means by which we could purify ourselves, but insight, which enables us to escape, which liberates us from things. Not freed from things, one is impure, tainted, infatuated, passionate. Once free, one is pure, spotless, enlightened, tranquil. This is the fruit of insight, the condition that results when insight has done its job completely.

Have a good look at this factor, insight, the third aspect of the threefold training. Get to know it, and you will come to regard it as the highest virtue. Buddhist insight is insight that results in backing away from things by completely destroying the four kinds of attachment. Those four attachments are ropes holding us fast; insight is the knife that can cut those bonds and set us free. With the four attachments gone, there is nothing left to bind us fast

to things.

Will these three modes of practice stand the test? Are they soundly based and suitable for all in practice? Do examine them. When you have another look at them you will see that these three factors do not conflict with any religious doctrine at all, assuming that the religion in question really aims at remedying the problem of human suffering. The Buddhist teaching does not conflict with any other religion, yet it has some things that no other religion has. In particular it has the practice of insight, which is the superlative technique for eliminating the four attachments. It liberates the mind, rendering it independent and incapable of becoming bound, enslaved, overpowered by anything whatsoever, including God in heaven, spirits, or celestial beings. No other religion is prepared to let the individual free himself completely, or be entirely self-reliant. We must be fully aware of this principle of self-reliance, which is a key feature of Buddhism.

As soon as we see that Buddhism has everything that any other religion has and also several things that none of them have, we realize that Buddhism is for everyone. Buddhism is a universal religion. It can be put into practice by everyone, in every age and era. People everywhere have the same problem: to free themselves from suffering — suffering which is inherent in birth, aging, pain, and death, suffering which stems from desire, from grasping. Everyone

without exception, celestial being, human being, or beast, has this same problem, and everyone has the same job to do, namely to eliminate completely the desire, the unskillful grasping which is the root cause of that suffering. Thus Buddhism is a universal religion.

VI THE THINGS WE CLING TO

What are we clinging to? What is our handhold? What we are clinging to is the world itself. In Buddhism the word "world" has a broader connotation than it has in ordinary usage. It refers to all things, to the totality. It does not refer just to human beings, or celestial beings, or gods, or beasts, or the denizens of hell, or demons, or hungry ghosts, or titans, or any particular realm of existence at all. What the word "world" refers to here is the whole lot taken together. To know the world is difficult because certain levels of the world are concealed. Most of us are familiar with only the outermost layer or level, the level of relative truth, the level corresponding to the intellect of the average man. For this reason Buddhism teaches us about the world at various levels.

The Buddha had a method of instruction based on a division of the world into a material or physical aspect and nonmaterial or mental aspect. He further divided up the mental world or mind into four parts. Counting the physical and the mental together makes a total of five components, called by the Buddha the Five Aggregates, which together

go to make up the world, in particular living creatures and man himself. In looking at the world we shall concentrate on the world of living creatures, in particular man, because it is man that happens to be the problem. In man these five components are all present together: his physical body is the material aggregate; his mental aspect is divisible into four aggregates, which we shall now describe.

The first of the mental aggregates is feeling (*vedana*), which is of three kinds, namely pleasure or gratification, displeasure or suffering, and a neutral kind, which is neither pleasure nor displeasure, but which is a kind of feeling nevertheless. Under normal conditions feelings are always present in us. Every day we are filled with feelings. The Buddha, then, pointed out feeling as one of the components which together go to make up the man.

The second component of mind is perception (*Sanna*). This is the process of becoming aware, similar to waking up as opposed to being sound asleep or unconscious, or dead. It refers to memory as well as awareness of sense impressions, covering both the primary sensation resulting from contact with an object by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, and the recall of previous impressions. Thus one may be directly aware of an object as black or white, long or short, man or beast, and so on, or one may be similarly aware in retrospect by way of memory.

The third mental aggregate is the actively thinking component (*sankhara*) in an individual - thinking of doing something, thinking of saying something, good thought and bad thought, willed thinking, active thinking - this is the third mental aggregate.

The fourth component of mind is consciousness (*vinna*). It is the function of knowing the objects perceived by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and the general body sense, and also by way of the mind itself.

These five aggregates constitute the site of the four kinds of clinging explained in the fourth chapter. Turn back and read it again, and think it over so that you understand it properly. You will then realize that it is these five aggregates that are the object and handhold for our grasping and clinging. A person may grasp at any one of these groups as being a self according to the extent of his ignorance. For instance, a boy who carelessly bumps into a door and hurts himself feels he has to give the door a kick in order to relieve his anger and pain. In other words, he is grasping at a purely material object, namely the door, which is nothing but wood, as being a self. This is attachment at the lowest level of all. A man who becomes angry with his body to the point of striking it or hitting himself on the head is grasping and clinging in the same way. He is taking those body parts to be selves. If he is rather more intelligent than

that, he may seize on feeling, or perception or active thinking, or consciousness as being a self. If he is unable to distinguish them individually, he may grasp at the whole lot collectively as being a self, that is, take all five groups together to be "his self."

After the physical body, the group next most likely to be clung to as being a self is feeling pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Let us consider the situation in which we find ourselves, entranced with sensual pleasures, in particular delectable sensations, caught up heart and soul in the various colours and shapes, sound, scents, tastes, and tactile objects that we perceive. Here feeling is the pleasure and delight experienced, and it is to that very feeling of pleasure and delight that we cling. Almost everyone clings to feeling as being a self, because there is no one who does not like delightful sensations, especially tactile sensations by way of the skin. Ignorance or delusion blinds a person to all else. He sees only the delightful object and grasps at it as being a self; he regards that object as "mine." Feeling, whether of pleasure or displeasure, is truly a site of suffering. Spiritually speaking, these feelings of pleasure and displeasure may be considered as synonymous with suffering, because they give rise to nothing but mental torment. Pleasure renders the mind buoyant; displeasure deflates it. Gain and loss, happiness and sorrow, amount in effect to mental restlessness or instability; they set the

mind spinning. This is what is meant by grasping at feeling as being a self. We should all do well to have a closer look at this process of grasping at feeling as being a self, as being "ours," and try to gain a proper understanding of it. Understanding feeling as an object of clinging, the mind will be rendered independent of it. Feeling normally has control over the mind, luring us into situations that we regret later on. In his practical path to perfection or Arahantship, the Buddha teaches us repeatedly to give particular attention to the examination of feeling. Many have become Arahants and broken free from suffering by means of restricting feeling to simply an object of study.

Feeling is more likely than any of the other aggregates to serve as a handhold for us to cling to because feeling is the primary objective of all our striving and activity. We study industriously and work at our jobs in order to get money. Then we go and buy things: utensils, food, amusements, things covering the whole range from gastronomy to sex. And then we partake of these things with one single objective, namely pleasurable feeling, in other words delightful stimulation of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. We invest all our resources, monetary, physical, mental, simply in the expectation of pleasurable feeling. And everyone knows well enough in his own mind that if it weren't for the lure of pleasurable feeling, he would never invest study, work and physical energy in the search for money.

We can see, then, that feeling is no small matter. A knowledge and understanding of it puts us in a position to keep it under control, makes us sufficiently highminded to remain above feelings, and enables us to carry out all our activities far better than we otherwise could. In similar fashion even the problems that arise in a social group have their origins in pleasurable feeling. And when we analyse closely the clashes between nations, or between opposing blocs, we discover that there too, both sides are just slaves to pleasurable feeling. A war is not fought because of adherence to a doctrine or an ideal or anything of the sort. In point of fact, the motivation is the anticipation of pleasurable feeling. Each side sees itself making all sorts of gains, scooping up benefits for itself. The doctrine is just camouflage, or at best a purely secondary motive. The most deep seated cause of all strife is really subservience to pleasurable feeling. To know feeling is, then, to know an important root cause responsible for our falling slaves to the mental defilements, to evil, to suffering.

If this is how things are in the case of human beings, the celestial beings are no better off. They are subservient to pleasurable feeling just as are humans, and more so, though they may suppose it to be something better and finer, more subject to free will than is the human variety. But even they are not free from craving and attachment, from the fascination of delectable sensations received by way of

eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Still higher up at the level of the gods, sensual delights necessarily have been discarded completely; but even this does not bring liberation from another kind of delight, the pleasure associated with deep concentration practice. When the mind is deeply concentrated, it experiences pleasure, a delightful sensation to which it then becomes attached. Although this has nothing to do with sensuality, it is pleasurable feeling nevertheless. Animals lower down the scale than human beings are bound to fall under the power of pleasurable feeling in much cruder ways than we do. To know the nature of feeling, in particular to know that feeling is not a self at all and not something to be clung to, is, then, of very great use in life.

Perception, too, can easily be seized on as being a self or "one's self." The average villager likes to say that when we fall asleep, something, which he calls the "soul," departs from the body. The body is then like a log of wood, receiving no sensation by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue or body. As soon as that something has returned to the body, awareness and wakefulness are restored. A great many people have this naive belief that perception is "the self." But, as the Buddha taught, perception is not a self. Perception is simply sensation and memory, that is, knowing, and is bound to be present as long as the body continues to function normally. As soon as the bodily

functions become disrupted, that thing we call perception changes or ceases to function. For this reason true Buddhists refuse to accept perception as a self, though the average person does choose to accept it as such, clinging to it as "myself." Close examination along Buddhist lines reveals that quite the opposite is the case. Perception is nobody's self at all; it is simply a result of natural processes and nothing more.

The next possible point of attachment is active thinking, intending to do this or that, intending to get this or that, mental action good or bad. This is once again a manifestation of the arising of strong ideas of selfhood. Everyone feels that if anything at all is to be identified as his self, then it is more likely to be this thinking element than any other. For instance, one philosopher in recent centuries based his philosophy on "I think, therefore I am." Even philosophers in this scientific age have the same ideas about "the self" as people have had for thousands of years, maintaining that the thinking element is the self. They regard as the self that which they understand to be "the thinker." We have said that the Buddha denied that either feeling or perception might be a self. He also rejected thinking, the thinking aspect of the mind as a self, because the activity which manifests as thought is a purely natural event. Thought arises as a result of the interaction of a variety of prior events. It is just one of the aggregation of assorted

components that makes up "the individual," and no "I" or "self" entity is involved. Hence we maintain that this thinking component is devoid of selfhood, just as are the other aggregates we have mentioned.

The difficulty in understanding this lies in our inadequate knowledge of the mental element or mind. We are familiar only with the body, the material element, and know almost nothing about the other, the mental, nonmaterial element. As a result, we have difficulty understanding it. Here it can only be said that the Buddha taught that "the individual" is a combination of the five aggregates, physical and mental. Now, when the event we call thinking takes place, we jump to the conclusion that there is "someone" there who is "the thinker." We believe there is a thinker, a soul, which is master of the body or something of the sort. But the Buddha rejected such entities completely. When we analyse "the individual" into these five components, there is nothing left over, proving that he consists of just these components and that there is nothing that might be "his self." Not even thinking is a self as the average man commonly supposes.

Now the last group, consciousness (*vinnana*) is simply the function of becoming fully aware of objects perceived by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. It is no self either. The organs simply take in the colour and

shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile objects that impinge on them, and as a result consciousness of those objects arises in three stages. In the case of the eye there arises clear consciousness of the shape of the visual object, whether it is man or beast, long or short, black or white. The arising of clear consciousness in this way is a mechanical process which happens of its own accord, automatically. There are some who maintain that this is the "soul," the "spirit," which moves into and out of the mind and receives stimuli by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and consider it to be "the self." Buddhists recognize it as just nature. If a visual object and an eye complete with optic nerve make contact, seeing will take place and there will arise visual consciousness. And there is once again no need for any self whatsoever.

When we have analysed the "being" into its components, namely body, feeling, perception, thinking, and consciousness, we find no part which might be a self or belong to a self. Thus we can completely reject the false self idea and conclude that nobody is or has a self at all. When one ceases to cling to things, no longer liking or disliking them, this indicates that one has perceived that those things are not selves. Rational thinking is sufficient to convince one that they cannot be selves; but the result is only belief, not clear insight of the sort that can completely cut out clinging to them as selves. For this very reason we

have to study and examine the five aggregates on the basis of the threefold training and develop sufficient insight to be able to give up clinging to this self idea. This practice with respect to the five aggregates serves to develop clear insight and eliminate ignorance. When we have completely eliminated ignorance, we shall be able to see for ourselves that none of the aggregates is a self, none is worth clinging to. All clinging, even the kind that has existed since birth, will then cease completely. It is essential, then, that we study thoroughly the five aggregates, which are the objects of the self conceit. The Buddha stressed this aspect of his teaching more than any other. It may be summed up very briefly by saying: "None of the five aggregates is a self." This should be considered a key point in Buddhism, whether one looks at it as philosophy, as science, or as religion. When we know this truth, ignorance-based grasping and clinging vanish, desire of any sort has no means of arising, and suffering ceases.

Why is it, then, that we normally don't see these five aggregates as they really are? When we were born, we had no understanding of things. We acquired knowledge on the basis of what people taught us. The way they taught us led us to understand that all things are selves. The power of the primal instinctive belief in selfhood, which is present right from birth, becomes very strong in the course of time. In speaking we use the words "I, you, he, she," which only

serve to consolidate the self idea. We say: "This is Mr.X; that is Mr. Y. He is Mr.A's son and Mr. B's grandson. This is So - and - so's husband; that is So - and - so's wife." This way of speaking serves simply to identify people as selves. The result is that we are none of us conscious of our clinging to selfhood, which increases daily. **When we cling to something as being a self, the result is selfishness,** and our actions are biased accordingly. If we were to develop sufficient insight to see this idea as a deception, we would stop clinging to the ideas of "Mr. A and Mr. B, high class and low class, beast and human being," and would see that these are nothing more than terms which man has devised for use in social intercourse. When we have come to understand this, we can be said to have dispensed with one sort of social deception. When we examine the whole of what goes to make up Mr. A, we find that Mr. A is simply an aggregation of body, feeling, perception, thinking and consciousness. This is a rather more intelligent way of looking at things. Doing this, one is not deluded by worldly relative truth.

It is possible to carry the process of analysis further than this. For instance the physical body can be divided up rather crudely into the elements of earth, water, wind, and fire; or it can be analysed scientifically into carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and so on. The deeper we look, the less we are deceived. Penetrating below the surface, we find

that in fact there is no person; there are only elements, physical and mental. Looked at in this light, the "person" disappears. The idea of "Mr. A and Mr. B, high class and low class" dissolves. The idea of "**my** child, **my** husband, **my** wife" vanishes away. When we look at things in the light of absolute truth, we find only elements: earth, water, wind, and fire; oxygen, hydrogen, and so on; body, feeling, perception, thinking, and consciousness. On examining these closely we find they all have one property in common, namely emptiness. Each is empty of what we refer to as "its self." Earth, water, wind, and fire, looked at properly, are seen to be empty of selfhood. It is possible for each one of us to see anything and everything as empty in this sense. This done, grasping and clinging will have no means of arising and any already arisen will have no means of remaining. They will dissolve, pass away, vanish entirely, not a trace remaining.

So there are no animals, no people, no elements, no aggregates. There are no things at all; there is only emptiness, emptiness of selfhood. When we don't grasp and cling, there is no way suffering can arise. One who sees all things as empty is quite unmoved when people call him good or bad, happy or miserable, or anything. This is the fruit of knowledge, understanding, and clear insight into the true nature of the five aggregates, which makes it possible to give up completely those four kinds of unskillful clinging.

In summary, everything in the whole world is included within the five aggregates, namely matter, feeling, perception, thinking, and consciousness. Each of these groups is a deception, each is quite devoid of selfhood, but has the seductive power to induce grasping and clinging. As a result, the ordinary person desires to possess, desires to be, desires not to possess, desires not to be, all of which only serves to produce suffering, suffering which is not obvious, but concealed. It behoves everyone to utilize the threefold training in morality, concentration, and insight, and eliminate delusion with respect to the five aggregates completely and utterly. A person who has done this will not fall under the power of the five aggregates and will be free of suffering. For him life will be unblemished bliss. His mind will be above all things for as long as he lives. This is the fruit of clear and perfect insight into the five aggregates.

VII

INSIGHT, BY THE NATURE METHOD

In this chapter we shall see how concentration may come about naturally on the one hand, and as a result of organized practice on the other. The end result is identical in the two cases: the mind is concentrated and fit to be used for carrying out close introspection. One thing must be noticed, however: the intensity of concentration that comes about naturally is usually sufficient and appropriate for introspection and insight, whereas the concentration resulting from organized training is usually excessive, more than can be made use of. Furthermore, misguided satisfaction with that highly developed concentration may result. While the mind is fully concentrated, it is likely to be experiencing such a satisfying kind of bliss and well being that the meditator may become attached to it, or imagine it to be the Fruit of the Path. Naturally occurring concentration, which is sufficient and suitable for use in introspection, is harmless, having none of the disadvantages inherent in concentration developed by means of intensive training.

In the Tipitaka, there are numerous references to

people attaining naturally all states of Path and Fruit. This generally came about in the presence of the Buddha himself, but also happened later with other teachers. These people did not go into the forest and sit, assiduously practising concentration on certain objects in the way described in later manuals.

Clearly no organized effort was involved when Arahantship was attained by the first five disciples of the Buddha on hearing the Discourse on Non-selfhood, or by the one thousand hermits on hearing the Fire Sermon. In these cases, keen, penetrating insight came about quite naturally. These examples clearly show that natural concentration is liable to develop of its own accord while one is attempting to understand clearly some question, and that the resulting insight, as long as it is firmly established, must be quite intense and stable. It happens naturally, automatically, in just the same way as the mind becomes concentrated the moment we set about doing arithmetic. Likewise in firing a gun, when we take aim, the mind automatically becomes concentrated and steady. This is how naturally occurring concentration comes about. We normally overlook it completely because it does not appear the least bit magical, miraculous, or awe inspiring. But through the power of just this naturally occurring concentration, most of us could actually attain liberation. We could attain the Fruit of the Path, Nirvana, arahantship, just by means of natural

concentration.

So don't overlook this naturally occurring concentration. It is something most of us either already have, or can readily develop. We have to do everything we can to cultivate and develop it, to make it function perfectly and yield the appropriate results, just as did most of the people who succeeded in becoming Arahants, none of whom knew anything of modern concentration techniques.

Now let us have a look at the nature of the states of inner awareness leading up to full insight into "the world," that is, into the five aggregates. The first stage is joy (*piti*), mental happiness or spiritual well being. Doing good in some way, even giving alms, considered the most basic form of meritmaking, can be a source of joy. Higher up, at the level of morality, completely blameless conduct by way of word and action brings an increase in joy. Then in the case of concentration, we discover that there is a definite kind of delight associated with the lower stages of concentration.

This rapture has in itself the power to induce tranquillity. Normally the mind is quite unrestrained, continually falling slave to all sorts of thoughts and feelings associated with enticing things outside. It is normally restless, not calm. But as spiritual joy becomes established, calm and steadiness are bound to increase in proportion. When steadiness has been perfected, the result is full

concentration. The mind becomes tranquil, steady, flexible, manageable, light, and at ease, ready to be used for any desired purpose, in particular for the elimination of the defilements.

It is not a case of the mind's being rendered silent, hard, and rocklike. Nothing like that happens at all. The body feels normal, but the mind is especially calm and suitable for use in thinking and introspection. It is perfectly clear, perfectly cool, perfectly still and restrained. In other words, it is fit for work, ready to know. This is the degree of concentration to be aimed for, not the very deep concentration where one sits rigidly like a stone image, quite devoid of awareness. Sitting in deep concentration like that, one is in no position to investigate anything. A deeply concentrated mind cannot practise introspection at all. It is in a state of unawareness and is of no use for insight. DEEP CONCENTRATION IS A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO INSIGHT PRACTICE. To practise introspection one must first return to the shallower levels of concentration; then one can make use of the power the mind has acquired. Highly developed concentration is just a tool. In this developing of insight by the nature method, we don't have to attain deep concentration and sit with the body rigid. Rather, we aim at a calm, steady mind, one so fit for work that when it is applied to insight practice, it gains right understanding with regard to the entire world. Insight so developed is

natural insight, the same sort as was gained by some individuals while sitting listening to the Buddha expounding Dhamma. It is conducive to thought and introspection of the right kind, the kind that brings understanding. And it involves neither ceremonial procedures nor miracles.

This doesn't mean, however, that insight will arise instantaneously. One can't be an Arahant straight off. The first step in knowledge may come about at any time, depending once again on the intensity of the concentration. It may happen that what arises is not true insight, because one has been practising wrongly or has been surrounded by too many false views. But however it turns out, the insight that does arise is bound to be something quite special, for instance extraordinarily clear and profound. If the knowledge gained is right knowledge, corresponding with reality, corresponding with Dhamma, then it will progress, developing ultimately into right and true knowledge of all phenomena. If insight develops in only small measure, it may convert a person into an Ariyan at the lowest stage; or if it is not sufficient to do that, it will just make him a highminded individual, an ordinary person of good qualities. If the environment is suitable and good qualities have been properly and adequately established, it is possible to become an Arahant. It all depends on the circumstances. But however far things go, as long as the mind has natural concentration, this factor called insight is bound to arise and

to correspond more or less closely with reality. Because we, being Buddhists, have heard about, thought about, and studied the world, the five aggregates and phenomena, in the hope of coming to understand their true nature, it follows that the knowledge we acquire while in a calm and concentrated state will not be in any way misleading. It is bound to be always beneficial.

The expression "insight into the true nature of things" refers to seeing transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood, seeing that nothing is worth getting, nothing is worth being, seeing that no object whatsoever should be grasped at and clung to as being a self or as belonging to a self, as being good or bad, attractive or repulsive. Liking or disliking anything, even if it is only an idea or a memory, is clinging. To say that nothing is worth getting or being is the same as to say that nothing is worth clinging to. "Getting" refers to setting one's heart on property, position, wealth, or any pleasing object. "Being" refers to the awareness of one's status as husband, wife, rich man, poor man, winner, loser, or human being, or even the awareness of being oneself. If we really look deeply at it, even being oneself is no fun, is wearisome, because it is a source of suffering. If one can completely give up clinging to the idea of being oneself, then being oneself will no longer be suffering. This is what it is to see the worthlessness of being anything, and is the gist of the statement that being anything

no matter what, is bound to be suffering in a way appropriate to that particular state of being. Any state of being, if it is to continue as such, has to be made to last, to endure. At the very least, it must endure in one's mind in the form of a belief in that particular state of being. When there exists "oneself," there are bound to exist things which are other than that self and belong to it. Thus one has one's children, one's wife, one's this, that, and the other. Then one has one's duty as husband or wife, master or servant, and so on. All this points to the truth of the statement that there is no state of being such that to maintain it will not involve struggle. The trouble and struggle necessary to maintain one's state of being are simply the result of blind infatuation with things, of clinging to things.

If we were to give up trying to get or to be anything, how could we continue to exist? This is bound to be a major source of scepticism for anyone who has not given much thought to the matter. The words "getting" and "being" as used here refer to getting and being based on mental defilements, on craving, on the idea of "worth getting, worth being," so that the mind does get and be in real earnest. This is bound to lead to depression, anxiety, distress and upset, or at least a heavy burden on the mind, right from beginning to end. Knowing this truth, we shall be constantly on the alert, keeping watch over the mind to see that it doesn't fall slave to getting and being through the influence

of grasping and clinging. Aware that in reality things are just not worth getting or being, we shall be smart enough to stay aloof from them.

If, however, we are not yet in a position to withdraw completely from having and being, we must be mindful and wide awake, so that when we do get or become something, we do so without emotional upset. We must not be like those people who, turning a blind eye and a deaf ear, go ahead brainlessly and inexpertly getting or becoming with the result that they fall right into the pit of their own stupidity and attachment, and end up having to commit suicide.

The world and all things have the property of impermanence, of worthlessness, and of not belonging to anyone. Any individual who grasps at and clings to anything will be hurt by it, in the very beginning when he first desires to get it or to be it, later while he is in the process of getting it and being it, and then again after he has got it or been it. All the time, before, during, and after, when anyone grasps and clings with deaf ear and blind eye, he will receive his full measure of suffering, just as can be seen happening to all deluded worldlings. It is the same even with goodness, which everyone values highly. If anyone becomes involved with goodness in the wrong way and clings to it too much, he will derive just as much suffering from goodness as he would from evil. In becoming involved with goodness, we have to bear in mind that it possesses this property.

A sceptic may ask: "If nothing at all is worth getting or being, does it follow that nobody ought to do any work or build up wealth, position, and property?" Anyone who comprehends this subject can see that a person equipped with right knowledge and understanding is actually in a far better position to carry out any task than one who is subject to strong desires, foolish, and lacking in understanding. Very briefly, in becoming involved in things, we must do so mindfully; our actions must not be motivated by craving. The result will follow accordingly.

The Buddha and all the other Arahants were completely free of desire, yet succeeded in doing many things far more useful than what any of us are capable of. If we look at accounts of how the Buddha spent his day, we find that he slept for only four hours and spent all the rest of the time working. We spend more than four hours a day just amusing ourselves. If the defilements responsible for the desire to be and get things had been completely eliminated, what was the force that motivated the Buddha and all Arahants to do all this? They were motivated by discrimination coupled with goodwill (*metta*). Even actions based on natural bodily wants such as receiving and eating alms food were motivated by discrimination. They were free of defilements, free of all desire to keep on living in order to be this or to get that, but they did have the ability to discriminate between what was worthwhile and what was

not as the motivating force that sent their bodies out to find food. If they found food, well and good; if not, never mind. When they were suffering with fever, they knew how to treat it and did so as well as possible on the basis of this knowledge. If the fever was quite overpowering and they were not strong, they recalled that to die is natural. Whether they lived or died was of no significance to them; they were of equal value in their eyes.

If one is to be completely free of suffering, this is the very best attitude to have. There need not be any self as master of the body. Discrimination alone enables the body to carry on by natural power. The example of the Buddha shows that the power of pure discrimination and pure goodwill alone is sufficient to keep an Arahant living in the world, and, what is more, doing far more good for others than people still subject to craving. Defiled people are likely to do only what benefits themselves since they act out of selfishness. By contrast, the deeds of Arahants are entirely selfless and so are perfectly pure. In desiring to get and be, one is acting quite inappropriately, one is mistaking evil for good, not knowing "what is what". Let us all, then, go about things intelligently, always bearing in mind that, in reality, nothing is worth getting or being, nothing is worth becoming infatuated with, nothing is worth clinging to. Let us act in a manner in keeping with the knowledge that things are by their very nature not worth getting or

being. If we do have to become involved in things, then let us go about it the right way, acting appropriately. This is the way to keep the mind always pure, unobscured, tranquil, and cool. It allows us to become involved in the world, in things, without doing ourselves any harm in the process.

When the ordinary worldly man hears that nothing is worth getting or being, he is not convinced, he doesn't believe it. But anyone who understands the real meaning of this statement becomes emboldened and cheered by it. His mind becomes master of things and independent of them. He becomes capable of going after things sure in the knowledge that he will not become enslaved by them. His actions are not motivated by desire and he is not so blind with passion that he comes to be a slave to things. In getting anything or being anything, let us always be aware that we are getting or being something which, in terms of absolute truth, we cannot get or be at all, because there is nothing that we can really get or be as we might wish. All things are transient and unsatisfactory and can never belong to us; and yet we go foolishly ahead, grasping at them and craving for them. In other words, we act inappropriately, or in a way which does not accord with the true nature of things, simply because we become involved in them while ignorant of their true nature. The result is bound to be all manner of suffering and trouble. The reason a person is incapable of doing his job perfectly, faultlessly,

is that he is always far too concerned with getting something and being something, always motivated entirely by his own desires. As a result, he is not master of himself and cannot be consistently good, honest, and fair. In every case of failure and ruin, the root cause is slavery to desire.

To come to know the true nature of things is the true objective of every Buddhist. It is the means by which we can liberate ourselves. Regardless of whether we are hoping for worldly benefits, such as wealth, position, and fame; or for benefits in the next world, such as heaven; or for the supramundane benefit, the Fruit of the Path, Nirvana — whatever we are hoping for, the only way to achieve it is by means of this right knowledge and insight. We thrive on insight. In the Texts it is said that we may become purified through insight and not by any other means. Our path to freedom lies in having the insight, the clear vision, that in all things there neither is nor has ever been anything at all that is worth grasping at or clinging to, worth getting or being, worth risking life and limb for. We have things and are things only in terms of worldly, relative truth. In worldly language, we say we are this or that, just because in any society it is expedient to recognize by names and occupations. But we mustn't go believing that we really are this or that, as is assumed at the level of relative truth. To do so is to behave like the crickets, which, when their faces become covered with dirt, become disoriented and muddled,

and proceed to bite each other until they die. We humans, when our faces become covered in dirt, when we are subject to all sorts of delusions, become so bewildered and disoriented that we do things no human being could ever do under ordinary circumstances — killing for instance. So let us not go blindly clinging to relative truths; rather let us be aware that they are just relative truths, essential in a society but nothing more. We have to be aware of what this body and mind really is, what its true nature is. In particular, we have to be aware of its impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non selfhood, and make sure we always remain independent of it.

As for the wealth, position and so on, which we can't do without, let us regard these too as relative truths so that we can break free from the existing custom of saying, for instance: "This belongs to So-and-so. That belongs to Such-and-such." The law watches over ownership rights for us; there is no need for us to cling to the idea of "mine." We ought to possess things purely and simply for the sake of convenience and ease, and not so that they can be master over our minds. When we have this clear knowledge, things will become our servants and slaves and we shall remain on top of them. If our thoughts go the way of craving and attachment, so that we become conscious of having such-and-such and being so-and-so, clinging firmly to these ideas, things will get on top of us, and we shall be the

servants and slaves, under their control instead. The tables can quite easily be turned in this way, so we have to be careful. We have to arrange things in such a way that we are sure of staying independent and on top of things. If we don't, we may find ourselves in a most pitiable position and feel very sorry for ourselves indeed.

When we have really come to perceive clearly that nothing is worth getting or being, disenchantment (*nibbida*) develops in proportion to the intensity of the insight. It is a sign that the clinging has become less firm and is starting to give way. It is a sign that we have been slaves for so long that the idea of trying to escape has at last occurred to us. This is the onset of disenchantment and disillusionment, when one becomes fed up with one's own stupidity in grasping at and clinging to things, believing things to be worth having and being. As soon as disenchantment has set in, there is bound to come about a natural, automatic process of disentanglement (*viraga*), as if a rope with which one had been tightly bound were being untied; or a rinsing out, as when the dye that had been firmly fixed in a piece of cloth is washed out by soaking it in the appropriate substances. This process whereby clinging gives way to a breaking free from, or a dissolving out from the world, or from the objects of that clinging, was called by the Buddha emancipation (*vimutti*). This state is most important. Though not the final stage, it is a most

important step towards complete liberation. When one has broken free to this extent, complete liberation from suffering is assured.

Once broken free from slavery, one need never again be a slave to the world. One becomes pure and uncontaminated whereas previously one was defiled in every way. To be enslaved to things is to be defiled in body, speech and thought. To break free from slavery to the delightful tastes of the world is to achieve the pure condition and never be defiled again. This real purity (*Visuddhi*), once it has been attained, will give rise to a genuine calm and coolness free from all turbulence, strife, and torment. This state of freedom from oppression and turbulence was called by the Buddha simply peace (*Santi*), that is, stillness, coolness in all situations, which is virtually the same thing as Nirvana.

"Nirvana" has been translated as "absence of any instrument of torture." Taken another way, it means "extinction without remainder." So the word "Nirvana" has two very important meanings; firstly, absence of any source of torment and burning, freedom from all forms of bondage and constraint and secondly, extinction, with no fuel for the further arising of suffering. The combination of these meanings indicates a condition of complete freedom from suffering. There are several other useful meanings for the word "Nirvana." It can be taken to mean the extinction of

suffering, or the complete elimination of defilements, or the state, realm, or condition that is the cessation of all suffering, all defilements and all karmic activity. Though the word "Nirvana" is used by numerous different sects, the sense in which they use it is often not the same at all. For instance, one group takes it to mean simply calm and coolness, because they identify Nirvana with deep concentration. Other groups even consider total absorption in sensuality as Nirvana.

The Buddha defined Nirvana as simply that condition of freedom from bondage, torment, and suffering which results from seeing the true nature of the worldly condition and all things, and so being able to give up all clinging to them. It is essential, then, that we recognize the very great value of insight into the true nature of things and endeavour to cultivate this insight by one means or another. Using one method, we simply encourage it to come about of its own accord, naturally, by developing, day and night, the joy that results from mental purity, until the qualities we have described gradually come about. The other method consists in developing mental power by following an organized system of concentration and insight practice. This latter technique is appropriate for people with a certain kind of disposition, who may make rapid progress with it if conditions are right. But we can practise the development of insight by the nature method in all circumstances and

at all times just by making our own way of daily living so pure and honest that there arise in succession spiritual joy (*piti and pamoda*), calm (*passaddhi*), insight into the true nature of things (*yathabhutananadassana*), disenchantment (*nibbida*), withdrawal (*viraga*), escape (*vimutti*), purification from defilements (*visuddhi*), and coolness (*santi*), so that we come to get a taste of freedom from suffering (*nibbana*) — steadily, naturally, day by day, month by month, year by year, gradually approaching closer and closer to Nirvana.

Summing up, natural concentration and insight, which enable a person to attain the Path and the Fruit, consist in verifying all day and every day the truth of the statement that nothing is worth getting or being. Anyone who wishes to get this result must strive to purify himself and to develop exemplary personal qualities, so that he can find perpetual spiritual joy in work and leisure. That very joy induces clarity and freshness, mental calm and stillness, and serves, naturally and automatically, to give the mind ability to think and introspect. With the insight that nothing is worth getting or being constantly present, the mind loses all desire for the things it once used to grasp at and cling to. It is able to break free from the things it used to regard as "me and mine," and all blind craving for things ceases. Suffering, which no longer has anywhere to lodge, dwindles right away, and the job of eliminating suffering is done. This is the reward, and it can be gained by any one of us.

VIII

INSIGHT, BY ORGANIZED TRAINING

Now we shall deal with the organized systems of insight training, which were not taught by the Buddha but were developed by later teachers. This kind of practice is suitable for people at a fairly undeveloped stage, who still cannot perceive the unsatisfactoriness of worldly existence with their own eyes, naturally. This doesn't mean, however, that the results obtained by these systems have any special qualities not obtainable by the nature method, because when we examine the Tipitaka closely, we find the nature method is the only one mentioned. Some people consider, however, that natural insight can be developed only by someone who has become so remarkably virtuous, or has such a suitable disposition, that for him to come to a full understanding of things is just child's play. What is a person to do who lacks transcendent virtues and the appropriate disposition? For such people, teachers laid down ordered systems of practice, concise courses which start from scratch and have to be followed through thoroughly and systematically.

These systems of practice for developing insight are now known by the technical term "*Vipassana - dhura*."

Vipassana - dhura is contrasted with Study (*Gantha - dhura*), the two being considered nowadays complementary aspects of training. *Vipassana - dhura* is study done within; it is strictly mental training, having nothing to do with textbooks. Neither the term Study (*Gantha - dhura*) nor *Vipassana - dhura* is mentioned in the Tipitaka, both appearing only in later books; but *Vipassana - dhura* is nevertheless a genuine Buddhist practice, designed for people intent on eliminating suffering. It is based directly on sustained, concentrated introspection. In order to explain *Vipassana* to people, teachers in former ages considered it in terms of the following questions:

What is the basis, the foundation of *Vipassana*?

What are the characteristics by which we may know that this is *Vipassana*?

Just what is the activity called *Vipassana*?

What should be the ultimate result of *Vipassana*?

Asked what is the basis, the foundation of *Vipassana*, we answer: morality and concentration. "*Vipassana*" means "clear insight," and refers to the unobscured vision that may arise when a person's mind is full of joy and devoid of any defilement. Joy develops when there is Moral Purity (*Silavisuddhi*); morality is a prerequisite. This is stated in the texts (*Rathavinatasutta*, *Majjhima - nikaya*, 24), where the practice is described as proceeding in a series of stages

called the Seven Purifications, and culminating in the Path and the Fruit. Teachers regard the attainment of Moral Purity as the first of the Seven Purifications. It consists of faultless behaviour and is prerequisite to purification of the mind (*Citta-visuddhi*). Purification of the mind, achieved when the mind has been rendered free of any contamination, is conducive to purification of Views (*Ditthi-visuddhi*) or freedom from misunderstanding. Freedom from misunderstanding leads to purity by freedom from doubt (*Kankhavitarana-visuddhi*), and this conduces in its turn to the arising of purity by knowledge and vision of what is the true path to be followed and what is not the path (*Magga-magga-Nanadassana-visuddhi*). This knowledge of the path to be followed leads to the purity by knowledge and vision of the progress along the path (*Patipada-Nanadassana-visuddhi*). This finally leads to the last stage of full intuitive insight or purity of knowledge and vision (*Nanadassana-visuddhi*), which is the perfection of the very Noble Path. Because the Fruit of the Path arises automatically once the Path is established, the attainment of the Path is regarded as the culmination of the practice.

Moral purity is faultless behaviour by way of body and speech. As long as any imperfection in body or speech remains, morality in the true sense is lacking. When it has been perfected, that is, when tranquillity of bodily activities and speech has been achieved, the result is bound to be

mental tranquillity, conducive in its turn to the further stages of purification: freedom from misunderstanding, freedom from doubt, knowledge as to what is the Path to be followed and what is not, knowledge and vision of the progress along the Path, and finally full intuitive insight. These last five stages constitute Vipassana proper. Purification of conduct and mind are merely the entrance into the path of Vipassana.

*THE SEVEN PURIFICATIONS,
THE FIVE STAGES IN
VIPASSANA,
AND
THE NINE STEPS IN THE
PERFECTION
OF KNOWLEDGE*

I Moral purity

II Mental purity

III (1) Freedom from false views

IV (2) Freedom from doubt

V (3) Knowledge and vision of what is the true Path

VI (4) Knowledge and vision of the progress along the Path

(a) Knowledge of arising and passing away

(b) Knowledge of passing away

(c) Awareness of fearsomeness

(d) Awareness of danger

(e) Disenchantment

(f) Desire for freedom

(g) Struggle to escape

(h) Imperturbability

(i) Readiness to perceive the Four Noble Truths

VII(5) Full Intuitive Insight

The Purification consisting of freedom from misunderstanding implies the elimination of all false views, both inborn and acquired. It covers the whole range from irrational belief in magic to false ideas as to the true nature of things — for instance, regarding this body and mind as something enduring, something worthwhile, a self; seeing it as animal, human being, celestial being, or god, or as something magical or sacred; failing to perceive that it consists of just the four elements, or of just body plus mind, and regarding it instead as a self, as possessing a soul or spirit, which enters and leaves it; failing to see it as consisting of the five aggregates: body, feeling, perception, active thinking and consciousness; failing to see it as just a mass of perceptions received by way of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. False views lead to belief in magic and sacred objects, and so give rise to fear. Rites and rituals are then performed to neutralize the fear, and the end result is firm attachment to rites and rituals — all on account of false views. Such a situation indicates views that are not as yet faultless. To have given up false views is to have attained what was originally called the third Purification, and what later teachers classed the first stage in *Vipassana*.

The Purification consisting of freedom from doubt is brought about by introspection into causes. With freedom from false views, one sees oneself as just body plus mind. Freedom from doubt consists in perceiving the nature of the

causes responsible for the coming into existence of the body-mind complex. One sees penetratingly and in fine detail the coming into existence and the interaction of ignorance, desire, grasping and clinging, karma, "nutriment," and so on, to form body and mind. Freedom from doubt results simply from this clear knowledge of the causes and effects of all things. In the Vipassana system, teachers recognize twenty-nine or thirty kinds of doubt, but summed up they all amount to doubt as to whether or not "one's self" exists, whether or not "one's self" existed previously, whether or not "one's self" will continue to exist in the future and, if so, in what form. The only way doubt can be completely dispelled is to realize that there is no "I," but only elements, aggregates, a nervous system together with such causes as ignorance, craving, and attachment, karma, "nutriment," and so on. Because no real "I" is involved at all, one starts giving up the unclear idea: "I am, I have been, I shall be." With the complete eradication of doubt, the second stage in Vipassana has been achieved. This does not mean that the "I"-conceit has been given up for good and all; fine vestiges are still present. Adequate understanding of the mode of interaction of causes has resulted in the dispelling of doubt and has made it possible to give up the idea of "I" in its grossest forms.

When doubt has been transcended, it becomes possible to bring about the Purification consisting of perfect

knowledge as to what is the right path to follow and what is not. There exist several obstacles to this further progress, which usually arise in the course of Vipassana practice. While the mind is in a concentrated state, there are likely to arise various strange phenomena with which the meditator may become overawed, such as wonderful impressive auras seen in the mind's eye (the physical eyes being shut). If these effects are purposely encouraged, they can become highly developed; and if the meditator jumps to the conclusion that "this is the Fruit of Vipassana practice," or congratulates himself saying, "This is something supernatural; this will do me!" and the like, the arising of these phenomena is liable to bar the way to the true Path and Fruit. Consequently, teachers consider it a side track, a blind alley. Another example is the arising of feelings of joy and contentment which continually overflow the mind to such an extent that it becomes incapable of any further introspection, or jumps to the conclusion that "this is Nirvana, right here and now," so that the way becomes blocked and further progress is impossible. This is another obstruction to insight. Teachers say, furthermore, that even insight into the nature of body and mind may sometimes lead to self satisfaction and the delusion that the meditator has a remarkable degree of spiritual insight, so that he becomes over confident. This too is an obstacle to progress in Vipassana. Occasionally the meditator may make use of the mental power he has developed to make his body go rigid, with the result that

he loses the awareness necessary for further introspection. This is a stubborn obstacle in the path to further progress, yet meditators usually approve of it, regarding it as a supernatural faculty, or even as the Fruit of the Path. Anyone who becomes so pleased with and infatuated by the attainment of deep concentration, this sitting with body rigid and devoid of all sensation, that he is unable to progress further in Vipassana, is in a most pitiable position.

Another condition that may very easily come about is a blissful rapture the like of which the meditator has never encountered before. Once arisen it induces wonder and amazement and unjustified self satisfaction. While the rapture lasts, the body and the mind experience extreme bliss and all problems vanish. Things that formerly were liked or disliked are liked or disliked no longer when recalled to mind. Things the meditator had formerly feared and dreaded or worried and fretted over no longer induce those reactions, so that he gets the false idea that he has already *attained* liberation, freedom from all defilements; because for as long as he is in that condition he has all the characteristics of a genuinely perfected individual. Should satisfaction arise with respect to this condition, it acts as an obstacle to further progress in Vipassana. And in time the condition will fade away so that things formerly liked or disliked will be liked or disliked again just as before, or even more so.

Yet another kind of obstacle involves faith. Faith or confidence never felt before becomes firmly established, for example confidence in the Threefold Gem, Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, or in theories the meditator thinks out for himself. There may even come about a most intense satisfaction in Dhamma. The ability to remain unmoved by anything becomes so strongly developed that it may even delude the meditator into believing he has already attained the Fruit of the Path and Nirvana itself. These things are a great difficulty for anyone encountering them for the first time. As you can see they constitute a barrier in the way of Vipassana. The meditator, however, is likely to regard them as highly desirable until such time as he develops the unobscured knowledge that these things are in fact obstacles and succeeds in cutting out these finer defilements completely. This knowledge of what is the right path and what is not constitutes the third stage in Vipassana and the fifth Purification.

Until such time as the aspirant has developed this knowledge of what really constitutes the right path, he has to be always steering himself away from the various side tracks. Once this knowledge of the path to be followed has become fully established, however, any further knowledge will automatically develop along the right line. It will progress step by step, bringing perfectly clear understanding of the true nature of things and ultimately perfect freedom from,

and noninvolvement in things. The mind, equipped with this right understanding, is all set to attain insight into the Four Noble Truths, and is said to have attained the Purity by Knowledge and Vision of the progress along the Path. This is counted as the fourth stage in Vipassana and the sixth Purification. The Tipitaka contains no detailed explanation of the stages in this Knowledge and Vision of the progress along the Path, but later teachers recognized in it nine steps, as follows:

a) *Vipassana* has progressed properly, and the birth, ageing, pain, and death of phenomena have been thoroughly scrutinized. The arising and passing away of phenomena has been perceived in all clarity. All phenomenal existence is seen to consist of just an endless process of arising and ceasing like the glittering dazzle on the surface of the sea, or like the forming and bursting of the foamy crests of waves. This is known as knowledge of arising and passing away (*Udayabbayanupassana - nana*). It is brought about by concentrated introspection so clear, and sustained for so long a time that the knowledge becomes firmly established, like a dye absorbed by the mind, powerful enough to make the meditator become disenchanted with things and give up clinging to them. This is the first step in the Knowledge and Vision of the Progress along the Path.

b) Arising and passing away, if observed simultaneously,

cannot be perceived with such clarity as they can if either one is concentrated on separately. At this stage, the meditator gives up watching one of the two, namely arising, and concentrates exclusively on the passing away. This permits him to see the process of disintegration and decay in such depth and intensity that he comes to realize that decay and perishing are universally evident no matter where in the world one looks. A mind dwelling in this knowledge is said to be equipped with knowledge of decay and dissolution (*Bhanganupassana - nana*). This is the second step in the developing of knowledge.

c) Knowledge of decay and dissolution, when sufficiently well developed, gives rise next to the awareness that all things are to be feared. All phenomenal existence, whether in the sensual realm, in the form realm, or in the formless realm, is seen as inherently fearsome. All spheres of existence are seen as thoroughly fearsome because the decay and dissolution of all phenomena is perceived in every conscious moment. Thus an intense apprehension arises in the mind of one possessing this awareness and becomes established as a genuine fear. This awareness sees nothing but fearsomeness, like poison, or deadly weapons, or vicious armed bandits, completely filling the three spheres of phenomenal existence — nothing but fearsomeness. This awareness of the fearsomeness (*Bhayatupatthana - nana*) of all phenomenal existence is reckoned as the third step.

d) When awareness of the completely fearsome nature of all phenomenal existence has been fully developed, there will arise in its turn awareness that all things are inherently dangerous. To become involved in things is not safe. They are like a forest full of dangerous beasts, and anyone seeking diversion in that forest finds nothing pleasing there. This awareness of the danger (*Adinavan-upassana - nana*) inherent in all phenomenal existence is the fourth step.

e) When all things are seen to be in every way full of danger, this gives rise to disenchantment. Things are seen as resembling a burnt-out house of which nothing remains but ashes and a skeleton, utterly unattractive. This disenchantment (*Nibbidanupassanaa - nana*) with having to be associated with conditioned things is the fifth step in the developing of knowledge.

f) When genuine disenchantment has become established, there arises a desire to become really free from those things. This is quite unlike our ordinary desire for freedom, which, lacking the power of concentration or insight to boost it up, is not a real desire for freedom. The disenchantment arising out of Vipassana insight involves the entire mind; and the desire for freedom is as great as the disenchantment, so is very real and genuine. This desire to escape from the unsatisfactoriness of phenomenal existence is as great as the desire for freedom of a frog struggling to escape from a snake's jaws, or the desire for freedom of a deer or bird

struggling to break loose from a snare. This real desire to escape (*Muncitukamyata - nana*) from unsatisfactoriness is the sixth step.

g) Now with the full development of the desire to escape, there arises a feeling of an intense struggling to find a way out, an everpresent feeling that, phenomenal existence being as it is, one has to escape from it. Introspecting, one perceives the clinging and one perceives the defilements that are the cause of the mind's bondage, the fetters binding it securely to that condition. Consequently one seeks for ways of weakening the defilements. Then seeing the defilements weakened, one sets about destroying them completely.

This weakening of the defilements is illustrated by means of a simile. A man goes to his fish trap and pulls out a snake thinking it to be a fish. When told it is a snake, he doesn't believe it, at least not until he meets a wise, benevolent, and sympathetic teacher, who guides and instructs him so that he comes to realize that it is in fact a snake. He then becomes afraid and searches about for a means of killing it. He grabs the snake by the neck and, lifting it above his head, swings it in a circle until it is worn out and falls down dead. This simile illustrates the arising of the knowledge that the defilements are the cause of people's bondage to a condition much to be feared and dreaded.

If one has no technique for reducing the force of the defilements day by day, eradicating them is bound to be impossible. The power of the defilements far exceeds that of the still meagre knowledge to be used in destroying them; hence knowledge must be developed and increased, and the suffering produced by the defilements will simultaneously diminish. Always maintaining and developing the knowledge that all things are transient, worthless, and devoid of selfhood, that they are not worth getting or being, serves to cut off the food supply to the defilements, weakening them day by day. It behoves us to build ourselves up, develop, become more skillful and ingenious. By this means, we can conquer defilements the size of mountains, small though we may be. Our situation can be compared to that of a small mouse faced with the job of killing several tigers. We have to be really steadfast and always on the lookout for means appropriate to a small mouse. If we get nowhere, we must use all sorts of devices and techniques to weaken those tigers day by day rather than trying to kill them outright. This intense search for a way of escape (*Patisankhanu passana - nana*) constitutes the seventh step in the Knowledge and Vision of the Progress along the Path.

h) This weakening of the defilements serves to make us progressively more and more independent of and oblivious to things. So this next step in the developing of right understanding, which results in imperturbability with respect

to all things, consists in seeing all phenomena as empty, as devoid of essence, as devoid of status such as "animal" or "person," devoid of substance or real permanence, devoid of worth because they are thoroughly unsatisfactory, and devoid of all attraction because they are thoroughly disenchanting. Ultimately the mind becomes independent of and unperturbed by anything in any realm of existence. Things formerly likable, desirable, and infatuating, come to be seen as lumps of rock and earth.

This too has been explained by means of a simile. A man who has always loved a certain woman may one day experience a change of heart and stop loving her. For instance, he will stop loving his wife if she is unfaithful. Once divorced, however, he is free to go ahead and do as he pleases; his mind can be unperturbed. And at this level of knowledge, conditions hitherto delightful, each in its own way, are recognized as devoid of substance, so that one can be independent of them and unperturbed by them in all circumstances, just like the man who becomes independent on divorcing his wife. This indifference to all phenomena (*Sankharupekkha - nana*) is the eighth step.

i) The mind thus independent of and unmoved by all phenomenal existence is ready to perfect the Path and know the Four Noble Truths (*Saccanulomika - nana*). At this stage one is all set to overcome the defilements, to break the

fetters binding one to the world, and become an Ariyan of one degree or another. This is the ninth step in the process of Knowledge and Vision of the Progress along the Path.

When this stepwise developing of knowledge, from knowledge of arising and passing away up to the state of readiness to perceive the Four Noble Truths, has been carried through to completion, one is said to have achieved the fourth state in Vipassana, or the sixth Purification. The pure and perfect knowledge it yields is an instrument that reveals to the meditator the path by which he has come, and can lead on to the perfect intuitive insight that will destroy the defilements.

This perfect intuitive insight, or Purity of Knowledge and Vision, the seventh Purification, is the insight that arises out of the perfected Path. It is the goal, the Fruit of Vipassana practice. This insight that arises out of the perfected Path is the fifth and final stage in Vipassana.

In between the state of readiness to perceive the Noble Truths and this perfect intuitive insight comes "qualifying" knowledge (*Gotrabhu - nana*), which marks the point of transition from the ordinary defiled individual to the Ariyan. But this qualifying knowledge lasts only an instant. It is the culmination of the progressive perfection of knowledge and is still at the level of good karma, still in the sensual realm.

To sum up, then, Vipassana has as its foundation morality and concentration. What do we examine? The answer is: We examine all things, or to use other terms, the world, or phenomenal existence, or conditioned things, or the five aggregates, since all phenomenal existence consists of nothing apart from the five aggregates. What do we aim at seeing as a result of this scrutiny? We aim at seeing the transience, the unsatisfactoriness, the non-selfhood inherent in all things in the world. We observe them arising, persisting, and ceasing until we come to perceive them as absolutely fearsome and disenchanting, and realize that nothing is worth getting or being. These are the conditions that ought to arise in Vipassana practice. What is the objective of Vipassana? The immediate objective of Vipassana is to reduce delusion, the meaning of "Vipassana" being "clear vision." What is the fruit of Vipassana? The fruit is the arising of clear intuitive insight, clear and enduring insight into the nature of all things, which ultimately will reduce the defilements to nothing. With the defilements gone, there is just perfection, enlightenment, peace. Nothing remains to bind the mind to any worldly condition. As a result, there comes about a slipping free from the world, this place of slavery to sensuality. The mind is freed of suffering because it's freed for good of all craving or desire. The Buddha called this the attainment of the cessation of suffering, the attainment of the Fruit of the Path, *Nirvana*.

To have achieved this is to have carried out to completion the task Buddhism has set for us.

This shows us the path of insight that has to be walked. There are seven stages of Purification which must be integrated in this way, and nine steps in the process of developing knowledge of the world. These taken together are known as Vipassana. In the Texts it is set out as an ordered system. The finer details can be found in the books written by later teachers. There is one important thing that must be realized, however, in order to avoid misunderstanding. It so happens that even in the field of Dhamma practice, the highest aspect of Buddhism, there are misguided people. At the present time there are many who have got hold of things that are not Vipassana at all and are presenting them as being the real thing. They have made Vipassana practice their means of livelihood. They win people over in order to get classes together, then proceed to certify them as noble ones (*Ariyapuggala*), modern style, all of which is most despicable and regrettable.

IX

EMANCIPATION FROM THE WORLD

Vipassana meditation is mental training aimed at raising the mind to such a level that it is no longer subject to suffering. The mind breaks free from suffering by virtue of the clear knowledge that nothing is worth grasping at or clinging to. This knowledge deprives worldly things of their ability to lead the mind into further thoughtless liking or disliking. Having this knowledge, the mind transcends the worldly condition and attains the level known as the Supramundane Plane (*Lokuttara-bhumi*).

In order to comprehend clearly the supramundane plane, we have to know first about its opposite, the mundane plane (*Lokiya-bhumi*). The mundane plane comprises those levels at which the things of the world have control over the mind. Very briefly, three levels are recognized in the mundane plane, namely: the sensual level (*Kamavacara-bhumi*), or the level of a mind still content with pleasures of every kind; the level of forms (*Rupavacara-bhumi*), the condition of a mind uninterested in sensual objects, but finding satisfaction in the various stages of concentration on forms as objects; and lastly the formless level

(*Arupavacara-bhumi*), the yet higher level of a mind finding satisfaction in the bliss and peace of concentration on objects other than forms. These three levels in the worldly plane are the mental levels of beings in general. Regardless of whether we presume to call them human beings, celestial beings, gods, beasts, or denizens of hell, they are all included within the three worldly levels. The mind of a worldling can at any particular time exist in any one of these three. It is not impossible. It is quite normal. As a rule, though, it will tend to fall back naturally to the unconcentrated sensual level; the human mind normally falls under the influence of the delightful in colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes, and tactile objects. Only on certain occasions is it able to escape from the influence of these seductive things and experience the tranquillity and bliss which comes from practising concentration on forms or other objects. It all depends on concentration.

At certain times, then, a person's mind may be located in any of these levels of concentration. In India at the time of the Buddha this must have been fairly common, because people who had gone in search of the tranquillity and bliss associated with the various levels of concentration were to be found living in forests all over the country. At the present time such people are few, but it is nevertheless possible for the ordinary man to attain these levels. If someone in this world is in the process of experiencing the

bliss of full concentration on a form, then for him "the world" consists of just that form, because he is aware of nothing else. At that time and for that person, "the world" is equivalent to just that one form, and it remains so until such time as his mental condition changes.

Even though a person dwelling in any of these three levels may have gained such bliss and calm tranquillity that he has come to resemble a rock, a lump of earth, or a log of wood, yet grasping and clinging to selfhood are still present. Also present are various kinds of desire, albeit of the finest and most tenuous sort, such as dissatisfaction with the state in which he finds himself, which prompts him to go in search of a new state. That desire for change constitutes karma, so such a person has not yet transcended the worldly state. He is not yet in the supramundane plane.

A mind dwelling in the supramundane plane has transcended the world. It views the worldly state as devoid of essence, self, or substance, and will have nothing of it. Dwellers in this supramundane plane can be further classified into grades. There are four levels of Path and Fruit, namely the levels of the Stream enterer (*Sotapanna*), the Once returner (*Skidagami*), the Never returner (*Anagami*), and the completely Perfected individual or *Arahant*. The condition of these four kinds of noble individuals or *Ariyans* is the supramundane condition. "Supramundane" means

"above the world," and refers to the mind, not the body. The body can be anywhere at all as long as living conditions are adequate. "Supramundane" simply describes a mind dwelling above the world. As for the nether worlds such as hell, purgatory, or the places of suffering, torment, and bondage, these are out of the question for the Ariyans.

The criteria for recognizing these four levels in the supramundane plane are the various mental impurities which are in the course of being eliminated. The Buddha divided the impurities in this group into ten kinds. He called them the Fetters (*Samyojana*). These ten fetters bind man and all beings to the world, keeping people in the mundane plane. If a person starts to cut through these fetters and break loose, his mind gradually and progressively becomes freed from the worldly condition; and when he manages to cut through them completely, his mind becomes completely free, transcends the world for good and comes to dwell permanently in the supramundane plane.

Of these ten kinds of subtle mental impurities that bind us, the first is the Self belief (*Sakkaya-ditthi*), the view that the body and mind is "my self." It is a misunderstanding or misconception based on clinging to the idea "I am." Because the average person is not aware of the true nature of the body and the mind, he unthinkingly regards these two as his "self." He assumes that body and mind is his

"self," his "I." This instinctive idea that there is an "I" and a "mine" is so firmly ingrained that normally nobody ever doubts their existence. True, the self instinct is what makes life possible, being the basis of self preservation, the search for food and propagation of the species, but in this case, what we are calling the self belief is to be taken only in its most basic sense as the root cause of selfishness. This is considered to be the first of the fetters, to be done away with before anything else.

The second fetter is Doubt (Vicikiccha), the cause of wavering and uncertainty. Most importantly it is doubt concerning the practice leading to liberation from suffering—doubt due to inadequate knowledge, doubt as to what this subject is really all about, doubt as to whether this practice for breaking free from suffering is really the right thing for one, whether one is really capable of carrying it through, whether it is really better than other things, whether or not it really does any good, whether the Buddha really did attain enlightenment, whether he really did achieve liberation from suffering, whether the Buddha's teaching and the practical method based on his teaching really do lead to liberation from suffering, whether it is really possible for a bhikkhu in the Sangha to attain liberation from suffering.

The root cause of hesitancy is ignorance. A fish that has always lived in the water, if told about life on dry land,

would be sure to believe none of it, or at most only half of it. We, immersed as we are in sensuality, are as habituated to sensuality as is the fish to water, so that when someone speaks of transcending sensuality, transcending the world, we can't understand. And that which we can understand to some extent we are hesitant about. It is natural for us to think on this lower level; to think on the high level produces a new picture. The conflict between the high level thinking and the low level thinking is what constitutes wavering. If mental energy is insufficient, the low level thinking will triumph. Doubt and wavering with regard to goodness is something chronically present in everyone right from birth. In a person who has been brought up wrongly, it may be a very common complaint. We have to introspect and note the bad consequences of this wavering, which is present to such an extent in our work and our everyday living that we become sceptical about goodness, truth, and liberation from suffering.

The third fetter is Superstition (*Silabbatapraramasa*) or attachment to rules and rituals based on a misunderstanding of their real purpose. Essentially it is a misguided attachment to certain things one does. Usually it has to do with doctrines and ceremonies. An example of this is belief in magic and magical practices, which is blatantly just superstition and occurs even among Buddhists. Practice based on the belief that it will produce magical abilities,

psychic powers, and protective forces is founded on false hopes and is irrational. Another example is the undertaking of moral precepts (Five Precepts, etc.) or virtuous conduct. The real purpose of this is to eliminate mental defilements; but if we believe that it will give rise to miraculous powers which we shall then be able to use to eradicate the defilements, we are in fact grasping and clinging, and so defeating our original purpose. The practice is quite correct in itself, but if we misunderstand it and cling to it irrationally, regarding it as something magical or sacred, then it becomes pure superstition. Even taking upon oneself the moral precepts, if done in the belief that it will lead to rebirth as a celestial being, is without a doubt an example of attachment to rules and rituals and goes contrary to Buddhist aims. Such beliefs contaminate otherwise virtuous conduct. The objective of the Buddhist discipline is the elimination of the cruder defilements of body and speech as a foundation for the progressive development of concentration and insight. The objective is not rebirth in heaven. To have such false motives is to soil and contaminate one's own morals with grasping and clinging, with false ideas. Charity or adherence to moral precepts, or meditation practice, if carried out with a mistaken idea of their true objective, inevitably will stray from the Buddhist path.

Do understand that even Buddhist practice, associated with misunderstanding because craving has come in

and taken over, bringing the expectation of mystical powers, becomes superstition instead. This applies to even the very small and trivial things that most of us like to indulge in, such as ritual chanting, merit making, and the like. The ceremony of placing rice and trays of sweets before the Buddha's image, if performed in the belief that it is an offering to the Buddha's "spirit" and that he will be able to partake of it, is 100 percent certain to produce effects precisely the opposite of what the devotee is hoping for. Behaviour that defeats its own true purpose is generally quite common in Buddhist circles. It is foolish and irrational and results in practices originally worthwhile and attractive becoming contaminated with the stupidity and ignorance of the people performing them. This is what is meant by superstition. As we can see, this defilement has its origins in delusion and misunderstanding. Most of us have our own ingrown beliefs in mystical powers as a result of having been misinformed and led astray by others. We need not go into any more detail here; but though it may be rather disturbing, everyone ought to do some critical self examination along these lines.

When these first three defilements, namely self belief, doubt, and superstition, have been completely given up, one is said to have attained the lowest level in the supramundane plane, that is, to have become a Stream

enterer. To give up completely these three defilements is not difficult at all, because they are just primitive qualities possessed by primitive, underdeveloped people. In anyone who has studied well and made progress, these three elements should not be present; and if they are, then that person's mind should be considered still primitive. Anyone ought to be able to give up these three defilements and become an Ariyan. If he can't he is still a foolish and deluded person, or, to use the best term, a worldling (*Puthujjana*), someone with a thick blindfold covering the eye of insight.

When any individual has managed to give up these defilements, his mind is freed from bondage to the world. These three are ignorance and delusion obscuring the truth and are fetters binding the mind to the world. Giving them up is like rendering ineffective three kinds of bondage or three blindfolds, then slipping free and rising above and beyond the world, into the first supramundane level. This is what it is to become an Ariyan of the first degree, to attain the first level in the supramundane plane. Such an individual is called a Stream enterer, one who has attained for the first time the Stream that flows on to Nirvana. In other words an individual at this stage is certain to attain Nirvana at some time in the future. What he has attained is only the Stream of Nirvana, not Nirvana itself. This Stream is a course that flows right on to Nirvana, inclining towards Nirvana just as the water-course of a river slopes down

towards the sea. Though it may still take some time, a mind which has once entered the Stream is certain to achieve Nirvana eventually.

Attaining the second level in the supramundane plane implies giving up the three fetters just mentioned, and further, being able to attenuate certain types of craving, aversion, and delusion to such a degree that the mind becomes elevated and only very feebly attached to sensuality. It is traditionally held that an individual who achieves this level will return to this world at most only once more, hence he is known as a Once returner. A Once returner is closer to Nirvana than a Stream enterer, there remaining in him no more than a trace of worldliness. Should he return to the sensual human world, he will do so not more than once, because craving, aversion, and delusion, though not completely eliminated, have become exceedingly attenuated.

The third stage is that of the Never returner. This grade of Ariyan, besides having succeeded in giving up the defilements to the extent necessary for becoming a Once returner, has also managed to give up the fourth and fifth fetters. The fourth fetter is sensual desire and the fifth is ill will. Neither the Stream enterer nor the Once returner has completely given up sensual desire. In both of them there is still a remnant of satisfaction in alluring and

desirable objects. Even though they have managed to give up self belief, doubt, and superstition, they are still unable to relinquish completely their attachment to sensuality of which some traces remain. But an Ariyan at the third stage, a Never returner, has succeeded in giving it up completely, so that not a trace remains. The defilement called ill will, which includes all feelings of anger or resentment, has been washed out to a large extent by the Once returner so that there remains only a trace of ill humour to obstruct his mind; but the Never returner has got rid of it altogether. Thus the Never returner has thrown off both sensual desire and ill will.

This sensual desire or attachment to and satisfaction in sensuality was explained adequately in the section on sensual attachment. It is a chronic defilement, firmly fixed in the mind as if it were a very part of it, of the same substance. For the ordinary man, it is hard to understand and hard to eradicate. Anything at all can serve as an object for desire: colours and shapes, sounds, odours, tastes and tactile objects of any sort, kind, and description. These are sensual objects (*Kama*), and the state of mental attachment which takes the form of satisfaction in these desirable objects is sensual desire (*Kama - raga*).

What we call ill will is the reaction of a mind that feels dissatisfaction. If there is satisfaction, there is sensual

desire; if dissatisfaction, ill will. Most people's minds are subject to these two states. There may arise ill will towards even inanimate objects, and what is more, one can even be dissatisfied with the things one has produced oneself, the things that arise in one's own mind. Where there is actual hatred and anger towards an object, ill will has become too fierce. An Ariyan at a stage below the Non - returner has given it up to a degree appropriate to his station. The ill will that remains for the third grade of Ariyan to relinquish is just a mental reaction so subtle that possibly no outward evidence of it appears. It is an inner perturbation not revealed by any facial expression, yet present inwardly as dissatisfaction, as irritation, or annoyance at some person or thing that does not conform to expectation. Imagine a person completely devoid of every form of ill will : consider what a very exceptional individual he would be, and how worthy of respect.

The five defilements we have just been discussing were grouped together by the Buddha as the first to be given up. Self belief, doubt, superstition, sensual desire, and ill will have all been given up by an Ariyan at the third level. Because there remains no sensual desire, this grade of Ariyan never again returns to the sensual state of existence. This is why he gets the name "Never returner," one who will never come back. For him there is only movement forward and upward to Arahantship and Nirvana, in a state

having nothing to do with sensuality, a supreme, divine condition. As for the five remaining defilements, these only the Arahant, the fourth grade of Ariyan, succeeds in relinquishing completely.

The next defilement, the sixth of the fetters, is desire for the bliss associated with the various stages of concentration on forms (*rupa - raga*). The first three grades of Ariyan are still not capable of giving up attachment to the bliss and tranquillity obtainable by concentrating deeply on forms, but they will succeed in doing so when they move up to the last stage, that of the Arahant. The fully concentrated state has a captivating flavour, which can be described as a foretaste of Nirvana. Though it differs from real Nirvana, it has more or less the same flavour. While one is fully concentrated, the defilements are dormant ; but they have not evaporated away entirely, and will reappear as soon as concentration is lost. As long as they are dormant, however, the mind is empty, clear, free, and knows the flavour of real Nirvana. Consequently this state can also become a cause of attachment.

The seventh subtle defilement is desire for the bliss associated with full concentration on objects other than forms (*arupa - raga*). It resembles the sixth fetter, but is one degree more subtle and attenuated. Concentration on an object such as space or emptiness yields a tranquillity and

quiescence more profound than concentration on a form, with the result that one becomes attached to that state. No Arahant could ever become fascinated by any state of pleasant feeling whatsoever, regardless of where it originated, because an Arahant is automatically aware of the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non selfhood of every state of feeling. Other hermits and mystics practising concentration in the forest do not perceive the hidden danger in these blissful states and so become fascinated by and attached to the flavour of them just as immature people become attached to the flavour of sensual objects. For this reason the Buddha used the same word "desire" for both cases. If you think this subject over and really come to understand it, you will be full of admiration and respect for these individuals called Ariyans.

The eighth fetter binding a man to the world is awareness of superiority or inferiority (*mana*). It is the delusion of having this or that status relative to another. It consists in the thought: "I am not as good as he is. I am just as good as he is. I am better or higher than he is." Thinking "I am not as good as.....," one feels inferior; thinking "I am better than.....," one feels puffed up; and thinking "I am just as good as.....," one thinks along competitive lines or in terms of getting ahead of the other fellow. It is not pride or conceit. Not to think automatically of oneself as better or worse than the other fellow in this

fashion is bound to be very difficult. The placing of this defilement as number eight is probably meant to indicate that it is hard to give up and so belongs near the end of the list. Only the highest grade of Ariyan can relinquish it. The likes of us naturally can't give it up. This idea that one is better than, or on a par with, or not as good as the other fellow, comes from a certain kind of attachment. As long as the mind is still involved in good and bad, the awareness of inferiority, superiority, or equality with respect to others remains to disturb it; but when it has completely transcended good and bad, such ideas cannot exist. As long as such ideas do remain, real bliss and tranquillity are lacking.

The ninth fetter is agitation (*Uddhacca*), that is, mental unrest, distraction, lack of peace and quiet. This is the feeling of agitation that arises when something interesting comes by. We all have certain chronic wishes, particularly a desire to get, to be, not to get, or not to be, one thing or another. When something comes by, via the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, which fits in with one of our tendencies, there is likely to come about the mental reaction, pro or con, which we call interest. If we see something new and strange, wavering and curiosity are bound to arise, because there are still things that we want and things that we fear and mistrust. So the mind cannot resist, it has to be interested in the various things that come by — at least that is how it is with an ordinary person. If

the object in question happens to coincide with a desire of his, he finds it hard to resist. He is likely to become interested to the point of becoming involved, pleased to the point of forgetting himself. If it is an undersirable object, the mind becomes depressed so that his gratification comes to an end. This is the nature of agitation.

The first three grades of Ariyan still have curiosity and inquisitiveness about things, but the Arahant has none at all. His mind has abolished all desire for anything whatsoever: it has abolished fear and hatred, worry and anxiety, mistrust and doubt, and all desire to know about and see things. His mind is free. Nothing can provoke or lure him, and arouse inquisitiveness or curiosity, simply because he has abolished partiality. It should be realized that the existence or arising of agitation in any situation is a consequence of some form of desire, even including the desire for knowledge. When desire has been done away with through realizing the impermanence, worthlessness, and non selfhood of all things, nothing is any longer seen as worth getting or being, and so there is no curiosity about anything. If a bolt of lightning were to strike right beside an Arahant, he would not be interested, because he has no fear of death, or craving for continued existence, or anything of that sort. Even if something dangerous came along, or if something brand new were discovered in the world, he would know no inquisitiveness or curiosity,

because such things have no significance for him. He has no wish to know about anything from the point of view of what it may have to offer him. Because there is nothing that he longs for, he has no curiosity of any kind, and his mind has a purity, a tranquillity such as we ordinary folk have never attained.

The tenth and last defilement is ignorance. This covers every kind of defilement not yet mentioned. The word "ignorance" refers to a condition of lack of knowledge, and in this case "knowledge" means real knowledge, correct knowledge. Naturally no creature can exist without having some knowledge, but if that knowledge is false, it has the same value as no knowledge. Most people suffer from chronic ignorance or false knowledge; most of us are benighted. The most important questions for human beings are those that ask: "What is suffering, really?", "What is the real cause of the arising of suffering?", "What is real freedom from suffering?" and "What is the real way to attain freedom from suffering?". If some individual has real knowledge, if he is free of ignorance, he is reckoned as enlightened. The totality of human knowledge is of untold extent, but the Buddha classed most of it as not essential. The Buddha's enlightenment encompassed only what need be known. The Buddha knew all that need be known. The word "omniscient" or "all-knowing" means knowing just as much as need be known: it does not include anything non-essential.

Ignorance causes people to misidentify suffering as pleasure, to such an extent that they just swim around in circles in a sea of suffering. It also causes them to misidentify the cause of suffering, so that they go blaming the wrong things, spirits, celestial beings, or anything at all as the cause of their pain and misfortune, instead of rectifying the situation by the right means. The making of vows to these spirits and celestial beings is a manifestation of the lowest level of ignorance regarding the complete elimination of suffering by means of eliminating the craving which is its direct cause. The mistaken assumption that the bliss and tranquillity or unawareness brought about by deep concentration is the complete extinction of suffering was common in the Buddha's time, and is still promoted in the present day. Certain schools of thought have even come to regard sensuality as an instrument for extinguishing suffering, so that sects with shameful, obscene practices have arisen right in the temples. They firmly believe that sensuality is something quite essential, a kind of vital nourishment. Not content with just the four necessities of life, namely food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, they add an extra one, sensuality, making five necessities.

A person ignorant about the Path that leads to the extinction of suffering is liable to act foolishly and be motivated by his own desires, for instance naively relying on physical things, or on spirits and celestial beings, just

as if he had no religion at all. Such a person, though he may be a Buddhist by birth, is able to go to such foolish lengths simply because the power of ignorance prevents his being content with extinguishing suffering by way of the Noble Eightfold Path. Instead he goes about extinguishing suffering by lighting incense and candles, and making pledges to supposedly supernatural things.

Every normal person wishes to gain knowledge; but if the "knowledge" he gains is false, then the more he "knows," the more deluded he becomes. Thus more kinds of knowledge can blind the eyes. We have to be careful with this word "enlightenment." The "Light" may be the glare of ignorance, which blinds and deludes the eye and gives rise to overconfidence. Blinded by the glare of ignorance, we are unable to think straight and so are in no position to defeat suffering. We waste our time with trivialities, nonessential things unworthy of our respect. We become infatuated with sensuality, taking it to be something excellent and essential for human beings, something which every man ought to get his share of before he dies, and making the excuse that we are doing it for the sake of some quite different ideal. The hope for rebirth in heaven is founded on sensuality. Attachment to anything whatsoever, particularly sensuality, comes about because ignorance has enveloped the mind cutting off all means of escape. At several places in the Texts, ignorance is compared to a thick

shell covering the whole world and preventing people from seeing the real light.

The Buddha placed ignorance last in the list of the ten fetters. When a person becomes an Arahant, the highest grade of Ariyan, he completely eliminates the five remaining fetters or defilements. He eliminates desire for forms, desire for objects other than forms, status consciousness, agitation, and ignorance. The four kinds of Ariyan, Stream enterer, Once returner, Never returner, and Arahant, dwell in the Supramundane plane. The Supramundane can be recognized as having nine aspects. The condition of the Stream enterer while he is in the process of cutting out the defilements is called the Path of Stream entry, and that when he has succeeded in cutting them out is called the Fruit of Stream entry. Likewise there are the following pairs: Path and Fruit of Once returning, Path and Fruit of Never returning, and Path and Fruit of Arahantship, in all four pairs. These together with Nirvana make up the nine aspects of the Supramundane. For an individual in the supramundane plane, suffering is diminished in accordance with his status until ultimately he is completely free of it. When a person once succeeds in attaining unobscured and perfect insight into the true nature of things so that he is able to stop desiring anything whatsoever, he has attained the supramundane plane, his mind has transcended the worldly condition. And when he has completely and utterly

relinquished all the mental defilements, his mind is rendered permanently free of all those worldly things which formerly it liked and disliked.

Nirvana is a condition not in any way comparable to any other. It is unlike any worldly condition. In fact, it is the very negation of the worldly condition. Given all the characteristics of the worldly condition, of phenomenal existence, the result of completely cancelling out all those characteristics is Nirvana. That is to say, Nirvana is that which is in every respect precisely the opposite of the worldly condition. Nirvana neither creates nor is created, being the cessation of all creating. Speaking in terms of benefits, Nirvana is complete freedom from hellfire, scourging, torture, bondage, subjection, and thralldom, because the attainment of Nirvana presupposes the complete elimination of the defilements, which are the cause of all unsatisfactory mental states. Nirvana lies beyond the limitations of space and time. It is unique, unlike anything in the world. Rather it is the extinction of the worldly condition. Speaking metaphorically, the Buddha called it the realm where all conditional things cease to be (*Sankhara-samatho*). Hence it is the condition of freedom, of freedom from fetters. It is, as the end of torment and buffeting, stabbing and chafing, from any source whatsoever. This is the nature of the Supramundane, the ultimate. It is the Buddhist goal and destination. It is the final fruit of Buddhist practice.

In the foregoing pages we have explained systematically the principles of Buddhism. We have presented it as an organized practical system designed to bring knowledge of the true nature of things. In reality things are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not selves; but all creatures are attracted by things and become attached to them simply through misunderstanding. The Buddhist practice, based on Morality (*Sila*), Concentration (*Samadhi*), and Insight (*Pañña*), is a tool to be used for completely cutting out grasping and clinging. The objects of our clinging are the five aggregates: body, feeling, perception, active thinking, and consciousness. When we have come to know the true nature of the five aggregates, we understand all things so well that desire gives way to disenchantment, and we no longer cling to any of them.

What we have to do is lead the kind of life described as Right Living (*Samma Vihareyyum*), and be full day and night with the joy that arises out of conduct that is consistently good, beautiful, and right. This limits aimless wandering of the thoughts and makes it possible to concentrate and to have clear insight at all times. Then if conditions are right, the result is disenchantment, struggle to break loose, slipping free, or even complete Nirvana. If we wish to hurry and gain quick results, then there is the line of practice called Vipassana, which begins with moral purity and mental purity and carries right through to perfect

and unobscured intuitive insight. By this means we can completely cut through the fetters that bind us fast to this world, and attain the final Fruit of the Path.

This is a brief account of the whole of Buddha-Dhamma from beginning to end, including both theoretical and practical principles, and covering the entire subject right from the first steps to the final Fruit. The whole story ends with Nirvana. As the Buddha said: "All Buddhas recognized Nirvana as the highest good." So it behoves us to practise in order to realize and attain that which should be realized and attained. Doing this, we shall deserve to be called Buddhists ; we shall gain insight and penetrate to the real essence of Buddha-Dhamma. If we don't practise Buddha-Dhamma, we shall only know about it and shall lack any true insight. It rests with each of us to practise introspection, observe and understand his own imperfections, and then try to root them out completely. Even if one is only half successful, some clear understanding will result. As the defilements are progressively eliminated, their place is taken by purity, insight, and peace.

So I advise and beseech you to approach the subject in this fashion. You may then succeed in penetrating to the real Buddha-Dhamma. Don't waste the advantages of having been born a human being and having encountered the Buddha's teaching. Don't miss this chance to be a perfect human being.

Why were We Born?

A lecture delivered at Makkabalarama

Thailand

on 21 July 1965
and 28 July 1965

by
Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

WHY WERE WE BORN ?

"Why were we born ?"

First of all, is this question a significant one for the average man? I think we can take it that this question is one that everyone is interested in and puzzled over. There may, however, be some who will raise an objection.

"The Buddha taught the non-existence of 'the being,' 'the individual,' 'the self,' 'you,' and 'me' He taught that there is no self to be born. So the problem 'Why were we born ?' does not arise !"

This sort of objection is valid only at the very highest mental level, for someone who himself knows Freedom but for the ordinary man who does not yet know Freedom it is not a valid objection since it is not relevant, not to the point. A person who does not as yet know Dharma thoroughly is bound to feel himself involved in the process of birth and to have a great many problems and questions. He has no idea for what purpose he has been born.

It is only an Arahant, one who has gone all the way in Buddha-Dharma, who will really realize that there is no

birth, and on "being" or "person" or "self" to be born. For an Arahant the question "why was I born?" does not arise. But for anyone who has not yet attained the stage of Arahantship, even though he may be at one of the lower stages of insight such as Stream entry, and in whom the idea of "self" and "of self" does still arise, the question "Why was I born?" very definitely does exist.

So we are putting the question "Why was I born?" and we are taking it that this question is a relevant one for anyone who is not as yet an Arahant.

Now let us have a look at the different ideas that naturally come up in the minds of different people in answer to this question "Why were we born?"

If we ask a child for what purpose he was born, he will simply say that he was born in order to be able to play and have fun and games. A teenage boy or girl is bound to answer that he or she was born for the sake of good looks, dating, and flirting. And an adult, parent, householder, will probably say he was born to earn a living, to save up money for his retirement and his children. These are the kinds of answers we are bound to get.

A person who has become old and feeble, is more than likely to have the foolish idea that he was born in order to die and be born again, and again, and again, over and over. Very few people consider that, having been born, we

shall simply die and that will be the end of it. Right from early childhood we have been trained and conditioned to this idea of another world, another birth to come after death, with the result that it has become well and truly fixed in our minds. In any culture having its origins in India the majority of people, Buddhists, Hindus, and others, adhere to this doctrine of rebirth after death. So people who are too old and senile to be able to think for themselves are bound to answer that they were born to die and be reborn.

Generally these are the kinds of answer we get. If we go into it in rather more detail, we shall find some people saying they were born to eat because they happen to have a weakness for food. And there are bound to be some, those who are permanent slaves to alcohol and value nothing more highly, who will say they were born to drink. Others were born to gamble and would part with their own skin before they would give up their vicious habit. And there are all sorts of other things, some of them utterly trivial, in which people become so wrapped up that they come to regard them as the best of all things. Some people, usually the so-called well educated ones, set a lot of value on prestige, they are very concerned about making a name for themselves. Such people were born for the sake of name and fame.

So some people consider they were born for the sake of eating, some for the sake of sensuality, and some for

the sake of name and fame.

The first of these, eating, is a necessity, but people carry it so far that they become infatuated with taste and addicted to eating. At the present time there is evidence of a general increase of interest in food. The rate of increase of newspaper advertisements promoting the art of eating would lead one to conclude that not a few people are obsessed with eating and worship food. These born eaters form the first group.

The second group comprises those who were born for sensuality, for every kind of pleasure and delight obtainable by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. Most people when they have satisfied themselves with eating go off in search of sense pleasures. Their subjection to the power of sensuality may be such that they can rightly be described as slaves to it. Ultimately all the kinds of infatuation we have mentioned so far can be included under sensuality. Even ideas in the mind, the sixth of the senses, can be a source of delight amounting to infatuation. It can be said that such people live for the sake of sensuality, for the sake of visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental things serving as objects of desire. They constitute the second group.

The third group consists of those born for the sake of name and fame. They have been conditioned to worship

prestige, to the extent that they would sacrifice their very lives for it. Name and fame, whether the means employed for attaining it bring benefit to others or only to the individual concerned, can still be of considerable worth, and in terms of worldly values is not something to be condemned. But in terms of absolute values, to go so far as to become a slave to name and fame is a tragedy. It by no means puts an end to the unsatisfactory condition (*dukka*).

So eating, sensuality, and prestige all lead to various kinds of obsession.

Among poorer people, we hear more than anything else of the need to earn a living in order to get the necessities of life. For the poor man nothing is so important or necessary as earning a living. This then is his major concern, and it can be said that he was born to earn a living. He is all the time ploughing his fields, or attending to his business, or whatever it may be, so that this becomes his one and only concern, and he can never have enough of it. In other words he really feels he was born to earn a living, and has never regarded anything as more important than this. The reason for this is that he has never moved among spiritually advanced people, never heard Dharma from them. It is fairly certain that he has moved only among his fellow worldlings and heard only the talk of worldlings. This is something well worth thinking about. Such a person

considers his way of life thoroughly right and proper and worthwhile; but in reality it is only half right, or even less. The magnitude of such a man's obsession with material things shows that he lives to get much more than just enough to eat.

Now what each one of us has to concern himself with, and examine, and come to understand clearly is *why* we were born to earn a living and stay alive. When we have come to understand properly for what ultimate purpose we are here in this life, we realize that this business of earning a living is something quite incidental. It is subsidiary to another big and important purpose, the *real* purpose for which we were born. Do we earn a living simply in order to stay alive and go on endlessly accumulating more and more wealth and property? Or do we do it in order to achieve some higher purpose?

For most people this endless accumulation of wealth and property does seem to be the purpose of earning a living. Few people stop short at earning just enough to satisfy their basic wants, to feed themselves and family, to provide the necessities for a happy life free from misery. For most people no amount of wealth and property is enough. Most don't know where to stop, and have so much they don't know what to do with it. There are plenty like this in the world.

In terms of religion this kind of behaviour is considered, either explicitly or implicitly, to be sinful. In Christianity the accumulation of more wealth than necessary is explicitly stated to be a sin. Other religions say much the same. A person who goes on endlessly accumulating and hoarding wealth and property, who has become in some way or other infatuated and obsessed by it, is regarded as deluded and a sinner. He is not as much of a sinner as someone who kills, but he is a sinner nevertheless. This then is how we ought to see it. We ought not to live just in order to go on endlessly accumulating wealth and property. We ought to regard it as simply a means to an end. We ought to acquire wealth simply to provide for our basic wants, in order that we can then go in search of something else, something better than wealth. And just what that something is we shall discuss later on.

Now the man who lives for the sake of sensuality ought to give a thought to an old saying: "Seeking pleasure in eating, sleeping, and sex, and avoiding danger all these man and beast have in common. What sets man apart is Dharma. Without Dharma man is no different from the beasts"

This is an old saying dating back to pre-Buddhist times, and no doubt also current at the time of the Buddha. In any case it certainly accords with Buddhist principles.

Human beings normally feel the same way as lower animals towards eating, sleeping, and sex, and danger in the form of disease, pain, and enemies. The lower animals can handle these things just as well as human beings. Preoccupation with these things, which any animal has access to, indicates a none too high level of intelligence. And because those objects of sensuality have such an influence over the mind, it is difficult for any ordinary being to recognize them for what they are and break free from them.

To live for sensuality by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind will never lead to Liberation. The average run of people are far removed from the top level, the highest stage attainable in human birth. Having become obsessed with sense objects, they have got stuck half-way along the road, mid-way towards the goal. They are not to be taken as a model. If this sensuality were really as precious as they seem to think it is, then they, together with their animal counterparts, ought to be rated the highest of beings.

At this point we ought to mention that even celestial beings dwelling in the "heaven of sensuality" (*Kamavaca radevata*) are in no way especially well-off. They too are subject to suffering and anxiety. They too are impure constantly defiled by their inappropriate bodily, vocal, and

mental actions, Devatas of this type, whenever they succeed in elevating themselves, leave their heaven of sensuality and go off in search of Buddha Dhamma and Sangha. Sensuality, even in its highest form, is not by any means the highest thing for man, and no man should maintain that this was the purpose for which he was born.

Now we come to prestige. For a man to think he was born for the sake of name and fame is a tragedy. A glance at this thing known as prestige shows it to be thoroughly insubstantial. It depends on other people's having a high regard for one; and it may well be that, though no one realizes it, this high regard is quite unfounded. When the majority of people are deluded, slow-witted, undiscerning, lacking any knowledge of Dharma, the things for which they have a high regard and to which they give prestige are bound to be pretty ordinary and average things, in keeping with their ordinary and average sense of values. In their eyes the things advocated and taught by spiritually advanced people will hardly rate very high. In fact we invariably find that the more concerned people are with name and fame, the more worldly are the things they rate highly. The person who deserves to be rated highest is the one who is able to renounce worldly values and promote the happiness of mankind; but in practice we find all the prestige going to the people responsible for adding to the world's confusion and distress. This is an example of

prestige in the eyes of the worldling, the man stuck here in the world.

To say that we were born to gain prestige is as ridiculous as to say we were born to pursue sensuality or to eat. All these views are equally pitiful. They differ only in degree of sophistication. In short then, there is no doubt whatsoever that neither eating, *nor* sensuality, *nor* prestige is the highest thing, the objective for which a Buddhist ought to aim.

Now let us have a look at a saying of the Buddha which I believe may help us to answer the question of why we were born.

***Sankhara parama dukkha,
Nibbanam paramam sukham.
Etam natva vathabhutam
Santimaggam va bruhayeti.***

Compounding is utter misery,
Nirvana is highest bliss.
Really knowing this truth.
One is on the Path to Peace.

To understand the first line of this quotation, we have first of all to understand properly the word "*sankhara*" This word has several meanings. It can refer either to the

physical, the body, or as in the present case to the mental, the mind. Literally "*sankhara*" means simply "compound" ([both noun and verb]), that is, the function we refer to as "compounding" (and the compound that results therefrom).

Following this definition, then, compounding is utter misery, thoroughly unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). But it is not being stated that compounding is in itself misery, a cause of human distress and suffering. The word "compounding" implies no rest, just continual combining leading to continual "rebirth." And the things responsible for this compounding are the mental defilements (*kilesa*). These are the compounders. With the arising of ignorance, stupidity, infatuation, the root cause of the other defilements, greed and hatred, compounding takes place. They are responsible for the compounding function of the mind, causing it to grasp at and cling to one thing after another, endlessly, without let-up. The word "compounding" as used here refers to grasping and clinging *with attachment* (*upadana*). If there is no attachment, if contamination by attachment does not take place, then the term "compounding" is not applicable.

Sankhara parama dukkha - All compounding is thoroughly unsatisfactory. This means that involvement which has reached the point of craving and attachment is nothing but misery. Without this kind of compounding there is freedom from the misery of the unsatisfactory condition.

It is this very compounding that is referred to as the Wheel of *samsara*, that cyclic process with its three aspects: defilements, action based on those defilements, and results of the action. The defilements, producing satisfaction with the results of our actions (or karmas), prompt us to further action - and so the cycle of defilements, action, and fruit of action goes on endlessly. It is this process that is called compounding: and it is this endlessly repeated process of compounding that is referred to in the statement that all compounding is thoroughly unsatisfactory.

Now the second line: *Nibbanam paramam sukham*. This has become a household maxim. It refers to Nirvana (*nibbana*), the precise opposite of the compounded condition, in other words, freedom from *sankharas*. At any time when compounding ceases, there is Nirvana. Complete and final freedom from compounds is full Nirvana, momentary freedom from compounds is momentary Nirvana, just a trial sample of the real Nirvana. Anyone who has come to know fully the true nature of compounding will have no trouble in understanding by inference the opposite condition of freedom from compounding. The word "Nirvana" can be translated "extinction," or "cessation," or "coolness," or "freedom from distress." All these meanings are consistent with the idea of stopping, of not compounding. Compounding is nothing but constant worry, trouble, distress, misery. "Nirvana" implies the antithesis of "*sankhara*," that is,

freedom from this process of compounding.

Now the next part of the quotation: "Really knowing this truth, one is on the Path to Peace." This means that the realization of this truth leads one to seek the path leading to peace or Nirvana. Nirvana is sometimes called peace (*santi*), that is, stillness, coolness. They are equivalent terms. So this realization prompts us to do everything possible to move in the direction of peace or Nirvana.

From this we can gather that the Buddha wished us to know about the unsatisfactory condition (*dukkha*), to know about freedom from the unsatisfactory condition, and to set out on the path leading to this freedom from the unsatisfactory condition, in other words to Nirvana. If a person has no idea of the possibility of Nirvana, and does not realize that Nirvana, being the absolute cessation of the unsatisfactory condition, is something to be valued above all else, then he will have no wish for Nirvana, and will never set out on the path towards it. As soon as a person recognizes this present condition as thoroughly unsatisfactory, and loses all wish for anything but the very opposite condition, he will start taking an interest in Nirvana and will set out on the path towards it. What he has to do is have a good look at his own mind and subject it to a deep and detailed scrutiny, to discover whether or not it is in the compounded condition.

When a person under the influence of defilements performs some action (karma), especially when he performs some action considered evil, such as drinking, killing, adultery, stealing, or the like, then he is compounding. Compounding is based on ignorance, delusion, stupidity. It goes on until it produces feelings of pleasure and satisfaction in the mind of the doer. When he experiences the unsatisfactory result of his actions, he attempts to deal with it by further actionwhich only makes matters worse. The result is that compounding goes on more than ever... until the time comes when he recognizes this as an unsatisfactory state of affairs and determines to put a stop to it. He then has a look around for something that is not unsatisfactory, and so is able to get free from his evil ways.

Now let us have a quick look at the man who does good, the sort that abstains from evil acts and performs only acts of the type usually called good. Such a man gets all the fitting results of his so-called good actions. He may get wealth and prestige, and all the things a good man could wish for. But if he were to examine his mental condition, he would realize that he is still subject to worry and anxiety. He experiences the suffering that always goes with wealth and prestige. A man rich in fame is usually caused distress by that very fame; and the same goes for wealth and children. Whatever one happens to be attached to and finds satisfaction in is bound to be a cause of distress.

So even good action, action in no way evil, sinful, unwholesome, does not by any means bring freedom from the unsatisfactory condition. Just as an evil man suffers the torment due to an evil-doer, so a good man too is bound to experience his own particular type of suffering. A good man experiences the subtle inconspicuous type of suffering that comes whenever one clings to one's own goodness. So when we examine it as a phenomenon of nature, we find that it is not only the evil man experiencing the fruits of his evil deeds who is whirling around in the cycle of compounding: the good man too, experiencing the fruits of his good deeds, is likewise involved in compounding. Both of them are involved in compounding. There is no end to this process. It goes on and on incessantly. Thought is followed by action, and when the fruits of the action have been got, thinking follows once again. This is the wheel of Samsara, the cycle of wandering on. Samsara is simply this cycle of compounding.

As soon as a person has managed to comprehend this process, he is bound to start taking an interest in the opposite condition. He comes to realize that money, name and fame, and the like are of no help at all and that what is needed is something better than all these. He then starts looking around for something better and higher, some other way. He continues his search until such time as he meets some spiritually advanced person, sits at his feet, and learns

from him the Truth, the Dharma. In this way he comes to know about that state which is the very opposite of all that he has so far had and been and done. He comes to know about Nirvana and the way to attain it. He arrives at the certitude that **this** is the goal that each and every man ought to attain. He realizes: "This is why I was born!" Anything other than this is involvement, entanglement, compounding. This alone is the putting out of the flame, coolness, stillness. His interest in Nirvana prompts him to seek the means of attaining it, and he is convinced that the treading of this path to Nirvana is the purpose for which he was born.

There is one more small question to think over in this connection: "Am I glad I was born? Am I happy about it or not?" Of course no one ever has any choice in the matter of birth. It never happens that a person is in a position to *decide* that he will be born. He simply is born. But no sooner is he born than he comes into contact with sense objects by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. He becomes engrossed in these objects, and finds satisfaction in them. This means that he is glad of having been born and wishes to continue existing in order that he may continue experiencing these sense objects. And when people speak of making a lot of merit in order to have sense objects again after death, at a better, more refined, higher level than at present, this indicates an even greater desire to be born for the sake of these pleasant things.

The important point here is this: a person having been born, enjoys the forms, sounds, odours, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental images which his mind encounters. As a result he grasps at them and clings to them with egoism and possessiveness. He has been born and he finds satisfaction and delight in having been born. He dreads death because death would mean no more of all these things. The essence of this is that no man is ever born of his own free will, as a result of some decision on his own part; birth just happens as a natural process characterising all living reproducing things. No sooner is a man born than a liking for this birth arises in him in the manner described. In the completely natural situation, that is, among the lower animals, the desire for birth is very slight and does not pose the great problem it does for man.

A man should question himself and verify two things: "I am glad I was born." and "I was born for some purpose." Now if a man concludes that he is glad of having been born to carry out the highest task possible for a man, then his position is rather paradoxical. If the real goal of life is freedom from rebirth, then he was born in order not to be reborn, and so ought never to have been born in the first place! Why should he be glad he was born and so given the opportunity to walk the path to Nirvana? If freedom from birth is such a good thing, why then is there birth in the first place?

These are some of the questions that constitute ignorance, or at least that arise out of ignorance. "Was I born of my own free will or was birth forced upon me?" "Having been born, what ought I to be doing?" The average person doesn't delve so deeply into these questions. Accepting his birth as an accomplished fact, he simply asks himself the immediate question "What to do now?" Believing he was born to accumulate wealth, he goes right on accumulating wealth. Or if he believes he was born to eat, or to build up name and fame, then he works towards those ends. He feels that is enough. To get name and fame and be materially well off is all the average person wants. For him that is the ideal; and there are not a few people who take this sort of shallow view.

But we are now in a position to consider this question rather more deeply. We have come to see that no amount of this kind of action or this kind of condition is by any means satisfactory. There is still something dissatisfying about it. Something is lacking. No matter how successfully we may pursue these worldly ends we are always left dissatisfied. We are forced to recognize that something more is needed, and in the end we find ourselves drawn to the Dharma. We come to realize that we were born to study this highest and most precious piece of human knowledge and come to understand it, in order to attain Freedom, the highest and

most precious thing accessible to a human being. There is nothing higher than this. This is the **summum bonum**, the best thing attainable by a human being.

Suppose we accept that we have been born, and that having been born we have a certain task to do, a task so important that to carry it through to completion ought to be man's highest aim. There can be no aim higher than this attainment of complete freedom from the misery of the unsatisfactory condition. And by following the Buddha's directions this complete freedom can be attained. The Buddhist teaching came into the world in order to inform people about the highest thing attainable by human beings. All the other religions existing prior to Buddhism had had this same objective, to answer the question: "Why was I born?" They had all been fully occupied with this same question: "What is that highest good for the sake of which man was born?"

Some of these religions considered sensual satisfaction to be the ultimate, the highest good. Some considered the *summum bonum* to be the pure non-sensual bliss of the *brahmaloka*. Then there was a sect which maintained that man's purpose in life was to seek bliss in the knowledge that nothing at all exists! There even existed the view that the highest thing attainable by man is the death-like condition of complete unconsciousness in which there is no

awareness of anything whatsoever! These were the highest doctrines in existence at the time when the Buddha-to-be started his seeking. When he searched and studied in the various ashrams, the highest teaching he was able to find was this. Being sufficiently wise to see that this was by no means the *summum bonum*, he set about investigating on his own account. Thus he arrived at the perfect insight which puts a final end to the unsatisfactory condition, and as we say, he attained Nirvana.

Even though people had been talking about nirvana long before the time of the Buddha, the meaning of the word as used by him differs from the meanings it had for those sects. Mere words cannot be relied on; it is the meanings that count. When we say we were born in order to attain Nirvana, we mean nirvana as that word was used by the Buddha. We don't mean the Nirvana of other sects, such as abundance of sensual pleasures, or the highest stage of mental concentration. When we say Nirvana is our goal, we must have in mind Nirvana as understood in the Buddha's teaching. And in the Buddha's teaching Nirvana is generally to be taken as the opposite of the compounded condition. This is expressed in the Pali saying we have already quoted:

Sankhara parama dukkha
Nibbanam paramam sukham.

Nivana is simply freedom from *sankharas*, compounds. We must understand then that we were born in order to attain freedom from compounding. Some people may laugh at this statement that our objective in life is to attain "freedom from compounding." Compounding, this spinning on in the wheel of Samsara, is unsatisfactory. Freedom from compounding consists in having such a degree of insight that this vicious circle is cut through and got rid of completely. When there is freedom from compounding, there is no more spinning on, no more wheel of Samsara. Our purpose in life is to bring to a standstill the cycle of Samsara, to put a complete end to the unsatisfactory condition. This complete freedom from unsatisfactoriness is called Nirvana.

Now Nirvana is not something occult and mysterious. It is not some sort of miracle, something supernatural. Further more, *Nirvana is not something to be attained only after death*. This is a point that *must* be understood. Nirvana is attained at any moment that the mind becomes free from compounding. Freedom from compounding, at any moment, is Nirvana. Permanent cessation of compounding is full Nirvana; temporary cessation is just a momentary Nirvana, which is the kind we have been discussing. The experiencing of temporary Nirvana serves as an incentive to go further, to head for permanent Nirvana, the full Nirvana.

that makes a man an Arahant. This state arises with the knowledge that *sankharas*, that is compounds and compounding, are misery, while Nirvana, freedom from compounding, is peace, bliss. Every man's purpose in life ought to be to tread the path to full Nirvana.

So the answer to the question "Why were we born?" is provided by this saying:

Compounding is utter misery,
Nirvana is highest bliss.

WALKING THE PATH.

Our present birth is to be thought of as resembling a journey along a road. It is necessary then to have a good look and discover which is the right and which the wrong way to walk this road. If we just follow the crowd, we may well go astray and miss the true destination. This is not the kind of walking we have in mind when we speak of "walking the Path." By "walking the Path" we mean progress towards nirvana, towards freedom from the unsatisfactory condition.

If this comparison of our present birth to a journey along a road is still unclear, the matter must be thought over deeply, discussed, and studied thoroughly. In this study and practice, we can find help and guidance in the teachings of the Buddha, the one who succeeded in walking the Path right to the end. Unfortunately however, most people take no interest in the Buddha's teaching as a guide to the Path and how to walk it.

Now here is an important point to consider: this person who is to walk the Path - just which particular person

is it? Or if it is a number of people, how many? Taking the broad outlook we can see that it is really the whole of humanity, mankind in general. Think about it. As long as no one exists who knows the Path and how to walk it, most people are sure to stray from the Path. But slowly and by degrees the right way is found, little by little the Path is re-discovered, until the time comes when there arises a fully enlightened being, a buddha, someone who manages to walk the perfectly right Path. In other words walking the Path is a long-term project which mankind is engaged in collectively, until such time as some exceptional individual happens to increase so much in insight that he manages to walk it right to the end.

Let us put this another way. Most people live no longer than one hundred years at the most. Walking the Path more or less clumsily, they cover only a short distance before they die. No single person gets very far - and who is to carry on where he leaves off? The answer is posterity. Succeeding generations, benefiting from the insight gained by their predecessors, inherit the task of carrying on the journey. Children and grandchildren carry on where their elders have left off, making steadily more progress until the time comes when one of them manages to complete the journey.

Looked at in this way, even the having of children,

the propagation of the species, has as its objective continual progress along the Path, and ultimately arrival at the end. But do people at the present time really have this objective in view when they have children? People go on producing more and more dark-eyed little infants - but are they thinking of these new individuals as heirs to the task of carrying on along the Path? If not, then their motivation must be on some lower level, the level of animals like dogs and cats. People give birth to offspring, which they then love so dearly they would willingly lay down their life for them. But animals do this too. The attachment to offspring dominating the mind of a parent operates in precisely the same way in animals as in man.

But let us examine *why* an animal has such an attachment to its offspring, such a strong desire to protect them. Just what is the purpose of it? We can safely assume that it is not a result of rational thinking on the part of the animal. Attachment to offspring and desire to protect them are naturally present in animals. And why has Nature equipped animals with this kind of instinct? In order to guard against the extinction of the species. And for what purpose should the extinction of an animal species be averted? Ultimately in order to make possible further evolution, further steady progress towards the highest stage possible for a reproducing species. Thus we see Nature working to save each species of living things from extinction, thereby

ensuring continued evolution up to the highest point. This is Nature's purpose. Animals in general are subject to this law, whether they realize it or not. It can be said, then, that for the lower animals too, birth is a journey. It is a non-stop journey of progress until the top is reached, until there evolves Man. And after that further progress is possible to the stage of Fully Enlightened Man.

Now, for what purpose does present-day man produce offspring? Possibly there do exist people who genuinely believe they are producing children in order that the human species may be perpetuated and Nirvana ultimately attained, in other words, in order that there may be continual progress along the Path. But obviously the great majority do not think like this. They love their children. They feed and care for them and make all sorts of sacrifices on account of their blind love. Everyone wants his own children to be the best and the most beautiful. No one is concerned about the propagation of the species for the sake of continuing the journey. No one looks on his children in terms of humanity's collective progress towards the goal. Everyone thinks in terms of individual benefit, in terms of "me" and "mine." It is only "my child" that matters. It is only **he** whose condition and progress are of any concern. This kind of thinking conforms with the laws of Nature, but conflicts with all the principles of Dharma. As a result, children are bound to bring their parents misery and tears.

This narrow thinking does nothing to help humanity towards nirvana.

All this discussion is intended to bring us back to the questions: "Why was I born?" and "What ought I to be doing?" Even if one has children and keeps the species going, what must one hand on to them so that they may be fit to encounter the Dharma and become genuine Dharma-followers: As long as each individual considers himself a single self-sufficient unit, not involved with the rest, mankind has no means of moving forward towards the coming into existence of an enlightened being.

All of man's scientific knowledge is of no use unless it helps him to progress spiritually. Now, speaking in terms of material values, it does happen that what evil people achieve and pass on to evil people following them brings about progress. If this were not so, the world could never have attained its present unbelievably high stage of technological development. It could be maintained that we were born to work for the material progress of mankind up to the ultimate. But in material progress there *is* no ultimate. Progress, as understood by the average householder, the man of the world, never leads to any ultimate goal. By contrast, spiritual progress, progress towards the Truth known by an enlightened being, does have an ultimate goal. On *this* road it *is* possible to go right to the end and

attain complete freedom from the unsatisfactory condition.

Let us pursue the question further. Given that man was born to walk the Path to nirvana, how exactly are we to set about this walking? The Buddha has said:

*Sabbe sankhara aniccati
Yada pannaya passati
Atha nibbindati dukkhe
Esa maggo visuddhiya.*

"When a man sees with insight that all compounds are transient, he becomes fed up with them as unsatisfactory. That is the Path to Nirvana, to Purity."

When a man comes to recognize the true nature of compounds (*sankharas*), he becomes fed up with them. And this disenchantment with compounds is the first step on the Path leading to Nirvana, to Dharma. The Buddha said furthermore:

*Sabbe sankhara anicca,
Sabbe sankhara dukkha,
Sabbe dhamma anatta,*

All compounds are transient,
All compounds are unsatisfactory,
All things are not selves (*anatta*).

When one has seen these three characteristics, one becomes disenchanted with those unsatisfactory compounds. And that is the Path to Nirvana - or at least the beginning of it. The point to note here is that when a person has come to a proper realization of these characteristics of compounds, he finds himself naturally repelled by compounds, that is, by the unsatisfactory condition. *All compounds are thoroughly unsatisfactory.* As soon as a person begins to see compounds as thoroughly unsatisfactory, he becomes utterly fed-up with compounds. Compounds are by their very nature unsatisfactory. The word "compound" automatically implies unsatisfactoriness. There is no such thing as a satisfactory compound. When compounding stops, there is Nirvana, the ideal state.

But the last line of this quotation covers both compounds and non-compounds. Nothing whatsoever, be it compound or no compound, is a self that might be grasped at as being one's own. This is the last word. Compounds are ever changing; compounds are unsatisfactory; **all** things, compounds or not, are such that they may not be grasped at as selves or as belonging to oneself. Only when this fact is seen in all clarity has the real Path begun; only then has one really started moving towards the overcoming of the unsatisfactory condition, that is, towards Nirvana.

The word "Path" has several meanings. First of all

and most basically it should be understood as synonymous with "practice" (*Patipatti*) or "way of practice" (*patipada*). Both of these terms imply stepwise progress like walking along a path; and they also imply the path itself which is to be walked. The word "Path" refers specifically to that which is practised or walked, but strictly speaking the Path and the walking of it ought not to be distinguished. The walking, the walker, and the path walked are not to be recognized as separate things. In the Pali language one single word was used for these, or at least one basic root word was used in slightly different forms which referred respectively to the one who walks, the path walked, and the act of walking. All these are in Pali variants of the one root word. So when we hear of the practice (*Patipatti*) or the way of practice (*patipada*), let us bear in mind that they refer to walking the Path.

And there are numerous other terms all referring to this same Path. A person who, not having studied the matter very closely, comes across such a large number of equivalent terms may well jump to the conclusion that they refer to several different things. In reality they all refer to this one Path. For instance the Task (*kammapatha*) is simply the Path to be walked; the Ten Skillful Actions (*kusalakammapatha*) are also simply the Path; Morality, Concentration, and Insight (*sila-samadhi panna*) are the Path; the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya atthangika magga*) is

once again the Path; and even to see all compounds as transient and unsatisfactory, and all things as not selves - this too is the Path. Anyone who has been thinking of these various names as all denoting different things would do well to correct this misunderstanding. All these different names denote one and the same Path looked at from different points of view for purposes of instruction.

Now what are the Ten Skillful Actions? These are ten kinds of abstinence from sinful bodily, vocal, and mental action. Taken together they are called the Ten Skillful Actions because anyone who practises in this way is walking the high Path. The Buddha used this particular mode of speaking when teaching ordinary average people. When he wished to teach on a higher level or in briefer terms, for the benefit of people with a more than average degree of understanding, he spoke in terms of the Noble Eightfold Path - right understanding, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This Eightfold Path is a mode of practice rather above the level appropriate for the average householder. But its objective is just the same. It too aims at the attainment of Nirvana, differing from other schemes only in intensity or level.

Now let us look at the Buddha's brief statement that whenever transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood

(*anicca, dukka, anatta*) are perceived with insight, that is the Path. This is even more clearly a statement designed specifically for people with insight. The Pali says quite clearly: "When transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood are perceived *with insight*, that is the Path."

Reflection will show that when we have proper insight and understanding of the true characteristics of all compounds, that is, of Nature itself, then at that time our behaviour, bodily, vocal, and mental, will be just as it should be. It will be *right* behaviour - but not simply right in terms of the law-books or general morality, or social custom, not just unintelligently right. To put it another way, if a person really perceives transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood, he cannot possibly do the wrong thing by way of body, speech, or mind, because the power of this understanding acts as a governor. If we properly know and understand and perceive the three characteristics, we cannot possibly think wrong thoughts or have wrong aspirations, or say or do the wrong thing. Having had clear insight into the true nature of things, we are no longer liable to become obsessed with them. Actions based on true insight are always right actions. Thus morality, concentration, and insight (or the Noble Eightfold Path, or the Ten Skillful Actions, etc.) come into being of their own accord.

Suppose now, that, having reached the peak of

insight into transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood, we then descend. Any action we then do at this lower level will be a thoroughly right action. And taking it the other way round, if we are working up from the bottom, we have to build a firm foundation of right behaviour, bodily, vocal, and mental, supported by which we may grow in insight day by day. So a man of the world, one who is still an ordinary deluded worldling, must have faith in the efficacy of the Ten Skillful Actions and try his best to practise them. If he does this constantly, he will soon start making progress in insight because this is the *right* way to walk the Path. Ultimately he will reach the peak, attaining insight into transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood. So regardless of whether the Path is viewed from the end towards the beginning, or from the beginning towards the end, it is seen as something that *can be done* - provided of course the individual concerned is reasonably well equipped as to character, sense faculties, and intelligence. Everyone who has been born in the world and blessed with long life, ought to make it his business to develop insight, little by little, every day, until he reaches the stage where he is able to see the three characteristics of all compounds, to see the endless process of compounding as unsatisfactory, and to perceive escape from unsatisfactoriness in the state of freedom from compounding.

This is sufficient answer to the question why the

Buddha taught the Path in several different ways. At the high level he taught the Four Exercises in Mindfulness (*satipatthana*) as the One Path, the perfect system for the individual walking alone, the one way towards the one and only goal. He taught the Path under the name of Mindfulness, and under many other names which we need not go into here at length.

All we wish to do here is to realize that this thing called the Path will have come to be the True Path just as soon as there arises insight into transience, unsatisfactoriness, and nonselfhood. As long as this insight has not yet arisen, it is still not the True Path, but only the very beginning of it. So if a person has not yet gained this insight into the three characteristics, he still does not know the Path to be walked. Instead he goes off in search of things which are transient, unsatisfactory, and not selves more than ever, and his life becomes more and more unsatisfactory. But if a person does come to see that all compounds are transient, unsatisfactory, and not selves, his mind will seek to avoid those compounds. It will seek to transcend them, to get above them, so that they cannot harm it. This is the True Path, the Path that leads away from unsatisfactoriness and towards the overcoming of it.

So it is up to each one of us to develop the True Path based on insight and try to gain understanding of the transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood of com-

pounds, to see them as inherently unsatisfactory, as nothing but unsatisfactory, as the unsatisfactory condition itself, to be avoided at all costs. This seen, behaviour will thenceforth be free of compounding with craving and attachment. **Once transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood have been seen, craving and attachment cannot arise.** All that is left is the insight. Insight serves to prevent the arising of craving and attachment. So this life can be one with the Path. Life can be in itself a good steady progress; it can be one and the same as walking the Path.

I hope you will all now take a greater interest in these three words "transience, unsatisfactoriness, non-selfhood." Don't go just memorising someone's explanation of them. See for yourself that things which go on perpetually combining and changing possess these three characteristics. When a person does not realize the true nature of things, he unwittingly takes them as lasting, worthwhile, selves belonging to himself. You can imagine the trouble that then results. It's like taking a thing with certain properties and trying to force it to have different properties. It can't be done any more than fire can be forced to be without heat. The result is both comic and tragic.

So the majority of people believe that having been born into this life, we ought to go after one thing or another, according to our desires, being pleased when we get what we want and upset when we don't. When people have

children they have nothing better to teach them than this primitive philosophy. This is all they have to offer. It is a far cry from the Path taught by the Buddha. Children walk in the same old ruts as their parents, and so it goes on from one generation to the next. There is no progress forwards, no variation or improvement based on knowledge that all things are transient, unsatisfactory, and not selves, and therefore not to be grasped at. If then our children, and we ourselves too, are to walk the Path easily and quickly, it behoves us to take a special interest in this matter of grasping and non-grasping, to train ourselves in it and teach it to others.

True, we have to live in the world. We have to eat, to make use of various articles, to see and come in contact with all sorts of things. But it is possible to live with these things without grasping at and clinging to them. We must act intelligently, always mindful of the three characteristics. When our offspring have this insight, when they have come to see that nothing whatsoever can be grasped at and clung to, we can then leave them to look after themselves. They are then able to think, speak, and act correctly of their own accord, in the way that is free from the unsatisfactory condition. It is up to us to teach and train our children in this matter of grasping and non-grasping so that they may be free from excessive depression and elation. They must develop sufficient intelligence to keep them *above* the things

that would otherwise make them laugh or cry. They must develop in this insight just as they develop physically. This is how to be a good parent who hands on to his offspring the job of walking the Path the right and rapid way. This is how it should be, in keeping with the principle that man is born to walk the Path so that the goal may one day be attained.

Now let us have a look at Thailand, and the hundred-odd other countries of the world, and see what sorts of things people are teaching their children. What sorts of things are people doing? What are their desires, the causes of those actions that are producing so much suffering and misery in every part of the world at the present time?

We find that people, far from walking the right Path, are following the Devil, Satan, Mara, whatever one cares to call him, which is bound to be a source of all sorts of misery. This is not at all in keeping with the purpose of birth as a human being, let alone a human being who has encountered the Buddha's teaching. Even any ordinary human being ought not to behave like this, because the term "human" (in Sanskrit *manusya*) means something rather special. It implies a high-minded being, a descendant of Manu the wise, something higher than average. To deserve the title of human being, one must walk the True Path. As soon as one wanders from the Path, one ceases to be human in the true sense. If one thinks along lines

inconsistent with Truth of Dharma for even one moment, then in that moment one has ceased being a true human being and is instead walking the path of Mara, or the path of the beasts. Our examination has to be done in such detail that we walk the Path *all the time*, with every breath we take, every minute and every second. We must walk the Path *all the time*. As soon as we relax, we go astray.

So let us not go lapsing into thought patterns that lead to carelessness or overconfidence, or the idea that this journey is an easy one. There is also a danger of relaxing and simply going downstream, drifting with the current. This is one of the worst dangers. The Buddha taught us to be constantly aware, to walk the Path every single "thought moment." One moment of unawareness and the mind is off the track again. Sometimes it may go so far astray that to return to the Path becomes very difficult and time-consuming. Suppose one falls into one of the "woeful states" such as hell. This means that one has done the wrong thing, relaxed, and let the mind drop to the low level known as hell, so that it is difficult to return promptly. This wandering from the Path is like walking into a trap, falling into a pit or ditch. It comes from being careless, not keeping to the Path, not being constantly aware of those three characteristics, transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood. And there is no travelling companion who will help us keep to the straight and narrow. There is no one to keep an eye

on us and see that we don't wander off the Path. Each of us is just a blind man being led by blind men. The lot of us are just fumbling along all the time. It is because the great majority of people are forever being careless and wandering off the Path that the entire world is in such a pitiful and hopeless condition.

Do realize that this business of the Path and the walking of it is no small matter, no joke. On the contrary it is the most vital matter of all. It is *the* task for a human being. It is a job to be done with all the intelligence and ability a human being can muster. Don't waver for an instant, not for a split second! In a single instant one may go astray from the Path. If the mind is not on the lookout at every moment, there is a danger of its running off the Path and even falling into hell. It behoves each one of us to reflect on the dangers of this kind of lapse, and resolve to maintain clear and unobscured insight into the transience, unsatisfactoriness, and non-selfhood of every single thing about him. His every action, word, and thought will then be in keeping with that insight. There is no way it can lapse and give rise to some kind of suffering.

This, then, is in brief the way to walk the Path. It is just a brief summary, just the essence of it. It could be dealt with in more detail to cover the numerous different forms of practice out of which an individual may choose just the one that best suits his own particular temperament.

One can think of it as the Noble Eightfold Path, or the Four Exercises in Mindfulness, or the Ten Skillful Actions, or something else, just as one chooses. We may choose to think of it as the Ten Virtues, which a buddha is said to possess. These Virtues are once again the Path to be walked from ordinary human status to buddhahood. If we feel ten Virtues are too much for us to aim at, that is all right; and if we feel we could manage all ten but not to the degree possible for a buddha, that is all right too. These Virtues simply constitute a mode of practice governed by insight into the thoroughly unsatisfactory nature of this worldly condition, this cycle of Samsara, these compounds. Our job is to cross over from all this to the other side, Nirvana, by means of the kind of action that sees things as they really are, as transient, unsatisfactory, and not selves. So we practise in such a way as to wipe out all grasping and clinging to these transient, unsatisfactory, selfless things. We practise charity, goodwill, honesty, tolerance, all the virtues that we realize will give mastery over the lower kinds of thought, the kind that is blind to the three characteristics.

To sum up then, walking the Path must begin, develop, and culminate with perfectly clear insight into the three characteristics. This is all there is to it. I hope you will follow this Path taught by the Buddha and gain the benefits of so doing.

Another Kind of Birth

A lecture delivered at Pattalung Province

Thailand

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by

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

ANOTHER KIND OF BIRTH

- * Birth is perpetual suffering.
True happiness consists in eliminating the false idea of "I".
- * Mankind's problems reduce to the problem of suffering, whether inflicted by another or by oneself.
- * Everyday language-Dharma language : In everyday language the term *birth* refers simply to physical birth from a mother's body ; in Dharma language *birth* refers to a mental event arising out of ignorance, craving, and clinging.
- * Whenever there arises the mistaken idea "I" , the "I" has been *born* ; its parents are ignorance and craving.
- * The kind of birth that constitutes a problem for us is *mental* birth.
- * Anyone who fails to grasp this point will never succeed in understanding anything of the Buddha's teaching.

The subject we shall discuss today is one which I feel everyone ought to recognize as pressing, namely the following two statements made by the Buddha :

"Birth is perpetual suffering." (*Dukkha jati punap-punam*) and

"True happiness consists in eliminating the false idea of 'I'." (*Asmimanassa vinayo etam ve paramam sukham.*)

Mankind's problems reduce to the problem of suffering, whether inflicted by another or by oneself by way of mental defilements (*kilesa*). This is the primary problem for every human being, because noone wants suffering. In the above statements the Buddha equates suffering with birth: "Birth is perpetual suffering"; and he equates happiness with the complete giving up of the false idea "I", "myself", "I am", "I exist".

The statement that birth is the cause of suffering is complex, having several levels of meaning. The main difficulty lies in the interpretation of the word "birth". Most of us don't understand what the word "birth" refers to and are likely to take it in the everyday sense of physical birth from a mother's body. The Buddha taught that birth is perpetual suffering. Is it likely that in saying this he was referring to physical birth? Think it over. If he was referring to physical birth, it is unlikely that he would

have gone on to say: "True happiness consists in eliminating the false idea 'I'" because this statement clearly indicates that what constitutes the suffering is the false idea "I". When the idea "I" has been completely eradicated, that is true happiness. So suffering actually consists in the misconception "I", "I am", "I have". The Buddha taught: "Birth is perpetual suffering." What is meant here by the word "birth"? Clearly "birth" refers to nothing other than the arising of the idea "I" (*asmimāna*).

The word "birth" refers to the arising of the mistaken idea "I", "myself". It does *not* refer to physical birth, as generally supposed. *The mistaken assumption that this word "birth" refers to physical birth is a major obstacle to comprehending the Buddha's teaching.*

It has to be borne in mind that in general a word can have several different meanings according to the context. Two principal cases can be recognized: (1) language referring to physical things, which is spoken by the average person; and (2) language referring to mental things, psychological language, Dharma language, which is spoken by people who know Dharma (higher Truth, Buddha's teaching). The first type may be called "everyday language", the language spoken by the average person; the second may be called "Dharma language", the language spoken by a person who knows Dharma.

The ordinary person speaks as he has learnt to speak, and when he uses the word "birth" he means physical birth, birth from a mother's body ; however in Dharma language, the language used by a person who knows Dharma, "birth" refers to the arising of the idea "I am". If at some moment there arises in the mind the false idea "I am", then at that moment the "I" has been *born*. When this false idea ceases, there is no longer any "I", the "I" has momentarily ceased to exist. When the "I" idea again arises in the mind, the "I" has been *reborn*. This is the meaning of the word "birth" in Dharma language. It refers not to physical birth from a mother of flesh and blood but to mental birth from a mental "mother", namely craving, ignorance, clinging (*tanha, avijja, upadana*). One could think of craving as the mother and ignorance as the father ; in any case the result is the birth of "I", the arising of the false idea "I". The father and mother of the "I" - delusion are ignorance and craving or clinging. Ignorance, delusion, misunderstanding, give birth to the idea "I", "me". And it is *this* kind of birth that is perpetual suffering. Physical birth is no problem ; once born from his mother ; a person need have nothing more to do with birth. Birth from a mother takes only a few minutes ; and no one ever has to undergo the experience more than once.

Now we hear talk of rebirth, birth again and again, and of the suffering that inevitably goes with it. Just what

is this rebirth ? What is it that is reborn ? The birth referred to is a mental event, something taking place in the mind, the non-physical side of our make-up. This is "birth" in Dharma language. "Birth" in everyday language is birth from a mother ; "birth" in Dharma language is birth from ignorance, craving, clinging, the arising of the false notion of "I" and "mine" These are the two meanings of the word "birth".

This is an important matter, which simply *must* be understood. Anyone who fails to grasp this point will never succeed in understanding anything of the Buddha's teaching. So do take a special interest in it. There are these two kinds of language, these two levels of meaning : everyday language, referring to physical things, and Dharma language, referring to mental things, and used by people who *know*. To clarify this point here are some examples.

Consider the word "path". Usually when we use the word "path" we are referring to a road or way along which vehicles, men, and animals can move. But the word "path" may also refer to the Noble Eightfold Path, the way of practice taught by the Buddha - right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration - which leads to Nirvana. In everyday language "path" refers to a physical road ; in Dharma language it refers to the eightfold way of right practice known as the Noble Eightfold Path. These are the two meanings of the word "path".

Similarly with the word "Nirvana" (*nibbana*). In everyday language this word refers to the cooling of a hot object. For example, when hot coals become cool, they are said (in Pali or Sanskrit) to have "nirvana'd" ; when hot food in a pot or on a plate becomes cool it has "nirvana'd". This is everyday language. In Dharma language "Nirvana" refers to the kind of coolness that results from eliminating mental defilements. At any time when there is freedom from mental defilements, at that time there is coolness, momentary Nirvana. So "nirvana" or "coolness" has two meanings, according as the speaker is using everyday language or Dharma language.

Another important word is "emptiness" (*sunyata*, *sunyata*). In everyday language, the language of physical things, "emptiness" means total absence of any object ; in Dharma language it means absence of the idea "I", "mine". When the mind is not grasping or clinging to anything whatsoever as "I" or "mine", it is in a state of "emptiness". The word "empty" has these two levels of meaning, one referring to physical things, the other referring to mental things; one in everyday language, the other in Dharma language. Physical emptiness is absence of any object, vacuum. Mental emptiness is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present as usual, but none of them is being grasped at or clung to as "mine". Such a mind is said to be "empty". When the mind has come

to see things as not worth wanting, not worth being, not worth grasping at and clinging to, it is then empty of wanting, being, grasping, clinging. The mind is then an empty or void mind (จิตว่าง), but not in the sense of being void of content. All objects are there as usual and the thinking processes are going on as usual, but they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with the idea of "I" and "mine". The mind is devoid of grasping and clinging and so is called an empty or void mind. It is stated in the texts: "A mind is said to be empty when it is empty of desire, aversion, and delusion (*raga, dosa, moha*). " The world is also described as empty, because it is empty of anything that might be identified as "I" or "mine". It is in this sense that the world is spoken of as empty. "Empty" in Dharma language does not mean physically empty, devoid of content.

You can see the confusion and misunderstanding that can arise if these words are taken in their usual everyday sense. Unless we understand Dharma language, we can never understand Dharma; and the most important piece of Dharma language to understand is the term "birth".

The kind of birth that constitutes a problem for us is mental birth, the birth or arising of the false notion "I". Once the idea "I" has arisen, there inevitably follows the idea "I am Such-and-such". For example, "I am a man", "I am a living creature", "I am a good man", "I am not a good

man", or something else of the sort. And once the idea "I am Such-and-such" has arisen, there follows the idea of comparison: "I am better than So-and-so" "I am not as good as So-and-so", "I am equal to So-and-so". All these ideas are of a type; they are all part of the false notion "I am", "I exist". It is to this that the term "birth" refers. So in a single day we may be born many times, many dozens of times. Even in a single hour we may experience many, many births. Whenever there arises the idea "I" and the idea "I am Such-and-such", that is a birth. When no such idea arises, there is no birth, and this freedom from birth is a state of coolness. So this is a principle to be recognized: whenever there arises the idea "I", "mine", at that time the cycle of Samsara has come into existence in the mind, and there is suffering, burning, spinning on; and whenever there is freedom from defects of these kinds, there is Nirvana, Nirvana of the type referred to *astadanga-nibbana* or *vikkhambhana-nibbana*.

Tadanga-nibbana is mentioned in the *Anguttara-nikaya*. It is a state that comes about momentarily when external conditions happen, fortuitously, to be such that no idea of "I" or "mine" arises. *Tadanga-nibbana* is momentary cessation of the idea "I", "mine", due to favourable external circumstances. At a higher level than this, if we engage in some form of Dharma practice, in particular if we develop concentration, so that the idea of "I", "mine" cannot arise, that

extinction of "I", "mine" is called *vikkhambhana-nibbana*. And finally, when we succeed in bringing about the complete elimination of all defilements, that is full Nirvana, total Nirvana.

Now we shall limit our discussion to the everyday life of the ordinary person. It must be understood that at any time when there exists the idea "I", "mine", at that time there exists birth, suffering, the cycle of Samsara. The "I" is born, endures for a moment, then ceases, is born again, endures for a moment, and again ceases-which is why the process is referred to as the *cycle* of Samsara. It is suffering because of the birth of the "I". If at any moment conditions happen to be favourable, so that the "I"-idea does not arise, then there is peace-what is called *tadanga-nibbana*, momentary Nirvana, a taste of Nirvana, a sample of Nirvana, peace, coolness.

The meaning of "Nirvana" becomes clearer when we consider how the word is used in the *Anguttara-nikaya*. In that text we find that hot objects that have become cool are said to have "nirvana'd". Animals that have been tamed, rendered docile and harmless are said to have "nirvana'd". How can a human being become "cool"? This question is complicated by the fact that man's present knowledge and understanding of life has not been suddenly acquired but has evolved gradually over a long period.

Well before the time of the Buddha people considered that Nirvana lay in sensual delight, because a person who gets precisely whatever sensual pleasure he wishes does experience a certain kind of coolness. Having a shower on a hot day brings a kind of coolness ; and going into a quiet place brings another kind, in the form of contentment, freedom from disturbance. So to begin with, people were interested in the kind of Nirvana that consisted in an abundance of sensual pleasure. Later, wiser men came to realize that this was not good enough. They saw that sensual pleasure was largely a deception (*maya*), so sought their coolness in the mental tranquillity of concentration (*jhana*). The *jhanas* are states of genuine mental coolness and this was the kind of Nirvana people were concerned with in the period immediately before the Buddha's enlightenment. Gurus were teaching that Nirvana was identical with the most refined state of mental concentration. The Buddha's last guru, Udakatapasa Ramaputra, taught him that to attain the "*jhana* of neither perception nor non-perception (*n'eva sanna n'asannayatana*)" was to attain complete cessation of suffering. But the Buddha did not accept this teaching ; he did not consider this to be genuine Nirvana. He went off and delved into the matter on his own account until he realized the Nirvana that is the total elimination of every kind of craving and clinging. As he himself later taught : "True happiness consists in eradicating the false idea 'I' ". When defilements have been

totally eliminated, that is Nirvana. If the defilements are only momentarily absent, it is momentary Nirvana. Hence the teaching of *tadanga-nibbana* and *vikkhanbhananibbana* already discussed. These terms refer to a condition of freedom from defilements.

Now if we examine ourselves we discover that we are not dominated by defilements *all* the time. There are moments when we are free from defilements ; if this were not the case we should soon be driven mad by defilements and die, and there would not be many people left in the world. It is thanks to these brief periods of freedom from distress causing defilements that we don't all suffer from nervous disorders and go insane or die. Let us give Nature due credit for this and be thankful she made us in such a way that we get a sufficient period of respite from defilements each day. There is the time we are asleep, and there are times when the mind is clear, cool, at ease. A person who can manage to do as Nature intended can avoid nervous and psychological disorders ; one who cannot is bound to have more and more nervous disorders until he becomes mentally ill or even dies. Let us be thankful for momentary Nirvana, the transient type of Nirvana that comes when conditions are favourable. For a brief moment there is freedom from craving, conceit, and false views, in particular, freedom from the idea of "I" and "mine". The mind is empty, free, just long enough to have a rest or to sleep,

and so it remains healthy.

In days gone by this condition was more common than it is now. Modern man, with his ever-changing knowledge and behaviour, is more subject to disturbance from defilements than man in past ages. Consequently modern man is more prone to nervous and psychological illnesses—which is a disgrace. The more scientific knowledge he has the more prone he is to insanity! The number of psychiatric patients is increasing so rapidly the hospitals can't cope. There is one simple cause for this: people don't know how to relax mentally. They are too ambitious. They have been taught to be ambitious since they were small children. They acquire nervous complaints right in childhood and by the time they have completed their studies they are already mentally disturbed people. This comes from taking no interest in the Buddha's teaching that the birth of the idea of "I" and "mine" is the height of suffering.

Now let us go further into the matter of "birth". No matter what type of existence one is born into, it is nothing but suffering, because the word "birth" refers here to attachment *unaccompanied by awareness*. This is an important point which must be well understood: if there arises in a person's mind the idea "I am Such-and-such" and he is *aware* that this idea has arisen, that arising is *not* a birth (as that term is used in Dharma language). If on the other hand he deludedly identifies with the idea,

that *is* birth. Hence the Buddha advised continual mindfulness. If we know what we are, know what we have to do, and do it with awareness, there is no suffering, because there is no birth of "I" or "mine". Whenever delusion, carelessness, and forgetfulness come in, there arise desire and attachment to the false idea "I", "mine", "I am So-and-so," "I am Such-and-such",....., and this is birth.

Birth is suffering ; and the kind of suffering depends on the kind of birth. Birth as a mother brings the suffering of a mother, birth as a father brings the suffering of a father. If, for example, there arises in a person the illusory idea of being a mother and therefore of wanting this, that , and the other thing-that is the suffering of a mother. It is the same for a father. If he identifies with the idea of being a father, wanting this and that, grasping and clinging-that is the suffering of a father. But if a person has awareness, there is no such confusion and distortion ; he simply knows in full clarity what he has to do as a father or as a mother and does it with a steady mind, not clinging to the idea "I am this", "I am that". In this way he is free from suffering ; and in this condition he is fit to rear his children properly and to their best advantage. Birth as a mother brings the suffering of a mother ; birth as a father brings the suffering of a father; birth as a millionaire brings the suffering of a millionaire ; birth as a beggar brings the suffering of a beggar. What is meant here can be illustrated by the

following contrast.

Suppose first a millionaire, dominated by delusion, desire, attachment, grasping at the idea "I am a millionaire". This idea is in itself suffering; and whatever that man says or does is said and done under the influence of those defilements and so becomes further suffering. Even after he has gone to bed he dwells on the idea of being a millionaire and so is unable to sleep. So birth as a millionaire brings the suffering of a millionaire. Then suppose a beggar, dwelling on his misfortunes, his poverty, his sufferings and difficulties-this is the suffering of a beggar. Now if at any moment either of these two men were to be free of these ideas, in that moment he would be free from suffering; the millionaire would be free from the suffering of a millionaire, the beggar would be free from the suffering of a beggar. Thus it is that one sometimes sees a beggar singing happily, because at that time he is not being born as a beggar, is not identifying himself as a beggar or as in any sort of difficulty. For one moment he has forgotten it, has ceased being born a beggar and instead has been born a singer, a musician. Suppose a poor ferryman. If he clings to the idea of being poor, and rows his ferryboat with a sense of weariness and self-pity, then he suffers, just as if he had fallen straight into hell. But if instead of dwelling on such ideas, he reflects that he is doing what he has to do, that work is the lot

of human beings, and does his work with awareness and steadiness of mind, he will find himself singing as he rows his ferryboat.

So do look closely, carefully, and clearly into this question: what is it that is being referred to as *birth*? If at any moment a millionaire is "born" as a millionaire, in that moment he experiences the suffering of a millionaire; if a beggar is born as a beggar, he experiences the suffering of a beggar. If, however, a person does not identify in this way, he is not "born" and so is free from suffering—whether he is a millionaire, a beggar, a ferryman, or whatever. At the present day we take no interest in this matter. We let ourselves be dominated by delusion, craving, attachment. We experience birth as this, that, or the other, I don't know how many times each day. Every kind of birth without exception is suffering, as the Buddha said. The only way to be free from this suffering is to be free from birth. So one has to take good care, always keeping the mind in a state of awareness and insight, never disturbed and confused by "I" and "mine". One will then be free from suffering. Whether one is a farmer, a merchant, a soldier, a public servant, or anything else, even a god in heaven, one will be free from suffering.

As soon as there is the idea "I" there is suffering. Grasp this important principle and you are in a position to understand the essential core of Buddhism, and to derive

benefit from Buddhism, taking full advantage of having been born a human being and encountered Buddhism. If you don't grasp it, then though you are a Buddhist you will derive no benefit from it; you will be a Buddhist only nominally, only according to the records; you will have to sit and weep like all those other people who are not Buddhists; you will continue to experience suffering like a non-Buddhist. To be genuine Buddhists we have to practise the genuine teaching of the Buddha, in particular the injunction: *Don't identify as "I" or "mine"; act with clear awareness and there will be no suffering.* You will then be able to do your work well, and that work will be a pleasure. When the mind is involved in "I" and "mine", all work becomes suffering; one doesn't feel like doing it; light work becomes heavy work, burdensome in every way. But if the mind is not grasping and clinging to the idea "I", "mine", if it is aware, all work, even heavy or dirty work, is enjoyable.

This is a profound, hidden truth that has to be understood. The essence of it lies in the single word "birth". Birth is suffering; once we can give up being "born", we become free from suffering. If a person experiences dozens of births in a day he has to suffer dozens of times a day; if he does not experience birth at all, he has no suffering at all. So the direct practice of Dharma, the kernel of the Buddha's teaching, consists in keeping close watch

on the mind, so that it does not give rise to the condition called the cycle of Samsara, so that it is always in the state called Nirvana. One has to be watchful, guarding the mind at all times so that the state of coolness is constantly there, and leaving no opportunity for the arising of Samsara. The mind will then become accustomed to the state of Nirvana day and night and that state may become permanent and complete. We already have momentary Nirvana, the type of Nirvana that comes when circumstances are right, the Nirvana that is a sample, a foretaste. Preserve it carefully. Leave no opening for Samsara, for the idea "I", "mine". Don't, let the "I"-idea come to birth. Keep watch, be aware, develop full insight. Whatever you do, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, do it with awareness. Don't become involved in "I" and "mine". Then Samsara will not be able to arise; the mind will remain in Nirvana until it has become fully accustomed to it and unable to relapse-and that is full or complete Nirvana.

Since childhood we have lived in a way favourable to the birth of "I" and "mine", and have become used to the cycle of Samsara. This habit is hard to break. It has become part of our makeup, and so is sometimes called a fetter (*samyojana*) or a latent disposition (*anusaya*), something that is bound up in our character. These terms refer to the habit of giving birth to "I", "mine", of producing the sense of "I", "mine". In one form it is called greed

(*lobha*); in another form it is called anger (*krodha*); in another form it is called delusion (*moha*). Whatever form it takes it is simply the idea "I", "mine", self-centredness. When the "I" wants to get something, there is greed; when it doesn't get that something, there is anger; when it hesitates and doesn't know what it wants, there is confusion, involvement in hopes and possibilities. Greed, anger, and delusion of whatever kind are simply forms of the "I"-idea, and when they are present in the mind, that is everlasting Samsara, total absence of Nirvana. A person in this condition does not live long. But Nature helps. As we saw in the beginning, through natural weariness the process sometimes stops of itself, there is sleep or some other form of respite, and one's condition improves, becomes tolerable, and death is averted.

The various enlightened beings that have appeared in the world have discovered that it is possible to prolong these periods of Nirvana, and have taught the most direct way of practice to this end, namely the Noble Eightfold Path. This is a way of practice intended to prolong the periods of coolness, or Nirvana, and to reduce the periods of suffering, or Samsara, by preventing as far as possible the birth of "I" and "mine". It's so simple it's hard to believe—like the Buddha's statement: "If monks will practise right living, the world will not be empty of *Arahants* (enlightened beings)." (*Sace me bhikkhu samma vihareyyum asunno loko*

arahantehi assa.) One finds it hard to believe. But if one examines it, one must believe it.

In the simple statement: "If monks will practise right living, the world will not be empty of Arahants" the expression "right living" has an important and profound meaning. Right living implies absence of the idea of "I", "mine". We are living day after day, but we are not living rightly, so the idea of "I" and "mine" is born. It pops up numerous times every day, so there is no chance for full Nirvana to come in and we don't become Arahants. Right living means living in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and right concentration. If we have these eight kinds of perfection, we are practising right living. And if we live rightly in this way, the mental defilements cannot arise, "I" and "mine" cannot be born; they wither away, like an animal deprived of nourishment. Right living deprives the "I" and the "mine" of nourishment, and so prevents them from taking birth. In time they lose their strength and the day finally comes when they dry up completely and disappear for good and that is what is called attaining the Fruit of the Path, total Nirvana.

The important thing is continuous right understanding and right action, so that the "I" and the "mine" cannot arise, so that there is no birth. When there is no birth of any kind, there is no suffering of any kind, and that

is true happiness, as the Buddha said. Once one has examined this matter and come to realize that birth is *always* suffering, every time, one takes good care to avoid birth. It is easy to understand that the birth referred to is something mental, something in the mind, but it is very difficult to master this birth. In a single day or even in a single hour one may experience this kind of birth many times, many dozens of times. Be careful about this problem of birth; it is a problem that faces us here and now. If we can master this kind of birth here and now we will also be able to master the birth that comes after physical death. So let's not concern ourselves with the birth that follows physical death; instead let us concern ourselves seriously with the birth that happens *before* physical death, the kind of birth that goes on while we are alive, which happens dozens of times every day; let us learn to master it and the problem will be eliminated. If birth can be eliminated here and now, in this life, that will be the end of birth for good and all.

Everyone concerns himself with the trivial question in what form he will be reborn after death, wondering into which of the eight realms of existence he will be reborn: as a hell-being, an animal, a *preta* (hungry ghost), an *asura* (frightened ghost), a human being, a god of the sensuous heaven (*kamavacara*), an embodied brahma, or a bodiless brahma. Each of these possible forms of rebirth falls under either of the two headings Sugati and Duggati,

depending on the nature of the corresponding feelings. Those states that are desirable or satisfying are called Sugati; those that are the opposite are called Duggati. But this is not the doctrine the Buddha taught. He taught: *if there is birth there is nothing but perpetual suffering*; and this is so regardless of the realm into which one is born, because "birth" refers to grasping and clinging, as already discussed. No matter what one is born as, it is suffering. The form of the suffering may vary, as in the case of the millionaire and the beggar, but it is suffering nevertheless, suffering as heavy as that of the Duggati realms. And while birth in the Duggati realms brings the sufferings of the Duggati realms, birth in the Sugati realms brings the sufferings of the Sugati realms. Birth has to be stopped altogether. Don't go wondering what you will be reborn as; don't go thinking of being reborn as a human being, or a god, or a brahma. The result will be the suffering of a human being, a god, or a brahma, because even the brahmas experience suffering, the suffering of brahmas. If brahmas were free from suffering there would have been no need for Buddhism. Buddhism came into existence in order to produce *Ariyans*, people who have put an end to suffering of every kind, the suffering of human beings, of gods, and of brahmas. This is why the Buddha is referred to as the "Teacher of gods and men": he taught to put an end to suffering for all beings.

Here caution is needed. A person here in this particular life has the possibility of being reborn into any realm of existence in the vast cycle of Samsara: into one of the lower worlds or Duggati as a hell-being, animal, *preta*, or *asura*; into the middle realm as a human being; or into one of the higher realms as a god of the sensuous sphere, as an embodied brahma, or (at the highest level) as a bodiless brahma. So there are eight possibilities: the four woeful states or lower realms, the human world or middle realm, and three heavens or upper realms. Each of these eight forms of birth is suffering in its own particular way. If one identifies with one's state of birth, one is bound to experience the corresponding kind of suffering-and every one of us has, in his everyday life, experienced these eight kinds of birth. Let us try to understand what this means. We shall deal first with birth in the woeful states, birth as a hell-being, animal, *preta* (hungry ghost), or *asura* (frightened ghost).

The real meaning of "hell" is anxiety (ความร้อนใจ, literally "mind-heat"). Anxiety burns one like a fire. If a person is worked up, burning with anxiety, then he is to be recognized as a hell-being. Whether monk, novice, lay follower, householder, or whatever, if he is burning with anxiety ("mind-heat"), burning through involvement in "I", "mine", then he is in hell.

If at some moment a person is deluded, then at that moment he is a dumb animal. At any time that a person, male or female, monk or layman, or whatever, is deluded, he has taken birth as an animal. The meaning of birth as an animal is delusion.

At any time that "I" and "mine" go the way of mental hunger and thirst, as when a gambler or a person buying lottery tickets suffers a hunger for money, a hunger to win a prize, a mental hunger, that is birth as a *preta* (hungry ghost). Birth as a *preta* is extreme mental hunger.

If there is fear, timidity, that is birth as an *asura* (frightened ghost). The word "a-sura" means "not brave", an *asura* is any timid, frightened person.

In a single day we may be born in all four of these states. Watch! Notice in what form the "I" and "mine" arise. If they arise in the form of anxiety, one has been born a denizen of hell; if as delusion, an animal; if as mental hunger, a *preta*; and if they arise in the form of fear, one has been born an *asura*. Here is an example to illustrate

A gambler who makes a blunder and loses everything experiences anxiety, as if burnt by fire; he has fallen into hell right there in the gambling-house. Again, when he is so deluded as to think that gambling can solve his problems, he is a dumb animal—even before he begins playing. When, in the course of playing, he has an

uncontrollable mental hunger, then he is a *preta*. And when he is afraid of being beaten and losing everything, then he is an *asura*. This single example, the case of a gambler in a gaming-house, shows how one may be born as a hell-being, an animal, a *preta*, or an *asura*.

Our grandparents were no fools, otherwise they would not have had the saying: "Heaven is in the heart; hell is in the mind." Their children and grandchildren apparently *are* fools because they think one goes to heaven or hell only after dying, after having been put into the coffin. Examine this idea and you will see how foolish it is. So let us be as intelligent as our grandparents, at least to the extent of recognizing that heaven and hell are in the mind.

Think of the example of the gambler, who can become a hell-being, an animal, a *preta*, or an *asura*. Anxiety can come from wrong-doing or as a result of karma. Anxiety is hell. Delusion can sometimes be so bad as to be almost beyond belief. Have a good think about it; examine it and you will see that we are sometimes unbelievably deluded. This delusion leads us into inappropriate or bad action. As for hunger, it is always present: desire for pleasure, desire for fame, and so on. If it reaches the point of being a mental thirst, one becomes a *preta*. Why be hungry? We have sufficient intelligence to know what we have to do, so, let's do it contentedly, without *preta*-

like hunger. Even if we do buy lottery tickets, we don't have to do it with *preta-like* hunger. We can buy our tickets simply for the fun of it, or we can think of how we are thereby helping provide funds to develop the country. We don't have to buy tickets out of hunger, as *pretas*. If there is awareness, "I" and "mine" do not arise and one is not hungry, not a *preta*. But if awareness is lacking one is hungry, one has become a *preta* here and now. It is the same with fear. Fear can become a habit. Think about it. To be afraid, as some people are, of even earthworms, lizards, geckoes, and mice is just going too far. This is unjustified fear. Then there is fear of ghosts, things whose presence cannot even be demonstrated. And something some people are very afraid of is Dharma. They are afraid that practising Dharma will make life tasteless and dry, that Nirvana is simply tasteless and dry. So they fear Dharma and Nirvana. Such people are full-fledged *asuras*, right here and now.

Now we move up to the realm of human beings. The term "human being" in this context implies fatigue, exhaustion, shedding sweat, hard work, trading the sweat of one's brow for food and sensual pleasure. It has nothing to do with anxiety, delusion, or the others; it is the honest exchanging of the sweat of one's brow for things one wants. This is the meaning of the term "human being". Don't think of it as of a type with the terms "hell-being" "animal", "*preta*",

and "asura", which refer to something much lower. "Hell" means anxiety, "animal" means delusion, "preta" means hunger, "asura" means fear. "Human being" means something of a totally different type. It means simply striving, persevering, working to get things one wants honestly and fairly, purchasing them with the sweat of one's brow. This is what it is to be a human being. In short the meaning of "human being" is fatigue, a condition of habitual fatigue.

Higher than this are the gods of the *kamavacara* (sensual) heaven. These are the gods we hear about who have celestial mansions, attendant angels, and so on. The reference is to a condition of freedom from fatigue, and abundance of every sensual pleasure. Higher again is the state of a person who has become bored with sensual pleasure, who has come to see sensual pleasure as something contaminating and wishes to live uncontaminated and pure. This is the heaven of the embodied brahmas (*rupa-brahma*), in which there is involvement in material things. And higher again is the level where one sees the body as impermanent, not worth becoming involved in, and feels it would be better to have no body at all. A person who feels this way is called a bodiless brahma (*arupabrahma*).

The meanings of these terms are not as in everyday usage. For example the hell depicted in temple murals, with great copper cauldrons, seas of acid, rains of lances

and swords, is a metaphor, an illustration in material terms of mental states that cannot be depicted. It is a physical illustration of anxiety and worry ("mind-heat"). Similarly we have physical representations of delusion, hunger, and fear. Similarly again the "human realm" is the condition of fatigue. And the *kamavacara* heaven is complete sensual satisfaction; when a person has, by means of money, power, good luck, or whatever, attained satisfaction in sensual pleasure, and is free of fatigue, he is a god in the sensual realm, called *kamavacara*. And a bodiless brahma is one who has become tired of this, who has ceased being involved in sensual pleasure and takes delight only in pure things, things that do not contaminate.

Let us examine the state of our own minds. Sometimes we are infatuated with sensual pleasure, but when we repeat it over and over, we become fed up with it and wish to have a rest from it. Sometimes we want to play, or interest ourselves in other material things, and those things fail to satisfy, and we begin thinking of non-physical things such as good fortune, name, and fame. Let's put it more simply. There are people who are infatuated with sensual pleasure and there are others who prefer to amuse themselves with hobbies, such as gardening or keeping tropical fish or pigeons, and become infatuated with them. The mind is liable to change in this way. Now it may happen that a certain person at a certain time comes to see that all these

things are a source of confusion and not to be compared with mental things-thoughts and dreams about possible good fortune, about beauty, or about name and fame, non-physical things. These various conditions differ considerably among themselves; they constitute a series of levels. The point to note is that a single person is liable to experience any of these eight kinds of birth. Examine yourselves and see how many different states the mind can go through. On a certain day a certain person may be involved in sensual pleasure for an hour or so. Then he may feel like having a break from it by going and playing sport or amusing himself with some hobby. At other times he may feel like having a complete rest, free from all disturbance. Sometimes he has to be a "human being", working for long hours, becoming fatigued. And sometimes he spends a few minutes in hell (anxiety); or in the condition of an animal (delusion), or a *preta* (hunger), or an *asura* (fear). So a single person may experience several kinds of birth in a single day; and in a week he may experience all eight kinds. He may be born in one of the woeful states (hell, animal, *preta*, *asura*), in the human realm, or in the heavens of gods and brahmas. But whichever kind of birth it is, it is nothing but suffering; freedom from suffering comes only with freedom from birth. This last statement is difficult to understand; but once you have understood it, you have understood the whole of the Buddha's teaching.

The expression "freedom from birth" does not imply that one is not born again after physical death, that after having died and been placed in the coffin one is not reborn. Please think about this: if in the daily round there is only awareness, preventing the arising of "I" and "mine". the "self"-idea, egoism - that is freedom from birth. When nothing remains but awareness, one is able to do what one has to do, and to do it properly. Under these conditions, doing one's job is fun; to be able to do one's job properly without any "I" or "mine" is a joy. This is the essence of the Buddha's teaching. In effect it calls on us to live with a mind free from the idea "I", "mine". Every religion teaches this; it is based on a law of nature, which can be proved rigorously, scientifically.

Buddhism teaches that if one's thoughts include the idea of self, self centredness, that is suffering. Christianity teaches the same thing; it teaches us not to think in terms of "I" or "mine", not to misidentify as "I" or "mine". But most Christians don't understand this teaching, just as most of us Buddhists don't understand the Buddha's teaching on this matter. It's the same the world over and in every religion: no one understands the real essence of his own religion. We Buddhists don't understand what is meant by "Don't be born! Stop being born!" We don't understand it and so we are perplexed, disbelieving it, or even considering it a false teaching. Perhaps we do not go so far as to accuse the

Buddha of teaching false doctrine but still that idea is there in our minds; or we may think that any monk expounding this doctrine is misrepresenting the Buddha. This is what happens. So we fail completely to understand the doctrine of *anatta* (non-self) and *sunyata* (emptiness), the doctrine that there is no "I" or "mine". Consequently we experience suffering. We are born frequently; we experience more of Samsara than of Nirvana.

The proof of all this is the fact that the hospitals for nervous and mental disorders are overfilled. This is all the proof needed; we don't have to ask further. People simply don't understand the truth about how to prevent mental illness. This is the objective of the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha's goal was a life of awareness, continuous awareness, seeing the world as something empty of "I", "mine", keeping the mind always free of the idea "I", "mine", leaving only the awareness, so that one knows what has to be done, and does it. This is the essence of the Buddha's teaching; there is no more to it than this.

Now at this point I should like to say something about a Christian teaching which Christians themselves take no interest in. It is a piece in the New Testament, from the book of Corinthians, in which St Paul sums up the entire teaching of Jesus. It is a short piece of instruction to the Corinthian people: "If you have a wife, think as if you have no wife. If you have wealth, think as if you have no wealth. If you

are suffering, think as if you were not suffering. If you are happy, think as if you were not happy. If you go to buy goods at the market, bring nothing home."

Here we have the essence of the Buddhist teaching in the Bible: "If you have a wife, think as if you have no wife." Paul is speaking to the men; he does not mention that a woman who has a husband should think as if she had no husband, but this is understood; the statement is good for both wife and husband. The meaning is: "Don't grasp and cling; don't identify as 'mine'." If you have wealth, don't go clinging to it, thinking of it as *my* wealth; in effect, think as if you had no wealth. If suffering arises, then acknowledge it and it will go away. Don't think of it as *my* suffering. If you have happiness, then don't think of it as *my* happiness. If you go and buy something at the market, bring nothing home. This means: while we are carrying our purchases home from the market, our mind is not identifying them as "mine". In this sense we are bringing nothing home. This is a Christian teaching, the essence of Christianity. I once asked a Christian, a highranking teacher, how he understood this passage. At first he was speechless, then he said "I've never taken any interest in it." He had never taken any interest whatever in this piece from the Bible because he thought it unimportant. He had taken great interest in the subject of faith and so on, but had taken no interest in this, the most

important subject of all. *Every religion worthy of the name aims essentially at teaching freedom from self-centredness.* Every religion includes the important teaching of freedom from self and from concern with self-in which, however, its adherents take no interest. They are like us Buddhists, who take no interest in the doctrine of *sunnata* and *anatta*, the characteristic doctrine of Buddhism.

It can be said, then, that mankind is taking no interest in the thing that is most important to mankind. People are interested only in chattering and eating, self-centred pastimes which increase "I" and "mine". Consequently they are more often hell-beings, animals, *pretas*, and *asuras* than human beings. And when they *are* human beings, they are sweating and striving far too much, not knowing how to relax. If they are in one of the heavenly realms, they are experiencing the corresponding kind of suffering as gods, or brahmas, or whatever. This is because they don't understand. they have fallen under the influence of *Mara* (Satan): they have been drawn into the way of *Mara* rather than in to the way of the Buddha.

Mara (Satan) is yet another thing we don't understand properly. In reality "Mara" denotes all the fascinating things that draw the mind and subjugate it. *Mara* is these things, in particular sexual and other sensual pleasures. *Mara's* commander-in-chief entices us into the *paranimmitavasavatti* heaven, the heaven that abounds in sensual delights, where

other off-siders of Mara then wait on us, serving us and attending to our every need. This is what is meant by "Mara's commander-in-chief". At present we are underlings or victims of Mara because we are desiring these things and are thereby cultivating the "I" and the "mine". Once "I" and "mine" have arisen, there is no end to it; one has got into the Mara current rather than the Buddha current. This is all there is to Mara. Whenever there exists in the mind the idea "I", "mine", then Mara is present, one is an underling of Mara. And whenever the mind is empty of "I", "mine", one is a follower of the Buddha. In a single day you may be an underling of Mara for a few hours and a follower of the Buddha for a few hours. Everyone realizes this so there is no need to discuss it here. Everyone can see for himself that in a single day "I" and "mine" may be present for a few hours, and absent for a few hours.

At any moment when "I" and "mine" arise, one is born as this or that, and identifying with it; and that is suffering, every time. We ought to fight shy of this and take steps to prevent its arising. We have to foster and prolong those periods of emptiness and quietness, or Nirvana, and in time we shall be free of all ailments, both mental and physical. Diabetes, high blood pressure, heart diseases—all these come from "I", "mine". Identification as "I" or "mine" is a source of disturbance which prevents our getting sufficient rest. When the mind is confused, the sugar metabolism

becomes abnormal, rising and falling sharply, and the result is some physical illness. Mental illness also results, in the form of mental suffering. In short, the body can't take the stress and the result is nervous or mental illness, or even death. Though one may escape death, one is sure to experience much suffering and melancholy, as if one had fallen into one of the hells.

This whole question could be treated in much greater detail. For example, we have spoken of hell as equivalent to anxiety, though the more detailed texts recognize eighteen or twenty-eight or more different hell-regions. Ultimately, however, they all involve suffering from heat: there is no hell that is cool. With the *pretas* it is the same. Several different kinds of *pretas* are recognized : serpent-*pretas*, *pretas* with mouths the size of a needle's eye and bellies the size of a mountain (hence never able to satisfy their hunger) , and others. But they all amount to the same thing : hunger. You can interpret all these details how you like, at a great or little length as you like, so long as you understand the basic meaning : hell-beings suffer anxiety, animals are deluded, *pretas* are hungry, *asuras* are afraid, human beings are fatigued, *kamavacara* gods are infatuated with sensual delights, embodied brahmas are infatuated with pure physical things, and bodiless brahmas are infatuated with pure mental things. These are all forms of "birth". Without exception, everyone who is "born"

is certain to suffer. Try to give up this identifying altogether. "True happiness consists in eliminating the false idea 'I' ". Maintain awareness and insight ; be free of "I" and "mine" and you will be free from suffering. Maintain this condition ; when it has become permanent, that is genuine and complete Nirvana.

We already have momentary Nirvana. Let us prolong it, reducing suffering, or Samsara, as far as possible. Let us not waste this opportunity, this eighty-year or hundred-year long life into which we have been born. If we don't effect this improvement we may never get anywhere, even if we live a thousand years ; but if we do effect this improvement, we may achieve full Nirvana in this very life. Whether a person is a child, a teenager, an adult, or an eighty-year-old, if he properly understands the meaning of all this, how suffering arises and how it ceases, he will be able to cure all his ailments effectively, to control self-centredness, the "I" and the "mine" ; he will automatically become fed up with it, and begin experiencing coolness, happiness, freedom from suffering. This is all there is to it. The Buddha summed it up briefly when he said : Don't grasp at or cling to anything whatsoever (*Sabbe dhamma nalam abhinivesaya*) , that is, don't cling to it as "I" or "mine". No matter what it is-physical object, condition, action, mental object, result of action, or whatsoever-don't think of it as "I" or "mine". Think of it as belonging to Nature,

as Nature itself, as a part of Nature obeying the laws of Nature, as the property of Nature. Don't take it as "I", "mine". Anyone who is so bold as to think of it as "I", "mine", is a thief, appropriating for himself something that properly belongs to Nature. No good can come of thieving; it is bound to lead to the suffering of a thief. Hence the Buddha's teaching that we shouldn't grasp at or cling to anything as "I" or "mine". Hence also his statement, so terse that it is hard to understand and even harder to accept: "If people will practise right living, this world will not be empty of Arahants". This statement sums up the whole teaching.

I hope you will all take an interest in this teaching of the Buddha, that you will think it over, examine it, and come to understand it. It is the profound and essential core of the Dharma, and it is genuinely capable of helping us attain freedom from suffering.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Slave of the Buddha) went forth as a bhikkhu (Buddhist monk) in 1926, at the age of twenty. After a few years of study in Bangkok, he was inspired to live close with nature in order to investigate the Buddha-Dhamma. Thus, he established Suan Mokkhabalarama (the Grove of the Power of Liberation) in 1932, near his hometown. At that time, it was the only Forest Dhamma Center and one of the few places dedicated to Vipassana (mental cultivation leading to "seeing clearly" into reality) in Southern Thailand. Word of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, his work, and Suan Mokkh spread over the years so that they are easily described as "one of the most influential events of Buddhist history in Siam" Here, we can only mention some of the more interesting services he has rendered Buddhism.

Achan Buddhadasa has worked painstakingly to establish and explain the correct and essential principles of

original Buddhism. That work is based on extensive research of the Pali texts (Canon and commentary), especially of the Buddha's Discourses (*sutta pitaka*), followed by personal experiment and practice with these teachings. Then he has taught whatever he can say truly quenches *dukkha* (suffering.) His goal has been to produce a complete set of references for present and future research and practice. His approach has been always scientific, straight-forward, and practical.

Although his formal education only went as far as ninth grade and beginning Pali studies, he has been given five Honorary Doctorates by Thai universities. His books, both written and transcribed from talks, fill a room at the National Library and influence all serious Thai Buddhists.

Progressive elements in Thai society, especially the young, have been inspired by his teaching and selfless example. Since the 1960's, activists and thinkers in areas such as education, social welfare, and rural development have drawn upon his teaching and advice.

Since the founding of Suan Mokkh, he has studied all schools of Buddhism, as well as the major religious traditions. This interest is practical rather than scholarly. He seeks to unite all genuinely religious people in order to work together to help humanity. This broadmindedness has won him friends and students from around the world, including Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

Now he focuses his energies on his last project, establishing an international Dhamma Hermitage. This addition to Suan Mokkh is intended to provide facilities for :

- Courses which introduce foreigners to the correct understanding of Buddhist principles and practice;
- Meetings among Buddhists from around the world to establish and agree upon the "heart of Buddhism."

Why were we born?
What are we living for?
Where is the value and meaning in life?

Summing up, Buddhism is an organized practical system designed to reveal to us the "what is what." Once we have seen thing as they really are, we no longer need anyone to teach or guide us. We can carry on practising by ourselves. One progresses along the Ariyan Path just as rapidly as one eliminates the defilements and gives up inappropriate action. Ultimately one will attain to the best thing possible for a human being, what we call the Fruit of the Path, Nirvana. This one can do by oneself simply by means of coming to know the ultimate sense of the "what is what".

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu