

Questions & Answers in Buddhism
VOLUME I

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RADHIKA ABEYSEKERA

Questions & Answers in Buddhism

VOLUME I

*This book is dedicated to all students of the Dhamma (Truth).
May you continue to question, investigate, understand,
and practise the Dhamma.*

Cover design: That 2 Graphics, Winnipeg, Canada
*Just as this small lamp helps to dispel the darkness,
may this book dispel the darkness of ignorance from our
minds.*

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VOLUME I



“Come O Kālāmas, do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept anything on mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumours. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere supposition. Do not accept anything by inference. Do not accept anything by merely considering the appearances. Do not accept anything because it agrees with your preconceived notions. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable. Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic (who teaches it) is respected by all.”

“But when you know for yourself that these things are immoral, that these things are blameworthy, that these things are censured by the wise, that these things when performed and undertaken, could ruin and cause sorrow... then indeed do reject them.”

“And when you know for yourself that these things are moral, that these things are blameless, that these things are praised by the wise, that these things when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness... then do you live and act accordingly.”

Gotama Buddha
Anguttara Nikaya

*I gratefully acknowledge the
Ottawa Buddhist Association Newsletter
for providing this picture of the face of the Buddha*

Questions & Answers in Buddhism

Volume - I

Foreword

It is a pleasure to see the success of Mrs. Radhika Abeyskera's contribution to Dhamma. Her second Dhamma book has come out as a result of her energetic hard work. As a working mother she is an example to others who spend their time after work in a wasteful manner. Most of our friends do not want to develop their knowledge after their attainment of higher qualification.

The Lord Buddha said, “Wisdom is the most valuable wealth to a human” (“Panna naranam ratanam”). The human world is the one in which a living being can acquire merit most easily. We all have to wander in samsaric metempsychosis until we attain Nibbāna. This will not be reached in a short time. Until then, we have to live happily in samsara. If not we will fall into woeful states. And it is not easy to acquire merit while in a woeful state. If we have fewer chances or opportunities to acquire merit for the future, we will suffer as we go through existence. This may delay our attainment of Nibbāna far into the future.

The next Buddha, Metteyya, will not come at any time in the foreseeable future. It may take a very long time. Meanwhile, if we are reborn in a hell or a woeful state, we may not be able to acquire enough merit even to come out from the suffering of hell. If we are reborn very far into the future, but before the coming of the Buddha Metteyya, we may have to face a world which is not as rich with Dhamma as today. According to our present experience it is very obvious that the world is reverting to former times of uncivilized existence. We see that people are becoming mostly enslaved to their desires. This is a sign of the

decline of virtuousness. If we have to live in a future which is filled with such worldly distractions, and become accustomed to this as the usual state, then we may easily become unwholesome and demeritorious. Therefore it is our responsibility to acquire as much merit as we can, and to teach the Dhamma to our beloved children so that they do not fall into woeful states and suffer.

We must dedicate our time to the well-being of our children and families. It is unfair, and not useful or helpful, if we do not teach them to be righteous. If we spend our time without doing good deeds, we are wasting our short and valuable time. The happiness we enjoy in this life is temporary and momentary. It is not permanent. It is fleeting. So we ought not to waste valuable time that could be used for much higher purpose.

After working hard all day, it is essential that we devote even a few minutes to our future life. It is not good to spend our time only for the benefit of our present life. The tenfold meritorious kamma was well practised by our ancestors in their daily life. If we can visit one of our ancient cities like Anuradhapura or Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka, we will see how our ancestors spent their time. Generosity, morality and development of wisdom were their major efforts. They devoted their leisure time to acquiring merit. They built magnificent shrines and temples, and practised all the tenfold wholesome deeds. Today this is forgotten by common society. To attract the minds of modern society it is essential to have these types of easy books for the younger generation. It is our responsibility to enrich our children's minds with the Dhamma. If we do so, then we will not deserve to be blamed by them in the future. Even among ourselves it is essential to develop our knowledge by reading the Truth (Dhamma). Let everyone try to do something of benefit to life in future samsara.

The questions discussed in this book are very common and innocent doubts which arise in the tender minds of our children;

and they are well discussed by Mrs. Abeysekera. One's answers can go deeper than she has gone. Her limit of explanation is very sensible for what children can manage to understand in their capacity. This is a very good sign of a good writer. I hope Radhika will be a prolific writer in the future. She has gone far beyond her first work, and I hope to see her next book in the near future. May all beings be well and happy!

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Questions & Answers in Buddhism

Volume - I

Preface

People say that children should be seen and not heard. I don't agree. I feel that often we underestimate the capabilities and intelligence of our children. I feel that children have the capability to understand many things that we usually don't credit them with because of their young age.

When I started teaching the children in Winnipeg, I had a difficult time deciding on how to structure my classes. I had very young children, teenagers, university students and adults. How was I going to keep them all interested? The classes were predominantly for the children who had no knowledge at all of Buddhism. But even the children ranged from five years to about fourteen. I started with the life story of the Buddha, stories from the past lives of the Buddha (Jataka Mala), and from incidents that happened at the time of the Buddha. I tried teaching the very important and serious teachings of the Buddha with intermingled Buddhist stories so that the younger children would be happy and the older ones would be challenged.

In 1989, the year I started teaching, I did not really expect our daughter Chayanika, who was not yet three years old, to understand anything. She sat on my lap and listened. At times she fell asleep as it was often well past her bed-time. In my mind she was there more for the discipline, to learn how to sit quietly at the temple without disturbing others, to get used to the idea of coming to the temple, and to take part in the Gilanpasa puja which we had before the class. I was surprised, however, to find that over the years she had absorbed quite a lot of the Teachings. By questioning my children I found that they had understood far more than I had given them credit for. Lessons

I discussed with the older children had been understood to some extent by the younger children.

I realized that the children were capable of understanding far more than would normally be expected of young children. Age alone did not determine their understanding. It was then that I started to encourage the children to ask questions and in turn to ask questions of them. This book is a collection of the notes I used for some of the lessons I gave and of some of the questions they asked. I have arranged them (including the lessons) in a question–answer format. I have also included the name of the person asking the question.

When a younger child asked a question, I answered it with the same detail I would have given if the question had been asked by an older child. The only difference was that I used simpler words, repeated myself often using different examples, and encouraged them over and over to stop and question me if they did not understand. Chayanika was five when she asked me the question on the cause of inequalities among mankind. Our son Chamal was nine when he asked the question on what determined the place of rebirth. The answer, however, was for an audience of children, university students and adults. And even though the level of understanding may have differed, I found that the children had understood the essence of the lesson. It will now be easier to build on this foundation by repeating the lessons when they are older.

Some of these questions arose from the lessons I had given. Some, like the question asked by Theekshana and Gayathri, were questions that friends in Sri Lanka had asked me by letter. I replied to their question and then discussed the same question with my class in Winnipeg. The question on rebirth was asked by one of my students. The answer, however, was delivered to my students and to the guest students from the University of Winnipeg who were taking the class on “Gotama The Buddha” at the University of Winnipeg. The question on capital

punishment was prepared for the religion class from the University of Brandon. Professor Laurance Nixon had brought his students 100 miles to Winnipeg to participate in our class.

This is what the Buddha expected of us. He wanted us to question and examine His teachings. In the Jnanasara-samuccaya he said, “As the wise test gold by burning, cutting and rubbing (on a piece of touchstone), so are you to accept my words after examining them and not merely out of regard for me.”

I would encourage parents all over the world to introduce the teachings of the Buddha to their children at a very young age. Do not feel that they are too young to understand. Do not feel that you are in a country where the teachings of the Buddha are not readily available. The teachings of the Buddha are a way of life to be practised and enjoyed by all, regardless of their age. Above all, encourage your children to ask questions. They learn to think and participate through their questions. You will be amazed by the childrens' ability to grasp the teachings of the Buddha.

I could not have written this book without the questions of my students and friends. The Buddha said that if a person has an inquiring mind, is always trying to seek the truth and learn what is moral and right, then as a result of his inquiring spirit he will be intelligent when born among mankind. I hope that you will continue to study, investigate, question, and practise the teachings you have learned.

This is the second book that I have written. Again, Ven. Pandit K. Piyatissa (Maha Thero, M.A.) of the New York Buddhist Vihara has very generously agreed to write the foreword and check (and correct) the accuracy of the material. His encouragement in my efforts to teach the wisdom of the Buddha is greatly appreciated.

I also wish to thank my husband, Sarath, who helped me to make this book a reality. Not only did he edit and format this book, he also helped with the children and the housework, freeing up the time that was required for me (a full-time working mother) to write this book.

This is the second edition of *Questions & Answers in Buddhism – Volume I*. My good friend, Adrienne Bouchard Langlois, has enriched this book by very generously offering her expertise in editing the contents of this second edition. Her encouragement and effort are a constant source of inspiration in my work. Her valuable contribution to this second edition is gratefully acknowledged.

May you all partake in the merit of this gift of Truth.

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CHAPTER 1

Who was the Buddha and what is Buddhism?

Tania's question - "I have been asked to talk about Buddhism to my class at school. Most of the children in my class are Catholic and have no knowledge of Buddhism. Can you help me?"

Answer - Two thousand six hundred years ago a baby Prince was born to King Suddhodana and Queen Mahāmayā of Kapilavattu, India. The baby Prince was named Siddhāttha Gotama. At the age of twenty-nine the Prince left His wealth and kingdom and took the life of an ascetic (holy man). He gave up all His worldly possessions to find lasting happiness by finding a way to end this recurring life of old age, sickness, and death.

He studied under many great religious teachers but did not find what He sought. He joined five friends and performed self-mortification to no avail. Finally, He set off on His own to seek lasting happiness. Six years after He left His home, on a full moon day in the month of May, the ascetic Gotama attained enlightenment by realizing the Four Noble Truths¹ and finding the Path to end this cycle of death and

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1. **The Four Noble Truths** – Dissatisfaction or suffering
– Cause of suffering (craving)
– End of suffering (Nibbāna)
– Path to the end of suffering (Noble Eightfold Path)

rebirth. From this day, He was known as the Gotama Buddha. The meaning of the word Buddha is The Perfect One, The Enlightened One, or One With Wisdom. His teachings are known today as Buddhism.

The documented teachings of the Buddha are about eleven times the length of the Bible. As such it would not be possible to talk about His teachings in one class period. What I have done is to share with you some of what I found most interesting about His teachings.

1. The Buddha wanted us to study, investigate and understand His teachings, only accepting them when we found them to be moral and conducive to the well-being and happiness of mankind. The Buddha said, “Do not accept anything on mere hearsay, tradition, rumours, inference, preconceived notions, supposition, or because it seems acceptable. Do not accept anything because the ascetic who taught it is respected by all.” I like this scientific approach that the Buddha took. It gives me a great deal of confidence in His teachings, as He encouraged us to think for ourselves, accepting after understanding rather than on blind faith.

2. The Buddha advised us that at no time should we ever insult or condemn the religion of another. Intolerance is the greatest enemy of peace on earth. Denouncing unfair criticism of other faiths the Buddha stated, “It is as a man who looks up and spits at heaven; the spittle does not soil the heaven, but comes back and soils his own person.” On another occasion the Buddha said, “If you find Truth in any religion, accept that Truth.” Respecting the beliefs and faiths of others, it is easy for us to accept persons of different religions and to respect them for what they are. To the unique credit of Buddhism it must be said that throughout its peaceful existence of over 2,500 years, not a drop of blood has been shed in the name of the Buddha. No mighty monarch has wielded his powerful sword to spread the

teachings of the Buddha.

3. The precepts that Buddhists follow are not commandments but modes of discipline (sikkhāpada) that Buddhists take of their own accord. In Buddhism we are not forced or commanded to do anything. We follow the teachings of the Buddha of our own free will because we understand and believe in them. I like the freedom that the Buddha gave us. It makes me feel that He respected us for what we are, giving each of us credit for our intellect.

4. Buddhism teaches non-violence. In the Dhammapada (Law Verses) the Buddha said:

*“All fear the rod,
Life is dear to all.
Feeling for others as for yourself
You should neither slay,
Nor cause others to slay.”*

Following, understanding and accepting the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhists observe the first precept “pānātipātā veramani sikkāpadam samādhiyāmi”, which means “I undertake to observe the precept to abstain from destroying living beings.” As Buddhists, we refrain from killing any living being.

5. The Buddha taught us to be compassionate to all living beings. In the Karaniya Metta Sutta (Verses of Loving Kindness) the Buddha said:

*“As a mother protects her only child,
Even at the risk of her own life,
Let one cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness.
Towards all living beings.”*

6. The Buddha taught us that we must show love and kindness to our enemies and to those whom we do not like. He did not believe in revenge or an eye for an eye. In the Dhammapada (Law Verses) the Buddha said:

*“Conquer anger by loving kindness.
Conquer evil by good.
Conquer the stingy by liberality.
Conquer the liar by truthfulness.”*

Buddhism appeals to my emotion, to my heart. The Buddha taught us how to practise infinite compassion toward all living beings. I like the gentle, compassionate component of His teachings. Over two thousand five hundred years ago the Buddha taught us to be refined and civilized.

7. The Buddha advocated the equality of all mankind. He attempted to abolish slavery and the degrading caste system in Indian society. He declared:

*“By birth is not one an outcaste.
By birth is not one a Brahmin (Noble man).
By deeds is one an outcaste,
By deeds is one a Brahmin.”*

According to the Buddha's teaching, caste or creed do not prevent one from becoming a Buddhist or joining the order of the Sangha (Buddhist monks). Fishermen and scavengers, together with warriors

and Brahmins, were freely admitted to the order of the Sangha and given positions of high rank.

8. The Buddha also raised the status of women. He was the first religious teacher to establish the order of the nuns. He saw the good in both men and women. Gender is no barrier to spiritual development and religious service. At that time women in Indian society were often treated as inferior to men. When Queen Mallikā gave birth to a baby girl, the Buddha comforted the distraught King Pasanadi Kosala by saying, “*A female child may prove even better than a male offspring*”. Two thousand six hundred years ago the Buddha gave religious equality to women.

9. Rebirth and kamma are also integral parts of Buddhism. According to the teachings of the Buddha, life does not end at death. One is reborn instantaneously. Though many great teachers of the East advocate rebirth, it is not a belief exclusively held by people in the East. Many great men in the West believe in rebirth. Among its advocates we have the scientist Thomas Huxley, who was responsible for introducing science to the 19th century British school system, Professor Gustaf Stromberg, the famous Swedish astronomer, Professor Julian Huxley, the distinguished British scientist, the philosophers Pythagoras and Plato, the poets Shelley, Tennyson and Wordsworth, and the American industrialist Henry Ford.

Kamma means intentional actions. Vipāka means results. Good actions cause good results. Bad actions cause bad results. The Buddha said, “Whether you are in the sea, in the air or in a cave you cannot hide from the effects of your evil actions”. That is the Law of Kamma. It must be stressed, however, that it is the intention behind the action and not just the action alone that sets off the reaction (vipāka). As Buddhists we refrain from bad actions and perform good actions because we know that one day, either in this birth or in

a future birth, the effects of our actions will come back to us. We know that not even the Buddha can save us from the effects of our bad actions. As Buddhists we understand that due to the Law of Karma, bad things can happen to a good person just as good things can happen to a bad person. We see the bigger picture by going back into our past lives and understanding that these are the results of our past bad actions. As such we do not blame any divine powers for our misfortunes. Knowing that we are now paying for the results of our past bad actions, we take heed and ensure that we improve and do not make the same mistake again. Our misfortunes teach us to continue doing good actions while avoiding bad actions.

10. The Buddha taught us that you are your own saviour. No all-powerful God can help us to attain Nibbāna² (salvation). No God can help us to escape from the effects of our own actions. As such you make your own destiny. Mind is supreme. In Buddhism we learn to control our minds and our destiny. We rely on no one but ourselves. The Buddhas show us how. They are our teachers. It is up to us to follow Their teachings of the Noble Eightfold path, to control and purify our minds through meditation, and attain our own salvation.

The essence of the Buddha's teaching can be found in the Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path. Buddhism appeals to me both intellectually and emotionally. I have just given a few examples that attracted me to His teachings. In conclusion, I would like to summarize the teachings of all Buddhas:

“Do no evil

2. **Nibbāna (Nirvana)** - The wisdom or knowledge that defeats the cycle of birth, decay and death. The knowledge that destroys the cycle of rebirth.

*Do good
Purify the mind.”*

This is the teaching of all Buddhas.

Test of Understanding

1. All religions teach good. You practise the religion that appeals to you (intellectually and emotionally) and helps you to be a better person. Select a religion to compare with Buddhism. Find out about the religion you selected and talk about the similarities and the differences.
2. Was the Lord Buddha a saviour? Give your definition of the word “saviour”. Then answer this question and support your answer.



CHAPTER 2

Ānupubbi Katha – How did the Buddha teach?

Question - The Buddha had infinite knowledge. How did He teach this infinite wisdom that He had realized to the people, who were so different and varied in their spiritual and intellectual development?

Answer - Today we are going to start the class with a question. Most of you have come to classes for over two years and have learned some of the teachings of the Buddha from me. I am going to ask you to tell me in a few words what the Buddha has taught you.

Nishadi says that the Buddha has taught her to treat her parents with respect. Tania says that the Buddha has taught her to be good and to treat people kindly. Chamal says that the Buddha has taught him not to do bad things.

Each one of you has given me a different answer. And all of you are right. The Buddha has taught you all these different things that you have told me today. If you had asked me the same question I would have told you that the Buddha has taught me how to do good actions, how to avoid bad actions and how to develop my mind.

Today you are going to learn about “Ānupubbi Kathā” or “How the Buddha Taught”. Shortly after the Buddha attained enlightenment He was not sure whether He should teach this new-found knowledge to the world. He thought, “Should I preach the Law? It would gain

nothing. Grief and weariness would be the only fruit of my labour, for the Truth remains hidden from men absorbed in hate and greed...”. Brahma Sahampathi, sensing the doubts the Buddha had, appeared before the Blessed One (Buddha) and said, “There are a few whose eyes are not dimmed with the dust of passion. They will see, they will understand. Open, O Wise One, the door of immortality.”

The Buddha then examined the world and realized that this was so, and said: “Yes, as on a lotus stem bearing the lotus blossoms, some lotus flowers do not rise out of the water but are below it, some float on the calm water, and others rise high, reflecting themselves in its mirror. So are men: some weak and dull, some noble, some strong in mind, others pure and untouched by evil, like the beautiful lotus flower that rises out of the water.”

And so He taught each person only after first examining the abilities and spiritual development of that person. The goal was still the same – to show them the path to Nibbāna – but the method of teaching took them little by little up the steps in that direction, up to the point where each individual was capable of understanding³. The Buddha used a sevenfold method, or system of preaching, known as ānupubbi kathā.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------------|
| 1. Dānakathām | – | The results of generosity |
| 2. Silakatham | – | The results of morality |
| 3. Saggakathām | – | The nature of heavenly pleasures |
| 4. Kāmānam ādinavam | – | The dangers and evils of sensual pleasures |

³ The “understanding” here is *penetration* (pativedha) as opposed to what we generally call *understanding* (anubodha). See Chapter 4 for more details.

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 5. Okāram | – | Lowliness and degradation |
| 6. Samkilesam ca | – | Defilements and corruptions |
| 7. Nekkhamma ca anisamsam | – | The results of renunciation |

It was in the seventh week after enlightenment that the Buddha ate the honey and rice cakes served by Tappasu and Bhallika. However, the Lord Buddha did not teach them His most important sermon, the Dhammacakka Sutta, which contains the essence of His teachings. He only taught them the seven steps of ānupubbi kathā, which was what they were ready for, so that they were set on the right path and took refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma. It was to the five monks, who were spiritually more advanced, that the Buddha first preached His new-found knowledge.

This pattern is seen over and over again in His teachings. Anātha Pindika was the Buddha's principal male benefactor. He was very rich and had given many alms, but on one occasion when he spoke to the Buddha he was poor, as he had given away almost all of his possessions. He was still giving alms however, in whatever way he could. The Buddha then told Anātha Pindika about another man like him called Velama, who gave many alms of gold and precious jewels and then added, “But greater would his merit have been if he had practised meditation on Anicca (impermanence), Dukkha (suffering), and Anatta (no permanent soul or substance).” The Buddha realized that Anātha Pindika, by all the merit of the gifts given, was now ready to take the next step necessary in his quest for salvation – the purification or development of the mind through meditation. Very gently, with compassion, the Buddha directed Anātha Pindika toward mental development.

The Buddha preached the Sigālovada Sutta to a young man named Sigāla. In that sutta the Buddha shows how a lay person should behave to lead a happy and prosperous life. By following the path outlined in this sutta you can pave the way to attain Nibbāna. But Sigāla was not sufficiently mature to attain Nibbāna. What the sutta did was to put him on the correct path, closer to his goal of Nibbāna.

The explanation the Buddha gave to Subha regarding the inequalities among humanity is another good example. By explaining the effects of kamma in detail to Subha, the Buddha convinced him of the Truth of His teachings and set him on the right path, the path to Nibbāna.

However, there were many who attained Arahantship after listening to just four lines of the Buddha's teachings. In such cases the four lines were carefully selected by the Buddha after looking into their past lives and seeing the merit they had acquired.

In every instance the Buddha taught only that which could be understood by His audience, and only as much as was required to set His devotees on the right path, the path to Nibbāna. The Buddha's knowledge was infinite. However, He did not cloud the issue and confuse His devotees with teachings beyond their understanding, or with knowledge that would not lead them toward the Buddhist goal of Nibbāna.

The essence of the Buddha's teachings is in the Dhammacakka Sutta. In it He teaches the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Everything else He has taught will lead you to this path. If you can understand the Four Noble Truths and practise the Noble Eightfold Path, then you too, can attain Nibbāna. By merit acquired in past lives we have come a long way. Even though you are so far away from our homeland of Sri Lanka, you are very fortunate. You still have the opportunity to study the teachings of the Buddha. Having

this opportunity, I would say that you are like the lotus flowers that are on the surface of the water, but you still have to rise above the water. And we do this slowly. One step at a time.

The path to Nibbāna is like a very long ladder. You cannot reach the top rung from the bottom. You cannot reach the top rung from the middle. You have to go up step by step. That is what you and I are doing together now. Little by little, we are climbing up the ladder by following His teachings, by following that part that we can understand and practise.

That is why each one of you was correct in your answers. The Buddha did teach everything you said. Now it is up to us to do good, avoid evil and purify our minds, little by little.

It is not always easy to do good. Sometimes it may be easier, and even at times more fun, to do bad. Sometimes it may sound like fun to join your friends who are teasing another child. Sometimes it may seem “cool” to smoke and to drink liquor. After all, your friends are doing it. You don't want to be left out or be called a “loser”. Sometimes children boast of their bad deeds just to get attention. Some of what they say is not even true. At times it is hard not to get angry and lash back when someone is angry and yelling at you. Yes, it is a lot easier to be bad than to be good. You have to put effort and skill into being good. That is why good deeds are also referred to as skilful deeds.

This is why I say that the Buddha taught us how to do good and avoid bad actions. He did this by asking us to treat others in the same way as we would want them to treat us. We would not like it if someone injured us, killed us or stole from us. Similarly, no living being likes being injured or hurt in any way. He also taught us the effects, or consequences, of our evil deeds. Now that we know what will

happen to us if we do evil things we try, however hard it may be, to avoid evil. Sometimes we fail and do something bad. But we don't give up. Next time we try a little harder.

It is the same with good deeds. How many of you knew that when you give alms to monks (sanghika dāna), that the monks themselves are only a symbol? When you give alms to monks (Sangha), you are giving alms to all of the great Arahants from the time of the Buddha, and all of the monks of the past and present. The piety of the individual monk is immaterial. I have myself often heard Buddhists say, “Oh, I don't go to temple or give alms to the monks any more. That monk is not good. He takes liquor and even runs a business.” The fact is that when he is in the capacity of a monk and you give him alms, he is a symbol of the Sangha, of all the Sangha of the present and the past. If you give the alms with a pure heart, then the merit you acquire is enormous.

However, it is not the same when alms are given to lay persons. The merit will be greater according to the virtuousness of the recipient and the giver. This is why we take the five precepts before we partake in an alms-giving. Then, at least for that moment, we will be pure so that the giver of alms can have greater benefit from his gifts.

Often we give what we don't want or can't use to someone who can use it. Did you know that the merit to you would be greater if you tried to restore this used item to the best possible condition before you gave it away so that the receiver would then have greater pleasure? In our house we have a permanent box for the poor. When I find that the kids have outgrown toys or clothes I just put them in the box. When the box is full we give it to “Goodwill” or the “Diabetes Association”. Often the box was crammed to the top. I did not pay much attention to the appearance of the gift. All I did was to make sure it was clean and that it could still be used. In my mind I

thought I was doing something good, and I was. Whenever you give with a pure mind you acquire merit. However, the merit would have been a lot greater if I had sorted the box, pulled all the clothes out, ironed and neatly folded them and kept them separate; if I had checked each toy, cleaned and repaired it as required, and made it look as nice as possible. Because I gave these away I will acquire the beneficial effects of the giving. Some day in the future I will receive. But because of the careless way I gave the gifts, almost like, “I cannot use them, so I am giving them away”, I will not have the good fortune to be able to use fully that which I receive. By telling us the effects of our good actions the Buddha made it a lot easier for us to do good.

So, little by little, all of us will try to do a little more good each day and stay away from evil actions. We might digress and make small mistakes, then we will try a little harder the next time. And even without our knowledge we will be slowly climbing up the rungs of that ladder toward Nibbāna.

As you continue in this way, there will come a time when you will want to do more. More than just doing good and staying away from bad. Then you are ready to purify your mind through meditation. The first is known as the Āmisa Pujā, the second as the Patipatti Pujā. When you reach this stage you should find a topic of meditation that best suits your temperament and practise meditation daily, just as we try to do good every day and to stay away from evil. Though I have introduced you to meditation and we have practised the meditation on loving kindness, we have not yet made it a part of our daily life.

Now you might feel that I am saying you must first perform the Āmisa Pujā and then the Patipatti Pujā. This is not so. In fact, you should practise them together whenever you can. However, often people are not yet ready, for whatever reason, to start directly with

meditation. We should get into meditation gradually. Try starting the practise of meditation slowly, for a very short time. In your life in samsara, a time will come when you will be ready for more meditation, then you will slowly increase the duration. I chose this lesson today because in the next few classes we will be studying the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. You will then realise that even without your knowledge, you have been slowly learning and practising some of the Noble Eightfold Path which is the path to Nibbāna. Even without realizing it, you have been slowly going up the ladder toward this goal that all Buddhists should have, the goal of Nibbāna. This is the way the Buddha taught. This is what we call Ānupubbi Kathā.

Test of Understanding

1. The Buddha did not teach all He knew to mankind. Once He took a handful of leaves from a tree and said that His knowledge was like the leaves in the forest and that what He had taught mankind was like the leaves in His hand. Did the Buddha hold back any of his knowledge? If so, why?
2. You have learned many things from the Buddha. The Buddha wanted you to practise what you have learned. Talk about five examples from your life where you have practised the teachings of the Buddha.



CHAPTER 3

What do we mean when we say “The Ascetic Gotama attained enlightenment?”

Question: On a full moon day in the month of May, the ascetic Gotama attained enlightenment. After that He was called the Gotama Buddha. What do we mean when we say that He attained enlightenment? What exactly happened to the ascetic Gotama on that day?

Answer: It was six years after the ascetic Gotama had left the palace and all His wealth and family. He had studied under two famous teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputra. He had tried to find a way to end the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death through self-mortification. And yet He had not found the wisdom that He was seeking. The wisdom to end this recurring life of rebirth.

The ascetic Gotama went to Gayā, sat down under the shade of a tree and started to develop and purify His mind through meditation on His breathing in and out (Ānāpānasati meditation). He was determined that He would not get up until He had realized the wisdom that would end this cycle of rebirth. His mind was clear and keen. His determination and effort were strong.

The ascetic Gotama first developed the Jhāna⁴. By degrees, He developed the first, second, third and fourth Jhāna. His mind was now like a polished mirror where everything is reflected in its true perspective. As such, with a mind tranquil and pure, in the first watch of the night the ascetic Gotama realized the ability to see into His own past lives. First one, then two, and then three, four, and five. Then ten, twenty, and fifty. Then a hundred and a hundred thousand. He then saw the dissolution of world cycles and the evolution of world cycles. Thus, He recalled the mode and details of His varied lots in His former births. He then realized that living beings will be born again after their death. **This was the First Knowledge that He realized in the first watch of the night.**

With vision purified and supernormal He saw, in the middle watch of the night, beings disappearing (dying) from one state of existence and reappearing (reborn) in another. He saw the crude and the noble, the beautiful and the ugly, the happy and the miserable, all passing according to their deeds from one birth to another. He saw that those who had done evil were born in the lower, unhappy worlds, while those who had been good and noble were born in happy, celestial worlds. He then understood the results of kamma. **This was the Second Knowledge that He realized in the middle watch of the night.**

After understanding the effects of one's actions the ascetic Gotama directed His purified mind to the cessation of corruptions (evil). In the last watch of the night He realized what is now known as the Four

⁴ **Jhāna** (mental absorption) - levels of spiritual development that are achieved through meditation. Prince Siddhāttha achieved the first Jhāna at the ploughing festival when He was still a little child. Persons who have developed and purified their minds to reach the Jhānas are born in the Brahma worlds after death.

Noble Truths: that birth causes suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. He realized that delusion (not knowing) was the main cause of all suffering. Having realized this knowledge He knew that He was now delivered from this recurring life of suffering. **This was the Third Knowledge that he realized in the last watch of the night.**

He had realized the Truth He was seeking. He had realized the Path to end all suffering. He had conquered death. He had attained enlightenment. He was now the Supreme Buddha, the Enlightened One. It is this knowledge that He realized, this knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, this wisdom that He attained, that we call enlightenment.

Let us now study in greater detail the Four Noble Truths that the Buddha realized. They are as follow:

1. **Dukkha** (often translated into English as suffering) – The First Noble Truth, dukkha, conveys much more than suffering. Dukka is that which is difficult to endure. The Lord Buddha said that this life was dukka (unsatisfactory and full of suffering). He said this because He could see the amount of pain and suffering that each of us had undergone in this infinitely long chain of life. For example, the Buddha said: “Not getting what you want causes suffering; having to associate with those you don't like causes suffering; being separated from those you love causes suffering; old age causes suffering; as do disease and death.” In short, birth of the five aggregates – form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness – causes suffering.

Now I am going to ask how many of you agree with the Lord Buddha that there is much suffering in life? I want you to draw from your experience of life, your friends and family. Do you agree with Him?

Remember that the Buddha asked us always to question and understand His teachings.

Why did the Buddha not say that life was pleasant, fun and happy? In actual fact, the Buddha did say that there were many pleasures in life. In fact, in the Sigālovāda Sutta He taught us how lay persons could enhance their happiness. He taught us that by performing good deeds and refraining from evil deeds we could be born in celestial worlds where there is much happiness.

The Buddha said that birth causes suffering because all these forms of happiness are only temporary. Even the extremely long happy life spans in the celestial worlds come to an end. In this uncertain life the only certain thing is old age, sickness, and death, all of which cause pain or dissatisfaction.

If we could see into our past lives, we too would see the pain and misery that each of us has gone through. The Lord Buddha said, “If we could collect all the tears we have shed in all our past lives, the tears would be more than all the waters in the great oceans”. Life causes suffering, birth causes suffering. Due to good actions we have performed in the past, some of us have been born with plenty. But if you look around in the world you will see that there is a lot of pain and misery around us. And if we are not careful, in a future birth we too, could face the same fate. **The first Noble Truth realized by the Buddha is that birth causes suffering.**

2. **Samudaya** (the cause of dukka) – The second Noble Truth is the cause of suffering. The Buddha realized that it is craving or attachment (tanhā) that is the root cause of all suffering. Not getting what you want causes suffering. The stronger the attachment or craving, the stronger the pain, or suffering, when you can't have it. It is the same with death. The more attached you are to the person, the

more pain you feel at his death. The Lord Buddha said that it is this craving, this strong attachment to life and existence, that causes rebirth. **The second Noble Truth that the Buddha realized is that the cause of suffering is craving or attachment.**

3. **Nirodha** (the cessation of dukkha) – The third Noble Truth is the cessation of suffering. To end suffering one must destroy the cause or root of suffering. We must destroy craving and attachment. This cessation (ending) of craving is what Buddhists call Nibbāna. **The third Noble Truth that the Buddha realized is the cessation of suffering.**

4. **Magga** (the path that ends dukkha) – The fourth Noble Truth shows us the path that has to be followed to end suffering. The path that has to be used to destroy the root cause of suffering. The path that has to be practised to perfect oneself by destroying craving and attachment. This path that the Buddha realized is known as The Noble Eightfold Path. This is the essence of the Teachings of the Buddha. Following The Noble Eightfold Path is the only way to end this chain of rebirth. With a little effort, it is not difficult for the wise to practise the Noble Eightfold Path. As Buddhists we should attempt to improve ourselves gradually by modelling our lives on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. **The fourth Noble Truth that the Buddha realized is the path to end suffering, which is known as the Noble Eightfold Path.** We will learn the details of the Noble Eightfold Path on another day. However, I will use this opportunity to introduce you to The Path. The Noble Eightfold Path consists of the following eight components:

- 1. Right understanding**
- 2. Right thought**
- 3. Right speech**
- 4. Right action**
- 5. Right livelihood**
- 6. Right effort**
- 7. Right mindfulness**
- 8. Right concentration**

On a full moon day over 2,500 years ago our Lord Buddha, by His own efforts, realized the Four Noble Truths. The Truth is always there in the world. It has to be realized by a Buddha and proclaimed to the world. It is the ascetic Gotama's self-realization of this wisdom that we refer to when we say that He attained enlightenment. It is this self-realization that makes Him a Buddha.

Test of Understanding

1. Some say that Buddhism is a pessimistic religion because the Buddha said that "life is dukkha". Buddhists do not agree. Using your knowledge of the Teachings, defend your position.
2. The teachings of the Gotama Buddha will be with us for another 2,500 years. Is it possible for another Buddha to be born during this period? Include in your answer the difference between a Supreme Buddha, Pacea Buddha, and Arahamth.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3. Sammā Vācā
Right Speech | Sila
Ethical Conduct |
| 4. Sammā Kammanta
Right Action | |
| 5. Sammā Ājiva
Right Livelihood | |
| 6. Sammā Vāyāma
Right Effort | Samādhi
Mental Discipline |
| 7. Sammā Sati
Right Mindfulness | (Concentration) |
| 8. Sammā Samādhi
Right Concentration | |

The Noble Eightfold Path was realized as the way to enlightenment by the Gotama Buddha. It was in the third watch of the night that the ascetic Gotama realized the Four Noble Truths and the path to Nibbāna, the Noble Eightfold Path. The Truth is always the same. It takes a Supreme Buddha to realize the Truth and then teach it to others. The Noble Eightfold Path is a moral code of conduct to develop morality, mindfulness and wisdom. We need all three of these components to reach perfection. Persons with good morality but who are not wise will be good-hearted fools. In the same way one does not want to be a hard-hearted intellectual. We also want at all times to be in full control of our mind. The Noble Eightfold Path that the Buddha taught provides morality, mindfulness and wisdom.

Even though you see these three components in this order (the order set out in the Lord Buddha's Teaching), to be most effective all three must be practised together. However, since most of you are still very young, I have so far concentrated my teachings on ethical conduct (Sila) or morality. Every day when we come to the temple we recite the Ājiva Atthamaka Sila. When we do this we undertake to keep to

Ethical Conduct as laid out in right speech, right action, and right livelihood of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Today I am going to group the Eight into Pannā (wisdom), Sila (ethical conduct), and Samādhi (mental discipline). I am also going to change the order and start with Sila, keeping wisdom for the last for ease of understanding.

Three of the Noble Eightfold Path fall under Sila. They are:

Right Speech

Right Action

Right Livelihood

According to the Buddha, **Right Speech** means you will abstain from:

- Telling lies
- Backbiting and slander
- Harsh, rude or abusive language
- Idle gossip

When one abstains from this type of hurtful speech, one is automatically speaking the truth, using refined polite language, and only talking when it is of some use or profit. Silence is golden as they say. This is true. If you don't have something worthwhile to say, then you are better off saying nothing.

According to the Buddha, **Right Action** means you will abstain from:

- Destroying life
- Stealing and dishonest dealings
- Sexual misconduct

When one abstains from this type of harmful behaviour one is automatically being considerate and compassionate. We should also

try to help others to lead a peaceful and honourable life.

According to the Buddha, **Right Livelihood** means that you will not work in a profession that will directly or indirectly cause harm to any living being. Right livelihood means that you will abstain from manufacturing or trading in:

- Arms and lethal weapons
- Intoxicating drinks or drugs
- Poisons and harmful chemicals
- Slavery
- Killing animals or breeding them for killing

When one abstains from this type of harmful livelihood and conducts one's livelihood honourably with no cheating, one is practising right livelihood.

Now if I were to summarize the above three: right speech, right action and right livelihood, I could say that the Buddha was trying to teach us morality or ethical behaviour. I could also say that the Buddha was asking us to treat every living being with infinite compassion and friendliness. That is not easy to do. Often we tend to put ourselves first. But if you really think of what He is saying, if you practise infinite compassion toward all living beings, you will automatically refrain from doing the wrong things mentioned above.

We have now studied morality or ethical behaviour and we see the relevance of the Buddha's teachings to our everyday life. Conducting ourselves according to right speech, right action and right livelihood is definitely to our moral and spiritual good. It is also to the benefit of other living beings. Why then, when we understand that it is for our own benefit and for the benefit of others to follow the Buddha's path to moral development, do we continue doing things to the contrary? Why is it that even after we know the effects of anger, we

still get angry and use harsh, hurtful words? Why is it that we are at times tempted to take something that is not ours, especially if we know that nobody will 'catch' us? How many of us will be tempted to keep a gold ring that we found on a sink in a washroom? How many of us are tempted to evade taxes when we feel that we will not be caught? We know that these are wrong actions and yet we tend to do them.

The reason behind this behaviour is that we have not yet learned to control our minds. We know which is right and which is wrong behaviour. We may even want to adopt the right behaviour. But we have not yet mastered the art of controlling our minds. This means that if we want to perfect right speech, right action and right livelihood, we must also learn to discipline our mind. According to the Buddha's teachings, the practise of Sila (ethical conduct) has to be in conjunction with the practise of Samadhi (mental discipline). One cannot perfect the former without the latter.

Three of the Noble Eightfold Path fall under samadhi. They are:

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration

According to the Buddha, **Right Effort** is the energetic will to:

- Prevent evil or unwholesome thoughts from arising.
- Get rid of such evil or unwholesome thoughts as have arisen.
- Produce good and wholesome thoughts that have not arisen.
- Develop and bring to perfection good and wholesome thoughts that have arisen.

According to the Buddha, **Right Mindfulness** is to be aware at all

times of ⁵:

- The activities of the body (kāya nupassanā)
- Sensations or feelings (vedana nupassanā)
- The activities of the mind (citta nupassanā)
- Ideas and thoughts (dhammā nupassanā)

There are many ways of developing mental awareness. The practise of concentration on breathing (anapanasati) is what the Buddha recommended. It is also the form of meditation that He used to attain enlightenment.

The third factor of mental discipline is right concentration. According to the Buddha, **Right Concentration** leads to the four Jhāna:

- In the first stage of Jhāna, passionate desires, sensuous lust, ill-will, worry, and doubt are discarded. Feelings of joy and happiness are maintained.
- In the second stage, all intellectual activities are suppressed, tranquility and one-pointedness of the mind are developed. The feeling of joy and happiness are still retained.
- In the third stage, the feeling of joy which is an active sensation disappears, but the disposition of happiness remains with mindful equanimity.
- In the fourth stage, all sensations of happiness and unhappiness, joy and sorrow, disappear, leaving only pure equanimity and awareness.

Right concentration and right mindfulness are obtained through meditation. Through meditation one achieves perfect mental health, equilibrium, and tranquility.

5 These four forms of mental culture are treated in detail by the Buddha in the Satipathāna Sutta (setting up of mindfulness).

We have now studied ethical conduct and mental discipline. The final section of the Noble Eightfold Path is wisdom (Pannā). According to Buddhism, for a person to be perfect there are two qualities that he or she should develop: compassion and wisdom. Compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and other such noble qualities that affect the emotional side of a person or qualities of the heart. Wisdom stands for the intellectual side or qualities of the mind. As I stated before, developing only the emotional side might lead to a person becoming a good-hearted fool, while developing only the intellectual side would lead to a person becoming a hard-hearted intellectual. Therefore, to be perfect one has to develop both sides. This is the Buddhist way of life. Wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked.

Two of the Noble Eightfold Path fall under pannā. They are:

Right Thought

Right Understanding

Again, I have changed the order for easy understanding. According to the Buddha, **Right Thought** denotes thoughts of selfless detachment, thoughts of love, and thoughts of non-violence toward all living beings. It is very important to note that thoughts of love, self-detachment and non-violence were grouped by the Buddha under wisdom. This clearly shows that true wisdom is endowed with these noble qualities. As such, thoughts of hatred, ill-will and violence are a result of lack of wisdom in all spheres of life: individual, social, and political.

It is also seen that thoughts of hatred, ill-will, and violence could very easily result in harmful actions which hinder the practise of ethical conduct, while thoughts of love, compassion, and non-violence are conducive to the practise of ethical conduct. As such, Right Thought should be practised in conjunction with the others.

According to the Buddha, **Right Understanding** is the understanding of things as they are. It is the Four Noble Truths that explain things as they really are. What the Buddha meant by Right Understanding is the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This understanding is the highest wisdom. According to Buddhism there are two types of understanding. What we generally call understanding is knowledge, an intellectual grasping of a subject according to certain given data. This is called 'knowing accordingly' (anubodha). It is not very deep. Real understanding is called 'penetration' (pativedha), seeing a thing in its true nature. This penetration is only possible when the mind is free from all impurities, and fully developed through meditation. It is this type of understanding (penetration) that the Buddha referred to when He wanted us to develop Right Understanding.

From this brief account of the Noble Eightfold Path one may see that it is a way of life. A way of life to be practised by each individual so that one can reach moral, spiritual and intellectual perfection. It is self-purification through self-discipline in body, word, and mind. To me it is the most complete moral code that exists. I will conclude with this quotation from Professor Rhys Davids "... I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world; and in none have I found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that path."

Test of Understanding

1. Select one area from ethical behaviour (Sila) that you feel you should improve. Which of the other eight will help you to develop the one you chose? Why?

2. The Noble Eightfold Path is the most complete moral code. Comment on this statement.
3. The Buddha said that all of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path should be practised in conjunction with each other (together). Do you agree? Why?
4. The Buddha helped persons such as Angulimāla, Ālavaka and Patāchāra. The Buddha is no longer with us. How would you use His teachings to help a person such as Angulimāla, Ālavaka and Patāchāra?



CHAPTER 5

Why is the last of the five precepts not included in the Noble Eightfold Path?

Nishadhi's question - “Why is it that the Buddha did not include the precept, “I will refrain from taking intoxicating substances” (Surāmeraya majja-pamādatthānā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi), in the Noble Eightfold Path?”

Answer - Nishadhi's question is a very good question. The last of the five precepts, “Surāmeraya majja-pamādatthānā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi” or “I will refrain from taking intoxicating substances”, has been left out of the Noble Eightfold Path. Why would the Buddha include it with the five precepts that Buddhists observe in their daily life and leave it out of the Noble Eightfold Path, the path to Nibbāna?

Let us first examine the five precepts so that we will have a good understanding of the difference between the last precept and the other four. In the first precept, “Panātipātā Veramani sikkhāpadam Samādiyāmi”, we undertake to observe the precept to refrain from destroying living beings. Why do we make such a promise? We make this promise after studying carefully the Teachings of the Buddha. We would not like it if somebody hurt us or destroyed our life. Life is precious to us. We do not want anything painful to happen to us. As such we understand that just as we are afraid of injury and death, just as we enjoy life, all other beings are afraid of pain, injury and death. All other beings enjoy life.

The Buddha has also told us about the karmic effect of taking another's life. In the “Matakabhatta Jataka” a Brahmin who sacrificed a goat for a religious ceremony found that he was reborn as a goat and that he now had to suffer death in the same manner. Not once, but many times over, he met his death by having his head cut off, just as he had cut off the head of the goat many lives before. Understanding the effects of kamma makes us refrain from destroying living beings. We must treat all living beings with compassion.

Likewise, when we observe the precept, “Adinnadāna veramani sikkhāpadam Samādiyāmi”, we refrain from taking things that belong to others because we would not like it if somebody else took something of ours. We learn to treat others with the same compassion and respect we would like to receive from others. We also know the karmic effects of stealing. Just as we have brought sorrow to others by taking their property, we too will reap the effects of our bad kamma in the future and lose our property.

The last precept is slightly different from the others. In the last precept we undertake to refrain from taking any substance that will intoxicate, cloud, or impair our mind. I used the term “any substance” because in this precept I include liquor, drugs such as cocaine and marijuana, drugs that come in powder form, intravenous drugs that are injected, chemical inhalers, and any other substance that affects the control of our mind. Each of these substances impairs the mind. In other words, the effect of the liquor or drug is that it takes control over your mind. No longer are you in full control of your mind. The drug or alcohol now controls your mind.

You may have heard the phrase that people often use “we drink to drown our sorrows and problems”. The sorrows are still there, the problems are still there, but because their mind is impaired by the alcohol or drug, these people think that their problems are solved.

When the effects of the drug wear off they are usually in worse trouble. Some people drink and take drugs because it makes them feel better, happier, more confident and often a lot more talkative (verbose). The drugs don't really make you a better speaker or make you a more confident person; it is only your impaired mind that makes you think that way. In the last precept the Buddha wanted us to stay away from any substance that takes control of our mind. In other words, He wanted us to be fully in control of our mind at all times.

We will now examine the teachings of all Buddhas. The teachings of all Buddhas can be summarized in three lines:

**“Do no evil,
Do good,
Purify (Discipline) your mind.”**

How can you purify or discipline your mind when you have given control of your mind to a drug? **The teachings of the Buddha are a way of life to be practised at all times, every day.** At the best of times it is most difficult to discipline our minds. Not to give in to temptation to steal or misbehave is difficult even when we have full control of our mind. Can we then control our mind when it is impaired? This is why the Lord Buddha wanted us to refrain from taking any substance that would impair our mind. Not only is it impossible to purify and discipline a mind that is impaired by drugs, but in this condition it is also very easy to break the other four precepts that we have adopted. Most of the crime that is committed in this world – the killing, the stealing, the adultery – is committed under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Not only can we not purify and discipline our mind that is impaired by drugs, but under the influence of drugs it is a lot harder to refrain from doing evil.

You will now understand the importance of this last precept. If you

do not observe this last precept you cannot begin to follow the rest of the Buddha's teachings. All of you have studied the Noble Eightfold Path and know what it comprises. Ethical behaviour (Sila), Mental discipline (Samadhi), and Wisdom (Pannā). How can you practise the noble Eightfold Path if you do not have control of your mind? How can you use right effort to ward off evil thoughts? How can you resist the temptation to steal when the opportunity is there? You have given your mind away to a drug. You have given control away. You have impaired your mind. The last precept is a pre-requisite to the Noble Eightfold Path. You cannot begin the proper practise of the Noble Eightfold Path if you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Why did the Buddha not include the last precept, "I undertake to observe the precept of refraining from taking any substance that impairs my mind", in the Noble Eightfold Path? He did not include it because it is like generosity a pre-requisite to the practise of the Path.

Test of Understanding

1. A friend says, "I only drink socially. Just the occasional drink to keep up with my crowd. I know my limits. I never drink more than I can handle." Is this acceptable according to the teachings of the Buddha? What do you feel about joining your friends and drinking to be socially accepted? Discuss.
2. It is said that the fifth precept is left out in some of the texts of the Tripitaka. Some scholars feel that this is because the fifth precept, "Surāmeraya majja-pamādatthānā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi", (I undertake to observe the precept to refrain from drugs and other intoxicating

substances) is included in the third precept, “kāmesu micchācārā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi”, (I undertake to observe the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct). If so, it would be included in the Noble Eightfold Path under morality. What are your views on this concept?



CHAPTER 6

Why are there inequalities among mankind?

Chayanika's question - “Why is it that some people in the world have good food, homes and clothes, and others, like in some parts of Africa, have nothing?”

Answer - Chayanika is asking me about the inequalities among mankind. We in North America are very comfortable. We have good food, nice clothes and toys, and comfortable homes. However, on television we often see very poor, malnourished children in places like Somalia and Ethiopia. They have no food, clothing or homes. Why is this? What have they done to deserve such misery?

This is an excellent question. In fact a young man named Subha asked the Lord Buddha the same question. Subha wanted to know why some people died young and some lived a long life, why some were sick and others healthy, why some were ugly while others were beautiful, why some had no power and others were very powerful, why some people were poor while others were rich, why some were low-born while others were born into noble families, and why some were ignorant when others were intelligent and wise. Subha wanted to know the cause of the inequalities among mankind.

Science attempts to explain such differences through heredity (genes) and the environment in which you are brought up. In other words, you inherit characteristics or genes that your parents carry, and you adapt to the environment in which you are brought up. While

Buddhism is consistent with this theory, we feel that this does not account for all inequalities. In fact, it accounts more for the similarities than the differences. A child will have similarities to his parents, and children brought up in the same environment may have similar characteristics. But what about the differences? The identical twins who are brought up in the same environment could be totally different. Illiterate parents produced a scholar like Shakespeare.

Religions that believe in an omnipotent God Creator feel that these inequalities have a purpose. Some believe that they were designed by God for a reason. Some feel that they are a test from God. Others are not sure of the reason, but feel that it is God's will to do such a thing and that He must have a good reason for it. Buddhists do not accept this theory.

The Lord Buddha attributed these inequalities to one's own actions. **All living beings have their actions (kamma) as their inheritance.** It is kamma that determines whether beings are born into low (unhappy) or high (happy) states.

The Buddha then explained to Subha the effects of one's good and bad actions (kamma). He explained the causes of such differences by explaining the law of kamma – the law of cause and effect.

If a person destroys life, hunts and kills, and is unmerciful toward living beings, then he will have a short life when born among mankind. If a person avoids killing and is merciful and compassionate, then he will have a long life when born among mankind.

If a person is in the habit of harming others by striking or battering them and is insensitive to the pain of others, then he will be subject to various diseases when born among mankind. If a person refrains

from harming others and is always thoughtful of others' feelings, then he will be healthy when born among mankind.

If a person gets angry, is wrathful and gives vent to his anger and resentment, then he will be ugly when born among mankind. If a person does not give vent to anger and ill-will even when he is abused, then such a person will be beautiful when born among mankind⁶.

If a person is always jealous and envious of others, then, as a result of his jealousy, he will be born without power. If a person is happy when others are doing well, if he does not store jealousy and envy in his heart, then he will be powerful when born among mankind.

If a person does not give anything to charity, if he is miserly and clinging to what he has, then he will be poor when born among mankind. If a person is generous and always bent on giving, then, as a result of his generosity, he will be rich when born among mankind.

If a person is haughty and arrogant, and if he does not honour those who are worthy of honour, then as a result of his arrogance, he will be of low birth when born among mankind. If a person is not haughty and arrogant and if he honours those who are worthy of honour, then, as a result of his humility, he will be of high (noble) birth when born among mankind.

If a person does not approach the learned and the virtuous and inquire what is right and wrong, what is good and evil, then, as a result of his non-inquiring spirit, he will be born ignorant. If a person has an inquiring mind, is always trying to seek the Truth and what is moral

⁶ As an illustration, think of how anger disfigures one's face.

and right, then, as a result of his inquiring spirit he will be intelligent when born among mankind.

From the Buddha's answer it is clear what He meant when He said that kamma is your inheritance. It is your own good and evil actions that have caused these inequalities. However, despite its importance, kamma is not the only cause of everything that happens. According to the teachings of the Buddha, kamma is one of five orders or processes (niyāma) which operate in the physical and mental realms. They are the following:

- Utu Niyāma** – Physical, inorganic orders such as wind and rain, the changing seasons, heat and cold.

- Bija Niyāma** – The order of germs and seeds (physical organic order). Rice produced from rice seed. Sugary taste from sugar cane. The scientific theory of cells and genes. Similarity in looks of identical twins.

- Kamma Niyāma** – The order of cause and effect. Kamma, given opportunity, produces its inevitable results.

- Dharma Niyāma** – Order of the norm. Laws of nature such as gravitation.

Citta Niyāma – Order of the mind. Psychic laws such as telepathy, retro-cognition, clairvoyance, etc., achieved through the power of the mind.

It will be clear to you now that drought or a tornado are caused by Utu Niyāma – inorganic order. However, if you happen to be there at the time and are adversely affected by the drought or tornado, this is because of your present life or past life kamma. A son may look like his father because of Bija Niyāma, but the son may grow up to be a brilliant scholar while his father was illiterate due to his present and past kamma.

To complete this lesson we must now see if there is anything we can do to reduce or negate the effects of our past actions. The effects of our past actions are the results we are now reaping; the effects of our present actions will be our future results. If you can understand this you know that you can always improve your lot. So if you are born poor, instead of resorting to stealing and cheating, think, “I am now born in this state because of my past miserliness. Let me share whatever little I have. Let me live honourably through hard work so that I earn what I have instead of stealing.” Your present actions will then ensure a happier future. If we can at all times keep in mind that this present life of 80 or so years is but a grain of sand in the journey of life in samsara, we will realize that every little effort to do good and avoid evil is important. One does not have to give in, be lethargic and say, “Everything that happens to me is the result of my kamma. What can I do?” There is a lot you can do. You have the free will to change the effects of your kamma by your present actions. A criminal today may be a saint tomorrow.

Why are there inequalities among mankind? The inequalities arise because of the past actions of mankind. Kamma is your inheritance.

However, those who know and understand the teachings of the Buddha and practise His teachings can always ensure that they improve their inheritance.

Test of Understanding

1. “Those who are born poor, the starving millions, are reaping the effects of their past kamma. It is the just punishment of the law of kamma. Why should we help them? After all, they must have done something to deserve this present state.” Use the teachings of the Buddha to comment on this statement.

2. Recently, in some parts of North America there were raging floods and earthquakes with the loss of many human lives and property, while in other areas there was extreme heat with record-setting temperatures that again resulted in loss of life. Some say that this was a message from God as people were corrupt and not living as He willed. Explain such phenomena using the teachings of the Buddha.



CHAPTER 7

What is the effect of bad thoughts?

Prasanna's Question - “What is the effect of bad thoughts that do not lead to bad deeds?”

Answer - We know that it is kamma (our actions) that causes the vipāka (results). To explain the effects of bad thoughts that do not result in bad deeds we have to understand the meaning of the word kamma. Kamma means intentional action. Any kind of intentional action. It could be mental, verbal, or physical. Kamma covers thought, word and deed provided that it is intentional. In its ultimate sense, kamma means all moral and immoral (kusala and akusala) intentions (cetana).

Involuntary, unintentional or unconscious actions, though technically deeds, do not constitute kamma because volition, or intention, the most important factor in kamma, is absent.

The Buddha said, “Cetanāham bhikkhava kammam vadami. I declare, O Bhikkhus (monks), that cetanā (intention) is kamma.”

Having “willed”, one acts by body, speech, and thought.

Before I explain to you what is meant by mental actions or actions by thought, we have to make sure that you fully understand the meaning of the word cetanā or volition (intention). A blind Bhikkhu named Chakkupāla was meditating while walking back and forth (Sakman Bhavana). As he was blind he was unaware that he was treading on

and killing many tiny insects. In this instance there is no kamma, as the Bhikku had no intention of killing. While handling some dangerous equipment a chemist has an accident that results in an explosion with many deaths. This does not constitute bad kamma as he did not have the intention to kill. Childbirth is painful. It is painful to the mother and to the child. However, there are no effects from this pain and discomfort either to the mother or child, as there is no intention to hurt. This does not constitute bad kamma either, as there is no intention to hurt. On the other hand, if a person plans a murder but is foiled at the last moment by the police, even though he did not succeed in killing, this constitutes kamma, as the intention to kill was there. He will not have the full effects of the crime because he could not complete it, but he will pay for his actions to a lesser degree.

Now, does everybody understand the meaning of the word kamma? Kamma means an intentional action by thought, word or deed. According to the teachings of the Buddha, there are ten evil actions (dasa akusala) and ten good actions (dasa kusala). These actions will constitute kamma if they are accompanied by intention (cetanā).

So far we have learnt mostly about actions by deed and word. There are three evil actions that are performed by deed. They are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. There are four evil actions that are committed by word. They are lying, slandering, harsh speech and frivolous talk (gossip).

Today you are going to learn about the three evil actions that are committed by the mind. They are covetousness, ill-will and false view (abhijjā, vyāpada and micchāditthi).

1. **Covetousness** – What we mean by covetousness is wanting or craving to own another's possessions. For the full effects of this evil

to be felt, two conditions are necessary. You must know that it is another's possession and you must crave for it to be yours. The effect (vipāka) of covetousness is non-fulfilment of one's wishes.

2. **Ill-will** – What we mean by ill-will is thoughts of harming another living being. For the full effects of this evil to be felt, two conditions are necessary. They are that it must be directed toward another living being, and that the thoughts are of harming this being. The effects of ill-will are to be born ugly, to have various diseases and to have a detestable nature.

3. **False View** – According to Buddhism there are ten kinds of false views. The first three are when you don't believe in the effects of generosity – believing that there is no such virtue as generosity (dāna). The fourth is the belief that there are no effects from good and bad actions. The fifth and sixth are not believing in a past existence and a future existence. Seven and eight are believing that there are no effects from actions done to your mother and father. Nine is not believing in rebirth. And ten is not believing in Buddhas and Arahants who have, by their own efforts, realized the Truth. The effects of false view are lack of wisdom, dull wit, chronic disease and blameworthy ideas.

If you are a Buddhist and understand and practise the teachings of the Buddha, you will automatically not have a false view. However, I feel that two of these categories are worth looking into. So we will discuss them briefly.

The first is dāna. I have already taught you the three types of dāna⁷.

- **Āmisa Dāna** – gift of food and clothing

⁷ See Chapter 11

- **Abahya Dāna** – gift of life
- **Dhamma Dāna** – gift of Truth

The results of generosity are enormous. But dāna is important for another reason. When you give, you give up something that you were attached to. Little by little you reduce craving or attachment (tanhā). This is important because as you have learned in other lessons, one of the reasons people commit evil actions (bad kamma) is because of craving and attachment. It is also craving and attachment that cause sorrow and rebirth.

The other false view that I feel is important is believing that there are no effects from the actions done to your mother and father. To make you understand just how much we owe our parents, I am going to include this paragraph which I have taken from the book *The Experience of Insight* by Joseph Goldstein.

“Another part of right understanding is acknowledging the special relationship we have with our parents, and the responsibilities and obligations we have toward them. Our parents cared for us when we were unable to care for ourselves, and it is due to their concern at a time when we were helpless that we now have the opportunity to practise the Dhamma. The Buddha said that there is no way of repaying this debt, that we could carry our parents on our shoulders for an entire lifetime and still we would not have fulfilled our obligation.”

Test of Understanding

1. Would an evil act performed under the influence of alcohol or drugs constitute bad kamma? Use the knowledge you have gained from this lesson and the lesson on “Why is the last

precept not included in the Noble Eightfold Path” (Chapter 5) for your answer.

2. If the third precept, “kāmesu micchācārā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi”, included refraining from consuming intoxicating substances, what would be your answer? Has it changed in any way?



CHAPTER 8

What determines the place of rebirth?

Chamal's question: “If a person has done a lot of good he will be born in one of the heavens. If a person has done a lot of bad he will be born in one of the hells. What happens to a person who has done a little of both good and bad?”

Answer: Chamal says that a person who has done a lot of good will be born in heaven and that a person who has done a lot of bad will be born in hell. In other words, he says that it is your good and bad actions which will determine whether you will be born in heaven or hell. Going one step further, we can deduce that it is your good and bad actions that determine your next birth⁸.

In general, this is correct. I have told you many stories that agree with what Chamal has said. However, today I am going to tell you some stories which are different.

The first one is about Emperor Asoka of India. Emperor Asoka was a righteous king who ruled his country according to the teachings of the Buddha. Not only did he build many thousands of temples, it was also his son, Venerable Mahinda, who brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka and his daughter, Venerable Sanghamittā, who brought the

⁸ This question was asked after the lesson on “the 31 planes of existence and King Nimi's journey through the heavens and hell”. This lesson is not included in this book.

female order of nuns and the Bodhi tree. Emperor Asoka had performed many good actions. At the time of his death his attendant delayed bringing him fruit juice to quench his thirst. This annoyed him and made him angry just before he died. After his death his son and daughter, who were both Arahants, looked in the 6 heavens and the 16 Brahma worlds for their father. They were sure that because of all the good he had done, he would be born in a happy place. However, when they finally located his place of rebirth they found that he was born as a snake in the Himalayan forest. Now here is an example of an emperor who was called Dharmāsoka because of his good deeds, reborn in an unhappy state.

The next story I am going to tell you is about a frog. At the time of its death the frog overheard a sermon by the Lord Buddha. The sweet voice (and teachings) of the Buddha made him happy at the time of death. He was reborn in one of the heavens. Now, I have taught you how difficult it is for an animal even to be born as a human being. I am sure you all remember the story of the blind turtle. The Buddha said that the chance of an animal being born as a human is less than the chance of a blind turtle putting its neck through a ring that is floating on a rough sea. So how could a frog have performed a sufficient number of good actions to be reborn in a happy plane?

From these examples one can see that there must be something other than just your good and bad actions that determine your next life.

To teach you what the Buddha said about this phenomenon you have to study the Abhidhamma, or higher teachings of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha are divided into three categories: the Sutta Pitaka, the Vinaya Pitaka and the Abhidhamma. Most of what I have taught you so far is from the Sutta Pitaka. The Vinaya Pitaka are the rules by which Buddhist monks live. Today I am going to teach you something from the Abhidhamma, the higher teachings of the

Buddha. The Abhidhamma is more difficult, so I want you to listen carefully and ask me questions if you don't understand.

The Buddha said that it is your **kamma**, your **kamma nimitta** or your **gati nimitta** that enters your mind **at the time of death** that determines the next place of birth.

Now you all know what kamma means. Kamma means intentional actions. Kamma nimitta means a symbol of your intentional actions. If you are a butcher, your action will be killing. A knife or a carcass would be a symbol of your actions. Saving lives would be an action if you are a good doctor. The happiness in your patient's face when he got better, or an instrument that helped to make him better, is a symbol of your actions. Gati Nimitta is a vision of your next life resulting from your intentional actions. This could be a vision of hell, fire, or weapons for a person who has killed, a vision of heaven, flowers, or beautiful things for someone with many good actions, or even a mother's womb. The Buddha said it is your intentional actions (kamma), a symbol of your intentional actions (kamma nimitta), or a vision of your next life resulting from your actions (gati nimitta) at the time of death, that determines the next life.

We will first learn a little more about the different types of kamma. There are four types of kamma.

1. **Garuka Kamma** – This is a very serious action. On the bad side it is one of the five grave kammās. These are: shedding the blood of the Lord Buddha, killing one's mother, killing one's father, killing an Arahant, or causing disharmony in the Sangha. If a person has committed one of these five, then this action, a symbol of this action, or a vision of his next birth resulting from this action, will enter his mind at the time of death. On the good side, it is one who has attained the Jhānas. If a person has attained any of the four Jhānas

this will enter his mind at the time of death. One who has committed a bad garuka kamma will never attain a good garuka kamma in the same lifetime. If a person has committed a bad garuka kamma it will be the bad garuka kamma that will enter his mind at the time of death, as he will lose any attainments he may have reached before death. Even Devadatta lost his attainments of Jhāna before death due to his bad garuka kamma.

2. **Āsanna Kamma** – Āsanna means close. Āsanna kamma is an intentional action performed close to the time of death. If a person has no garuka kamma, an āsanna kamma or a symbol of an asanna kamma, or a vision of the next life resulting from the asanna kamma, will enter his mind at the moment of death. This is what happened to Emperor Asoka and the frog. They did not have a garuka kamma but they each had an asanna kamma. Emperor Asoka died in a state of anger and ill-will. The frog died content and happy. This is the second strongest type of kamma after garuka kamma, and a person who does not have a garuka kamma will have an asanna kamma enter his mind at the time of death. This is why Buddhists chant pirith and remind a person of his good deeds at the time of his death. It is in the hope of making his last thoughts happy and good.

3. **Āchinna Kamma** – Āchinna means habit. Not having a garuka kamma or asanna kamma, a person's last thoughts will be on his daily habits. Habit, they say, is second nature. This is what Chamal was talking about. A person who has done a lot of good will think of good things at the time of death, and a person who is habitually doing evil things will think of his evil actions at the time of death. It must be noted at this point that if a person's habitual behaviour is contrary to his last thought, as in the case of Emperor Asoka, the life span in the new life (as a snake) will be very short. He will then pass away and go to a place that better reflects his habitual actions. Āsanna kamma is stronger than Āchinna kamma but will be short-lived if his

habitual actions differ from his āsanna kamma and his āsanna kamma is not very strong.

4. **Katattā Kamma** – This is the 'catch-all'. Not having any of the above three types of kamma, any one of your actions will enter your mind at the time of death. The action, symbol of the action, or vision resulting from the action, that entered your mind, will determine the place of rebirth. A person who has led an indifferent life with neither many good nor many bad actions will fall into this category.

We now need to study a little of what the Buddha meant when he said “at the time of death”. At the time of death, your mind goes through five thought processes. I will be teaching you three of the five. The first thought is called the Bhavanga thought. This is something like the state of your mind during sleep. The third and most important, as it is the one that determines the next life, is called the Javana thought. Usually the Javana thought lasts for seven thought moments. But at the time of death it lasts for only five thought moments. They are very short and almost instantaneous. It is the kamma, kamma nimitta, or gati nimitta that enters your mind during the Javana process that determines your next life. The final thought process is known as Chutichitta (departing) or last thought. Many Buddhists think that it is this last thought which determines the next life. According to the teachings of the Buddha, however, it is the Javana process and not the Chutichitta, or last thought, that determines the place of rebirth. All living beings, even those in a coma, go through these thought processes at the time of death.

Therefore, while it is correct to say that it is one's kamma that determines the place of rebirth, one should be aware of the importance of the thought process at the time of death. A person who

dies will be reborn in one of the 31 planes of existence⁹, and it will be his thoughts at the time of death that will determine where he will be reborn. If an unhappy thought, or the thought of one of his bad actions enters his mind at the time of death, he will be reborn in one of the four unhappy planes of life. If a happy thought, or one of his good actions enters his mind at the time of death, he will be born in one of the seven happy planes of life or in one of the Brahma Realms. His characteristics and comforts in this place of rebirth will vary depending on his kamma.

Test of Understanding

1. Devadatta became a monk after listening to the teachings of the Buddha. He performed many meritorious deeds but later, overcome by jealousy, he tried to kill the Buddha and caused disharmony among the Sangha. After death he was reborn in the Avichi hell. However, the Buddha has said that one day in the very distant future Davadatta would be a Pacea Buddha. Why did the effects of his bad actions take precedence over the effects of his good actions? How is it possible for someone who is in the Avichi hell to become a Pacea Buddha one day?

⁹ See Chapter 12 for the 31 planes of existence.



CHAPTER 9

What is the Buddhist viewpoint on capital punishment?

Question - What do Buddhists feel about capital punishment? Is it acceptable for a man who has committed murder to be put to death?

Answer - In society, there are some individuals who have committed the terrible crime of murder. They have wilfully taken the life of another human being. In some countries this crime is punishable by death. That is, if the man is proven guilty of murder, he is put to death either by electrocution, by lethal injection, or by whatever method is used in that country.

To explain to you what the Lord Buddha's view was on the death penalty, I am going to tell you a story of some incidents that happened at the time of the Buddha.

Many years ago in the time of the Gotama Buddha, some incidents occurred that puzzled the people of the village. The first was that of an ordinary crow. It was flying over the chimney of a house when suddenly there was a burst of flame from the chimney that engulfed the crow and burnt it to death.

The second incident occurred at sea. A captain, his wife and his men were at sea when the boat stalled. At that time the people were quite superstitious. When they were unable to start the boat it was decided that the cause was one of the passengers. In other words, one of them

was the cause of the bad luck. They decided that all the people on the boat would draw straws and that the person with the shortest straw would be thrown overboard as a sacrifice. When they drew straws the shortest straw was drawn by the captain's wife. The dismayed captain held a second draw. When she again pulled the shortest straw the captain sadly commanded his men to throw her overboard. A heavy sack of sand was tied round her neck and she was thrown into the sea where she drowned.

The third incident happened in a cave. Five monks lived in a cave and spent their time in meditation. They usually came to the village for their meals, but there came a time when they were not seen by the villagers for a few days. Afraid that the monks had come to some harm, the villagers went to the cave, to find that a rock slide had blocked the entrance. After digging and moving the fallen rocks they finally managed to save the monks who were very weak, as they had been without food or water for many days.

The people of the village went to the Buddha to ask Him why these strange events had taken place. Was it a chance happening that the crow should have been just over the chimney when the fire sparked? Why was the captain's wife selected in both instances? What had the pious monks done to deserve the pain and discomfort of being trapped in the cave?

The Buddha, with His enlightened vision, looked into the past lives of these beings for an explanation. He saw that the crow in a former birth had been a farmer. He had owned a bull that was old and sick and of no further use to him. It was expensive to feed the bull that could no longer serve him. The ungrateful farmer had wrapped the bull in straw and set fire to it. It is the effects of this evil kamma or action of the farmer that resulted in his death by fire. For it was this same farmer who had now been reborn as a crow.

In a previous birth, the captain's wife had been a young lady. A certain stray dog had taken a liking to her and followed her around all the time, so much so that the villagers started to tease her about it. She tried unsuccessfully to stop the dog from following her, and finally when she could bear the teasing no more, tied a bag of sand around its neck and drowned it in the river. She did not know it at the time, but in a previous birth the dog had been her husband, which was the reason it was fond of her. It was the effects of this evil kamma or action that resulted in her death at sea by drowning.

In a previous birth, the five monks were goatherds. They had been up in the mountains tending their goats when they had spotted a lizard in the crevice of a rock. In play, the goatherds decided to block the lizard's entrance by placing a big rock over the crevice. They then forgot about the lizard and continued their work. It was only a few days later that they remembered what they had done. They quickly took the rock out to let the weak, starving lizard slowly crawl out. It was the effects of this evil kamma, or action, of the goatherds that resulted in their discomfort and pain by the rock-fall in the cave.

Some of you have already attended my talk on kamma and understand what happened. For those who have not attended, it is clear that the past action (kamma) in each case resulted in these puzzling incidents. They did not happen in the same life, but the effects were not lost. Each of them had to suffer the consequences of his past actions. In effect, each of them paid for his or her misdeeds or crimes.

After explaining these incidents to the people the Buddha said:

*“There is no place in the world,
neither in the sky, in the sea, or mountain cleft,
Where an evil-doer can hide
from the effects of his evil deeds.”*

Now if you examine very carefully what the Buddha was saying, you will understand that no one can escape from the effects of their actions. The law of kamma is one of the five orders, like the law of gravity. You cannot hide from it. Nor is ignorance of the law an excuse. If a man has committed the hideous crime of murder, then he will pay for it. In some instances in this same life, in some in his next life, or maybe, depending on the crime and the strength of his intentions, in many more lives. It is then not necessary for us as a society to punish him by killing him. An eye for an eye is not acceptable according to the teachings of the Buddha. He will get his just punishment irrespective of what we do. One cannot hide from the effects of one's bad kamma in the air, in the sea, or in a cave.

By setting the death penalty and having the wrongdoer killed we are again starting another round of kamma. There is now an executioner who administers the lethal dose, a person who directs his action, and many others involved. All contribute to a new crime. The killing of a human being is a crime, however justifiable it may seem. It is not necessary for us to start another round of kamma to punish his wrong action. You cannot justify one death by another. The murderer will pay for his crime. He will feel the same pain and fear he instilled in the other. He will not be able to hide from the effects of his crime. **The law of kamma will operate with or without our aid.**

What then should be done with such a person? Surely he cannot be allowed to go back into society! Are we not going to punish him at all for what he did? Are we just going to let him go? Will not our

inaction make him feel that his behaviour is acceptable? What if he kills again?

The following is what the Buddha would have wanted us to do. It must also be said that there was a great emperor, Emperor Asoka of India, who ruled his country in this manner. A murderer is an obvious danger to society. We must as such separate him from the rest of society to ensure the safety of our citizens. We do this by putting him in jail, or better still, in a reformatory, so that he can improve. We do so not to punish him but to safeguard the rest of society and to correct him. He cannot be trusted to act responsibly. He is a threat to mankind. To safeguard society he has to be put behind bars.

The Buddha said, “Hatred is not appeased by hatred. It is love alone that will conquer hatred.” The Buddha conquered the terrible murderer Angulimala with mettā (loving kindness). He conquered the raging mad elephant Nalagiri with loving kindness. He did not use any weapons. He did not use any punishment. If we could use the ways of the Buddha in society today, then the world would be a much better place in which to live. It has been proved that criminals respond far better to reform and rehabilitation than they do to a punishing jail term.

Punishment will not reform the murderer. Killing him will set off another round of evil kamma. Then what can we do to change him? Once we have separated him from society, when he is no longer a threat to others, we should teach him the Truth, the irrefutable Teachings of the Buddha, so that he can understand the effects of his evil actions. We should help him to reform himself with love and kindness, with mettā.

We will now settle down quietly for a few moments to practise loving

kindness the way the Buddha did. You will all use the hand-outs I have given you and begin by repeating after me. We will then all repeat together. I want all of you to concentrate on what you are saying. Try not to let your mind wander. Concentrate and let your mind, your body, your thoughts, radiate loving kindness. This form of meditation is known as meditation on loving kindness (mettā bhavana). It will be to your benefit if you can practise it for at least five minutes each day.

MEDITATION ON LOVING KINDNESS

May I be peaceful, happy and well.

May I be free from harm and grief.

May I be free from hatred and greed.

May I be free from jealousy and envy.

May I have courage, understanding and determination.

May I resolve my problems.

May I overcome my failures.

May I be successful.

May my parents be peaceful, happy and well.

May they be free from harm and grief.

May they be free from hatred and greed.

May they be free from jealousy and envy.

May they have courage, understanding and determination.

May they resolve their problems.

May they overcome their failures.

May they be successful.

*May my teachers be peaceful, happy and well.
May they be free from harm and grief.
May they be free from hatred and greed.
May they be free from jealousy and envy.
May they have courage, understanding and determination.
May they resolve their problems.
May they overcome their failures.
May they be successful.*

*May my immediate family be peaceful, happy and well.
May they be free from harm and grief.
May they be free from hatred and greed.
May they be free from jealousy and envy.
May they have courage, understanding and determination.
May they resolve their problems.
May they overcome their failures.
May they be successful.*

*May my relatives be peaceful, happy and well.
May they be free from harm and grief.
May they be free from hatred and greed.
May they be free from jealousy and envy.
May they have courage, understanding and determination.
May they resolve their problems.
May they overcome their failures.
May they be successful.*

*May my friends be peaceful, happy and well.
May they be free from harm and grief.
May they be free from hatred and greed.
May they be free from jealousy and envy.
May they have courage, understanding and determination.
May they resolve their problems.*

May they overcome their failures.

May they be successful.

May all non-friendly people be peaceful, happy and well.

May they be free from harm and grief.

May they be free from hatred and greed.

May they be free from jealousy and envy.

May they have courage, understanding and determination.

May they resolve their problems.

May they overcome their failures.

May they be successful.

May all living beings be peaceful, happy and well.

May they be free from harm and grief.

May they be free from hatred and greed.

May they be free from jealousy and envy.

May they have courage, understanding and determination.

May they resolve their problems.

May they overcome their failures.

May they be successful.

May all suffering beings be freed from suffering.

May all fearful beings be freed from fear.

May all grieving beings be freed from grief.

May all beings be well and happy.

Test of Understanding

Using examples from the Dhammapada and Jātaka stories, comment on the following hypothetical situations.

1. A patient is in excruciating pain and dying of cancer. Unable

to bear the pain any longer she collects her daily sleeping tablets and kills herself with an overdose of sleeping pills.

2. A man is in excruciating pain and dying of cancer. His daughter is a doctor. She knows that there is nothing that can be done for him. She understands the effects of taking the life of a parent. However, she cannot bear to see her father suffer. With love and compassion for her father, she withholds the medication that is keeping him alive. He passes away. There is no financial or other benefit to her from his death.
3. A doctor is keeping a patient alive on life support systems. He is brain dead and the doctor knows that there is no hope of recovery. The cost of medical care, sorrow and stress are destroying the man's family. The doctor looks on at the pain and hardship with compassion. Knowing that he may be liable for a malpractice suit, the doctor withholds life support. The man passes away.



CHAPTER 10

Why should I believe in rebirth?

Tharanga's question - "I cannot remember my past lives. How do I know if we really had past births and that we really will be born again?"

Answer - Most of us cannot remember our past lives. We cannot see into the past or the future. We usually believe that which we can see and remember. How then can we believe in rebirth which we can neither remember nor see?

If I ask you to remember an incident that took place when you were one year old, chances are that you will not be able to remember it. However, this does not mean that the incident did not happen. Neither does it mean that you were never one year old because you cannot remember being that age. I am sure that all of you will accept the fact that there was a time when you were one year old, and if your parents describe your birthday party you will accept the fact that such an event did take place. You accept it because your parents are reliable and you believe what they say.

I am sure that all of you agree that electricity travels through a conductor such as a wire. However, you cannot see the electricity. What you can see is the light bulb which is now lit and the heater that is now red hot. Because of these external manifestations of electricity, you believe me when I say that there is electricity travelling through this wire.

Now, as we cannot remember or see our past lives, we are going to have to use the documented word of reliable persons who can remember or see into their past lives, and external manifestations of rebirth (like the light for electricity) to believe in rebirth.

Documented Incidents of Persons Who Can Remember Their Past Lives

Though the majority of persons cannot remember their past births, there have been many instances where children and adults have been able to remember their past births. I have put together a few examples from scientific research done by well-known, reputable individuals.

Dr. Ian Stevenson, the eminent Canadian psychiatrist now living and working in the U.S.A., has documented around 600 cases of persons from all over the globe who talked of their former life, on the basis of research carried out by workers he had stationed in different countries. After verification and scientific study, he has concluded that rebirth is the most plausible explanation. His book, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, contain some of his best researched cases.

Francis Story, in his book *The Case for Rebirth*, cited the following authenticated case. Shanti Devi, a girl living in Delhi and born in 1926, began from the age of three to detail incidents from a former life in the town of Muttra, about eighty miles away. She said that she had given birth to a son and died ten days later. Her name had been Ludgi and she had been a Choban by caste, who had married a cloth merchant by the name of Kedar Nath Chaubey. Her family made an investigation and found that her former husband was still alive. He then visited her un-announced and was immediately recognised by her. After an investigating committee had established that she had

never left Delhi, she was taken to Muttra where she identified many places and found her way around with ease.

Even more interesting is the account from *Rebirth* by John Andrew Storey, where he writes of an American couple who stopped at Bombay while on a world cruise. Walking around the city they both found that they were so familiar with parts of the city that they did not require a guide. They could tell each other in advance what they would see around the next corner. They tested their knowledge by going around a corner and looking for a house and a banyan tree. When they reached the place where they expected to find the house and tree, they did not see them. However, when they questioned a policeman, he confirmed that there had been a house and a tree as the couple described. He also added that the house had belonged to a family called Bhan. The couple had, for some unknown reason, liked the name Bhan and named their son Bhan.

A more recent example of rebirth was cited in the September 12, 1996, issue of the *Budusarana* paper, in Sri Lanka. The young monk Dammatilaka (age 9) had spoken of his past life and wanted to be ordained as a monk at the age of two, when he started to talk. His mother, Chandralatha Rodrigo, said that her son Ruwan Taranga (ordained as Ven. Dammatilaka), had claimed that in his previous birth he was the Venerable Ganigama Pannasekara of the Pitumpe Temple. He had then described the temple, his room and said that the Venerable Panadure Ariyadamma (Maha Thera) had been residing in the Pitumpe temple at that time. He had also described a visit to the Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura with the Venerable (Pandith) Balangoda Ananda Maithreya and the Venerable Rerukane Chandavimala, during which they had recited the Satipattāna Sutta. Ruwan had also described a pilgrimage to the sacred sites in India. Between the ages of five and nine, when he was ordained, Ruwan had conducted 240 offerings to the Bodhi Tree (Bodhi Puja) in the Pali

language using the Suttas of the Buddha. His past life story has since been confirmed by the authorities who investigated and by monks who are well-known in Buddhist countries all over the world.

To this list we could add the English poet Shelley's experience. When walking in a part of the country he had never been to before, he said to his companion, "Over that hill there is a windmill". As they climbed the hill and sighted the windmill, Shelley fainted with emotion.

Documented Incidents Where Past Lives Have Been Explored Through Hypnosis

There are still others who have been taken back to their infant days, and even into their past births, through hypnosis. Extraordinary phobias, panic attacks and anxiety have been explained by psychologists using hypnosis and past life regressions. The following examples are all taken from books written by famous doctors.

Brian L. Weiss M.D. in his book, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, successfully regresses a young woman into her past lives to cure her phobias and other mental problems. Dr Weiss, who graduated magna cum laude from Columbia University in New York in 1966, received his medical degree from the Yale University in 1970. Dr. Weiss was at first reluctant to share his experiences with the medical community as his findings of rebirth were not traditionally accepted by the Jewish and Christian faith or the medical community. In his book his patient, Catherine, talks about eighty-one past births. Approximately fifteen of her past births are documented in detail. Her experiences and descriptions of Egyptian and other ancient cultures are fascinating. This book is also unique as Dr. Weiss regresses Caroline into celestial and human realms thereby giving the reader an opportunity to glimpse the celestial realms. Commenting on

humankind's resistance to change and the initial rejection of Galileo's discoveries Dr. Weiss says, " So it is now with psychiatrists and other therapists, who refuse to examine and evaluate the considerable evidence being gathered about survival after bodily death and about past-life memories. Their eyes stay tightly shut."

Dr. H. J. Eysenck, professor of psychology at the University of London, in his book *Sense and Nonsense* refers to a middle-aged woman who had a crippling phobia of speed which prevented her from traveling in a vehicle exceeding 20 miles per hour. Through hypnosis and past life regression he found that as a young girl in a previous birth, she had been in a train accident with her family. All of her family had been killed and she had been badly crippled. The speed of the train had been the dominant factor in the accident and she had been left with this lasting impression.

Dr. Alexander Cannon, in his book *The Power Within*, refers to 1,382 cases of reported reincarnation. One case study is of a businessman who had a phobia of going down in elevators. Hypnotic experiments revealed that some centuries ago he was a Chinese general who was killed after falling from a great height.

In 1955, Dr. Jonathan Rodney reported the case of Mrs. Anne Baker in the book *Explorations of a Hypnotist*. A Lancashire housewife, Mrs. Baker, who had never studied French or been to France, had spoken perfect French under hypnosis. She had referred to the death of Queen Marie Antoinette and said that her name in that life had been Marielle Pacasse and that her husband's name had been Jules. She had also spoken of a street in Paris, Rue de St-Pierre, near Notre-Dame Cathedral. Subsequent investigations revealed that Marielle, which is an uncommon name at present, was a popular name at the time of the French Revolution, and that even though a street of that name no longer exists, there had, in fact, been a street of that name in

that vicinity at that time.

Documented Incidents Where Persons With Clairvoyant Abilities Refer to Rebirth

We also have persons who have developed clairvoyant abilities. The most well-known among them was Edgar Cayce of West Virginia, U.S.A. The following examples have been taken from Gina Cerminara's book *Many Mansions* which describes Edgar Cayce's clairvoyant powers and provides case histories, and from *Edgar Cayce – The Sleeping Prophet* by Jess Stearn. Edgar Cayce could successfully diagnose people who were sick and often cited past-life incidents, some of which have been proved to be historically accurate.

In one case cited in Gina Cerminara's book, a person is born blind in this life because in a previous life around 1,000 B.C., he was a member of a barbaric tribe whose custom it was to blind its enemies with red hot irons and it had been his job to do the blinding. In this instance not only does Edgar Cayce refer to a past birth, he also introduces the effects of kamma. He also made many references to Egypt through his life readings, which have now been found to be accurate through archaeological discoveries. Stearn records a reading on a woman named Eula Allen where she was informed of many of her past lives in Ireland, Rome, Syria, Peru, Atlantis and in the Wild West of the U.S. before the civil war. While himself a devout Christian, Edgar Cayce could not refute the existence of past births due to his own abilities and experiences. It might be interesting to note that Edgar Cayce developed this ability because in a previous birth when he was bleeding to death as a soldier of war, he had successfully separated his mind from his body through concentration in order to escape excruciating pain. It is this deep concentration that Buddhists refer to as meditation.

The following examples from Gina Cerminara's book (Chapter V, page 57) illustrate facts similar to the explanation the Lord Buddha gave us in the story of Khujjuttarā, the karmic effects of mockery.

1. A woman of forty-five, wife of a professional man and mother of three children, was stricken with infantile paralysis and had not walked since. The karmic cause was explained in a previous life she had in Rome. She was of royalty at that time, and closely associated with Nero in his persecution of the Christians. The woman had laughed at those who were crippled in the arena.

2. A woman of thirty-four had been stricken with infantile paralysis at the age of six months. This resulted in a spinal curvature and a limping walk. The person, two lifetimes ago, was a member of a rich noble family in Rome. She too had enjoyed the games, and had viewed the struggle of man with man and man with beast as a source of pleasure.

3. The third case is of a motion picture producer who was stricken with polio. He too was in Rome during the early Christian era, and was a soldier who had jeered at those who were afraid.

4. A girl who was lame due to tuberculosis of the hip joint had been in Rome and had found the games in the arena amusing. She had particularly laughed at a girl whose side was ripped open by a lion.

5. A girl of eighteen years who was overweight due to “glandular problems” had in fact been a very beautiful athlete two lifetimes ago in Rome, and had laughed at and ridiculed those who were less nimble than she because of heaviness in body.

The following illustrations from the same book (Chapter XI, page 115) confirm the theory put forward by doctors who have used

hypnotism and age regression.

1. A woman who had a phobia about closed places had in her past life been smothered by the roof of a cave falling in.
2. A woman who had phobias of cutting instruments and fur bearing animals had met her death in a Persian incarnation by being run through with a sword. Her fear of fur bearing animals was traced to an Atlantean incarnation in which she had had a bad experience with fur bearing animals.
3. A person's morbid fear of dark places was due to a dungeon experience in France, as a political prisoner of Louis XVI.
4. A fear of sharp knives was traced to an experience in a torture chamber in France.
5. An overpowering fear of wild beasts was traced to the person having had to fight a wild beast in a Roman arena.

External Manifestations that Point Toward Rebirth

Now we will see if there are any external manifestations which will point to there having been a past birth. The first one that comes to my mind is that of child prodigies. There have been many documented cases of very young children performing feats that even adults are not capable of doing. Mozart composed his first sonata at age four and his first opera at age seven. In 1953, The London Evening Standard gave an interesting account of a little girl called Danielle Salamon who could play the piano before she could talk, and who by the time she was four had already composed several pieces of music and written the scores in a book. In 1967, the British Broadcasting Corporation News Bulletin gave an account of a three-year-old boy

in Korea who was already attending university where he was taking a course in advanced mathematics. He was already the author of several books. Political philosopher Jeremy Bentham was able to read and write Latin and Greek at the age of four. John Stuart Mill wrote *The History of Rome* at the age of six. These extraordinary abilities are well summarised by Alan Jay Lerner, author of *My Fair Lady*, who is of the view that these prodigies must surely have lived before to have been so gifted. He says, “They remembered through the subconscious, the source of all inspiration.”

We also have things that cannot be explained by heredity or science. Why are identical twins different in character? Why should something bad happen to a person who has led a blameless life and good things happen to persons who are evil? Why are some people born beautiful and others plain? What determines your birth among the high caste, the low caste, the rich or the poor? What crime could an innocent baby have done to deserve being born blind or crippled? Why is it that some among us die young, while others live long, healthy lives? Why is it that there is so much human suffering on one side of the world and so much surplus and waste on the other side? Are these chance happenings? Is this the work of an all-powerful, all-merciful God? Or are these, as the Buddha said, the results of our very own actions (kamma)?

Rebirth goes hand in hand with the law of kamma. It is your actions in past births that result in your present condition, be it happy or painful. The innocent baby that is born crippled may not have done anything in this life to deserve its pain and affliction, but if you could see into its past lives as the Buddhas and Arahants could, you would be able to isolate the action that caused its present affliction. The rich, the poor, the beautiful and the ugly, are all reaping the results of their past actions. For what you sow you shall reap. All these inequalities seem unfair if you isolate just this one life. If one looks

at the bigger picture, then everything falls into place. No longer does the world seem such an unfair place, for no one escapes the law of kamma. It is a natural law like the law of gravity or the law of relativity. You cannot deny it just because you cannot see it.

All that I have said so far points to a past birth, to the fact that we have lived before. This is not the first existence for us. But does this mean that we will have a future birth after death? The fact is that one person's recollection of a past birth is another person's recollection of a future birth. Shanti Devi will look back at her past birth and say, "In my past life I was a woman by the name of Ludgi." Her former husband, Kedar, will say, "My wife passed away shortly after giving birth and was reborn as a female child who was named Shanti Devi."

In the Western world's literature, I do not have any recently documented, verifiable examples of persons who could accurately forecast where a person has been born after death. This is not because there have been no persons who could do this, but because the persons who have such abilities are generally ascetics who have developed their minds to a great extent through meditation. They are not interested in research or publicizing their abilities but are bent on self-development and in some instances, on using their abilities to help mankind. Also, most of these people are in the Eastern countries where rebirth is an accepted fact, and therefore is not something that has to be researched, documented, and proved.

As such the only documented incident that I have (other than the word of the Buddha and the Arahants) is the ability of the Brahmin Vangisa. He was well-known in India, as he could rap on the skull of a dead person and tell accurately the exact place of rebirth. His skills were well-recognized in India and many persons paid him to find out the place of birth of their deceased relatives.

What the Buddha Said About Rebirth

Finally, the last and strongest argument in support of rebirth is the word of the Buddha. Not just our Buddha Gotama, but all Buddhas and Arahants who have achieved the bliss of Nibbāna. They who have developed their minds to see that which you and I cannot see. They who have shown us the path to achieve that which they have achieved, so that we too can achieve and see for ourselves.

It was at birth that Prince Siddhārtha made His first reference to rebirth. The Prince announced:

*“I am the chief in the world
There is no equal to me.
I am supreme
This is my last birth
No rebirth for me.”*

Some of you might think that surely this is but a legend. How can a baby talk? How can a baby walk? That possibility exists as the Buddha's teachings were documented about four hundred years after His Parinibbāna. But remember, we are not talking of just any baby. We are talking about a Person who had perfected Himself over a period of 300,000 world cycles and twenty periods of immeasurable length. Some of you who have heard my talk on “How one becomes a Buddha,”¹⁰ know just how long a time this is. For those who have not, it is sufficient to say that it is an inconceivably long time. All Buddhas make this announcement at birth.

10 This lesson is not included in this book. The Manopanidana-kāla, Vacipañidana-kāla, and Kayapanidana-kāla are included in this period. Read *Practising the Dhamma with a View to Nibbana* by Radhika Abeysekera for a comprehensive account on how one becomes a Buddha.

It was on the day He attained enlightenment that He made His next reference to rebirth. The Buddha said: “ In the first watch of the night, I attained the ability to see into my past lives. First one, then two, and then five, ten, and fifty. Before long I could see a hundred and a hundred thousand of my past births. Then world cycles destroyed and world cycles evolved.” Thus He understood about rebirth, and that all beings will be born again and again.

In the next watch of the night, He gained the ability to see people die and be instantly reborn. The good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly, the noble and the base, all being reborn according to their deeds and actions. It was then that He understood the effects of kamma.

In His first joyous announcement after enlightenment the Buddha said:

*“Thro' many a birth in existence wandered I,
Seeking but not finding, The builder of this house (body)
Sorrowful is repeated birth....”*

Since that time the Buddha made references time and time again to His own and to the past births of many others. Most of you are familiar with some of the Jātaka stories, stories of the past lives of our Buddha when He was completing the ten perfections. Many of the incidents that happened at the time of the Buddha were explained by Him with reference to the past births and actions of the people. Most of you know the story of Khujjuttarā, Puttigatta Tissa, Pālita, and many others, where the Buddha made reference to incidents from a person's past life. There are also many instances where Arahants have made references to their past lives. The Buddha has also made reference to those who had died and been reborn. Anātapindikka, He said, was born as a Deva and visited Him at Jetavana soon after his death. The Buddha's mother was reborn as a Deva by the name of

Mātu-deva Putta in the Tusita heaven. Devadatta, He said, was born in the Avichi hell. From the Arahants Mahinda and Sanghamitta, we know that Emperor Asoka was reborn as a snake in the Himalayan jungles for a short period.

Who Believes in Rebirth?

Many great thinkers and teachers of the East advocate rebirth. However, belief in rebirth is not confined just to the East. Many great men of the West also have advocated rebirth. The following has been taken from the book *Reincarnation in World Thought* edited by Head and Cranston, which lists over 400 great men of the West who believed in rebirth; scientists like Thomas Huxley, astronomers like Professor Gustaf Stromberg, philosophers like Pythagoras, Plotinus and Plato, poets like Shelley, Tennyson and Wordsworth, great writers like Tolstoy, Browning, Kipling and Longfellow, musicians like Bruno Walter, Sir Henry Wood and Yehudi Menuhin, statesmen like Benjamin Franklin and Lloyd George, etc. The list is impressive. You asked me, “Why should I believe in rebirth?” Now I will ask you: **“Why would you not believe in rebirth?”**

Test of Understanding

1. Research and report on three documented cases of rebirth. State the title and author of the book(s).



CHAPTER 11

What is the Buddhist view on being a vegetarian?

Theekshana's question - "I am a vegetarian. Often people ask me why I don't eat meat. Can you please explain to me what the Buddha said about vegetarianism so that I can better explain to them. Also, please explain the difference between animal life and plant life."

Answer - Most people are under the false belief that it is a sin (akusala kamma) to eat meat. If you carefully study the teachings of the Buddha, it is clear that He did not at any point request that His followers not eat meat. The Buddha had a reason for this, and if you analyse His teachings it is quite simple. If eating meat was an evil action (akusala kamma), the Buddha would have included it in the precepts. The only one included is the first precept that says, "I undertake to observe the precept to refrain from killing any living being."

Studying the first precept further, the Buddha said that five elements are required to **complete** the evil action (akusala Kamma) of killing. They are:

1. It must be a living being.
2. You must be aware that it is a living being.
3. You must have the intention (volition) to kill.
4. You must perform the act of killing or instigate the killing (effort to kill).
5. The living being must die.

A person who is trying to kill another being might complete all five and get the full effect of his evil action, or due to some hindrance, might perform only some of the five. The effect (vipāka) will depend on the degree of completion of the above five.

It is clear now that none of the above five requisites are met by eating meat that is cooked and left in front of you. However, if you or someone else were killing a life especially for your meal, this would constitute an akusala kamma. Whether you kill or someone else does so on your behalf, if you are aware of the killing, and you consented to it, you have committed an akusala kamma.

Meat can be eaten without its resulting in an akusala kamma if three conditions are met. They are as follow:

- Adittha** – One has not seen the slaughtering of the animal.
- Asuta** – One has not heard that it was killed for his or her consumption.
- Aparisankita** – There should be no doubt at all in the mind of the person consuming the meat that the animal was killed for the purpose of his or her consumption.

Devadatta committed the grave crime of causing disharmony among the Sangha. He was jealous of the Buddha's fame and following, and wanted the Buddha to establish some additional rules to govern the monks' behaviour (vinaya). The Buddha refused, as He did not feel that these rules would have been of any use. It was then that Devadatta broke away and started his own following. One of the rules he wanted was that monks should be forbidden to eat meat. The Buddha's refusal makes it even clearer that according to His teachings, eating meat that is already processed from an animal,

which was not killed specially for you, cannot constitute an unwholesome deed (akusala kamma).

To find the good action (kusala kamma) of not eating meat, one has to look at the first of the ten kusala kammas-Dāna. The Lord Buddha named Dāna as the first kusala kamma because it is very important in two ways. Not only do you get the benefits of the pure gift you made, but in giving you reduce craving (tanhā) which is the cause of suffering. So when you practice Dāna you receive not only the results (vipāka) of your good deeds, but you also reduce craving, because by giving something you like you are reducing your attachment to it.

According to the teachings of the Buddha there are three types of Dāna:

1. **Āmisa Dāna**
2. **Abhaya Dāna**
3. **Dhamma Dāna**

Āmisa Dāna is what we generally practise. It is the giving of food, clothing, etc. Abhaya Dāna, which is of greater merit than the Āmisa Dāna, is the gift of life. When people release a calf that is to be slaughtered or birds that are captive, they are giving the gift of life. A compassionate doctor who treats the poor without the motive of repayment gives the gift of life when he cures an otherwise fatal illness. Others, such as fire fighters, might give their life to save a life. When you refrain from eating meat you must aspire with compassion that by your act of not eating meat, may the life of a calf, chicken, fish, or other animal be saved. Over your life span, by not eating meat, a certain number of cattle, chickens and fish that otherwise would have been killed to be consumed, would be saved from slaughter. In other words, as a result of not consuming meat, one can expect a reduction in the number of animals slaughtered. It

should also be noted here that keeping the five precepts consistently is also an Abhaya Dāna. As such, if a person does not harm any living being there is no fear of harm from him. The giving of fearlessness is also an Abhaya Dāna.

What we call merit is the happiness you get from performing a good deed. (If you give a gift and regret it later, or give just for public honour, the full merit is not there). The happiness you get from giving is then the merit you earn. According to the Buddha's Teachings, **mind is supreme**. Each time you refrain from eating a meal of meat, relish the happiness you derive therefrom and think with compassion of the life that would have been taken to produce the meal of meat, and of the lives you will be saving by reducing the demand even in a small way. Use this opportunity to further the practise of compassion and loving kindness to all living beings. You will then accrue the full effect of your very generous gift of life.

The third type of Dāna is the Dhamma Dāna, any gift that will help to spread the Teachings of the Buddha. The Lord Buddha said, “Sabba dānam dhamma dānam jināti”, meaning that the gift of Truth excels all other gifts. This is the greatest gift, as it is only by following His Teachings that living beings can escape from the recurring cycle of birth, decay, and death.

The difference between a plant and an animal is that an animal has a mind. In Buddhism the mind is supreme. It is by developing the mind through meditation that one can achieve Nibbāna. The teachings of all Buddhas can be summed up in three lines. **Do no evil. Do good. Purify the mind.** Even though a plant has “life” it has no mind. As such it does not have thoughts like craving and ignorance that result in rebirth and samsara. We usually think of only five senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. In Buddhism the mind is like the sixth sense, with thoughts that are ever-changing.

The first precept, “panāti patā veramani sikkhā padam samādiyāmi”, if translated properly means, “I undertake to follow the precept of abstaining from killing beings that breathe,” meaning living beings. The Buddha was referring to animals as opposed to plants, as killing an animal is an akusala kamma that will lead to unwholesome results (vipāka).

I hope that when people chide you for being a vegetarian you can now explain to them why you have chosen to become one. However, whether or not they understand and agree with your reasoning is of no consequence to you. You should continue to relish the happiness you get from the compassion you feel by not eating meat. You will then get the full benefit of your very generous gift – the gift of life.

Test of Understanding

1. By being a vegetarian one can control one's craving and desire for taste. This may result in wholesome thoughts and help to control other sensual desires. Comment.
2. There is no difference between vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism because whatever we eat is made up of the same four elements. Solidity (pathavi), fluidity (apo), fire or heat (tejo), and air or gas (vayo). Could this be the reason the Lord Buddha refused to impose a rule about eating meat? Discuss this with a learned monk and express your opinion.



CHAPTER 12

What are the effects of alms given on behalf of a deceased relative?

Gayathri's question - “Do our deceased relatives really benefit from the alms we give on their behalf and for how long will they keep benefiting?”

Answer - According to the Buddhist texts, many years ago King Milinda asked Venerable Nāgasena the same question. Venerable Nāgasena informed King Milinda that “some received the merit and benefited by it but that some did not receive the merit”. Those who are reborn in purgatory, those born among animals, and three of the four classes of Petas cannot receive merit. If the deceased relative is born as a paradattupa-jivi peta, one who depends on what others give and remembers his living relatives, he can receive and share in the merits performed on his behalf.

To answer Gayathri's question we need to have a good understanding of the different planes of life, because the transfer of merit (the effects of a good action) is only possible in certain planes of life. As such, for the deceased relative to benefit or partake in the effects of the alms given on his behalf, he or she must be born in one of these planes of life where such a transfer is possible. You also need to have an understanding of the life span in these planes of life.

According to the teachings of the Buddha there are thirty-one planes of life. In other words, there are thirty-one different types of life

systems or forms. According to the Buddha, in each Solar System there is one planet such as the earth, which sustains life. Some of the other planes of life are in the same vicinity as earth. Some are farther away. The different planes of life can be categorised under four different headings:

1. The four unhappy planes of life (**Duggati Kāmaloka**)
2. The seven happy planes of life (**Sugati Kāmaloka**)
3. The sixteen Brahma Realms of form (**Rupa Loka**)
4. The four Formless Realms (**Arupa Loka**)

We give alms on behalf of a deceased relative in the hope that if he is born in one of the unhappy planes, he will be able to accept this merit and pass away from this unhappy state to a happier state. We also hope that it will in some way reduce his unhappiness and suffering and bring some measure of comfort to his life. As such, I am going to concentrate on the unhappy planes of life so that you will have a better understanding of them.

The four unhappy or lower planes are:

The animal world (**Tiracchana**)

The ghost worlds (**Peta**)

The demon worlds (**Asura**)

Purgatory or the hells (**Niraya**)

In keeping with the doctrine of impermanence, the unhappy planes of life, like the heavens, are not permanent. When the life span in this plane, or when the results (vipāka) of the bad kamma that caused rebirth in this unhappy plane are exhausted, the person will be reborn in another plane. As before, his good and bad actions (kamma) will determine the place of birth.

The animal world is known to all and needs no further explanation. It must be noted though that even in the animal world there are different degrees of unhappiness and different characteristics among the animals. Some pets have more comforts than humans. Some animals are loyal, obedient and kind while others are fierce and dangerous. These characteristics again are dependent on the past and present kamma of the animal. Those born among animals cannot accept the merit of our offerings.

The Petas live a life of misery generally subject to incessant pain and suffering, with lack of food and clothing, much like the poor among us. Some suffer greatly during the dark fortnight of the month (period from the full moon to the new moon) and have a small measure of comfort in the bright fortnight (period from the new moon to the full moon). They do not have a separate world or abode of their own. They live in dirty places and among filth in our world. They are not visible to the human eye as they are not three-dimensional beings like humans and animals.

There are four types of Petas. The Petas that feed on vomit (Vantāsika), the Petas that are constantly hungry (Khuppipāsino), the Petas that are consumed by thirst (Nijjhāmatanhika), and the Petas that depend on what others give (Paradattupa-jivi). Only this fourth type can accept merit.

The Asuras were not specifically mentioned in the text. But as this is an even lower form of life than the Petas and as they too are a type of Peta, it is assumed that they too cannot accept merit unless they fall into the Paradattupa-jivi class of Petas. The Petas often select a bride from among the Asuras. Because of this relationship the Asuras are included in the Peta realm. They are often disfigured, with scarcely any flesh and blood, looking like dried leaves. Their eyes jut out of their head like a crab's and their mouth is very small, like the eye of

a needle, and is situated on the top of their head. The Asuras of the peta group attack one another with burning weapons.

There are eight Nirayas, or hells. A person who is born in one of the hells undergoes much torment and misery. They cannot accept offerings made on their behalf.

The eight Nirayas are as follow:

Sanjiva – Sanjiva means coming to life again and again. Beings born in this hell feel that they are being cut into pieces over and over again but they come back to life over and over again. They do not die until the expiry of the karmic force that brought them to this world.

Kālasutta – Kālasutta or the black thread, is a world where the beings feel that they are being basted (tacked) with a needle and black thread and chopped with razors.

Sanghāta – The crushing hell is a world where the beings feel that they are constantly being crushed with huge fiery rocks.

Roruva – The inhabitants feel that flames of fire keep entering their body from the nine apertures or openings such as the ears, nose, mouth, etc.

Mahā-Roruva – The beings feel that they are being baked in a huge mass of red flame, and while suffering in this manner they cry incessantly.

Tāpana – The inhabitants feel that they are strung on fiery

crossbars planted on the fiery floor and thus suffer while held firmly, unable to move.

Patāpa – The world of extreme burning is where the inhabitants are forced by beatings with fiery weapons to climb a mountain that is covered by fire. The force of the fire is so strong that they fall down but are forced to climb again by the fiery beatings.

Avici – The hell without intermission, the lowest and greatest of the hells, wherein the inhabitants feel that they are attacked by fire that rushes incessantly from one side and then strikes from the opposite side.

There are also 128 sub-hells positioned around the gates of these main hells.

The problem we have is that we have no way of knowing where the deceased relative was reborn. If it was in an animal birth we know that he cannot accept the merit we transfer. Similarly, if it was in one of the hells, we know that he cannot accept the merit we wish to transfer. However, as there is always the possibility that he may be among the Paradattupa-Jivi Petas, and because we still love the deceased relative, we continue to give alms on his behalf on the premise that if he was born in a plane of life where it is possible to accept merit, he will benefit by our good deeds.

The life span in these unhappy worlds (as with the human life span) is not constant. At the time of the Gotama Buddha the human life span was 120 years. Now it is about 80-90 years. At the time of the Maitreya Buddha it is said that it will be about 80,000 years.

Similarly, the life span in the unhappy worlds changes. The life span in the animal kingdom changes with the type of animal. In most of the unhappy worlds the life span far exceeds the human life span on earth. It is said that Devadatta will still be in the Avici hell at the time of the Maitreya Buddha. Since the era of the Maitreya Buddha is millions of years away, this will give you some idea of how long some of the life spans in hell could be. As such, offerings made on behalf of a relative who has passed away should be given for as long as possible.

It should also be added that the custom of giving pansakula (offering of cloth) when a person dies arose in the hope that, if the deceased was born as a naked Peta, he could obtain cloth to cover himself from this merit. The custom of having a big alms-giving at the end of seven days arose because there is the possibility for a person who has acquired a lot of merit to be born in a lower world because of an unhappy thought occurring at the time of death. It is believed that in such instances his life span in this unhappy place will be very short and that with the merit of the seven days' alms-giving, he will pass away to a better place. It is said that Emperor Asoka was reborn as a snake for seven days as a result of his having been angry at the time of death. What is not known by many is the fact that among the beings born in the unhappy planes, only the Paradattupa-Jivi Petas can accept merit.

You might feel that these offerings made on behalf of deceased relatives are often wasted. This is not the case. What is more important, and what people sometimes do not realize, is the benefit to self from the giving of alms. The benefit to the person giving the alms will always accrue irrespective of whether or not it can be accepted by the deceased relative. In fact, the benefit is greater to self than to the deceased relative. This is because we accomplish two things through the practise of generosity. One is the merit that

accrues to us for planning, preparing and giving the alms with a pure heart – the happiness we derive from the giving of the alms. The other is the reduction of craving (tanhā), of the attachment to the material thing that you are giving away. It is tanhā, craving, and attachment to material things and even to life itself, as well as ignorance, that cause rebirth. It is this deep attachment or craving that is the root cause of all suffering. By practising generosity we reduce this craving and attachment.

None of us will know for sure if the deceased relative is benefiting by the offering made. As such I would say that one should use every opportunity to give alms. By all means, give alms on behalf of your deceased relatives whenever you can. Perhaps it will help them and reduce their life of misery in an unhappy plane of life. Perhaps it will decrease their life span in an unhappy state of life. Perhaps it will reduce your sorrow because in a situation where you have no control (death) you feel that you are doing something for the one you still love. But most of all, remember that the giving of alms is taking you, little by little, one step closer to reducing your attachment to the material things in life. So use this opportunity whenever you can to practise generosity. The benefits will follow you wherever you are.

Test of Understanding

1. I have concentrated on beings born in the unhappy planes of life. However, we also give merit to our deceased relatives in the hope that those born in the Deva Realms (six of the seven happy planes) may rejoice in our transfer of merit. Research and comment on the transfer of merit to divine beings.
2. “The Buddhist custom of giving alms (dāna) to transfer merit to deceased relatives helps many others to participate in

meritorious deeds and in the practise of loving kindness and morality”. Comment on this statement.

3. At the time of the Buddha Gotama, some (prior) relatives of King Bimbisara born as petas at the time of Buddha Kakusandha were waiting to rejoice in the transfer of merit by King Bimbisara. The reign of Buddha Kakusandha was three Buddhas before Buddha Gotama. What does this tell you about the life span in the Peta worlds? Comment on the term “relatives” in relation to this incident.



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