



**SĪLAVANTA  
SUTTA**

**VENERABLE  
U SĪLĀNANDA**



**SĪLAVANTA  
SUTTA**



## Preface

The book “Silavantasutta” is a discourse on the Silavantasutta given by Venerable U Silananda during the 2001 Thanksgiving nine-day Special Retreat at Tathagata Meditation Center. The Sutta is about a conversation between venerables Sariputta and Mahakothika, two of the greatest disciples of the Buddha, regarding the objects of mindfulness meditation. This is, therefore, one of the Suttas directly related to the practice of four foundations of mindfulness meditation.

In this discourse, Venerable U Silananda gradually explains in detail the meaning of the teachings contained in this Sutta, as follows:

- The five aggregates of clinging as objects of mindfulness meditation.
- The requirements for five aggregates of clinging observation.
- The impermanent, nonsatisfactory and nonself-nature of the five aggregates of clinging.
- The concealment of three general characteristics.
- The benefits of mindful observation of the five aggregates of clinging.
- The benefits of first stage, second stage, third stage, and fourth stage of enlightenments.

The conclusion of the sutta is that even Arahants, the fully enlightened persons, should continue to practice mindfulness meditation. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the Sutta is, no doubt, significant and helpful for all meditators.

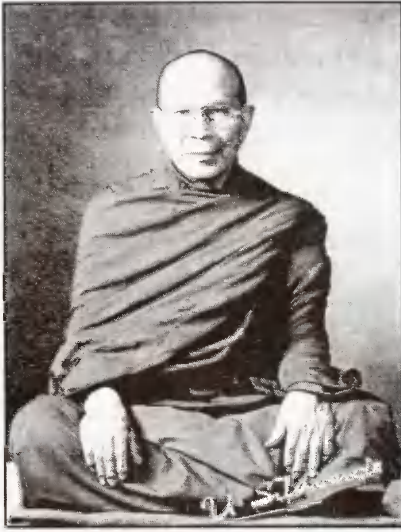
Since the Sutta with the excellent elaboration by Sayadawgyi U Silananda is so insightful, Tathagata Meditation Center (TMC), with the permission of venerable U Silananda, has requested Caroline Karuna Rakkhita, a long-time disciple of Sayadawgyi U Silananda and also an experienced editor, to edit the discourse. This will enable the TMC to publish and distribute it free of charge to all people who are interested in the Dhamma and meditation practice.

Now that the book is completed, we would like to thank venerable U Silananda for giving us permission to publish the book, Caroline Karuna Rakkhita for editing it, and many yogis for supporting this project. Without such support, this book would not be possible. May your meritorious deed bring you much happiness and especially provide suitable conditions for your wisdom cultivation which will lead to your enlightenment in the future.

We are very happy to introduce the book to all of those who are interested in the Dhamma and the mindfulness meditation practice.

In Metta,

Tathagata Meditation Center



## Venerable U Sīlānanda

Venerable U Sīlānanda was born on December 16, 1927, to parents Kyaw Htin Say Hsaing and Daw Mone, in Mandalay, Burma. His father was a very devoted Buddhist and also a renowned architect of many religious buildings throughout the country.

He attended Kelly High School, an American Baptist Mission School, in Mandalay. At the age of sixteen, Venerable U Silananda became a novice at Mahvijjodaya Chaung Monastery, Sagaing Hills, under the preceptorship of Sayādaw U Paññāvanta, and received the religious name “Shin Sīlānanda”. With the support of his parents, he became a full-fledged monk at the same monastery with the same preceptor in 1947. Taught by his preceptor and other famous senior monks in Sagaing Hills and Mandalay, he took the religious examinations

held by the Government of Burma and passed first, second, and third grades in 1946, 1947, and 1948. He received the degree of Dhammacariya, Master of Dhamma, in 1950.

In 1954, he passed the most difficult examination held by Pariyattisāsanahita Association in Mandalay and received the title “Abhivamsa”. In this same year, he went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and passed the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) examination held by the University of London, with distinctions in Pāli and Sanskrit. While in Ceylon, he made a return to Burma and practiced Vipasana meditation with Mahāsi Sayadaw.

He served as a member of the Board of Editors and edited Buddhist Texts for the Sixth Buddhist Council held in Rangoon in 1954. He was appointed the head of the Tipitaka Pāli-Burmese Dictionary Department of the Buddha Sāsana Council in 1957.

In 1960, after the death of his preceptor, he became the Abbot of Mahāvijjodaya Chaung Monastery. He taught and lectured at Atithokdāyone Pali University in Sagaing Hills. In 1968, he moved to Abhayārāma Shwegu Taik Monastery, Mandalay and was appointed the Vice Abbot of that monastery in 1969. He taught Buddhist Scriptures, Pāli, Sanskrit, and Prakrit languages there. He was also an External Examiner of Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees for the Department of Oriental Studies, Art and Sciences University, Mandalay. He is currently the Chief Abbot of that Monastery. He was recently appointed as a member of the Advisory Board of Meditation Teachers of Mahāsi Sāsana Yeiktha in



Rangoon.

In 1979, he accompanied Mahāsi Sayadaw to the United States. At the request of Burmese people in San Francisco and the Bay Area, Mahāsi Sayadaw left him and Sayadaw U Kelatha behind to spread the Dhamma in the west, especially in the United States. Since then, he has been teaching Insight Meditation, Buddhist Psychology (Abhidhamma), and Discourses as well as leading meditation retreats throughout the country and in Canada, Mexico, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Australia. With an extraordinary depth of knowledge of the Dhamma and personal meditative experience, he teaches compassionately and skillfully as in the custom of any renowned Dhamma teachers. He communicates in clear and precise English. He is loved by his students and devotees as a patient and compassionate teacher.

He is the author of many books written in both Burmese and English. Among them are the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness”, “Volition – An Introduction to the Law of Kamma”, and “No Inner Core – An Introduction to the Doctrine of Anatta.”

Venerable U Silananda is the Spiritual Advisor of the Theravāda Buddhist Society of America, which he helped establish and is the Founder Abbot of the Dhammānanda Vihāra Monastery in Half Moon Bay, California. He is also the Spiritual Advisor of the Dhammachakka Meditation Center in California, the Bodhi Tree Dhamma Center in Largo, Florida and the Society for Advancement of Buddhism in Ft. Myers, Florida.

In 1993, the Government of the Union of Myanmar, recognizing his efforts in spreading the Dhamma, conferred upon him the prestigious title “Aggamahāpandita” (Great Wisdom). In 1999, he was awarded the title “Aggamahāsaddhammajotikadhaja” (Great Dhamma Teacher) by the Government of Myanmar, for his successful mission to spread Dhamma abroad. In the same year, he was appointed as Chancellor of the newly-created International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University of Yangon in Myanmar.

Venerable U Silananda has been the Chief Meditation Teacher of Tathāgata Meditation Center in San Jose, California since it was founded in 1992. Under his shade of wisdom and compassion, Tathāgata Meditation Center has grown in the mission of spreading the original teachings of the Buddha.

Tathāgata Meditation Center

## *Contents*

- Preface ..... 7
- Author's Biography ..... 9
- Silavanta Sutta
- 1. Introducing The Aggregates ..... 17
- 2. Impermanence ..... 35
- 3. Dukkha ..... 51
- 4. The Three Characteristics ..... 67
- 5. Stream Entry ..... 81
- 6. Blessings and Noble Treasures ..... 93
- 7. Path to Nibbana ..... 107
- 8. The Higher Path ..... 121
- 9. Importance of Mindfulness ..... 139
- 10. Introductions for Vipassana ..... 149





Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato  
Sammāsambuddhassa



## I. Introducing the Aggregates

In 1967 Mahāsi Sayadaw gave a series of talks on a discourse called Sīlavanta Sutta. Although the Sutta is a very short discourse in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, he devoted sixteen talks to it. Whenever Mahāsi Sayadaw gave an explanation of a Dhamma topic, he tried to make his exposition as complete as possible. So he would draw from other relevant discourses and commentaries and include them in his discourses. After the talks were transcribed and published, the resulting book contained about five hundred pages.

In choosing to give a retreat on the Sīlavanta Sutta, I decided to follow the exposition of Mahāsi Sayadaw. Although he gave sixteen talks on the Sutta, I can give only nine, because our retreat is for only nine days. So some things will have to be left out. But I will include what is essential for the understanding of this discourse and for understanding the practice of meditation.

Please have the English translation of this Sutta with you when you come to the talks. You will find it in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*. My discourses during this retreat will be similar to the lectures given to students in Burmese monasteries.

The Sīlavanta Sutta is a discussion between two of the Buddha's foremost monks, Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika. Venerable Sāriputta is too well-known to need any introduction. I hope you all know who

he was. He was the first chief disciple of the Buddha, who declared him to be the foremost of the disciples possessing wisdom. He was second only to the Buddha in the field of wisdom.

But Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika is not so well-known as the Venerable Sāriputta, so you don't hear much about him. He was declared by the Buddha to be foremost among those of the disciples possessing *paṭisambhidā*, the four kinds of analytical knowledge attained only by Arahants and others who have reached enlightenment. An exception is the Venerable Ānanda, who is described as attaining *paṭisambhidā* while only a Sotāpanna during the lifetime of the Buddha.

In the English translation Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika's name ends with 'ta'. But in the Sixth Buddhist Council Edition his name was given as Mahākoṭṭhika, ending with 'ka'. However, in the Sixth Buddhist Council's printed editions of the Discourses and in other translations it appears as Mahākoṭṭhika, ending with 'ta'. So in Burmese editions both names are found. But whether his name is MahāMahākoṭṭhika or Mahākoṭṭhika makes no difference in our study of this discourse.

When the Sīlavanta Sutta took place, these two Venerables were staying at Bārāṇasī in the Deer Park at Isipatana, where the Buddha had given his first sermon. Now a very famous place of Buddhist pilgrimage, whenever the Deer Park at Isipatana is mentioned, people always think of the first sermon. But when you go there, please remember the Sīlavanta Sutta also, even though it was not delivered by the Buddha. Though it is a discussion between the two disciples, it was deemed worthy of being recorded in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, and therefore is as authentic as the suttas



given by the Buddha.

It is the custom of the Buddha's disciples, especially those who have attained enlightenment, to dwell in seclusion in the afternoon. Staying in seclusion does not mean just resting or sleeping. During this time, Arahants and others who are enlightened enter into the attainment of fruition, in which there is no suffering, no *dukkha*. Their minds rest on *Nibbāna*, giving them great peace and happiness. So they often enter into this attainment as a temporary escape during the hours of seclusion. The two Venerables followed this practice.

Late one afternoon the Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika emerged from his seclusion, approached the Venerable Sāriputta, and exchanged greetings, as is customary for disciples of the Buddha when they meet. Then he asked, "Friend Sāriputta, what are the things that virtuous *bhikkhus* should carefully attend to?"

The Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika seemed to be fond of asking questions. On other occasions in other discourses, again he is found putting questions to Venerable Sāriputta, many questions. I think that, as foremost among those who possessed the four kinds of analytical knowledge, he should have been the one answering the questions, not asking them. But he was always asking questions.

And he asked the questions not because he did not know the answers, but because he wanted posterity to respect the Buddha's teachings. People tended to give more respect and importance to teachings known to have been discussed by great disciples of the Buddha. So he and Venerable Sāriputta, as foremost disciples, sometimes purposely entered into dialogues of questions and answers for the benefit of posterity. And this discussion, the *Sīlavanta Sutta*, was

considered important enough for inclusion in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*.

The Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika had addressed his friend as “Friend Sāriputta.” During the time of the Buddha, the monks, regardless of age, could freely address one another with the word *āvuso*, the closest translation being “friend.” This does not mean that nobody used *Bhante*, “Venerable Sir,” at that time. Pupils would address their teachers as *Bhante* because the familiarity implied by *āvuso* would be disrespectful. Or if the difference in age were great, the younger monk might address the older as *Bhante*, and the older would address the younger as *āvuso*. Because the two Venerables addressed each other as *āvuso*, we do not know which of the two was older.

Before the Buddha passed away, he said to Ānanda, “After my passing away, older monks should address younger monks as *āvuso* and younger monks should address older monks as *Bhante*.”

So after the death of the Buddha these forms of address that he had sanctioned were adopted by the monks, and are observed to this day. But nowadays we base age on how many years as a monk, not on biological years. And we do not use the words *āvuso* or *Bhante* until we know the number of *vassa* (rainy season retreats) the other monk has had. If we do not know, we ask him “How many *vassa* are you?” If his years as a monk are more than our own, we address him as *Bhante*, and if they are fewer, we call him *āvuso*.

After the Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika had addressed the Venerable Sāriputta, he asked, “What are the things that a virtuous *bhikkhu* should carefully attend to?” Here there are two words that merit more detail: virtuous and *bhikkhu*. A virtuous *bhikkhu* is pure in his *sīla*. This is not easy, as

monks have more than two hundred rules to keep. When a monk can keep more than two hundred rules without breaking them, his *sīla* is said to be pure and he is said to be virtuous.

Those who have been newly ordained are also pure in *sīla*, as they have not yet committed any offence. And monks who have broken some rules, but have made amends and corrected their faults, may also be said to be pure in *sīla*. So a monk who is pure in *sīla* may be a monk who has broken no rules, or he can be a monk who had broken a rule or two but has developed enough judgment and self-discipline to be free from further offenses. Such a *bhikkhu* is called a virtuous monk, or a monk pure in *sīla*.

A monk once asked the Buddha to teach him just enough to enable him to go to a secluded place and practice meditation. The Buddha told him to begin by purifying two things—pure *sīla* and right view—before attempting to undertake the practice of meditation. Why? Because the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, the four foundations of mindfulness, is based on pure *sīla*. Purity of *sīla* is an especially important requisite for meditators. Therefore a monk who wishes to practice meditation should first purify his *sīla*. Lay people too must also be pure in *sīla* when practicing meditation.

Nowadays the word *bhikkhu* is translated as “monk.” Originally the word meant a person who begs, and a *bhikkhu* is a person who begs. But the begging done by *bhikkhus* is not the same as the begging done by beggars. *Bhikkhus* pick up their bowls and go out on alms round to collect food for their one daily meal. Silently standing in front of a house, they say nothing. The lay people inside understand that the *bhikkhus* are dependent on them for food, so with respect and reverence they offer whatever food they can give. Then the monks continue on to other houses in the same way—

standing, saying nothing, accepting whatever is given, and sometimes being turned away.

This kind of begging is called “noble begging,” and bears no resemblance to the begging of ordinary street beggars. As the practice still exists in Buddhist countries, it is important that the word *bhikkhu* should not be considered as “beggar,” which would be very derogatory to the monks.

There is another meaning assigned to the word *bhikkhu*. Many kinds of suffering are endured in the round of rebirth, as one goes from one life to another and is reborn again and again, so it is something to be feared. According to this second meaning, anybody who sees the round of rebirth as dangerous can be called a *bhikkhu*, whether he is a monk or a lay person. But the normal and usual definition of *bhikkhu* means a monk, and in most cases it cannot apply to lay people.

Even though a lay person might be called a *bhikkhu*, this extension of meaning should not be carried too far. For example, if a real *bhikkhu* cuts a tree he incurs a monastic offense. But if a “lay *bhikkhu*” cuts a tree no offense is incurred, because he follows no monastic rules. So you cannot say that a lay person is really a *bhikkhu*. In most cases a *bhikkhu* means one who has gone forth, a monk who is the Buddha’s disciple.

When the Buddha gave his teachings to the monks, the lay people who came to listen wanted to feel more included. They felt left out, and complained, unfairly, that the Buddha talked only to the monks. But the Buddha lived with his *bhikkhus* in order to instruct them on the path to *Nibbāna*. So when he wanted to talk, he would talk to them, always with a purpose, and when he wanted to give a discourse, he would address them. That is why the word *bhikkhu* so often

appears in the discourses and the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika's first question was "What are the things that a virtuous *bhikkhu* should carefully attend to?" Here "carefully attend to" means wisely attend to, correctly attend to, or pay correct attention to something.

And the Venerable Sāriputta answered, "Friend Koṭṭhika, a virtuous *bhikkhu* should carefully attend to the five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease. . . as empty, as non-self."

Please note that this answer contains the words "five aggregates subject to clinging." In some English translations this phrase is translated simply as "five aggregates of clinging." Because there is a difference, you should understand the correct meaning of these two phrases. There are two things to be examined here: (1) the aggregate and clinging, and (2) the aggregates that are subject to clinging—meaning aggregates that are objects of clinging, or that can become objects of clinging.

But you should first understand what clinging is. It means firmly holding on to something. When clinging to something, you take hold of it and do not let it go. The Buddha teaches that clinging is of two kinds. Clinging is a mental state, and with that mental state we cling to objects. Suppose you see something beautiful. When something is beautiful, you desire it, and have a strong craving to possess it. In this case you cling to the object by strong craving. In other words, things are, or can be, the objects of strong desire, strong craving or clinging.

Wrong view can also cause clinging to objects. Sometimes we have wrong views about objects, and think that they are permanent or that they possess a self or soul. Or we may have wrong views about ourselves. We may

think we have a self or soul, or we may take being to be self or soul. When we apply this kind of wrong view to objects, we are clinging to them. So we can cling to an object with strong craving or with wrong view. Anything that we can cling to, either with strong craving or wrong view, is called an aggregate subject to clinging.

What are the things we can cling to? They are the things we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think of—in other words, everything in the world. We can cling to everything in the world either by wrong view or by strong craving. When we say this is “I” we are clinging by wrong view, but when we say this is “mine” we are clinging by craving.

The things we cling to are technically termed aggregates, *khandhā* in Pāli. They are called aggregates because they are understood in groups. A group here does not mean a group of different things. It means a group of aspects of a thing. Take, for example, a visible object. There are twenty-eight kinds of matter, and that visible object is just one unit of matter. That one unit of matter is not a group of many things. It is only one, yet it is called an aggregate. How can that be? It is because one unit of matter can be of the past, of the future, or of the present. With the grouping together of these three aspects of time, that one unit of matter becomes an aggregate.

The same holds true with other states. Let us take feeling, a mental state. Feeling is just one mental state, one mental factor, one *cetasika*. But that one mental factor is also called an aggregate, because it can be of the past, of the future, or of the present. It also can be internal and external; it can be gross and it can be subtle, and so on. Because of the many varying aspects that it possesses, feeling is called an aggregate.

You have now seen that just one unit of matter is called an aggregate, and just one mental state is called an aggregate. Even one unit of matter is called an aggregate. Technically they each are called an aggregate. There are five such aggregates taught in Buddhism. As practitioners of *vipassanā* you should be familiar with them and with their names.

For the time being, let us put aside the subject of clinging, and continue with the five aggregates: (1) form aggregate, (2) feeling aggregate, (3) perception aggregate, (4) volitional formations aggregate, and (5) consciousness aggregate.

I prefer to call the first one “matter aggregate” rather than “form aggregate” because every unit of matter is called matter aggregate. Matter is something that changes with adverse conditions like heat, cold, hunger and so on. It can be found outside in the mountains, in trees, in living beings, and all material phenomena.

You all know what the feeling aggregate is—the feeling of pleasure, the feeling of displeasure, and neutral feeling. These feelings are called the feeling aggregate. Although feeling is only one mental factor, it is called an aggregate because it has division into past, present, future, and many other aspects.

The third one is perception aggregate. Perception is a mental state that makes marks of an object. Whenever we encounter or experience a new object, this mental state makes a mark of that object in our mind, so when we experience the object again we will recognize what it is. This is what is meant here by perception.

This function of perception is compared to a carpenter marking pieces of wood when he is building something. The marks indicate which part is to be put where, which part is to be cut off, which is to be retained, and so on.

Making marks like this is for his recognition later, when he needs the various pieces of wood. Just so, when your mind makes a mark of something new to you, it is for your future recognition. This perception is just one mental state, but because it has division into past, present, future, and so on, it is called a perception aggregate.

The next aggregate, the volitional formations aggregate, is somewhat difficult to understand. According to *Abhidhamma* there are fifty-two mental states. Feeling is one mental factor, perception is another mental factor. The remaining fifty mental states are collectively called volitional formations aggregate, because this group is headed by a mental factor called volition, or *cetanā* in Pāli.

The word “formation” is the translation of the Pāli word *saṅkhāra*, which I have explained many times. *Saṅkhāra* can mean both producer and product. Something that produces other things is called *saṅkhāra*, and that which it produces, or which is conditioned by it, is also called *saṅkhāra*. So *saṅkhāra* has at least two meanings—the maker and that which is made. In the context of the volitional forms aggregate, it means maker, it makes something. Here we must understand the word *saṅkhāra* in its active sense.

But in other contexts, such as the saying “All *saṅkhāras* are impermanent,” the word *saṅkhāra* means all things that are conditioned, all things that are made. Here the meaning is quite different from *saṅkhāra* meaning “those that make” and which is translated as “formations”. Maybe there is no other word to adequately convey the meaning carried by the original Pāli word.

So the fifty mental states are collectively called *saṅkhāra* aggregate or, in English, volitional formations aggregate. In addition to volition or *cetanā saṅkhāra*, mindfulness is also



*sañkhāra*, understanding is *sañkhāra*, attachment is *sañkhāra*, hatred is *sañkhāra*, delusion is *sañkhāra*. There are many *sañkhāras*. All of these are collectively called *sañkhāra* because they do something. For instance, when we see something, a kind of mental activity that makes seeing complete takes place. This kind of mental activity is called *sañkhāra*. More explanation will be given later.

The last aggregate is the consciousness aggregate. Consciousness is awareness of the object. Here it must be understood in its technical sense, not as it is understood popularly. In *Abhidhamma*, consciousness means just a mere awareness of the object. It is always accompanied by feeling, perception, and other factors from the volitional formations aggregate.

So these are the five aggregates: matter aggregate, feeling aggregate, perception aggregate, volitional formations aggregate, and consciousness aggregate. When they are objects of clinging, they are called aggregates of clinging, aggregates subject to clinging, or aggregate objects of clinging. Now you know the five aggregates and the five aggregates of clinging.

Let us see now whether we can find the five aggregates by looking at something. When we see something, there is something to be seen, a visible object. There are eyes through which the object is seen. And then there is seeing, which arises when the object to be seen comes into the avenue of the eyes. So the seeing consciousness arises, and when we see, we see with that consciousness.

Here we see how many aggregates? (1 and 2) The thing we see is matter aggregate and consciousness aggregate. (3) When we see something, it can be pleasurable, not pleasurable, or neutral. We might think it is good to see this

object or it is not good to see it. So feeling is also involved when we see something. (4) And whenever we see an object, the mind or a state of mind makes a mental mark of that object so it can be recognized when we experience it later. So perception also is involved in the act of seeing. (5) There are mental states that exert to make some effort to see, to bring this seeing to completion. Though it is very subtle, if you really watch your mind, you will notice that there is a kind of activity or exertion in the mind to see, to hear, and so on. That is *saṅkhāra*, the volitional formations aggregate.

So we do not need to look in books to find the five aggregates. They can be found in our own experience. In the experience of seeing we can find all five aggregates. They all are also present in the experience of hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. There are many touch sensations in the body, and they can be detected by paying close attention to what is happening at the present moment. Here a touch includes the feeling of heat, and when we feel cold, that too is a touch. When we are aware of the rising and falling movement of the abdomen, those movements are touches. And if pressure is felt there, that also is a touch. In touching something, the five aggregates can be experienced in that touch.

You already know that earth, air or wind, fire, and water are the four great elements forming the basis of all matter. Now, just by watching what is happening at the present moment, we can develop insight and penetration into the nature of things. For instance, making a bodily movement begins with the mind's desire to move. We want to move, so there is desire or intention to move. Minute properties of the air or wind element material are produced by this intention to move. When there is the desire to move, the mind produces new particles of the air element that

outnumber the old particles, which disappear. This increase of the air element is what we call movement.

According to the strict teaching of *Abhidhamma* there is nothing that moves. Can you believe that? I am moving my hand now. There is nothing that moves. What seems to be moving is only the increase of the material properties, the particles of air element caused by desire to move. Every movement, though it seems to be a movement, is not a movement at all, according to *Abhidhamma*.

I think it can be proved. How? When you go to a movie you think that the pictures on the screen are moving. But you know that there are no moving pictures. They are all still pictures projected one after another in sequence. When we see the screen, the illusion is created in our mind that the pictures are moving. Actually, they are not moving. What is moving is our own imagination. We imagine all of these separate static images to be a flowing continuity forming a whole, and then we think that the pictures are moving.

Similarly when you move your hand, it is not the hand that moves, but the increase of material properties of the air element caused by the desire to move. This may be seen through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation. When making notes of the rising and falling of the abdomen, you are actually noting the air element, because its function is movement, which is included in the sense of touch. And the air element is included in the sense of touch. So when you are aware of the movements of the abdomen's rising and falling, you are experiencing a kind of touch.

In that experience also, you can find the five aggregates: matter, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Actually, they can be found in every experience, and these five aggregates can be clung to by

way of strong craving or by way of wrong view. That is why they are called aggregates of clinging, aggregates subject to clinging, or aggregate objects of clinging.

It is these aggregates of clinging that we have to watch and be mindful of in order to get free from suffering. Even when you are thinking of something, the five aggregates are present. When you are thinking, you are not seeing with your eyes or hearing with your ears. You are thinking with your mind. When you are thinking, you are seeing something in your mind or hearing something in your mind, and so on. Objects seen or heard in the mind are called past objects. But if they are visible objects or audible objects, they belong to the matter aggregate.

Consciousness also must have a base from which to arise. If we do not have eyes, there will be no seeing consciousness. If we have no ears, there will be no hearing consciousness. And what about thinking? Thinking consciousness also needs a seat or a base. According to *Abhidhamma*, its base is the heart, specifically the blood in the heart.

With every experience—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking—there are always the five aggregates. If we do not watch them, if we do not apply mindfulness to them, we will always cling to them, either by strong craving or by wrong view. And because they are objects that can be clung to, we usually cling to them if we are not mindful.

In order not to cling to them, it is clear that we must watch them while they are present. We cannot observe them when they are past. Though we may be able to recall some past experience, it will never appear as vividly as it appeared during what was its present moment. So to avoid clinging to

these five aggregates, we must watch them when they are evident, when they are present. Otherwise we will always cling to them.

When there is clinging, it does not stop there, just with our clinging. Suppose we are attached to something and we want to possess it. Motivated by that desire, we will try to possess it, and will do something to acquire it. We may steal it, take it by force from somebody, or even commit murder, just to get what we want. So, motivated by clinging, we take up actions.

Sometimes what we cling to is unwholesome, and sometimes it may be wholesome. Whether wholesome or unwholesome, since they are *kammās* they have the potential to give results in the future, and we will get the results of those actions in the future. When there is clinging, there is action; when there is action, there is the result of that action in the form of rebirth in the future life. With rebirth there is aging, disease, death, and so on. So the duration of our *saṃsāra* is prolonged if we are not vigilant, if we do not apply mindfulness to what we experience at the present moment.

When seeing objects, see them just as objects that arise and disappear. Understand that they are impermanent, they are suffering, and they have no self or soul. Then you will not cling to them. When there is no clinging, there can be no action. When there is no action, there will be no reaction as a result. That is why it is important to apply mindfulness to whatever experience we are having at the present moment.

It should now be clear that it is important not to cling to the five aggregates of clinging. In order to avoid clinging to them, we must watch them, make notes of them, and be mindful of them when they are present. This answers the

questions “When are we to make notes of the five aggregates, and for what purpose do we have to make notes of them?” The answer to “when” is the present moment. The answer to “what purpose” is not to cling to them. When making notes of the five aggregates, we must try to note them as and when they arise, while they are still existing.

We speak frequently about the present moment. Actually, the present should be understood as a present duration, not an exact present moment. This is because when we are mindful of objects, most of the things we observe are no longer present. In less time, perhaps, than the blink of an eye, they have already become the past.

For example, when we are mindful of anger, when we are making notes of it, the anger is no longer there. It has disappeared, because anger and mindfulness cannot coexist. Just the fact that your mind is engaged in being mindful of anger means that the anger is not in your mind at that same moment. It is already in the past. But because it is so brief a moment of the past, we call it “present” when saying “be mindful of the present moment.”

However, while you are being mindful of your breaths or the movements of the abdomen, there are times when you can actually see the exact present moment. This can happen when you are noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, if the noting and the movements coincide exactly. But this cannot happen when you are being mindful of your thoughts, because by the time you are mindful of them, they are already in the past. But in the context of *vipassanā*, we regard them as being present when we say “be mindful of the present” or “be in the present moment.” When practicing *vipassanā* meditation it is essential that you remember to be mindful of the object at the present moment.

You must be mindful in order to avoid attachment to the five aggregates of clinging. You don't want to cling to them, because clinging leads to action. Action leads to reaction, which is suffering, and you want to escape from suffering as soon as possible. In order to avoid suffering, watch the present moment. By just paying attention to the object of the present moment, you can get concentration, you can penetrate the nature of things, and can progress from one stage to another until you reach enlightenment.

I may have told you last year about the elephants. Elephants are very intelligent animals, and many of them are made to work moving logs of wood in the forest. It is said that they have such a sense of exactness that when the bell rings for them to stop, they stop right away. Even if there were only six more inches left to finish pushing a log, they will not do it. As soon as the bell rings, they will just stop work and leave it.

Somebody has told me that talking for more than one hour is not such a good idea. After one hour people get uncomfortable with sitting. But I think that one hour is not enough, because about half of that time is for translation. I have now been talking for two hours. Now it is actually five minutes past two hours, so I will follow the example of the elephants.

\* \* \* \* \*





## II. Impermanence

According to the answers given by the Venerable Sāriputta in the Sīlavanta Sutta, a *bhikkhu* who is virtuous or whose *sīla* is pure should practice *vipassanā* meditation to see the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease... as non-self. Immediately following this sutta in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* there is a discourse called the Sutavanta Sutta. We can regard it as a sister sutta, as the text is the same as the Sīlavanta Sutta, the only difference being that the *bhikkhu* here is a *sutavanta*, an instructed monk.

The word *suta* means “heard.” In ancient times writing materials were not easily available, and it may have been customary in those days not to write down the teachings of the Buddha. So the teacher taught, and the students learned by listening to his talks. This is how the word *suta* came to mean something a person has learned, and *sutavanta* means one who possesses knowledge through learning, one who is knowledgeable.

In this discourse Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika asks Venerable Sāriputta the same question as in the Sīlavanta Sutta: “What are the things that an instructed *bhikkhu* should carefully attend to?” And the answer is also the same—“an instructed *bhikkhu* [who has the necessary knowledge of the Buddha’s teaching] should carefully attend to the five aggregates of clinging as impermanence, as suffering, as disease... as non-self. So these two suttas may be regarded as one.

In order to see the five aggregates of clinging as

impermanent and so on, what do you need? You need concentration. Without concentration you cannot hope to see the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, and so on. Concentration is an important factor in the practice of meditation. Whether your practice is *samatha* meditation or *vipassanā* meditation, you need to have this essential part of meditation practice.

To gain concentration what must you do? You must practice mindfulness. Without mindfulness you cannot get concentration, because mindfulness means full awareness of the object. If there is no full awareness of the object, there can be no concentration in the mind. So to get concentration, it is necessary to practice mindfulness.

In order to practice mindfulness what do you need? You need to make effort. Without making effort, you cannot practice mindfulness. The three most essential things for the practice of meditation are concentration, mindfulness, and effort. First you make effort to be mindful, and you become mindful. Then, with the support of effort and mindfulness you get concentration. Once you gain concentration or stillness of mind, the mind is free from mental hindrances. Then you will begin to see the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, as suffering, as a disease, and so on.

Of the three main steps in meditation, mindfulness is the most important. Because it is required for all meditation, it can never be too strong. We need it to be strong, and the stronger it is, the better. But you need to be careful with the other two steps, effort and concentration. Effort can be too little or too much, and concentration can be too little or too much.

If there is too little effort, we cannot practice

mindfulness. And if there is too much effort, we also cannot practice mindfulness. Too much effort leads to agitation and restlessness. It can come when a yogi is very eager to achieve something, very eager to reach enlightenment, very eager to get results. With such eagerness, the yogi tends to exert more effort than is needed. And when more effort than needed is made, the mind becomes disturbed, or it trembles and is agitated. When mind is agitated, it cannot stay on the object. So too much effort is to be avoided when practicing meditation.

Concentration can be too much also. When there is too much concentration, a yogi tends to lose or reduce effort. Then concentration regains the upper hand, and the yogi's effort level falls again, leading him to become lazy or sleepy. When there is lack of effort, the necessary concentration for meditation suffers.

This kind of cycle must be avoided if the practice of meditation is to proceed smoothly. Effort and concentration need to be just enough for the purpose, they need to be balanced. How to balance them? You do not have to worry. Your teachers are aware of this problem, and if you follow their instructions you will not have too much effort or too much concentration.

When you are practicing meditation you are instructed to be mindful of two things—either the in-breath and out-breath, or the rising and falling of the abdomen. But when another object becomes prominent at the present moment, you are to put mindfulness on that object until it disappears. Then you return to the breath or the abdomen. So the basic practice is to be mindful of two objects—either the breath or the abdomen, and whatever object might arise to distract you.

Why two objects? Why not just one object? Or why not more than two objects? If you have to be mindful of more than two objects, it can arouse too much effort and cause agitation. And if you have only one object to attend to, putting your mind totally on that one object is not recommended. Although you can get concentration, in this case the concentration could become excessive.

So in order for your effort not to be too much or too little, you are given two objects to keep your mindfulness strong, steady, intact, and without strain or agitation. Being mindful of just two objects helps you to balance effort and concentration, two important factors in the practice of meditation. They must always be balanced. They must always be just the right amount, not too much and not too little.

In answering Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika's first two questions, Venerable Sāriputta had said that a virtuous *bhikkhu* and an instructed *bhikkhu* should attend to the five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, as suffering, and so on. The reference to an "instructed *bhikkhu*" raises a question. How much knowledge does a person need before he can practice meditation? If you read the *Visuddhimagga* you may get the notion that you have to know a lot before you practice *vipassanā* meditation.

The *Visuddhimagga* is a book written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. by Venerable Buddhaghosa, a scholarly monk. As it was written for meditating monks, it was taken for granted that his readers would understand many of the teachings. But for those who are not initiated into the teachings of the Buddha, the book, which is divided into three parts, is not easy to read.

The subject of the first division is how to purify one's *sīla*. The second is on concentration, *samādhi*, and explains

the forty subjects of *samatha* meditation, how to prepare for meditation, how to find a teacher, and other details of *samatha* meditation. It also explains the *abhiññās*, the four kinds of direct knowledge that a yogi gains after attaining the material and immaterial *jhānas*.

The third division on understanding, *paññā*, is actually about *vipassanā*. Buddhaghosa began this division with detailed information on the aggregates, bases, elements, faculties, dependent origination, and the Four Noble Truths. Only after that did he describe the practice of *vipassanā* meditation. So reading the *Visuddhimagga* may give you the impression that before you can practice *vipassanā* meditation you have to be familiar with all the details of the aggregates, and very familiar with the teaching of dependent origination. I don't think that you are familiar with all of these subjects in detail.

Sakka, the king of the gods, once asked the Buddha how much knowledge a monk must have in order to practice and reach Arahantship. The Buddha answered, "A *bhikkhu* has heard that all things are not fit to be adhered to. When a *bhikkhu* has heard that all things are not fit to be adhered to, he directly knows everything." This means that after hearing that all phenomena are unfit to be adhered to by craving or wrong view, he can practice meditation.

So a *bhikkhu* needs to hear only this much—that all things are not to be taken as permanence, happiness, soul or self. If he knows just this much, he can practice meditation. According to this, a person does not have to know much about the teachings of the Buddha in order to practice meditation. (I think you will like this.)

The commentary adds a little more. It says that if one knows there are Four Noble Truths, and that the first two

truths belong to the round of rebirth, and the other two lead to release from the round of rebirth, one may practice meditation only on the first two. If you know this much, you have enough knowledge to practice meditation.

You already have heard about the Four Noble Truths. Two are mundane, and the other two supermundane. When practicing *vipassanā*, you deal only with the first two, which are mundane—the Noble Truth of Suffering and the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering. The third, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, is to be realized, and the fourth, the Noble Truth of the Path to Cessation, arises at the moment of enlightenment, and is the result of the practice of *vipassanā* meditation. If you know this much, you have enough knowledge to practice *vipassanā* meditation.

What about understanding dependent origination? It has been explained in great detail in the *Visuddhimagga*. In this case, the sub-commentary is helpful. It says that if you know that there is a cause, and that there are results of that cause, then you know dependent origination.

Even if you don't know the details of dependent origination, if you know that there are causes, and results of those causes, and that they are related as cause and effect, you are said to virtually have knowledge of dependent origination. In brief, dependent origination teaches that the material and mental states in beings always arise dependent on conditions.

According to this teaching, everything in the world is conditioned. So if you know only that there are conditions, and that there are those conditioned by those conditions, it is enough to say that you virtually understand dependent origination. This information is from the texts, commentaries, and sub-commentaries.

For those who have no knowledge of the texts and commentaries, but who have some ability to think, let us now consider the following. Two months after his Enlightenment, the Buddha gave his first sermon to the group of five disciples. Do you think they already knew about such things as the Four Noble Truths, the aggregates, bases or dependent origination? Can you say that they knew *Abhidhamma* from previous knowledge?

Some people might say “Oh, they had accumulated a lot of *pāramīs* and many experiences in the past, they were special, they were gifted persons. So when they heard the Buddha’s sermon, all of that information might already have been in them.”

But I think we can say that they definitely did not possess any such knowledge. These discoveries of the Buddha were unknown to any other human being until he gave the five disciples his first sermon at Isipatana. So the disciples, who had no prior knowledge of aggregates, dependent origination, and so forth, learned by listening to the Buddha’s first sermon. As the result of listening, all of them became Sotāpannas and, a little later, Arahants.

We can find many such examples in the texts as well as in the commentaries. Let us take just one more example. Venerable Sāriputta was not yet a Buddhist when he met the Venerable Assaji. At that time he belonged to the sect of another teacher, and knew very little about the Buddha’s teachings. But impressed by the demeanor of Venerable Assaji, he asked the Venerable to teach him something of the Dhamma. Venerable Assaji uttered an instructive verse of four lines, and it is said that after listening to just the first two lines of that verse, Sāriputta became a Sotāpanna, and not long afterward a disciple of the Buddha.

As Sāriputta was the most gifted person after the Buddha, it was not difficult for him to get this knowledge the moment he received the teaching from the Venerable Assaji. We, however, are not so gifted as the five disciples or Venerable Sāriputta, and we are here more than two thousand five hundred years after the Buddha. So I think we should be allowed some concessions.

You should know something about the teachings of the Buddha, but not very much. If you know that there are five aggregates; that they are impermanent, suffering and non-self; and that there are Four Noble Truths—if you have heard, read, or already know those things, I think you can practice *vipassanā* meditation.

Knowledge of the aggregates is very helpful, because you can verify your practice with what you already know. When you practice meditation, you experience many things, and sometimes you don't know what they are. But if you have sound knowledge of all the aggregates, you will know what is happening to you and what you are experiencing. Then you will be like a person who has read a map before going somewhere—when he is there, he knows where he is, and where to go.

Also, since you are practicing under the guidance of a teacher, I think it is enough if you have just a little bit of information about the teachings of the Buddha. Your teachers can give you enough information about the five aggregates, *nāma* and *rūpa*, and so forth. So it is all right for you to practice *vipassanā* meditation even if you have not read the *Visuddhimagga*, even if you do not know *Abhidhamma*. Your teachers will supply you with this kind of knowledge and whatever else is necessary to know.

I am not saying this to discourage you from studying



the Buddha's teachings. It is good to study them, it is good to know what the Buddha taught. If you are bent on practice, I want you to know that it is possible for you to practice right now, even without detailed knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha. But if you want to share your knowledge with other people, if you hope to be a teacher in the future, or if you are a teacher now, then certainly you will need to acquire wide knowledge of the Buddha's teachings.

Now we will return to the answer given by the Venerable Sāriputta when he said that a virtuous *bhikkhu* and an instructed *bhikkhu* should carefully attend to the five aggregates subject to clinging, which are impermanent, suffering, a disease... non-self.

The commentaries say that we should know three things regarding impermanence. (1) What is it that is impermanent? We say "impermanent, impermanent," but what is it that we say is impermanent? (2) What are the signs or marks of being impermanent? We should know the characteristics, marks, or signs of impermanence. (3) What is repeated seeing of impermanence?

What is it that is impermanent? When we say "impermanent" what do we mean by that? You already know the answer. The five aggregates are impermanent, and are taught by the Buddha as impermanence. You have yet to see that this is true, but through practice of *vipassanā* meditation it will eventually be seen. So what is it that is impermanent? The answer is all five aggregates, not just the five aggregates of clinging.

There is a difference between "aggregates" and "aggregates of clinging." When we say aggregates of clinging, we mean only the mundane aggregates. But when we say aggregates, the supermundane aggregates are also

included. So both mundane and supermundane aggregates are impermanent.

Path consciousness belongs to the supermundane aggregate. It also belongs to the consciousness aggregate and to the supermundane level. But path consciousness arises and disappears immediately, to be followed by fruition consciousness, which again disappears immediately. So the types of consciousness that are included in the supermundane aggregates are also impermanent.

When we speak of impermanence, we mean that everything in the world is impermanent. But in the language of Buddhist books, we say “the five aggregates,” instead of “everything in the world.” Why do we say that the five aggregates are impermanent? What can we see that causes us to say they are impermanent? There must be signs or characteristics that point to their impermanence. These signs are like flags by which we understand that the five aggregates are impermanent. I think you all know those characteristics.

According to the *Visuddhimagga*, rise, fall, and change are the characteristics of impermanence. First there is arising; then there is what is called change, becoming different or aging. Then there is falling, disappearing. In watching the aggregates, we see that they arise and last for a few brief moments, and then disappear. When we see that they constantly arise, change, and disappear, we know from these characteristics or signs that the aggregates are impermanent. And we know that the characteristics of impermanence are rise, fall, and change.

You may be familiar with the three stages of existence: arising, staying for a time and then disappearing. They are known as the three sub-moments of one thought moment. When we see a state of mind arise, stay for a time, and then

disappear, we know that this state is impermanent. This knowing or seeing that something is impermanent, must come from your own experience. It must not come from a book, it must not come from a teacher. It must come from within yourself. So do not be satisfied with what you read in books or hear in talks. You must see for yourself.

In order to see impermanence as Venerable Sāriputta did, practice is necessary. You need to do something to prove to yourself that things are really impermanent. So what should you do? It is actually very simple. You should watch things, including the mind. Just watch them and you cannot fail to see that they arise and disappear.

When practicing *vipassanā* meditation, sometimes you are making notes of your mind. Your mind wanders, and you say “wandering, wandering” until it is finished. Then you come back to the home object. So through your own experience you see for yourself that thought is impermanent because it arises, stays for a very short time, and then disappears. The impermanence of the five aggregates, the impermanence of mind and matter, can be seen for yourself through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation.

Having seen the impermanence of things for yourself, there is no need to go by faith and blindly accept the statements of other people regarding the impermanence of the five aggregates. You yourself will be able to verify that it is true. If you practice and pay close attention to objects appearing at the present moment, you cannot fail to see impermanence. It is very encouraging when, through your own experience, you can discover the secret of mind and matter as taught by the Buddha. That is what is called *sandiṭṭhika*, an attribute of the Dhamma meaning that things are to be seen by oneself, and not just heard secondhand

from another person.

The commentary describes this characteristic in another way, although it means the same thing. It says that non-existence, after having been, is the characteristic of impermanence. Book language is different from everyday language, and sometimes it is used to impress other people. So when I say “Non-existence, after having been, is the characteristic of impermanence,” you may be wondering what I am saying.

If you want to impress people, use the language of the books, but it may not serve the purpose. We want people to understand, rather than to admire our knowledge of books. So whatever we want to say should be put in a way that everybody will understand. “Disappearing after arising is the characteristic of impermanence.” Now you understand my sentence very easily.

If you want to know whether a certain state is permanent or impermanent, see if it disappears after arising. It is more important to see the disappearing than the arising. That is because if you see only the arising and not the disappearing, you may have the opposite understanding and think the state is permanent. So it is important to see the disappearing.

However, disappearing is preceded by arising. When there is no arising, there can be no disappearing, so the two go together—arising and disappearing. When you see a state arise and disappear, you know that it is impermanent. So disappearing after arising is the characteristic, mark, or sign of impermanence.

The third question to be considered is, “What is repeated seeing of impermanence?” This is described as contemplation of impermanence, *aniccānupassanā* in Pāli. You already know the word *anicca* as “impermanent.” The word

*anupassanā* is made up of *anu*, meaning “again and again” and *passanā*. You are familiar with the word *passanā*, as it occurs in *vipassanā*. It means “seeing.” So *anupassanā* means seeing again and again, repeated seeing, or repeated observation. But it is popularly translated as contemplation.

When *aniccānupassanā* is translated as contemplation, we may think that it means just thinking about impermanence. But that is not really seeing it. We can force ourselves to seem to understand by saying “impermanent, impermanent, impermanent.” But that is not real understanding of impermanence either. We must be careful not to deceive ourselves with false assumptions. Sometimes people say, “Oh, this is impermanent, this is impermanent,” and think that they really know the impermanence of something. Actually, what they are doing is just repeating, like parrots.

The real impermanence that we need to see in order to gain *vipassanā* knowledge is the moment-to-moment impermanence. The other kind of superficial impermanence can be understood without meditation—you drop a glass and it breaks, and you say it is impermanent. You don’t need meditation to understand that kind of impermanence; you just know it. Or when somebody dies and you say, “Oh, he is impermanent,” that kind of understanding is not called *vipassanā* knowledge. It cannot lead to dispassion toward the five aggregates.

Without dispassion toward the five aggregates, there can be no fading away of mental defilements and no attainment of enlightenment. Superficial understanding of impermanence cannot help us to be dispassionate toward the aggregates or disenchanted with mind and matter. It will not lead to enlightenment. This kind of understanding cannot help us. So it is very important to cultivate and gain the

deeper understanding of real impermanence, not the superficial kind.

*Aniccānupassanā*, as mentioned earlier, is the repeated seeing of impermanence while observing the rise and fall of the aggregates. It is not understanding just by thinking, or without observing the five aggregates. If it is real *aniccānupassanā*, it must be the seeing of impermanence while you are in the process of watching the rise and fall of the aggregates during *vipassanā* meditation.

If you are not practicing, there can be no *aniccānupassanā*. You may have had real experience of *aniccānupassanā* during the practice of *vipassanā*, but when you are out of practice there is no *aniccānupassanā*. There can be only the remembrance or memory of *aniccānupassanā*.

There are three characteristics of phenomenal existence: *anicca*, impermanence; *dukkha*, suffering; and *anattā* no-soul. It is said that even when there is no Buddha in the world, impermanence and suffering can be taught, but nobody except a Buddha can teach non-self. But there is a statement of the Buddha himself in one of the texts, which says that when one characteristic is seen, the other two are also seen. This means that if you see impermanence, you also see suffering nature and non-self nature.

However, it is said that *anattā* can be taught by Buddhas only. So when there are no Buddhas, can you really get *aniccānupassanā*? Can *aniccānupassanā* be taught? (This is not my thinking; I am not that penetrative.) The sub-commentary makes that statement, and says that the kind of impermanence taught when there is no Buddha must just be superficial impermanence, not real moment-to-moment impermanence, because if you see moment-to-moment impermanence when there is no Buddha, you also will see

the non-self nature without the Buddha. So the sub-commentary says that even the impermanence and suffering said to be taught during the time when there is no Buddha must be just superficial *anicca* and superficial *dukkha*, not the real *anicca* and *dukkha* that we see through *vipassanā* meditation.

\* \* \* \* \*

新語

Better  
it is  
to live  
one day  
feeling  
the rise and  
fall of  
things  
than to live  
a hundred years  
without ever  
feeling  
the rise and  
fall  
of things



(Chenmangpu)



### III. Dukkha

The five aggregates are called *dukkha*, suffering, because they are constantly oppressed by rise and fall. This is one of three reasons given in the commentaries. The second reason the aggregates are called *dukkha* is because they are the basis of suffering, they are the seeds of suffering. And the third reason is because there are five aggregates there is suffering, and as we ourselves are five aggregates, we suffer.

We suffer a lot because of the five aggregates. We see something we don't want to see, and we suffer. We hear something we don't want to hear, and there is suffering. We don't want to be sad or depressed, but we do get sad and depressed and we suffer. Because of these five aggregates, we have to endure all of these sufferings.

If there were no five aggregates, there would be no suffering. But because we are five aggregates, there will be aging, disease, and death, and so we suffer. We encounter all of this misery simply because of the five aggregates. Therefore they are called *dukkha*, suffering, because they are the basis of suffering. In this sense, the five aggregates of clinging are also called *dukkha*.

The third reason given is that they are called *dukkha* because they are fearsome, they are fearful, they are dreadful. Because of these five aggregates we undergo constant suffering, so they are fearful. Because they bring aging, disease, death, and other kinds of suffering, they are called *dukkha*. We must practice meditation in order to see and

understand that the five aggregates are *dukkha* or suffering. And they are called suffering for three reasons: they are constantly oppressed by rise and fall, they are the basis of suffering, and they are fearsome.

In order to include other meanings of suffering, nowadays *dukkha* is translated as “unsatisfactory” rather than “suffering.” I think it is a little better. Anything that is impermanent is unsatisfactory. We want things to be permanent, we want ourselves to be permanent, we want to live permanently, but we will not get what we want. And because there is no satisfaction with these five aggregates, they are unsatisfactory.

We need to understand three things: What is it that is *dukkha*? What is the characteristic of *dukkha*? and What is *dukkhānupassanā* or seeing *dukkha*?

What is it that is *dukkha*? When we say *dukkha*, we mean the five aggregates, which are also impermanent, *anicca*. These same five aggregates that are impermanent are also *dukkha* or suffering.

What is the characteristic, mark, or sign of being *dukkha*? We see that the five aggregates, which comprise everything in the world, are oppressed continuously by rise and fall. So the characteristic of *dukkha* is this constant oppression by rise and fall, which is continuous and never stops. There is not a single moment in our lives when we are not oppressed by rise and fall.

And what is *dukkhānupassanā*, or repeated seeing of *dukkha*? This means watching and noting the five aggregates during *vipassanā* meditation, and seeing with your own eyes the continuous oppression by rise and fall. *Dukkhānupassanā* is the understanding or knowledge you get from this observation of the five aggregates. Only when you observe

the five aggregates and see them continuously oppressed by rise and fall can this *vipassanā* knowledge be gained and made your own.

This knowledge, the understanding that the five aggregates are *dukkha*, can only be attained while you are actively engaged in practicing *vipassanā* meditation. There is no other way to see the rise and fall of the aggregates. Only while you are practicing *vipassanā* and watching them as they rise and fall at the present moment will you be convinced of their continuous oppression, and you will know that they are *dukkha*. This kind of knowledge is called *dukkhānupassanā*, and is the real seeing of *dukkha*.

The Venerable Sāriputta said that a virtuous and instructed *bhikkhu* should carefully attend to the five aggregates subject to clinging, in order to see and understand them as suffering. This means that the *bhikkhu* must practice *vipassanā* meditation.

Here there are two kinds of suffering—superficial and real suffering. Superficial suffering does not need the practice of *vipassanā* meditation in order to be understood. You cut your finger and then say, “Oh, it is *dukkha*,” or you hit your knee against something and say it is *dukkha*. This kind of understanding is superficial. The nature of *dukkha* is not really seen. You experience the unpleasant feeling involved, and then see it as suffering. You just feel it and know it. Meditation is not needed to understand it.

What we are concerned with here is real suffering, the deep understanding of real suffering, *dukkha*. The commentary says that we must understand three things: (1) What is it that is *dukkha*? (2) What is the characteristic of *dukkha*? (3) What is *dukkhānupassanā*, the seeing of *dukkha*?

What is it that is *dukkha*? This is easy to answer—again, the five aggregates. They are called *dukkha* or suffering. When we say suffering we mean both the five aggregates and the five aggregates of clinging, so it includes all of them.

And what is the characteristic of *dukkha*? You must understand the meaning of the word *dukkha* correctly. Normally it means suffering, unpleasant feeling, but its meaning goes deeper than that. You must understand it according to the words of the Buddha: “Whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*.” Whatever is impermanent is suffering. This we need to understand. The Buddha did not say that whatever is difficult to endure is suffering, or anything like that. He said that whatever is impermanent is suffering.

If you know something to be impermanent, you also know that it is suffering. Therefore the meaning of the word suffering goes deeper than the surface meaning. We have to go deeply into it. In order to understand it, you must remember the saying of the Buddha that whatever is impermanent is suffering. If you want to know whether something is suffering, see if it is permanent or impermanent. If it is impermanent, you will know that it is *dukkha*. Don’t be afraid to say it is *dukkha*.

When reading books, I am not satisfied when authors sometimes say that such and such is subject to suffering, or the *saṅkhāras* are subject to suffering. I don’t like that. We should have the courage to say the *saṅkhāras* are suffering, not just passively “subject to suffering,” which means under the control of suffering, having a tendency to suffer, or dependent on suffering. Once you see that something is impermanent, you can safely say that it is suffering.

The words “suffering” in English and *dukkha* in Pāli have more meaning than what appears on the surface. *Dukkha* means suffering, something difficult to endure, oppression. According to the Buddha’s definition, whatever is impermanent is suffering. Why should something impermanent be called suffering? Sometimes we enjoy good food, good companionship—we enjoy many things. Are those things *dukkha*? When you are enjoying good food, do you say, “Oh, I am suffering!”? According to the Buddha, indeed you are.

Why are such seemingly harmless activities called suffering? You must understand the characteristics of suffering. The commentary gives three reasons why the five aggregates of clinging are called suffering. The first reason is that they are constantly oppressed by rise and fall. You must keep firmly in mind that constant oppression by rise and fall is the characteristic of *dukkha*.

If you want to know whether or not something is *dukkha*, try to see whether it rises and falls. If it does, it has to be oppressed by the rising and falling, and that oppression is what *dukkha* means. So all five aggregates, including the five aggregates of clinging, are called *dukkha* because they are constantly oppressed by rise and fall. Look at everything in the world, and you will see that everything is oppressed by rise and fall, and that rise and fall also are constantly oppressed by rise and fall.

Can you find a single moment when there is no rise and fall? Can you find a single moment when the process of rise and fall stops? From the moment you take conception, this rise and fall begins to oppress you, and it goes on and on throughout your life. There is not a single moment when you are free from rise and fall. There is always rise and fall,

rise and fall, rise and fall.

When you see things during meditation you note them as rising and falling, rising and falling, one after another, maybe hundreds of objects. Then you get the impression that everything is oppressed by rising and falling. This rising and falling is a kind of oppression. Falling means destruction, which is a kind of oppression. And rising is a precursor to falling. It rises so that it can fall, and falling is also a kind of oppression.

Rising and falling oppress the five aggregates every moment, creating continuous oppression. This constant oppression by rise and fall is the characteristic of *dukkha*. If you can understand *dukkha* in this way, you can accept the fact that enjoying good food is *dukkha*. Whatever you are enjoying is *dukkha*, because there is nothing that is not *dukkha*. And you can accept the teachings of the Buddha that the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.

When explaining the first Noble Truth in his first sermon, the Buddha said at the end, “The five aggregates of clinging are suffering,” which means, in brief, that everything in the world is suffering. If you understand this to mean the continuous oppression by rise and fall, you can easily accept the truthfulness of the Buddha’s explanation.

If you don’t understand it, you may want to argue about the Buddha’s teaching, and talk about some kind of happiness, enjoyment, and so forth. But this I want you to understand and to hold firmly in mind—the meaning of *dukkha* is constant oppression by rise and fall.

We will now turn to another way of understanding the five aggregates of clinging, in terms of the eleven aspects listed in the *Sīlavanta Sutta*. As you already know, the Venerable *Sāriputta* said that a *bhikkhu* who is virtuous and

instructed should attend to the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent. This means that the *bhikkhu* must practice meditation so that he sees the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, as you have already studied. Then he must see them as suffering, as you have also studied. Now he must see them as a disease.

The *bhikkhu* who is virtuous and instructed must see the aggregates of clinging as a chronic disease. A person who has a chronic disease such as diabetes, asthma, or high blood pressure, is not free. He cannot eat what he likes, but must take medicine and avoid eating food that would aggravate his condition. He must always be careful. The disease may increase and at times decrease, but he is never in control. No matter how careful he is, the disease is still there. However much attention and care is given to a chronic disease, it is never cured.

In the same way, however much you find fault with the five aggregates, you still have them and need to attend to them. You must avoid food that is unsuitable for the body, you must avoid living in an unsuitable climate for the body, and you need to take care of a host of other things, just because of the five aggregates. So these aggregates can be viewed as a chronic disease.

The *bhikkhu* who is virtuous and instructed also must see the five aggregates of clinging as a tumor or a sore. When you have a tumor or sore that oozes blood and pus and causes a lot of pain, you must care for it with medication. The five aggregates are like a tumor. Many repulsive things ooze out, such as greed, hatred, delusion, pride, and envy. They ooze out of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. They are always oozing out. When we see something beautiful, what oozes out of our eyes? Greed or attachment.

And if we see something we don't like, anger oozes out of our eyes. Because these things are always oozing out of the five aggregates, they are like tumors or sores.

The *bhikkhu* must also see the five aggregates of clinging as a dart. When a dart penetrates a body it causes sharp pain whenever you touch the spot. In the same way, the five aggregates give us suffering of different kinds. Because we have eyes, we have to suffer the objects we don't want to see. Because we have ears, we have to suffer the sounds we don't like to hear. They are like darts in our flesh, and once a dart gets into the flesh, it is not easily removed. So the five aggregates are to be viewed as a dart causing suffering, and the aggregates of clinging are to be seen as misery.

The five aggregates are also to be viewed as *akusala*. The original Pāli word is *agha*, and in one commentary it is explained as *dukkha*. If we take this word to mean *dukkha*, it would be the same as the word "suffering." But the *Visuddhimagga* explains it differently. It describes *agha* as being censurable, deserving of censure, like *akusala kamma* that is censured by noble beings and giving painful results. The five aggregates are censurable because they give us pain, suffering, and bad results, so they are to be viewed as *akusala*.

They also are to be seen as affliction, which here means occasional sickness such as a cold, indigestion, diarrhea, or fever. When you are sick for a few days, and unable to eat or to do what you like, you may suffer because of this affliction. Even though it is an occasional sickness, it can afflict you with suffering. In the same way, the five aggregates are like occasional sickness. Since we are composed of the five aggregates, we cannot do what we like. We have to look after them, protect them, and avoid



what is unsuitable for them. So a monk is instructed to see these five aggregates of clinging as affliction or occasional sickness.

We have now studied seven aspects of the aggregates: as impermanent, as suffering, as disease, as tumor, as dart, as misery, and as affliction. All of the seven are aspects of being *dukkha*. So the five aggregates can be seen as *dukkha* or in terms of these seven individual aspects. In seeing them as a disease, as a tumor, and so on, we are seeing the *dukkha* aspect of the five aggregates.

The next aspect is “alien.” A person who is an alien is not in our power. Because he owes allegiance to another country, he is an outsider, and we have no authority over him. So we refer to him as alien. The five aggregates must be regarded as alien, not belonging to us, and something we cannot control. This alien aspect belongs to *anattā*, and now we come to the *anattā* nature of things.

The teaching of *anattā* is the most distinctive feature of the Buddha’s teachings. It is the most difficult to understand, the most misunderstood, and the most misinterpreted of his teachings. The Buddha appeared at a time when most people strongly believed in the existence of an inborn entity called *attā* in Pāli, and *ātman* in Sanskrit. Almost all other faiths believed in one kind of *attā* or another. But the Buddha appeared, and he taught that there is no *attā*. There are only the five aggregates, and these five aggregates are not *attā*.

In order to understand *anattā* we first need to understand *attā*, which in the time of the Buddha was seen as different things —as a master, as one who lives somewhere permanently, as an active person, and as one who fully experiences both joy and suffering. According to these views there is also something called an *attā* residing in one’s body,

and this *attā* is a master. It is master of itself and it is master of the body.

There are people who think that they are masters of themselves. They do what they want to do, say what they want to say, eat what they want to eat, and go where they want to go. If they really think they are masters of themselves, they should try practicing meditation for five minutes and see if they can keep the mind on the object. Then they would really see if they are masters of themselves. Their minds will wander off quite often, and not stay where their owners want them to stay. Faced by the five aggregates, there is this helplessness in us.

Although we think that we can think of whatever we want to think, if we try to train our mind on one object, we see that we are not masters of ourselves. We are at the mercy of our mind. And so the sense of *anattā*, not *attā*, manifests itself to us when we try to practice meditation. Then we know with certainty that we are not masters of ourselves. Actually, there is nothing that is master of the body.

There are people who still think that there is something called an *attā* living in the body. It enters our body at the moment of conception or moment of rebirth, and it lives in the body for the entire life. And when we die, it will leave our body and enter a new body. It will go on like that and never die, although the physical body will die. This is one belief in *attā* that many people had during the time of the Buddha.

Are you really free from this notion? Some Buddhists even say something like this. They say that there is soul or *attā*, and that when we die it will leave out of one's mouth or nose. So even Buddhists still have this belief. This is known as a belief in *attā* as something abiding in us

permanently. “Permanently” here means it will change from one body to another, and it goes on without becoming impermanent. It is permanent, and goes on from one life to another, one body to another.

Only the physical body deteriorates and dies. This belief is compared to wearing new clothes. When clothes get old and dirty, a person leaves them and gets new clothes. In the same way, this *attā* resides in the body, and when the body becomes old and dies, the *attā* will move into another new body, and so on.

This understanding can have some terrible consequences. There is a teaching in one book (not a Buddhist book) that says you cannot kill the *attā*. So if you kill a person, you are just killing his physical body, not his *attā*. That makes it all right to kill, if there is need to kill. Suppose you are engaged in a battle, and against your will you have to kill other people. Those who hold to the *attā* view will say, “Go ahead and kill them—it is your duty to kill our enemies. Even though you kill them, you are not killing the *attā*. It can never be killed.” This kind of notion has dire effects, if taken too far.

There are also people who believe there is an *attā*, and this *attā* does everything we do. When we do something, it is not we who do the actions, but the *attā*. Whatever we do is actually the action of *attā*. That is one view of *attā*. There is another view that it is *attā* that experiences, enjoys or suffers. When we enjoy something, it is not we who enjoy, but the *attā* that enjoys, and when we suffer it is the *attā* that suffers. Whenever we experience anything, it is the *attā* that experiences, not we. For those who believe in this way, *attā* is very real.

The Buddha rejected all of these theories, and in his second sermon and later discourses, he taught that *rūpa* is

not *attā*, *vedanā* is not *attā*, and so on. Because he knew the truth of *anattā*, he rejected the view of permanent entity, the view of *attā*. It is important that we see the *anattā* nature of the aggregates of clinging and of mind and matter. In order to see the *anattā* nature of things you need to practice *vipassanā* meditation. Only through *vipassanā* meditation can you see that *rūpa* and others or the five aggregates are not self and not *attā*, and there is no *attā* in *rūpa* or in the five aggregates.

One night when I was leading a retreat in Florida, I talked about *anattā*, and at the next day's interview a woman yogi reported that she had been unable to sleep that night, because she was very upset with me. She believes in the present existence of *attā*, and when I was saying there is no *attā*, it made her very angry, she said.

So I told her, "I am a Buddhist monk. When I give a talk I will say that, following the teachings of the Buddha, there is no *attā*. Do not take my word for it; do not take even the Buddha's words. But the next time you practice meditation, try to find *attā*. If you find it, hold on to it, and Buddha was wrong. And if you do not find it, do what you like." But she didn't give me an answer in the following days, so I am not sure whether she found it or not.

When you practice *vipassanā*, you watch mind, matter, thoughts, emotions, the breath, the movements of the abdomen, and so on. And when your concentration or understanding becomes mature, you begin to see the object, mind and matter, or the five aggregates clearly. When you begin to see clearly, you will know what they are, and then you will see them rise and fall. You will see that at every moment there is the object that is noted and the mind that notes.

You can find only two things at every moment of meditation. When you are mindful of the breath, there is the breath and there is awareness. There are only these two things. There is nothing in the form of a person administering the mindfulness of the breath. At such moments we see only the breath and mindfulness of the breath, and there is nothing more. We cannot see *attā* there.

Only when you see through *vipassanā* meditation that there is no *attā*, there is no permanent entity involved in seeing, hearing and so on, do you see the nature of *anattā* correctly. *Anattā* nature can be seen only through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation. When you practice meditation, you will come to see that there is no master, no such thing as a permanent abider, no such thing as a doer, no such thing as an experiencer.

There is only the experience, there is only the doing; there is no doer and no experiencer. At every moment of any experience, you can see for yourself that no person, no individual, no *attā* is involved, but just the doing action, or just the experiencing action. So through *vipassanā* you come to see the *anattā* nature of things. This is one kind of *anattā* nature.

There is another kind of *anattā* nature—it is not subject to any authority or control. When you see mind and matter arise and disappear, arise and disappear, you know that you cannot interfere with that process. You cannot tell them “Hey, wait a moment. Just stop arising, stop disappearing, you cannot do that.” You cannot have any authority over them. Actually, you are helpless.

Mind and matter just arise and disappear by their own nature, by their own free will, and not at your free will. This is also an aspect of *anattā* having no authority over a process

that is unsusceptible to authority. In order to know the *anattā* nature we need to know three things: What is *anattā*? What is the characteristic of *anattā*? And what is *anattānupassanā*?

What is it that is *anattā*? The same five aggregates. The same five aggregates are not self, and the same five aggregates have no self. When you find the word *anattā*, you must be careful. Sometimes it is translated as meaning “without *attā*.” Instead, let us say that *rūpa* is without *attā*. This would mean that there is *attā*, but *rūpa* is without *attā*. *Anattā* really means not *attā*, therefore it is the negation of *rūpa* being *attā*. So when we say *rūpa* is *anattā*, we mean *rūpa* is not *attā*, not soul, not self.

*Anattā* is sometimes translated as “soullessness.” I am not very comfortable with that translation. If we say the five aggregates are soulless then they will say that the five aggregates are soulless, but there is the soul somewhere outside the five aggregates.

The word *anattā* comes from *na*, which means “no,” and *attā*, which means “self,” so *anattā* means “no self.” It also can mean “not self,” and when we extend the meaning, it can mean we cannot have any authority over it.

And also it means the five aggregates have no core. Some trees have an inner core, the hardwood, but *rūpa*, etc., have no such core that lasts forever and is permanent.

So *anattā* has three meanings—not *attā*, not subject to authority, and no core. It is not *attā*, because *attā* can mean authority and core. So when we say *anattā*, we mean one of these three things: it is not *attā*, we cannot have any authority over it, or it has no core. This is called the characteristic of *anattā*. The fact that we cannot exercise any authority over it points to it being *anattā*. So what is it that is *anattā*? The five aggregates. What is the mark of *anattā*? Having no

authority, and also having no core or being no core.

Understanding that the five aggregates are *anattā* through observation of the five aggregates, or during the observation of the five aggregates, is called *anattānupassanā*, repeated seeing or repeated observation of *anattā*. *Nibbāna* is also *anattā* because it is not *attā*. But *Nibbāna* is not mentioned in this discourse or in the *Visuddhimagga*, because the context here is *vipassanā*. When we are talking about *vipassanā* we do not include *Nibbāna*, because it is not an object of *vipassanā*. Only the five aggregates of clinging can be the object of *vipassanā*.

So when you practice *vipassanā*, you take the five aggregates of clinging as object, but you do not take *Nibbāna* as object. The purpose of *vipassanā* is to see the three characteristics. *Nibbāna* has none of these three characteristics. So however much you watch *Nibbāna*, even if you could, you will never see impermanence of *Nibbāna* or suffering of *Nibbāna*.

*Nibbāna* is *anattā*, not *atta*. This we must understand. When we are talking about *vipassanā*, when we are in the context of *vipassanā*, we leave out *Nibbāna*, simply because it cannot be the object of *vipassanā*. But if we are speaking in general about such things as what is it that is *anattā*, then we may speak about the five aggregates and *Nibbāna*.

Characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-soul or non-self, are called the general characteristics of all conditioned phenomena because they are found in all conditioned phenomena. That means in all aggregates, in all mind and matter. It is very important that you see these three characteristics, because without seeing them you cannot progress in the practice of *vipassanā* meditation, and cannot reach the stage of enlightenment.

In order to see these three characteristics, there is no other way but to practice *vipassanā* or *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation. You also need to know what conceals these characteristics, why those who do not practice meditation cannot see them, and how these concealments are broken. You need to know what results you can get from understanding or seeing the five aggregates as impermanence, suffering and non-self or non-soul. You will find out tomorrow.



## IV. The Three Characteristics

You now have learned the basics about impermanence, suffering and non-soul. But actually seeing these characteristics is not so easy, as there are certain barriers that conceal them. The *Visuddhimagga* identifies the barriers concealing them, and explains how that concealment can be broken.

According to the *Visuddhimagga*, impermanence is concealed by continuity. The notion of continuity exists because people do not give attention to rise and fall. So there are two factors here: continuity, and failure to see the rise and fall of the aggregates, or mind and matter. What is continuity? Actually, there is no continuity; it does not exist. It is only a notion, the notion that things are continuous. And this notion conceals the characteristic of impermanence.

Let us take some examples. When we see something like a rope or a line in the distance, we think that it is a solid line, a solid object. But on getting closer to that line, we see that it is not a continuous thing. Actually, it is an army of ants, one ant following the other. On seeing that they are ants, we lose the notion that it is a continuous line.

Which is correct, which is the fact—the continuous object, or just the ant? You see a line of ants at a distance, but the fact is that there is not a line. What is true is the ant, but not the line. Yet we think that it is a line of ants. Why do we think that it is a line, a continuous thing? Why do we not see it as something made of segments or individual small things? It is because we do not see the individual things, we

cannot see them arising and disappearing.

Suppose there is the beginning of one ant, and its end is followed by the beginning of another ant. And that second ant's end is followed by the beginning of another ant, and the end of that ant is followed by the beginning of another ant, and so on. Between the ants there are gaps; they are not connected as a solid whole. But from a distance these gaps or breaks between the ants cannot be seen, and so we think we have seen a continuous line of them. However, there really is no such a thing as a line of ants. There are just ants, following one after another.

When you cannot see mind and matter, or parts of mind and matter, as separate from one another and arising and disappearing, you may think they are a continuous flow. Although you have read or been taught that they are not continuous and are composed of small parts, if you do not meditate and do not really see the arising and disappearing, you will still think in terms of one continuous thing.

Do you think your body today is one continuous process from the body yesterday, or that you have the same body that you had yesterday? Or is it a different body? At every moment material particles are arising and disappearing, but you do not see them. Only when we practice *vipassanā* meditation can we see them. When you see the material particles arising and disappearing, one material particle arising and disappearing, followed by another material property, and so on, only then will you be able to get rid of the notion of continuity. Then you will realize that there is no continuous phenomenon going on, but actually small parts arising and disappearing, one after another.

It is the same with the mind. You think that you have the same mind that you had ten years ago, last month or

yesterday. But through *vipassanā* you will find that mind is new at every moment. In one moment there is one mind or one consciousness. Then it disappears, and is followed by another type of consciousness, which disappears and is followed by another type of consciousness, and so on. When you can see them as separate moments falling one after another, you are able to break the notion of continuity. Once it is broken, you will have no sense of continuity, and the characteristic of impermanence becomes clear to you.

Let us take this sheet of paper as another example. Do you think that we use pen and ink on this paper because it is solid and opaque? We use it to write on and wrap things up, so we assume that it is solid. We all think that way. But if you look at this sheet of paper under a powerful microscope, what do you see? You see that it is an object that has more empty spaces than solid material. So which is the truth, a solid sheet of paper or something full of empty spaces?

We say that seeing is believing. What do you see? You see a sheet of paper, right? But we put the paper under a powerful microscope that can magnify about two thousand times, and find that our notion is wrong. Now you see that it is really something with a lot of empty spaces. So seeing is not believing—seeing is misleading. We needed a powerful microscope in order to see the truth about this piece of paper. It is no longer a smooth, continuous sheet of paper. It is a thing full of holes.

You may also think of the combination of mind and matter, the five aggregates, as being one whole continuous thing. Here, no microscope can help. But in practicing *vipassanā* meditation, you will be able to see mind and matter as separate entities arising and disappearing. Seeing them arise and disappear at every moment, you are able to break the notion of continuity.

*Vipassanā* knowledge is the powerful microscope we use to discover the characteristic of impermanence. Just as a microscope is needed to see the truth of a material sheet of paper, we need *vipassanā* knowledge in order to understand the truth of mind and matter, the five aggregates, and to see their impermanent nature.

One sub-commentary says that a person who rightly sees rise and fall does not see phenomena manifest in a connected state, but rather in a state of disconnectedness, like iron darts. You may have seen iron spikes. They are like iron darts, and are separate, one from another. To a person who practices *vipassanā* and can see the rise and fall of the aggregates, the mental and physical states no longer appear as connected, but are separate and unconnected.

Once you see this disconnectedness of things, see that they are not continuous but are composed of many separate parts, you come to understand that these constantly rising and falling things are impermanent. But as long as you think that they are continuous, it is impossible to see their impermanent nature.

The notion of continuity must be removed if the yogi is to see impermanence and know it to be the characteristic of the aggregates. To get rid of the notion of continuity, you need to watch things, you need to see that the aggregates arise and disappear. Once the arising and disappearance of the aggregates are seen, you will be able to rid yourself of the notion of continuity. When this notion is broken, the nature of impermanence manifests itself clearly to you.

According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the second characteristic, the characteristic of suffering, does not become apparent, because when continuous oppression is not given attention, it is concealed by one's postures. As

you know, if you sit for some time, you eventually will have pain somewhere. Under normal conditions when you are not meditating, as soon as there is pain you will change your posture and find a posture more comfortable. But pain eventually comes to that posture also, so you shift into another posture until pain appears there also. The attempt to avoid pain goes on and on.

So pain is temporarily removed by the next posture you adopt, which seems to conceal the nature of suffering. Because we keep changing postures, we do not realize that the body is always suffering. We do not sit down long enough to notice that the pain or numbness in the body is constant. We do that only when we sit down and make notes when practicing meditation. So the changing of postures conceals the *dukkha* nature of the physical body.

As meditators, after sitting for an hour without changing posture, you are sure to be suffering pain somewhere, so you know how much suffering there is. When the *Visuddhimagga* says pain is concealed by postures, it means that it is concealed by the postures taken to remove the pain or suffering of the previous posture. And it continues, “When the postures are exposed by attention to continuous oppression, the characteristic of pain becomes apparent in its true nature.”

Here the yogi sees arising and disappearing. First he understands impermanence. Then, dwelling on arising and disappearing, arising and disappearing, he finds that arising and disappearing is a constant oppression. When his attention is placed on this constant oppression caused by arising and disappearing, the postures can no longer conceal the nature of suffering, so suffering becomes evident.

When a person changes to a more comfortable posture

he knows that his pain will be gone temporarily, and that if he does not change the posture again, he will suffer. In this way he knows that the pain in any posture is shifted by substituting another posture. But if he does not substitute another posture, the nature of suffering is revealed. So when you do not change posture, but continue sitting in meditation, you will see the suffering nature of things, the constant oppression caused by arising and disappearing.

The *dukkha* that is being concealed by postures, applies to the physical body only. But what about mind? What about mental states? It is not enough just to see *dukkha* in the physical body. It is important that we see *dukkha* in the mental states also. Here postures cannot conceal *dukkha*, because postures have nothing to do with mental states. The *Visuddhimagga* says nothing about this aspect.

So with regard to mental states, I think the failure to see *nāma* and *rūpa* to arise and disappear is that which conceals the *dukkha* nature. The nature of *dukkha* is constant oppression by arising and disappearing. Only when you see arising and disappearing, will you see the *dukkha* nature. If you do not see them, you cannot see the nature of *dukkha*. So failure to see arising and disappearing may be that which conceals the second characteristic, the characteristic of suffering.

In regard to mental states, only when you see arising and disappearing can you see the *dukkha* nature of these states. So during meditation, try to be mindful of your thoughts. When a thought comes, pay attention to it. Then it disappears along with the attention, and is replaced by another thought and another moment of attention. Mental states and the mindfulness of those mental states come one after another, arising and disappearing, arising and disappearing.

When you see hundreds of objects arising and disappearing in this way, you cannot avoid understanding that they are bombarded and oppressed by arising and disappearing. Only when you see the constant oppression caused by arising and disappearing, do you really see the *dukkha* nature of mental states. And only when you understand *dukkha* in this sense, constantly oppressed by arising and disappearing, can you understand that all five aggregates of clinging are suffering.

The third characteristic, of non-self, *anattā*, does not become apparent because it is concealed by compactness when resolution into the various elements is not given attention. Here again there is a notion, the notion of compactness. In reality there is no compactness. But we always see things as compact, as solid things.

We think that even the mind is just one solid thing. We think it is the same as the mind a few moments ago, a week ago, or a month ago. And even though we have different minds—the seeing mind, hearing mind, smelling mind, and so on—we see them as a solid thing. We lump them all together as one. So these aggregates also are concealed by the notion of compactness.

In reality, it is not so simplistic. When you see something, there is a thing to be seen, the eyes to see it, and the seeing. On our part, we have the eyes and the seeing. Though the act of seeing is composed of many different moments of small mental states, normally you do not think of it that way. You take it as just one thing—“seeing,” or “I see.” The same notion applies to hearing, smelling, and so on, because you take each process to be one solid thing. You take a complex thing or process as a mass, and as long as you cannot break this mass into its components, you will always think in terms of “I,” a “person,” or an “individual.”

There are also different functions performed by different mental states. We will continue using “seeing” as an example. Seeing consciousness has the function of seeing, which is followed by other types of consciousness. They include receiving consciousness, which has the function of receiving the image of the object that has been seen; investigating consciousness, which has the function of investigating the object, and a number of other mental states, which arise and disappear after fulfilling their various functions in processing that one object.

But we are not able to see these mental states and processes. If we cannot analyze the seeing into different mental states performing their respective functions, we see only the visible object, and “I see” or “a person sees” is what we normally understand.

There is a difference in the way that different types of consciousness take different objects. One type of consciousness takes sight or a visible thing as object, another mental state takes sound as object, and another takes smell as object, and so on. But we just assume that it is one mind that takes these objects, and that the “I” that sees is also the “I” that hears. So if we do not see the difference in the way mental states take objects, we cannot shake off the notion that it is one compact “I” that sees, hears, smells, and so on.

Do you understand this explanation about *anattā* being concealed by compactness? In order to understand it, you need to understand the meaning of *anattā*. One meaning is “having no exercise of authority over it.” The other meaning, the subject of this explanation, is “having no core.” *Anattā* is that which has no inner core, no essence, and no self. As long as you take things to be compact, to be a mass, or to be just one thing with many functions, you cannot avoid the



notion that there is a core, an inherent essence, or a self.

To understand the *anattā* nature of things, you need to break things down into elements and their different components. As long as you cannot resolve things into their constituent parts, you will always think of them as one compact thing. But once you are able to analyze and resolve them into their various components, the notion of compactness and the notion of self or *attā* are gone. So in order to see *anattā* it is very important that you break things down. You need to cut things to pieces, and you need to analyze.

The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is all about *anattā*. Although it does not say that this is *anattā* or that is *anattā*, it tells us that everything is *anattā*, because everything is minutely analyzed. Mind is analyzed into consciousness and mental factors. Then consciousness is analyzed into one hundred and twenty types, and the mental factors are analyzed into fifty-two types, and so on. I think that everything is so minutely analyzed in order to show that there is no compactness, there is no core.

The whole of *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is always pointing to the *anattā* nature of things, although we also learn many other things from it. Everything can be analyzed into components, because nothing is compact. Since there is no compactness in anything, there can be no core, no *attā*.

When practicing *vipassanā* meditation, you make notes of objects that appear at the present moment, and you see that at every moment the objects are different. And when you take mental states as objects, you know that there are many mental states, not just one compact mind. So you are able to resolve mind into many components. You may not be able to name those components, but you see them and understand them.

It is more important to be able to resolve objects into component states than it is to give names to them. During the practice of meditation you will see that your mind is not just one mind. At different moments there is a different mind, or different consciousness. One consciousness goes to an object, and another consciousness makes note of it; then these two disappear, and another consciousness that is thinking of quite another thing arises, and so forth.

As you pay close attention to what is happening in your mind, you will see that what you thought to be one compact thing is actually composed of many small, different mental states. Once you see mind as comprising these small mental states, you come to understand that there is no core in the mind. When you see there is no core in the mind, you see the *anattā* nature of that mind.

Now you understand the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena: the characteristic of impermanence, *anicca*; of suffering, *dukkha*; and of non-self or no core, *anattā*. Are the three characteristics included in the aggregates? Are they aggregates? The sub-commentary of *Visuddhimagga* says they are not included in the aggregates, because they are states without individual essence. This means that they are just a mode of conditioned phenomena, but not conditioned phenomena, so they are not included in the aggregates.

Then are they separate from the aggregates? The sub-commentary says they are not separate from the aggregates because they cannot be apprehended without the aggregates; without the aggregates one cannot see the three characteristics. So they are not included in the aggregates, but they are not separate from them. They are concepts applied to these modes for easy communication.

The three characteristics are not *paramattha*, ultimate reality, but are attributes of ultimate reality, attributes of the aggregates. They are neither included in the aggregates nor are they separate from them, because they cannot be understood without the aggregates. Without calling them something, we cannot talk about them without something, So they are called concepts, and were given names for identification. They are connected with the aggregates, and in Pāḷi are called *paññatti*, meaning a particular mode of expression.

It is to see these three characteristics that we practice *vipassanā* meditation. You will see them only when you practice, not just by saying *anicca, dukkha, anattā* again and again. They can be understood only through practice, not by repeating the words or just thinking about them. So if you want to see the three characteristics, you must practice *vipassanā*.

When you practice *vipassanā*, in the beginning try to develop concentration in order to make the mind steady, still, and free from mental hindrances. When mind is free from mental hindrances, concentration comes. Through concentration you begin to see things clearly, you begin to see them separately. You begin to see two things occurring at the same time as a pair, the in-breath and mindfulness of in-breath, and the out-breath and mindfulness of out-breath. These things are seen separately, not mixed with one another.

After seeing that, you also will see conditionality. You will see that because there is the breath, there is mindfulness of the breath; because there is the intention to stretch, there is stretching, and so on. And then you will see objects arise and disappear. When you see the objects arise and disappear, you see the impermanent nature of things.

When you see the impermanent nature of things, you also see their *dukkha* nature, because when you see them arising and disappearing, arising and disappearing, you come to the understanding that they are bombarded and oppressed by arising and disappearing. Continuous oppression by rising and disappearing is what is meant by the word *dukkha*.

And when you see the impermanent nature and suffering nature of things, you can also see their *anattā* nature. You see things arising and disappearing, which means there is no core in them. If there were core in them, they would last forever, they would be together and intact. But they are separate and continuously arising and disappearing, so there is no unifying core in them. Moreover, you cannot tell them to stop, you cannot tell them not to arise or not to disappear. There is no way you can exercise any authority over them. So here, too, you are seeing the *anattā* nature of things.

Through the practice of *vipassanā* meditation, and through paying attention to the objects at the present moment, you can see *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* for yourself. Once you see these three characteristics for yourself, you don't have to base your faith on what other people say. Through your own experience you can verify that the teachings of the Buddha are correct. When you see this for yourself and come to this firm understanding, nobody can shake you away from this understanding. It becomes your very own property, your very own knowledge.

It is to possess this knowledge that we practice *vipassanā* meditation. Suppose you are practicing meditation, and you see your body disintegrate into powder, or you see your body disappear, or something similar. Does that mean that you have seen *anattā*? Mahāsi Sayadaw said "not yet," because even though you see your body disintegrating and

it is a kind of *anattā*, you still may be thinking “This is I who see it.” So with regard to the mental state, you have not yet seen the *anattā* nature.

Only when you see both mind and matter as arising and disappearing at every moment, can you say that you have seen the nature of *anattā*. You must understand that the real understanding of *anattā* nature comes only when you pay attention to both mind and matter, and see them as arising and disappearing; as being oppressed by arising and disappearing, and having no control over it; as having no core, and so on. Until then, if you see only your body, you have seen only about fifty percent of *anattā*.

\* \* \* \* \*



## V. Stream Entry

Now that the three characteristics have been explained, I think it is time to return to the *Sīlavanta Sutta* or “Virtuous,” as it is called in English. When we left, Venerable *Sāriputta* was answering questions put to him by Venerable *Mahākotṭhika*, and had just said that a virtuous and instructed *bhikkhu* should attend carefully to the five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, as suffering, as disease.

The list continues with eight other aspects, so altogether there are eleven aspects of the five aggregates. Among them we have examined impermanence, suffering, and having no essence or core. The next aspect to consider is disintegration. A *bhikkhu* should attend to the five aggregates as disintegrating or dissolving.

There are two kinds of disintegration: moment to moment disintegrating, and disintegration at the end of a life. We should see the five aggregates of clinging as disintegrating moment by moment. Seeing this moment by moment disappearance, we can understand the last disintegration of what we call life. Disintegrating at the end of life and disintegrating during life at every moment are actually the same.

A *bhikkhu* should see the five aggregates of clinging as disintegrating. And when he sees the impermanent nature of the aggregates, he sees both the arising and the disintegrating. Since he sees the disintegrating, he is able to see the impermanent nature or the characteristic of impermanence as non-existence after having been.

The next aspect is emptiness. A *bhikkhu* should see the five aggregates of clinging as empty. Here emptiness does not mean nothingness. In Theravāda, it means empty of *attā*, empty of an abiding self or essence. So it means seeing as *anattā*, seeing as non-self. When he observes the five aggregates he sees only the five aggregates, and nothing more that he can call a self or soul.

At every moment of noting the *bhikkhu* understands that there is the object that is noted and the mind that notes. These two go as pairs at every moment, and there is nothing else but the object that is noted and the mind that notes. So the *bhikkhu* does not see anything that he can call a self or a soul. And in seeing this way, he is seeing rightly.

Venerable Sāriputta describes the five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, suffering, a disease, a tumor, a dart, misery, affliction, alien, disintegrating, empty, and non-self. This list of eleven aspects can be accepted as an authentic teaching, as it is found in various other suttas taught by the Buddha himself. These eleven aspects can be condensed to only three. How so? Impermanence and disintegration actually mean the same thing, *anicca*. Suffering, disease, a tumor, a dart, misery, and affliction are all aspects of *dukkha*. And alien, empty, and non-self are attributes of *anattā*. So here again you meet the three characteristics.

While the above understanding is important, it is enough just to see the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, suffering, and non-self. But if you think they are too few and you want to know more, you can go to the *Visuddhimagga* which, in describing *vipassanā* knowledge, lists forty ways of observing the aggregates of clinging, or mind and matter.

What can we expect from seeing the aggregates of



clinging as impermanent, suffering, and non-self? According to Venerable Sāriputta, “When a virtuous and instructed *bhikkhu* carefully attends thus to these five aggregates subject to clinging, it is possible that he may realize the fruit of stream entry.” This means that when a *bhikkhu* sees the five aggregates as impermanent, and so on, it is possible that he will become a Sotāpanna.

In order to become a Sotāpanna what do you have to do? You have to observe the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, as suffering, and as non-self. It is very important that, when you are practicing *vipassanā* meditation, you see these three characteristics of the five aggregates of clinging that comprise mind, matter, and all conditioned phenomena. When the characteristics are seen, you will begin to experience dispassion towards the five aggregates.

Seeing impermanence, suffering, and non-self means that you see the arising and disappearing of the five aggregates. When you see the arising and disappearing, especially the disappearing, you will come to realize that the five aggregates disappearing every moment are fearsome or dangerous. Since they are disintegrating or disappearing every moment, what if they should stop arising and disappearing? That means death.

Death can come to us at any moment, which is a frightening thing about the five aggregates. So when we see that the aggregates are dangerous, we find fault with them. But in finding fault in them, we become dispassionate towards things. We are no longer attached to them, we no longer want them, we no longer want to possess them. So we turn away from them. This dispassionate attitude towards the five aggregates is very important, and is called strong *vipassanā*.

Before that happens, *vipassanā* is called young or tender *vipassanā*. At the stage of seeing the aggregates rising and falling, and seeing that they are fearsome, the meditator has not yet developed strong *vipassanā*. Only when the stage of dispassion or disenchantment towards the five aggregates is reached is it called strong *vipassanā*.

Strong *vipassanā* will lead a yogi to the attainment of enlightenment, to the attainment of stream entry. This is because when one becomes disenchanted with the five aggregates, one wants to get rid of them, to throw them away. So the yogi gives more time and perseverance to the practice, and in time will see the five aggregates of clinging as empty. But it is only when he sees the five aggregates as impermanent, suffering, and non-self that the important stage of dispassion towards the aggregates can be reached.

The phase of becoming dispassionate through seeing the three characteristics is vividly explained in an allegory about a man who tries to catch a fish. It can be found in detail in the twenty-first chapter of the *Visuddhimagga*.

Wanting to catch a fish, the man casts a net into the water. After some time he thinks there is a fish in the net, so he plunges his hand into the water and takes hold of his catch. But when he lifts it up he sees three identifying marks on the object, and realizes that he is holding not a fish, but a poisonous snake. At such a moment, how would you feel? First you would feel fear, because it is not a fish, but a poisonous snake that can kill with one bite.

So the man is afraid, and sees danger in it. When he sees the danger he becomes dispassionate and no longer wants what he has caught. He wants to turn away from it, to get free from it, to throw it away and be delivered from it. But first he wants to do something to prevent it from biting

him. So he takes the snake, swings it around his head two or three times, and throws it away.

In the same way, on becoming dispassionate towards the five aggregates, a yogi needs to watch and observe the three characteristics again and again, in order not to fall back under the influence of the five aggregates. So to avoid being bitten by failure to see the three characteristics, he dwells on them more frequently. Then a time will come when his mind rushes into the cessation of all conditioned phenomena. That rushing into what is unconditioned phenomena is what is meant by attaining enlightenment or taking *Nibbāna* as object.

The preceding fish-snake allegory is very pertinent. Until you see danger, you will not want to get away from something. Only when you see danger or something false do you want to escape from it. That is why if you want to quit smoking you have to see the real danger in smoking. If you want to quit drinking, you have to see the real danger in drinking. Until the danger is seen, you will not want to give it up. This is a natural and logical sequence, not just somebody's theory.

First you need to see the object, and then you need to see that this object is nothing to be attached to, because now you have seen that it is false, impermanent, and so on. Only when you see its untrue or transitory nature do you want to get away from something. This is why it is so important that we must first see the three characteristics in order to reach the stage of dispassion towards the five aggregates.

The Venerable Sāriputta said, "If a virtuous *bhikkhu* sees the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent and so on, there is the possibility that he may reach the stage of stream entry and become a Sotāpanna."

What is meant by “stream entry?” It is the English translation of the Pāli word *sotāpatti*, which is made up of two parts, *sota* and *āpatti*. The word *sota* does not really mean stream; it means the current in a river, or the flow of water. And *āpatti* means “first reaching.” So *sotāpatti* means “first reaching the current”. When anything gets into the current of a river, it is sure to reach the ocean. In the same way, when a person gets into the current of the Noble Path, he is sure to reach *Nibbāna*.

Once a person becomes a Sotāpanna, there is no turning back. He will progress nearer and nearer to *Nibbāna*, and within a maximum of seven lives he will reach it. Stream entry, *sotāpatti*, means getting into the current for the first time. When does a person get into this stream or current? He gets into it for the first time when his practice of *vipassanā* has become mature, when his practice of *vipassanā* has become complete—when he attains enlightenment for the first time.

At that moment, what happens is the arising in his mind of a type of consciousness he never in his life has experienced before. And as this consciousness arises at the end of *vipassanā* practice, it must be preceded by *vipassanā* consciousness or *vipassanā* thought moments. When that consciousness, which is called path consciousness, arises, it takes *Nibbāna* as its object. That means it plunges into the cessation of all suffering. So in taking *Nibbāna* as object, at the same time it eradicates mental defilements.

There are four stages of enlightenment and at each stage a mental defilement is eradicated. When path consciousness arises, it is accompanied by mental factors. There are said to be thirty-six mental factors arising with that consciousness. Among them, eight are most important. You may have

guessed what they are. The eight factors of path are Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, and so on. They are the mental factors that arise simultaneously with path consciousness. The first one, Right Understanding, means knowledge or wisdom. It is this understanding that actually eradicates the mental defilements.

According to Theravāda teaching, enlightenment means the arising of the path consciousness together with mental factors. That consciousness and the mental factors take *Nibbāna* as object, and at the same time eradicate the mental defilements. This is what we call enlightenment. When one first reaches this current, he is called a Sotāpanna in Pāli. In English this word is translated as stream winner, stream enterer, or stream entrant. We may use any of these English translations, but for its meaning we will understand it according to the Pāli.

When one reaches the stage of Sotāpanna, he is no longer a worldling, a *puthujjana* (loose translation, an “ordinary person”.) On entering into the current, he becomes a “noble person.” Having reached the stage of Sotāpanna, he is said to eradicate some of the mental defilements. However, it really is Right Understanding that eradicates them, not the person. So we will just say that some mental defilements are eradicated at the first moment of *sotāpatti*, the first moment of enlightenment. Eradicated means that they are completely uprooted, and cannot arise in the mind again. So it is total destruction of those particular mental defilements.

A Sotāpanna also eradicates three kinds of fetters, which are three kinds of mental defilements. One is *sakkāyadhiṭṭhi*, wrong view about the body or having a “self”. The second is doubt about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the training. The third is adherence to rites and rituals. These

are the three fetters eradicated at the moment of *sotāpatti-magga*.

Even before reaching enlightenment for the first time, when a yogi is practicing *vipassanā* he is able to abandon the wrong view about the body or having a self. His abandonment at that time, however, is momentary and incomplete. But at the moment of enlightenment he completely eradicates the notion of existence of self, and it does not arise in his mind again.

When he becomes a Sotāpanna he has unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Since he has realized the Dhamma himself and has reached this stage through the teachings of the Buddha, he knows that the Buddha is a genuine teacher, having himself attained enlightenment and taught the way to reach it. So the Sotāpanna has unshakable faith and confidence in the Buddha.

He also has unshakable faith in the Dhamma, which here means the practice by which he has reached the stage of Sotāpanna. And so he has complete faith that this practice will lead to the eradication of mental defilements and to the realization of *Nibbāna*. He also gains unshakable faith in the Saṅgha, the community of the Buddha's noble disciples who, following the Buddha's advice, practiced meditation and reached enlightenment.

The Sotāpanna can now identify himself with these noble disciples of the Buddha. Having gained unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, he also strengthens his faith in the practice. Before becoming a Sotāpanna he may have had doubts about whether he was really doing the right thing, or whether the practice would really lead to the realization of *Nibbāna*. But now that he has reached *sotāpatti* himself and has achieved the result

himself, he has no more doubts. He has eradicated any previous doubts about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the practice.

One who has reached the stage of enlightenment knows that no other practice is the correct path to realize *Nibbāna*. If anybody should tell a Sotāpanna that inflicting pain on oneself, acting like a dog, or behaving like a cow can lead to attainment of *Nibbāna*, he will not believe it. He knows through his own experience that any practice that does not include the Eightfold Path is the wrong path. Because he practices the Eightfold Path and *vipassanā*, and has reached the stage of enlightenment, he knows that it is the right path. And he knows that any practice that does not include the Eightfold Path, or the eight factors, cannot lead to the eradication of mental defilements.

If somebody were to approach and tell him that just by giving *dāna* one can reach enlightenment, or just by practicing *sīla* one can reach enlightenment, he would say no, and correct them. *Dāna* is good, and by *dāna* you acquire merit. You can share this merit with other beings and receive the results of it in the future. But to reach *Nibbāna*, *dāna* is not enough. Even *sīla* is not enough, although we need to have pure *sīla* when we practice meditation. But that alone will not lead to enlightenment. All of this he knows through his own experience, so he will not adhere to any practices that do not involve the eight factors of the path.

In brief, a Sotāpanna eradicates wrong view, doubt, and adherence to rites and rituals. But he also abandons more. There are other mental defilements, such as greed, hatred, delusion, and so on. For our purpose here we must understand that mental defilements are of two kinds. The first kind is serious enough to drag us down to the four states of misery. The second and lesser kind does not lead to those states.

Although greed, hatred, and delusion belong to the first category of mental defilements, a Sotāpanna is able to eradicate them. He still has greed, hatred, and delusion, but they are not strong enough or bad enough to cause him to fall to the four states of misery. So it is not only three fetters that he eradicates, but also the power of mental defilements that could otherwise drag him down. Whatever mental defilements remain in the Sotāpanna are too weak to send him to the states of misery.

A Sotāpanna is endowed with four qualities: unshakable faith in the Buddha, unshakable faith in the Dhamma, unshakable faith in the Saṅgha, and very pure *sīla*. Of these four, the first three have already been explained to you. It is very important that you now learn about the last one, the *sīla* of a Sotāpanna.

It is said that a Sotāpanna is endowed with *sīla* or moral purity that is dear to the noble ones, and valued by the noble ones. This means that his *sīla* is very pure and he has not broken the five precepts. He keeps them unbroken in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, and has never broken two or three consecutively. So he keeps the five precepts intact and very pure, without breaking any of them. This you should understand.

The texts say that when a Sotāpanna dies and is reborn as a human being in the next life, his observance of the five precepts is automatic. Even as a child he will not kill any living being. So a Sotāpanna is very pure in keeping the five moral precepts that all of you are familiar with—abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxicants.

Nowadays there are people who claim to be Sotāpannas, and it is very difficult to know whether they really are or



not. Because it is their own experience, we cannot go into their minds and find out whether they are really Sotāpannas. But there are ways to investigate such a claimant and find out. We can check his observance of the five precepts. If he keeps them really intact and does not break any of them, he may be a Sotāpanna. But if you see him not conforming to the rules of *sīla*, if you see him drinking, or if he tells a lie, you can decide that he is not a Sotāpanna.

According to the commentaries, a Sotāpanna does not break any of the five precepts, so he does not drink. Even if you mix alcohol with water and give it to him, it is said that only the water will go down his throat, but not the alcohol. So this is another way to test. Just mix alcohol with water, give it to him, and see whether it all goes down his throat or not.

There are some people who claim to be Sotāpannas, but they may still drink and do other unwholesome things. And then they will say, “Oh, I am a Sotāpanna. For me it is all right, I can do these things. I am immune to them. I am above getting an offense for doing this. So I can kill, I can steal, and so on. It is all right for me, because I am a Sotāpanna and I am spiritually advanced.”

If you believe such people, you will be very deluded. Being a Sotāpanna does not mean he is protected from going to hell and can do anything he likes. If he were capable of doing something that would take him to the woeful states, he would not be a Sotāpanna, and would be reborn there, not here. So being a Sotāpanna does not mean that he can do anything he likes, and be protected from going to hell.

For a Sotāpanna the doors of the woeful states are closed. That means he will not be reborn in the four states of misery. He will not be reborn in hell, in the animal kingdom, as a

hungry ghost, or as an *asura* ghost. He is not reborn in the woeful states simply because his purity of *sīla* protects him, and renders him unable to perform any unwholesome *kamma* and he does nothing that would cause him to go there. This you must understand.

There are blessings concerned with *sotāpatti-magga* which are mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga*. One of these blessings is called *The Doors of the Woeful States Are Closed*. There are other blessings given in the *Visuddhimagga*. You will hear about them tomorrow.

## VI. Blessings and Noble Treasures

Yesterday you learned something about *sotāpatti*, eradication and abandonment of defilements, and Sotāpannas who have reached the first stage of enlightenment. Now we shall turn to the blessings bestowed on them when they reach this attainment. The *Visuddhimagga* describes what are called the blessings of *sotāpatti-magga*. They are the benefits of becoming a Sotāpanna, or the benefits of reaching *sotāpatti-magga*. At the moment of enlightenment, the Sotāpanna eradicates certain mental defilements and abandons other mental defilements that could drag him to the lower worlds of misery.

The first blessing mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga* is the eradication of mental defilements never before eradicated. When a yogi is practicing *vipassanā* meditation, at every moment of *vipassanā* he is abandoning the mental defilements. But the abandonment during those moments is momentary abandonment, or substitute abandonment. That means the mental defilements are substituted by wholesome states, and as long as they remain wholesome states, there can be no mental defilements. So during the time when a yogi is practicing *vipassanā*, he can abandon mental defilements only momentarily.

There are two kinds of mental defilements: those that are embedded in the objects, and those that are latent in one's mental continuity. Defilements that are latent in object means defilements that arise when one is experiencing some object. Suppose there is a beautiful object, and a person sees

this beautiful object, likes it, and has craving for it. When he likes it, craves it, and clings to that object, he is said to invest mental defilements into it. He does not really invest anything into the object, but in clinging to it he has placed his craving and attachment onto it.

Because mental defilements arise in his mind when he experiences objects he craves, this is called mental defilements latent in the object. This kind of latency in objects can be abandoned by *vipassanā*. When practicing *vipassanā*, a yogi makes notes of the object so that no attachment, craving, or clinging can arise for it. Therefore he is said to have abandoned the mental defilement latent in the object. This is the kind of defilement a *vipassanā* yogi can abandon.

But *vipassanā* cannot touch the other kind of mental defilement, that which is latent in the yogi's mental continuity. It cannot help to get rid of such latency. This latency in the continuity of beings can be eradicated only by Magga, only at the moment of enlightenment. A Sotāpanna eradicates three mental defilements: wrong view, doubt, and adherence to practices that do not include the Eightfold Path. Eradication means they will never again arise in his mind. This is one blessing of reaching *sotāpatti-magga*.

You may be familiar with the stages of purity in *vipassanā* meditation—purity of moral conduct, purity of consciousness, purity of views, purity of transcending doubts, and so on. During the practice of *vipassanā* meditation, a yogi can abandon wrong view and doubts, but that abandonment is momentary. Total abandonment cannot be achieved yet. But at the moment of enlightenment, these mental defilements are abandoned once and for all. This kind of abandonment the yogi never has achieved before. Only when one reaches the stage of *sotāpatti-magga* can

total abandonment of the mental defilements of wrong views and doubt be achieved.

The second blessing is that *sotāpatti-magga* dries up the ocean of suffering in *saṃsāra*, the round of rebirth and death. So long as beings do not reach enlightenment, this round of rebirth and death will go on and on, and that is what is called *saṃsāra*. Going through *saṃsāra*, a being undergoes much suffering, sometimes being reborn in hell, sometimes as an animal or other creature. And when reborn as a human being, there is always the suffering of old age, disease, and death. Even rebirth as a *deva* or a Brahma is not totally free from suffering.

According to the Buddha, this suffering has no beginning, or its beginning cannot be known. If its beginning cannot be known, what about its end? Can there be an end of *saṃsāra*? Yes. For those who have become Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas and Arahants there is an end of it. But for those who do not gain enlightenment, there can be no end to the ocean of suffering in *saṃsāra*. However, once a person becomes a Sotāpanna or reaches the *sotāpatti-magga* stage, he is able to dry up the ocean of suffering in *saṃsāra*. However, one who strives hard to understand the Dhamma and follows the Buddha's teachings with diligence eventually can reach the *sotāpatti-magga* stage.

Suffering is compared here to the ocean. Nobody can measure the water in the ocean, as it is immeasurable. In the same way, suffering in *saṃsāra* is immeasurable. But once a person reaches *sotāpatti-magga*, he will suffer in *saṃsāra* for how many more rebirths? At most, seven. *Sotāpatti-magga* is said to dry up the ocean of *dukkha* in *saṃsāra*, and there are at most only seven years to go before reaching *Nibbāna*.

The third blessing is that *sotāpatti-magga* closes all doors to the four woeful states. As you already know, a Sotāpanna will never be reborn in the four woeful states: hell, the animal kingdom, the realm of the hungry ghosts, and the realm of *asurā* ghosts. He will not be reborn in these states of misery because he is incapable of doing evil *kamma* that would lead him to rebirth there.

But what about past *kamma*? Before becoming a Sotāpanna, one may have done some *kammas* in the past that could lead to the four woeful states. By the power of the attainment of *sotāpatti-magga*, or by the power of enlightenment, the potential of those remaining *kammas* to give results in the woeful states is destroyed. Although they may give results in this life, they cannot give results as rebirths. The old *kammas* either become defunct, too weakened, or unable to take one down to the four states of misery. So once a person attains *sotāpatti-magga*, all doors of the four woeful states are closed to him.

The next blessing is that *sotāpatti-magga* enables one to become the possessor of seven “noble treasures.” There are worldly treasures as well as Dhamma treasures. A person can possess worldly treasures but they are not real treasures, because they can be useful only in one lifetime. But the noble treasures mentioned here are those that are useful in both this life and in future lives.

The first of the seven noble treasures a Sotāpanna is said to possess is *saddhā*, confidence or faith. The confidence of Sotāpannas is unshakable. They have unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the practice. Even if their lives were threatened by somebody approaching and saying, “I will kill you if you do not give up the Buddha,” they would rather be killed than to give up the Buddha,

Dhamma, Saṅgha and the practice.

A Sotāpanna's *saddhā* or confidence in the Three Gems and the practice is extremely strong. Since it is so strong, he will turn only to the Buddha as his teacher, and will never change his faith. Even in his next rebirths he will not go to another teacher. He is said to be free from doing six things: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, taking intoxicants, and going to another teacher. This unshakable faith and confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and the practice, is a real treasure.

The next treasure is *sīla*. The *sīla* of Sotāpannas is very pure. As you know, their precepts are not broken in the beginning, in the middle, in the end, or two or three consecutively, or in any other way. Their *sīla* is totally pure and is praised by the noble ones. This kind of treasure they keep always.

The *sīla* of *puthujjanas* or ordinary persons, those who have not yet reached enlightenment, cannot be so pure. They may break precepts when they are confronted with different situations, but Sotāpannas will never break any one of the five precepts. Even when their lives are threatened, they will not kill another person.

The next treasure is moral shame to do wrong or evil actions. Its companion is moral fear of the consequences of wrongdoing. These two are important treasures. Although unenlightened people also have these qualities, those possessed by a Sotāpanna are of a higher kind. Because of moral shame and moral fear, Sotāpannas will not do anything wrong.

It is shame and fear that keep people from wrongdoing, and as long as these qualities are kept in their mind, they will do no wrong. However, once moral shame and moral

fear disappear from the minds of people, anything can happen. These two treasures are called noble treasures because they belong to noble persons who can do no wrong.

The next treasure is knowledge. Knowledge here means both knowledge through learning and knowledge through practice or experience. Sotāpannas possess both kinds of knowledge. In order to learn how to practice and become Sotāpannas, they had to hear from the Buddha or other persons. That is how knowledge is possessed through learning, listening to talks, or reading. And they are really rich in knowledge through practice. Having realized the truth and seen *Nibbāna* by themselves, their knowledge through practice is perfect. Both kinds of knowledge are possessed by Sotāpannas, so are called noble treasures.

Giving or generosity is the next treasure. Sotāpannas are said to be very generous. That is because they have eradicated certain mental defilements. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, they have eradicated avarice, the insatiable greed for riches. And in other commentaries it is said that they also eradicate envy. So, not being afflicted by envy and avarice, Sotāpannas are very generous.

There is a saying that if you want to test somebody to discover whether he is a Sotāpanna or not, ask him for something that is valuable. If he cannot give it to you, he is not yet a Sotāpanna. However, that is a false assumption. If you ask somebody for something that he cannot give or does not have, how can he give it to you? Every instance of being unable to give should not be interpreted as avarice or greed.

During the time of the Buddha, a monk asked Venerable Uppalavaṇṇā, a *bhikkhunī*, to give him her undergarment. Uppalavaṇṇā was not a Sotāpanna, but was an Arahant, so



she had no attachment whatsoever. But when the monk asked her to give him the robe, she said, “No, I cannot give it to you.” The monk still insisted, and at last, by performing some miracle, she gave the robe to him. Her first refusal to give it to him must not be interpreted as attachment or stinginess, because she also had said, “This is the only robe I have, so I cannot give it to you.”

The last noble treasure is *paññā*, wisdom. Among the eight factors of the Path, the first factor is Right Understanding, *paññā*. With this *paññā* a Sotāpanna is able to eradicate the three factors altogether, and also to abandon the power of certain mental defilements. Such wisdom or knowledge possessed by a Sotāpanna is regarded as a real treasure.

Wisdom or understanding is treasured because it cannot be stolen. It is one’s own, and is not common to anybody else. The best of treasures, it can eradicate the mental defilements totally, and eradication of mental defilements means eradication of suffering. So if you think you possess these qualities, even to a modest extent, you can say that you are not poor.

“Although I may have no money, I am not poor because I possess these noble treasures.” This is what a leper during the time of the Buddha said to Sakka, the king of the gods. Suppabuddha, as he was called, was very poor and had to beg for his food, but his leprosy caused people to turn away. Hungry, homeless, and plagued by his suffering, at night he could not sleep and would be crying aloud, keeping people awake and waking up those who were sleeping. That is why he was called Suppabuddha, which means “keeping people thoroughly awake.”

One day the Buddha went for alms in the city, and then

went to a certain place, perhaps to rest. When he saw lay people and disciple monks assembled there, he began to give them a Dhamma talk. Suppabuddha, who was begging for food nearby, saw the crowd of people. Thinking that food was being distributed, he decided to join the crowd and get something to eat. But on approaching the place, he saw that it was the Buddha giving a Dhamma talk. Forgetting his hunger, he respectfully sat down at the edge of the audience and paid attention to the Dhamma.

The Buddha saw him, and gave a talk that was especially suitable for him. And while listening to the Dhamma talk, Suppabuddha was able to practice *vipassanā* meditation, because at the end of the talk he became a Sotāpanna and a possessor of the noble treasures. After becoming a Sotāpanna, he wanted to see the Buddha and report his accomplishment. But the crowd was too big, and he was unable to find the Buddha, who had already left for the monastery. So Suppabuddha decided to go to the monastery to report his attainment.

Sakka, the king of the gods, wanted to test this new Sotāpanna. So he met him on the way and said to him, “Just say the Buddha is not the Buddha, Dhamma is not the Dhamma, and Saṅgha is not the Saṅgha. Just get away from Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and I will give you wealth because you are so poor.”

When Suppabuddha heard this, he asked, “Who are you?” and Sakka answered, “I am Sakka, king of the gods.” Unimpressed, Suppabuddha said, “You are a foolish man; you are wicked! You don’t deserve to talk to me! Although you say I am poor, I am rich in the seven noble treasures. And I have seen the Dhamma, so you cannot persuade me to abandon the Buddha.” And then he continued on his way.

Meanwhile, Sakka reached the Buddha, and told him how he had tested Suppabuddha by trying to turn him away from the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, but was unsuccessful. Then the Buddha said, “Even a hundred or a thousand Sakkas like you cannot dissuade my disciple from me or from the *Sāsana*, because he has now seen the Dhamma, he has now realized the Dhamma, and he has very strong faith in the Triple Gem and in the practice, so nobody can dissuade him.”

Then a tragic thing happened. On his way to the Buddha, Suppabuddha was attacked by a cow and died. After his death, he was reborn in the world of *devas*. What do you think—was it really a tragic event or not? I think it was lucky for Suppabuddha, because if he had not died, his disease and sufferings in the human world would have continued. But in dying he was reborn as a *deva* and, free of his disease, he could enjoy the happiness of the *devas* in their realm. Sometimes what seems to be tragic may be a blessing, in the ultimate analysis.

Just why was Suppabuddha reborn as a *deva*? *Sotāpatti-magga* cannot give result as rebirth, because it takes *Nibbāna* as object and leads to the cessation of rebirth. He was reborn as a *deva* in the celestial world because, being very poor during his life and shunned because of his disease, he was unable to do any meritorious deeds. The only good *kamma* he could have done was the practice of *vipassanā*. While listening to the Buddha’s talk, he was experiencing the different stages of *vipassanā*. So we can say that the wholesome *kamma* involved in that practice of *vipassanā* must have been responsible for his rebirth as a celestial being.

Mahāsī Sayadaw has said, “*Vipassanā* practice can lead to rebirth in the celestial realm. Even if you have done no other meritorious deeds, if you practice *vipassanā* and do

not get enlightenment, it still can lead you to rebirth in the celestial realm.”

In one of his discourses the Buddha said,

“A universal monarch may be powerful, he may enjoy the pleasures of human beings as well as the pleasures of celestial beings. But since he does not possess four things, he is not free from hell, from the animal realm, from the domain of ghosts, or from the plane of misery.

However, a noble disciple maintains himself with lumps of alms food and wears rag robes. Yet he does possess the four things, and is free from hell, the animal realm, the realm of ghosts and the plane of misery. What are the four things? They are: unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, and pure *sīla*.”

And at the end, the Buddha said that the obtaining of sovereignty over the four continents is not worth a sixteenth sixteenth part of the obtaining of the four things. This means that being a universal monarch is not worth a sixteenth sixteenth part of being a Sotāpanna. You may be a universal monarch, you may be the Secretary General of the United Nations, but you are not free from rebirth in the lower worlds. But if you are a Sotāpanna, even though you are not rich, you are free from rebirth in hell. That is why being king of the entire universe is not worth the sixteenth sixteenth part of being a Sotāpanna. This is the essence of the Buddha’s discourse.

Another blessing is that *sotāpatti-magga* abandons the eightfold wrong path. You are familiar with the eightfold right path, but it has an opposite—the eightfold wrong path. That path consists of eight wrong factors, beginning with wrong understanding, wrong thought, and so on. But Right Understanding, which belongs to the right eightfold path,

abandons wrong understanding or wrong view, Right Thought abandons wrong thought, and so on.

Also mentioned here is *micchāsati*, wrong *sati*. Strictly according to *Abhidhamma* there is no wrong *sati*, because it is always wholesome. But here we find the word *micchāsati*, wrong *sati*. The commentary says that there really is no such thing as wrong *sati*, but that here the remembrance of past *akusala* is called wrong *sati*. So if you remember killing or stealing in the past, that is called wrong *sati*. But if you remember to kill or steal, that is called wrong mindfulness. So sometimes words are used in different senses.

Right *sati* is to be understood according to *Abhidhamma*, which says that *sati* is always wholesome, *sati* is always good, there can be no unwholesome *sati*, and there is no such thing as wrong *sati*. The idea of wrong *sati* is to be understood according to Suttanta.

*Sammāsati*, right mindfulness, can abandon wrong mindfulness until Right Concentration can abandon wrong concentration. You have examples of wrong concentration when you look at people who are catching fish. They take the fishing rod and their *samādhi* is there. The moment they feel pressure on the line, they pull the rod up. That kind of *samādhi* is called *micchāsamādhi*, wrong concentration. The right kind of *samādhi* can eradicate wrong *samādhi*. *Sotāpatti-magga*, which is actually the eight right factors, can eradicate the eight wrong factors of the wrong path. This is another great blessing of *sotāpatti-magga*.

The next blessing is that *sotāpatti-magga* destroys all enmity and danger. Enmity is hatred that leads to hostile actions, killing living beings, stealing, and so forth. Because enmity and danger are our enemies, they can lead us to the four woeful states. However, *sotāpatti-magga* destroys these

tendencies, so the person who has become a Sotāpanna will never kill any kind of living being. *Sotāpatti-magga* also destroys all dangers that might lead to falling into the four woeful states.

Another blessing of *sotāpatti-magga* leads to the state of the Fully Enlightened One's "breast-born" son and daughter. (Actually there is no daughter in the books—I put it in because I am afraid.) Only on becoming a Sotāpanna can one claim to be a true son or daughter of the Buddha. Before that, one is still capable of deserting the Buddha and going to another teacher. This is because faith in the Triple Gem and the practice is not yet strong. But those who have attained at least *sotāpatti-magga* will never deviate from being disciples of the Buddha, should be called his true or breast-born sons and daughters.

Nowadays we often say that we are sons and daughters of the Buddha, but that is not really true unless we have reached at least the first stage. To show our confidence and devotion to the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha, I think it is acceptable to say that we are the sons and daughters of the Buddha. But only a person who has become enlightened, who has reached at least the stage of Sotāpanna, can really be called a true son or daughter of the Buddha.

There are many other blessings provided by *sotāpatti-magga*. Having seen the truth and realized the Dhamma for themselves, Sotāpannas have their own understanding, and do not have to turn to other people or other teachers. But *puthujjanas* have no right understanding of their own, and so must look to other people for it. Sotāpannas also receive other blessings. Among them are rebirth in a well-to-do family and being reborn in celestial realms, therefore having less suffering in the world.

Sotāpannas will suffer seven more lives in this *samsāra* if they remain as Sotāpannas and do not reach the higher stages within that time span. If they do reach higher stages, they are no longer be Sotāpannas, they will be Sakadāgāmis. Let us say a person remains a Sotāpanna and does not reach a higher stage. He still will enjoy the many benefits of *sotāpatti-magga*, suffer less in the world, and receive many more blessings to come.

There are three kinds of Sotāpannas. I think you have heard about them—those who have seven lives at the most before attaining *Nibbāna*, those who have only one more life, and those who have two to six more lives. I will explain them tomorrow.

\* \* \* \* \*

Seek wisdom and treasure it above all things

Seek  
wisdom  
and  
treasure  
it  
above  
all  
things

106



## VII. Path to Nibbāna

We have not yet finished with Sotāpannas. You know that a Sotāpanna is a person who has reached enlightenment for the first time; that he eradicates wrong view, doubt, and adherence to rites and rituals; and that he has, at most, only seven more rebirths in this round of *samsāra*.

There are three types of Sotāpanna mentioned in the discourses and in *Abhidhamma*. The first type is the “seven times maximum Sotāpanna.” The second type is “family-to-family Sotāpanna,” and the third is called “one seed Sotāpanna” (literal translations.)

The first type of Sotāpanna is called “seven times maximum” because he will be reborn seven times at most, and will gain final deliverance. After being a Sotāpanna in this life, he then will be reborn seven more times, either in the human world or in the world of celestial beings. He will not reach any higher stages of enlightenment until his last rebirth, the seventh. In this last birth he either will reach the other three stages of enlightenment one by one, or he will become an Arahant and attain final liberation.

Sotāpannas are reborn in good families only. As the name implies, the second type called “family-to-family Sotāpanna,” goes from one family to another. Here “family” means the family of celestial beings as well as the human family. According to the text, this Sotāpanna will be reborn two or three times and then will attain final liberation.

The commentaries, however, say that two or three

rebirths is just a manner of speaking. Actually we must understand not two or three rebirths, but up to six. Because the first type of Sotāpanna has seven rebirths and the third type has only one, this second type of Sotāpanna must have the remaining two to six rebirths. Rebirth will be in the human world or in the world of *devas* two, three, four, five or six times. And in the sixth rebirth he will surely reach the higher stages of enlightenment and make an end of suffering there.

The third type is called “one-seed Sotāpanna,” meaning only one seed of rebirth. According to the text, such a Sotāpanna who has only one more rebirth, will be reborn in the human world, or in the human world and the world of celestial beings. But according to the commentaries, he will be reborn only once, and in that life he will reach the three higher stages of enlightenment and make an end of suffering. That means he will become an Arahant and attain final liberation.

So now we have three types of Sotāpannas: those who have seven more rebirths, those who have two to six more rebirths, and those who have only one more rebirth. When we say a Sotāpanna will be reborn only seven times more, that means seven times maximum. But not every Sotāpanna will be reborn seven times. Some will be reborn according to the divisions of two times, three times, and so on.

Why are there three types of Sotāpanna? The commentaries explain that according to the strength of their *vipassanā* practice, there are three types of Sotāpanna. The *vipassanā* of some Sotāpannas is weak, so they are the ones who will have seven more rebirths. Those whose *vipassanā* is medium will have two to six more rebirths, and those whose *vipassanā* is strong will have only one more rebirth. So depending on the strength of their practice of *vipassanā*,

there are three types of Sotāpannas.

But there are other Sotāpannas who do not fit into these three types. The commentaries say that the banker Anāthapiṇḍika, the female devotee Visākhā, and the king of gods, Sakka, belong in this category. It is said that such Sotāpannas take delight in the round of suffering. They do not want to get out of *samsāra* quickly; they want to remain in *samsāra* as long as possible. So they will attain *Nibbāna* very much later than after seven rebirths.

These Sotāpannas first must undergo rebirths in each of the six celestial realms and in each of the five Pure Abodes, where they will attain final liberation in the highest of the Pure Abodes. But it will take some time. The Pure Abodes are realms where the life span is extremely long—millions of world cycles. So if we could achieve arahantship in this life, we would be in *Nibbāna* way ahead of those Sotāpannas, as they will still be in *samsāra* for a long, long time.

When a person becomes a Sotāpanna, that means *sotāpatti-magga* consciousness and *sotāpatti-phala* consciousness arise in the mind. After the arising of *sotāpatti-magga* and *sotāpatti-phala*, he becomes a Sotāpanna. Magga consciousness arises only once, for an extremely short time, maybe a billionth of a second. Then *sotāpatti-magga* is immediately followed by two or three moments of Phala, fruition consciousness. When we are talking about billions of thought moments in a second, two or three moments are nothing. So the enlightenment moment lasts like a flash of lightning. After that, the mind leads into ordinary consciousness.

But those who have reached Path and Fruition can get into the fruition consciousness again. When mind takes *Nibbāna* as object, it is very peaceful. Those who have

attained enlightenment always want to get that peacefulness of mind by taking *Nibbāna* as object. It is like a vacation for them when they can get into the attainment of fruition consciousness after attainment of enlightenment.

Those who have attained the first stage, or other stages as well, often enter into this attainment of fruition. In order to do so, a Sotāpanna must practice *vipassanā*. This time his aim is not to reach a higher stage of enlightenment, but to reach the peaceful stage that he has experienced before. With that aim in mind, he practices *vipassanā* meditation again, and goes through the different stages of *vipassanā*, as he had done when attaining *sotāpatti-magga*. And when his *vipassanā* is mature, fruition consciousness arises instead of path consciousness.

This is what is called *phala-samāpatti* or the attainment of fruition. During the attainment of fruition, only the fruition consciousness arises. One fruition consciousness is followed by another, billions and billions of times, as long as the meditator wants it to last—maybe one hour, two hours, or the whole day.

After becoming a Sotāpanna what must one do? Stop meditating, or continue practicing meditation? In both the *Sīlavanta Sutta* and the *Sutavanta Sutta*, the Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika asked that question: “Friend Sāriputta, what are the things that a *bhikkhu* who is a stream-enterer should carefully attend to? What are the things that a Sotāpanna should reflect upon?”

The Venerable Sāriputta replied: “Friend Koṭṭhika, a *bhikkhu* who is a stream-enterer should carefully attend to the five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, as suffering . . . as non-self. When, friend, a *bhikkhu* who is a stream-enterer carefully attends thus to these five aggregates

subject to clinging, it is possible that he may realize the fruit of once-returning.”

According to the Venerable Sāriputta, a Sotāpanna should be mindful of the same aggregates of clinging that were the objects of his meditation before he reached his present stage. So a *puthujjana* practices *vipassanā* on the five aggregates of clinging and reaches the stage of Sotāpanna, and as a Sotāpanna, he practices on the same five aggregates of clinging, which may lead him to the second stage of enlightenment.

If a person who has reached the first stage wants to reach the second stage, what must he do? He must practice *vipassanā* meditation again. So *vipassanā* meditation is not a practice to be done once in a while and then forgotten. After reaching the first stage, a disciple still practices *vipassanā* meditation. And as a result of *vipassanā* meditation, he can reach the second stage, which is known as “once-returning.”

A once-returner is called a Sakadāgāmī in Pāḷi. Sakadāgāmī is made up of *saka* “once” and *āgāmī* “coming.” “Once coming” here means once coming back. The disciple who reaches the second stage of enlightenment must come back to this human world once. But first he will be reborn among the celestial beings. After he dies from that celestial life, he will be reborn in the human world.

Because he comes back to this world only one time, he is called a once-returner. So a Sakadāgāmī actually has two more rebirths, not one more—one as a celestial being, and the next as a human being. After coming back to this human world once, in this life he will reach the other higher stages of enlightenment, and will make an end to suffering.

What mental defilements does a Sakadāgāmī abandon? Unlike a Sotāpanna who abandons or destroys three fetters,

a Sakadāgāmī does not eradicate any particular mental defilements. His achievement lies in making the remaining mental defilements weaker or thinner, particularly sensual desire and ill will.

A Sakadāgāmī still has sensual desire and ill will, but these two and the remaining mental defilements arise in a Sakadāgāmī's mind very infrequently— not as frequently as they do in the minds of *puthujjanas* and, perhaps, *Sotāpannas*. When they do arise, they are scattered and weak, thin, like a thin layer of cloud or the wing of a fly. They are so thin and occur so seldom that, although we can say that Sakadāgāmīs have mental defilements, their minds are very pure.

There was a man, an ex-monk, in my home town, Mandalay. He thought he was a Sakadāgāmī, and notified his friends, who were also very learned ex-monks. One of them said to him, “No, you cannot be a Sakadāgāmī, because you still lead a household life, you still have family.”

Then the deluded ex-monk said, “A Sakadāgāmī still has sensual desire and ill will, so it is allowable.” So his friends pointed out to him some passages in the commentaries. According to some of the commentaries, if this much gross desire will arise in the mind of a Sakadāgāmī, he should not lead a household life or married life.

In the commentaries there are two divergent opinions given by the teachers. The opinion of the minority was that when a Sakadāgāmī has a family and is still leading a household life, he must also have sensual desires. But the opinion of the majority was “No, the mental defilements that arise in the mind of a Sakadāgāmī are so thin that there cannot be sensual desire in the mind of a Sakadāgāmī.”

And his friends speculated, “What about having a family

and having sons and daughters?” The commentaries give different causes of conception such as, conception can take place just by touching; or just by hearing the sound, conception can take place, and so on. The friends pointed that out to him, and said that a Sakadāgāmī cannot have such gross sensual desire in his mind.

Mahāsī Sayadaw did not give any decision about this. He just said, “Since it could be difficult for scientists nowadays to accept that conception can take place just by touching or hearing, the opinions of some teachers should also be considered, not to refute it altogether.” So he did not offer any definite opinion here. But we should consider that the opinion of some teachers cannot be refuted totally, since it may be difficult for you to believe that conception can take place just by touching or hearing.

Do enlightened persons know what mental defilements they have eradicated and what mental defilements remain to be eradicated? Do they know or do they not? After the attainment of Magga, the newly successful meditator is met by certain thought processes in which he reflects upon his attainment. These processes almost always follow the attainment itself. They cause reflection on these five things: path, fruition, *Nibbāna*, the mental defilements that have been eradicated, and mental defilements that are yet to be eradicated.

There is no fixed rule that all five kinds of reflection must take place with everybody. It is said in the books that some people will definitely reflect on the first three—path, fruition and *Nibbāna*. But they may or may not reflect on the remaining two—the defilements that have been eradicated and the defilements that remain. If they fail to reflect on these two, they won’t even know which mental defilements they have eradicated, and which are remaining.

During the time of the Buddha, his cousin Mahānāma was a Sakadāgāmī. Though he thought that he had eradicated all his mental defilements, he found that some defilements still arose in his mind. When they arose, he was aware of them and consulted the Buddha as to why they were still appearing. The Buddha told him that it was because he had not reflected on the eradicated mental defilements and those that had remained.

Even an enlightened person may not know which mental defilements he has eradicated and which defilements remain with him. Only when he makes two kinds of reflection will he find out. The commentaries say that if a person does not know beforehand that some mental defilements are eradicated and some are not, he will be unable to tell which mental defilements are eradicated and which remain. Here, knowing beforehand means a person needs to have some knowledge of the books to understand the necessity for the two kinds of reflection.

What should a disciple do? Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika's question was, "What are the things that a once-returner should carefully attend to?" And the answer is the same:

"Friend Koṭṭhika, a *bhikkhu* who is a once-returner should carefully attend to these five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, as suffering . . . as non-self. When, friend, the *bhikkhu* who is a once-returner carefully attends thus to these five aggregates of clinging, it is possible that he may realize the fruit of non-returning."

So after becoming a Sakadāgāmī, if he practices *vīpassanā* meditation there is a possibility that he will reach the next higher stage of enlightenment. That is the stage of non-returning, the third stage of enlightenment.

The once-returner returns to this human world only once.



But the non-returner does not return to this human world or to the celestial world. He will not be reborn as a human being or a celestial being. The non-returner will have one rebirth as a Brahma in the Pure Abode, and may have five rebirths, one in each of the five realms of Pure Abode. In the highest realms of Pure Abode he will become an Arahant and will attain final liberation.

A non-returner is called Anāgāmī in Pāḷi. The word is made up of *na*, meaning “not” and *āgāmī*, meaning “coming.” Put together, they mean “not coming back.” The Anāgāmī eradicates some more mental defilements, including complete eradication of sensual desire and ill will. After becoming an Anāgāmī, a disciple will not be attached to any sense objects. He will not be able to go on leading a married life, and will be incapable of getting angry.

Along with ill will, he eradicates the fear that is said to be a kind of *dosa*, anger. So he will not be afraid of anything at all, and will not get angry even when there is provocation. He will not attach to anything in the human world and celestial worlds. These are some traits of one who is able to get rid of sensual desire and ill will.

There are two stories to illustrate Anāgāmīs abandoning or eradicating sensual desire. There was a man called Ugga who became an Anāgāmī. It is said that he had four wives. After becoming an Anāgāmī he called his wives together and told them, “Sisters, now I am keeping the five precepts, with abstinence from sex as the fifth.”

That means he took the five precepts, but instead of the usual third place for abstinence, he moved it to the fifth place. That is called “Noble conduct as the fifth.” Since he had become an Anāgāmī he naturally took the precepts, and so he said, “I am now keeping five precepts with abstinence

from sex as the fifth. So now you may go on living here, or you may take whatever you want and go back to your parents' house. Or just tell me if you want to get another man, and I will give you to him." Then the eldest wife said, "All right, please give me to a certain man."

So he took his wife with his left hand and took the water-bowl in the right hand, and gave his wife to that man. And he said, "It is wonderful that I did not feel any regret, any envy or any ill will when I gave my wife away." Since becoming an Anāgāmī, he had no interest in sensual things. He had no interest even in inanimate objects of sense. So he was able to give up his wives very easily, and he said, "This is one wonderful thing in me."

The second story is a little long, so I will have to make it short. During the time of the Buddha, in the city of Rājagaha there was a rich man called Visākha. Please note that his name is almost the same as the name of a female devotee, Visākhā. If the person is a woman, the name is pronounced Vi-sā-khā with the long 'ā'. If the person is a man, the name is pronounced Vi-sā-kha with a short 'a'.

After the Buddha had delivered the first sermon at Isipatana and spent the *vassa* there, he continued his journey and ultimately reached Rājagaha, where he spent the second *vassa*. After reaching the city, he gave talks to many people, including King Bimbisāra. The king and his many followers, including Visākha, became Sotāpannas at the first meeting with the Buddha.

Later Visākha listened to a Dhamma talk by the Buddha, and became a Sakadāgāmī. And another time when he attended a discourse he became an Anāgāmī. When he returned home after becoming an Anāgāmī, he was changed. On other days he would go home smiling and calling to his

wife, but on this day he went back home like a monk.

As he approached his house this time, his wife was looking out the window. Seeing his strange behavior, she wondered what had happened to him: “Does he want somebody outside, or has somebody had divisive talk with him?” When he entered the house, his wife offered her hand to him, just as she did every day, but Visākha did not take her hand. He just kept his hands to himself, so the wife was disappointed. And then she thought, “All right, I will know what is wrong when he eats.”

But at meal time he did not eat at the same table with her. He took his food, went to another place, and ate like a monk. Seeing this, the wife said to herself, “All right, I will know in the evening.” But at night he did not enter the bedchamber. He went to another room and slept on a small couch. And so it went on for two or three days. When his wife could not hold back any longer, she asked him what had happened to change him. Visākha then decided that, although it is not customary to declare one’s own attainment, he had to tell her. If he did not tell the truth, she would die of heartbreak.

And so he said, “I have attained this Dhamma, and can no longer live a married life. You have four hundred millions and I have four hundred millions. Now all of them are yours; you can do whatever you like with them. If you want to go on living in this house, you can live in this house, but you will be like my mother or sister.” And he added, “If you want to marry some other person, you are free to do so.”

Then she thought, “An ordinary man cannot say this, so the Dhamma he has attained must be very great.” And she asked, “Is the Dhamma obtainable by men only?”

When he replied, “No, it can be obtained by anybody,

man or woman,” she said, “In that case I want to be ordained.”

So Visākha was very happy, and arranged for her ordination. He informed King Kosala, got a palanquin, gathered some other people, and with great ceremony took his wife to the nunnery where *bhikkhunīs* lived. There he asked the chief *bhikkhunī* to ordain his wife. But the *bhikkhunī* thought he was just a man who was angry with his wife and was sending her to the nunnery. So she said, “Dear man, you should tolerate an offense or two. A little offense should be tolerated—don’t do like this.” He replied, “No, she wants to become a *bhikkhunī* by herself, through faith.” And so his wife was ordained and given the name Dhammadinnā.

After her ordination many people came to the nunnery and she did not get much time to practice. So, taking her teacher with her, she went to another place and practiced meditation there. Because she was a gifted person and had accumulated *pāramī* in her past life, it took her only two or three days to become an Arahant.

So she returned to the city, and when her husband heard that she had come back, he thought, “Oh, she ordained, and after a few days she now has come back. Maybe she wants to go back to lay life.” To test her, he went to her and asked questions about the Dhamma. Their conversation is recorded in a discourse found in the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

His questions were very deep, but she answered them. And he was so pleased that he went to the Buddha and reported her answers. The Buddha said, “Even if you were to ask me these questions, I would give the same answers that Dhammadinnā gave to you.” So she was very honored by the Buddha’s words.

When Visākha became an Anāgāmī he knew that he could not carry on living as a husband or in household life, so he was able to easily give up his wife, his wealth, and everything he owned. They are objects of the senses, and an Anāgāmī is not interested in any of those objects. So if you become an Anāgāmī, you will not care for anything in the world, including your spouse.

Mahāsī Sayadaw added here that since an Anāgāmī has eradicated desire for sense objects, if you think you are an Anāgāmī, you should not be smoking or be fond of chewing betel. He must have seen somebody who claimed to be an Anāgāmī, but still clung to those habits, so he added this to his talk. Tomorrow you will hear a little more about Anāgāmīs and about Arahants, and probably about life after death.

\* \* \* \* \*



## VIII. The Higher Path

Yesterday we were talking about the Anāgāmī or non-returner. The stage of Anāgāmī is the third stage of enlightenment. When a person reaches this stage, he eradicates desire for sense objects and ill will. He no longer has desire for things in the world, and no longer experiences hate, anger, or fear. So the Anāgāmī is almost like an Arahant.

But there still remain five fetters to be eradicated. The Anāgāmī has desire for Rūpāvacara, the Form realm, and for Arūpāvacara, the Formless realm. That means he has attachment to the existence of Brahmas who have both mind and body, and also to the realm of Brahmas who have no physical body, but mind only. He still has desire for these two realms, and wants to be reborn there.

It is said that the Anāgāmī still has pride, *māna*. It may be very small and very thin pride, but still he has it. Pride is mostly based on wrong view, the "I". But since he eradicated wrong view long ago, his pride is not based on that wrong view. Yet he still has it—perhaps pride in himself, in the sense of "I know, I see."

He also has what is called restlessness. Restlessness here means the mind being unable to rest on the meditation object properly. When a yogi practices meditation, sometimes he cannot see the object clearly. His mind is not distracted by other objects. It is on the meditation object, but he does not see it clearly. His mind is, as it were, a little away from the object and quivering above it.

Though this restlessness or agitation still remains with the non-returners, it must be very weak and thin. Anāgāmīs are described as those who have accomplished the fulfillment of *samādhi*, which means they are very strong in concentration. Although restlessness is the opposite of concentration, the Anāgāmī cannot eradicate it altogether. But his remaining restlessness must be very small, and is restlessness of mind, not the body.

The Anāgāmī still has the fetter of *avijjā*, ignorance. To say that the Anāgāmī has ignorance sounds like an insult. But this ignorance is not the ignorance that the *puthujjana*, Sotāpanna, and Sakadāgāmi possess. Perhaps his ignorance is due to not knowing the true nature of the Form sphere realm and the Formless sphere realm, the realms in which he longs to be reborn. So a little ignorance is left in him. Actually, the Anāgāmīs have very few mental defilements left, so most of them are reborn in the Pure Abodes of the Brahma realms.

There are twenty Brahma realms. One of them is the realm of Brahmas who have physical body only, but no mind, and four of them are the realms of Brahmas who have mind only, and no physical body. The remaining fifteen realms belong to the Brahmas, who have both physical body and mind. Of these fifteen realms, the highest five are called Pure Abodes or Abodes of Pure Persons. Having reached the third stage of enlightenment, Anāgāmīs have eradicated many mental defilements and have no desire for sensual things. They are said to be pure beings, and so they are reborn there. Only those who get *jhānas* can be reborn in the world of Brahmas.

But what if a person becomes an Anāgāmī without *jhāna*? There can be those who reach the stage of Anāgāmī without the attainment of *jhānas*. It is said that since Anāgāmīs are



those who are accomplished in fulfillment of *samādhi* or concentration, they will definitely get *jhānas* before they die or when the time of death is near. So they are mostly reborn in these five Pure Abodes. After a person becomes an Anāgāmī, he is able to get into the *phala-samāpatti* of an Anāgāmī when he wishes, simply because he has attained this stage.

Now the Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika asked, “Friend Sāriputta, what are the things that a *bhikkhu* who is a non-returner should carefully attend to?”

The answer is the same as for the stream-enterer and once-returner. The Venerable Sāriputta said, “Friend Koṭṭhika, a *bhikkhu* who is a non-returner should carefully attend to these five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, as suffering . . . as non-self. When, friend, a *bhikkhu* who is a non-returner attends thus to these five aggregates subject to clinging, it is possible that he may realize the fruit of arahantship.”

So there is the possibility that if an Anāgāmī practices meditation on the five aggregates of clinging, he will reach the fruit of arahantship and become an Arahant. Even an Anāgāmī must practice meditation to reach the higher stage of arahantship. When he practices *vipassanā* meditation to get into the *phala-samāpatti*, it is not difficult for him to enter. But when he tries to reach the higher stage of arahantship through the practice of *vipassanā*, he must go through all of the different stages of *vipassanā*.

When he reaches the next higher stage of arahantship, he is able to eradicate all of his remaining mental defilements, or the remaining five fetters. So on becoming an Arahant, he has no mental defilements at all. Some of them have been eradicated during the lower stages, and the remaining

five are eradicated at the attainment of arahantship. Thus an Arahant is a person whose mind is totally pure of all mental defilements. That is why he is incapable of becoming attached to anything; incapable of getting angry, even when there is provocation; incapable of envy or jealousy, and so forth.

An Arahant is described in the discourses and in the *Abhidhamma* as one who has destroyed all of the “taints,” meaning mental defilements; one who no longer has any defilements in his mind. He is also described as one who, having practiced meditation and reached arahantship, has lived the holy life. In order to live the holy life, one has to be perfect in *sīla*, must practice meditation, and must have reached the state of freedom from the mental defilements.

So an Arahant is described as one who has lived the holy life, and who has done what has to be done. *Puthujjanas* and people who have attained the lower stages of enlightenment also are called those who are doing what has to be done. They are still doing something. They are still trying to attain enlightenment, and are doing what needs to be done to reach that stage.

But an Arahant already has reached the highest stage, and has done what is to be done for attainment of total purification of mind, the highest stage of enlightenment. He has nothing to do with reaching enlightenment, as he has already reached its highest stage. He is described as one who has done what has to be done. And he is also described as one who has laid down the burden.

The aggregates are described as burdens because when you cling to them they are a heavy load. You have to take care of them, you have to nurture them, you have to attend to them every day. So you carry a big burden when you are attached to the five aggregates. The mental defilements are

also called burdens, because they cause the burden of aggregates.

*Kamma*, too, is called a burden. As long as you have *kamma* you will be reborn again and again. That means you will be suffering the burdensome five aggregates again and again. People who have not eradicated the mental defilements are carrying these heavy loads at every moment. Among the mental defilements there are craving and ignorance, which are the roots of all existence. Since an Arahant has destroyed all mental defilements, he has thrown away the great burden of aggregates, mental defilements, and *kamma*.

An Arahant is described as one who has reached his own goal—to become an Arahant—which is the goal for most monks and Buddhist seekers. According to the teachings of Theravāda, not everybody can become a Buddha. But arahantship is practical, and not so difficult as the path to Buddhahood. So a person who has reached arahantship can be called one who has reached his own goal.

An Arahant is also described as one whose fetters of existence are exhausted, meaning he has destroyed them. There are ten mental fetters such as sensual desire, ill will, conceit, and so on. They are called fetters because they bind beings to the round of rebirths, and connect one existence to another. So as long as one harbors these mental states, one will endure a continuous chain of rebirths linked together by the fetters. But the Arahant, having destroyed all ten fetters, is free—he has none to bind him to the round of rebirth.

The Arahant is also described as one who is completely liberated through understanding correctly. This means he has correctly understood the aggregates, bases, elements, and the Four Noble Truths. And he has understood that all

conditions and phenomena are impermanent, suffering and non-self. An Arahant understands all of these correctly. When this correct understanding is complete and he becomes an Arahant, he is fully liberated from all mental defilements and will never again be reborn in any round of rebirth.

This description of Arahants is found in many discourses. From these descriptions you know that an Arahant is one who has reached the highest stage of enlightenment by eradicating all mental defilements, and there is no more rebirth for him. He is one who has done what has to be done, and has nothing more to be done in order to gain enlightenment. So what does an Arahant do after he becomes an Arahant? Retire?

Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika wanted an answer to that, so he put the question to the Venerable Sāriputta, whose answer was “A *bhikkhu* who is an Arahant should carefully attend to these five aggregates subject to clinging as impermanent, suffering . . . non-self.” This one answer appears again and again, as you all must have noticed by now. The meditating *puṭhujjana* observes the five aggregates of clinging as impermanent, and so on. And the Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmī, and Anāgāmī must do the very same thing in order to attain their next higher stages.

Venerable Sāriputta continued: “For the Arahant there is nothing further that has to be done, and no repetition of what he has already done. However, when these things are developed and cultivated, they lead to pleasant dwelling in this very life, and to mindfulness and clear comprehension.”

So the benefits an Arahant gets from observing the five aggregates as impermanent and so forth, include mindfulness and clear comprehension as well as a pleasant life. This means that even after becoming an Arahant, he benefits by

practicing *vipassanā* meditation. So do not think that if you become an Arahant, you can just retire from the practice of *vipassanā* meditation. It is a lifelong work. Arahants do go on practicing meditation after they have attained arahantship.

For what purpose? For two purposes: one is pleasant dwelling in this very life and the second is to develop mindfulness and clear comprehension. The first purpose they have in mind when they practice *vipassanā* meditation is to live happily and comfortably in this very life. Does this sound too worldly?

You must remember that Arahants always view this life as a burning house—burning with birth, aging, death, diseases, and more. They never are comfortable living in this world. As far as possible, they want to get away from it. But they are still living, and cannot yet escape this life. So in order to experience some joy and peacefulness, they take *Nibbāna* as the object of *vipassanā* meditation. *Nibbāna* is very peaceful, so the mind that takes *Nibbāna* as object is also very peaceful.

Think of something that is peaceful, and you yourself become peaceful. In the same way, when the minds of Arahants take *Nibbāna* as object, they experience the unsurpassable peacefulness they value so greatly. So whenever they can, they enter the state of happiness, *phala-samāpatti*, in which mind takes *Nibbāna* as object as long as one wants. They can remain in that stage for one day up to about seven days, the maximum period that human beings can live comfortably without food.

So Arahants can be in *phala-samāpatti* for seven days and enjoy the bliss of *Nibbāna*. It is not the same kind of enjoyment found in sensual pleasures. But it is the best enjoyment, the enjoyment of peacefulness. For this purpose

they practice *vipassanā* meditation, because to enter into *phala-samāpatti* it is necessary to practice *vipassanā* meditation. Without *vipassanā* meditation, one will not be able to enter the attainment of fruition, *phala-samāpatti*.

The other purpose of meditation by Arahants is to maintain their mindfulness and clear comprehension. We may think that they are always mindful and don't need to do anything more to maintain their mindfulness and clear comprehension. But after becoming Arahants, they still meditate or make efforts to maintain mindfulness and clear comprehension.

There are two kinds of Arahants—those constantly living with mindfulness, and those that are not. Though we like to think that they all are always practicing mindfulness, some may not practice as much as they previously did. Some may have to attend to other things. They may be appointed to oversee repair work at the monastery, take care of the robes of the Saṅgha, or perform other tasks. They cannot refuse to do the duties of the Saṅgha. So when they are occupied with their duties, there will be times when they cannot give much attention to practicing meditation.

What is the difference between these two groups? For Arahants the purpose of maintaining mindfulness and clear comprehension is to enter *phala-samāpatti* without difficulty. Those who maintain mindfulness and clear comprehension can get into *phala-samāpatti* very easily, because they always maintain mindfulness and clear comprehension.

But those Arahants who cannot or do not practice much mindfulness are unable to enter easily. So although according to Venerable Sāriputta, observation of the five aggregates of clinging must be carried on by everybody and at all times, there are two kinds of Arahants—those who live constantly

with mindfulness, and those who do not.

An Arahant is described as one who has destroyed the fetters of existence. That means he will have no future rebirth. People often ask what happens to an Arahant after his passing away or just after his death. But when asked if a being exists after death, the Buddha did not answer.

There are some questions that he never answered. Since the Buddha did not answer, how can we? So there is no answer to the question of what happens to an Arahant after his death. And it is advised that we are not to say that an Arahant disappears altogether after his death.

That is because even before his death, in the ultimate analysis there is no person, there are only the five aggregates. Since in reality there are no Arahants, the question of what happens to an Arahant after his death is impractical and irrelevant. As there is no being, no Arahant, how can we ask what happens to an Arahant after his death?

But we can say there is no more rebirth after the death of an Arahant. He is described as one who has destroyed the fetters of existence. And when his arahantship is declared, they always say, "Birth is exhausted." That means this is the last birth, there is no more. So the Buddhas and the Arahants have no more rebirth in the future.

Rebirth can take place only when there are the causes of rebirth, only when there are mental states that create rebirth. In general, those are the mental defilements and, in particular, attachment, craving and ignorance. As long as we have ignorance we will be attached to things, we will be attached to our lives. And when there is attachment, we engage in wholesome or unwholesome actions. Since we engage in wholesome and unwholesome actions, we cannot avoid getting the good or bad results of those actions.

For those who still have ignorance and craving, there is always rebirth. But for those who do not have ignorance and craving, who have no attachment to anything at all, there is no rebirth. So when Buddhas and Arahants die, they die, and there is no more rebirth for them.

In the Ratana Sutta, or “Jewel” Sutta, the death of an Arahant is compared to a lamp going out. There the Buddha says, “Just as this lamp, those Arahants go out.” So we can only say that there is no rebirth for Arahants and Anāgāmīs after their death. We cannot answer what happens to them after death. We cannot say that they disappear completely. We can just say that there is no more rebirth for them.

So long as beings cannot eradicate mental defilements, cannot eradicate ignorance and craving, there will always be rebirth. We have no doubts about this belief. Those of us in the East who are born to Buddhism are born to Buddhist parents, and so we have no difficulty in accepting rebirth. We also think that there is sufficient evidence to show there is rebirth.

My mother died in 1982. When she was sick, I was not able to go back to Burma. I had a phone call from my brother, and asked about her condition. He said, “It is not so bad,” but two days later she was dead, and I could not go back. When I returned to Burma in 1993 and met my sisters, one of them said, “Bhante, Mother is reborn as a boy in our family.” We believe this, because certain evidence and incidents have arisen to indicate that he is our mother reborn as a boy. So in her past life she was my mother, and now he is my grandnephew. We have no difficulties when we come across such instances.

But people in the West, most of whom are brought up under Christianity, are different. They find it hard to accept



or believe in the round of rebirths. According to Christianity there is only one rebirth, either in heaven or hell. So for them it is very difficult. However much convincing evidence we may put forward, they always try to find ways to discredit it. By asking so many questions, they can confuse the person explaining rebirth and cause him to contradict himself. And then they say his words are not to be taken as true or authentic.

But when we use logical thinking, we can believe in rebirth. If you really want to have convincing evidence about rebirth, try to get the supernormal knowledge of *abhiññās* by practicing *samatha* meditation. Once you acquire this supernormal knowledge that enables you to remember past lives and to see people dying and being reborn, then you will be able to accept and believe in rebirth. But if you don't want to do that, and if you just say "I don't believe it, I don't believe it," that is not fair!

One sure way to believe it is to get the *abhiññās*. If you want to see very small things, you use a magnifying glass or microscope. If you do not use them, you cannot see the very small things properly. But simply because you cannot see them, you cannot say that they are non-existent. If you want to see small things, get a microscope and see them. And if you want to see rebirth, get the *abhiññās*, and you will see that rebirth is true.

There is a difference in human beings. Even children born of the same parents are different. One is intelligent, the other is dull; one is gentle, the other a bully, and so on. Though they were born of the same parents and brought up under the same conditions, still there are differences. How to account for such difference? There must be something that is the cause. And if we cannot find that cause in this life, we must find it in the past life.

So we take the mind back to the past, and though we cannot see with our eyes, we can guess that things done in the past must cause such differences. For example, one person may have been a scientist in the previous life, and another a lazy drunkard. Each comes to this life conditioned by his own separate and distinct inherent traits of the past, despite being born to the same parents and raised under the same conditions.

There also are child prodigies, born with extraordinary talents that manifest at a very young age. How can you explain children who can speak fluent Greek at the age of three or four, although is not their native tongue and they had no prior contact with it? How did they get this ability? It must have come from the past. Considered in this way, one can accept that there is life in the past, and that something in that past life conditions the unique nature of each child. And this explains the differences in all children including those born to the same parents.

When we consider these points, we can at least guess that there must be something that is the cause of this difference, and this cause must be in the past. So there must be something in the past, and that is the life in the past. If we can accept life in the past in this way, we can accept life in the future.

Mind has great power. It can produce or create material properties or material things. If a person is under stress for a long time, his appearance can change beyond recognition. Although he may be thirty or forty years old, he will look old, wrinkled and will have gray hair. Why is that? It is because his mind was under stress, his mind was not happy, his mind was depressed. Depression caused by the bad state of mind produces bad material properties in the body. That

is why he looks very old in a few years time.

But when a person is happy, with little stress, he looks young. There is a Burmese saying that when your mind is young, you are young. That is the effect of mind on matter. In our bodies there are material properties produced by mind, and other material properties produced by *kamma*. When we think of mind as having great power to produce even material things, we can understand that it can produce material things and also other states of mind, such as rebirth.

We believe in the law of *kamma*. *Kamma* is a mental state that has great power. Take your hand, for example. Your hand is a physical thing, so it is much heavier than your mind. Your mind has no weight and no substance, but you know that the mind is there. That mind which has no substance can cause this hand to move. When we have the mind to move, there is movement. When we don't want to move, there is no movement.

So this heavy material thing, this hand, cannot move by itself. Once mind leaves our body, we become like logs. So mind has the power to cause movement. We walk because we want to walk. The entire heavy physical body moves because we have the mind to push this body to move. Mind has this power.

And when we do something—let us say that we kill beings. When we kill beings it is because we want their lives to be cut short, so we kill them. When we kill them, there is the mental volition in our minds that we have the desire for their lives to be short. That mental state or mental volition has the power to produce the result, and so it produces the result.

What result does it produce? Since its desire is for the life of other beings to be short, when that mental state gives

the result, it also gives the same kind of result to the one doing the action. Why? Because this mental state belongs to the person who does the action, he too gets the results of its action. Since by killing he wants the life to be short, he too is given the result—a short life. That is why the Buddha has said that those who have short lives in this lifetime are those who have done a lot of killing in the past.

So the mind has power to affect and give results in this life. When it cannot give results in this life, it has the potential to give the results in future lives. In order to allow this mental state to be able to give results, we have to accept that there are other lives as well as this one—there is life in the future and life in the past.

Thinking this way, we can accept that there is other life and there is rebirth. We all have mental defilements: ignorance, craving and other mental defilements. Blinded by ignorance, we crave for this existence or that existence. With these two things in the background, we sometimes do wholesome deeds and sometimes unwholesome deeds.

When a person dies, three things together contrive to push that person to be reborn in another life. They are ignorance, craving and *kamma*. It is as though there is a man who is blindfolded by one person, and another turns him towards a steep cliff, and the third man pushes him off. In the same way we are blinded by ignorance. Because we are blinded by ignorance, we do good or bad *kamma*. At the moment of death, ignorance blinds us; then craving turns us to another life; and then *kamma* pushes us down to the next life. And so we are reborn in another life. Rebirth is actually the product of these three culprits: ignorance, craving and *kamma*.

As long as we are engaged in doing *kamma*, we cannot

escape the results of those *kammas*. Some may give results in this life, but many give results in future lives. Considering that the mind has great power to give results, that power cannot be eliminated at death. It has power to produce something even after death—rebirth resulting from *kamma* we have done in previous lives. If we can accept the power of mind to produce things, we can accept that there is rebirth, although it cannot be seen with our eyes.

There are still many other things we can think about in support of the fact that there is rebirth, but our time is limited. To see with your own eyes, you may have the experience of going someplace where you have not been before. But the surroundings look very familiar, and the feeling arises that you have been there in the past. Or sometimes you may meet a person whom, for no apparent reason, you hate or love. These experiences, which are not unusual, are caused by experiences in the past, and can also be considered in support of rebirth.

Those who do not want to accept rebirth will always find something to say against it, especially in the West. People may be afraid to say that they believe in rebirth because they fear being shunned by other people. Even prominent and well-known people who have written something about rebirth have found themselves ostracized.

There was an American professor who went to many countries and to Asia in order to interview people who could remember their past lives. After collecting enough data, he wrote some books on rebirth. One of his books describes twenty cases of rebirth, including the names of many of the people he had systematically interviewed. Although he was a convinced believer of rebirth, he was not brave enough to say that these cases were proof of rebirth. Instead, he referred to them as “suggestive of” rebirth. Many people did not like

him, but now he has more acceptance.

It is difficult for western people to accept or admit that they believe in rebirth. For us in the East, it comes naturally. We easily believe accounts about people who can remember their past life, identify articles used in their past life and, even though they have not returned to the place of that past life, are able to describe buildings and other things that are there.

There is a video called “Reincarnation”, concerning a man who had died in Scotland and was reborn in Australia. In the course of time, his travels took him to Scotland, where he happened to see the village of his previous death. Drawn to it, he entered the village gate as though he had been there for many years. He pointed out houses, greeted people there, and it is said that he described a building, a castle, very accurately. Such things happen in many places to many people. I am not forcing you to believe this, but do not dismiss it lightly. Please collect the facts, think about it yourself, and do what you like.

As long as we have ignorance, craving, *kamma*, and other mental defilements, there will be rebirth for us in the future. Once we are able to eradicate mental defilements altogether, there will be no rebirth in the future. Arahants have eradicated all mental defilements, and thus have achieved the exhaustion of *kamma*. By their attainment of arahantship they have rendered their past *kamma* incapable of giving results.

Arahants, before they became Arahants, had accumulated a lot of good and bad *kamma* in the past. But once they become Arahants, no past *kamma* can give results to them as rebirth. The most these *kamm*s can do is to give results while the Arahants are still alive. That is why

Arahants, and even Buddhas, still experience some painful consequences of their past *kamma*.

But after their death, these past *kammas* are unable to give results anymore, because the potential to give results in future lives has been eradicated by the attainment of arahantship. An Arahant is a person who has eradicated all mental defilements, and so has no more to do regarding the attainment of enlightenment, and no more rebirth in this round of rebirth and death.

Now I have exceeded my limit. To summarize, the Sīlavanta and Sutavanta discourses teach us that observation of the five aggregates of clinging is for everybody—for those who have not yet attained any enlightenment, for those who have attained the stages of enlightenment, and even for those who have reached the highest stage of enlightenment and have no more to do regarding the attainment of enlightenment. .

This practice of *vipassanā* is to be done as long as we live. It is not a practice to be done occasionally, or to be done once in a while and then left off. If you want to improve your spiritual status or spiritual welfare, you should practice *vipassanā* meditation or mindfulness meditation at home as much as you can. Then when you get a chance to practice at a retreat you can get into the practice quickly. *Vipassanā* practice is the one practice that should always be done. Do not think that you can drop it after reaching this or that stage.

\* \* \* \* \*





## IX. Importance of Mindfulness

Once when the Buddha was staying in the city of Sāvattthī, he called Sāriputta and asked, “Sāriputta, do you have faith that the faculty of faith, when developed and cultivated, has the Deathless as its ground, the Deathless as its destination, and the Deathless as its final goal?” And he asked the same question regarding faith in each of the other four faculties.

The Venerable Sāriputta answered, “Bhante, I do not go by faith in the Blessed One about this: that these five faculties, when developed, lead to the attainment of enlightenment, or lead to emancipation.” In other words, he is saying that he does not have to go by faith in the Buddha in order to know that when the five faculties are developed, they lead to emancipation.

And he added that those who have not experienced this themselves, who have not seen it themselves, might have to go by faith in others in order to understand it. But those who have known and experienced it by themselves would be without perplexity or doubt about the fact that the five faculties, when developed, lead to emancipation, enlightenment.

Continuing, he said, “I am one by whom this has been known, seen, understood, realized and contacted with wisdom.” This means that, having experienced this himself, he has known the five faculties, has seen them, and understood them. Therefore he could say, “I am without

perplexity or doubt about this.” This is how the Venerable Sāriputta answered the Buddha’s question “Do you believe that when these five faculties are developed they lead to emancipation?” And then he said, “I don’t have to go by faith in you, the Blessed One. That means I have experienced them myself, and so I have no doubt about it.”

When the Venerable Sāriputta gave this answer, the Buddha was glad, and said, “Good, good, Sāriputta! Those who have not seen, understood, and so on, would have to go by faith in other persons. But those who have seen this themselves have no doubt or perplexity about it.” So the Buddha was glad about the Venerable Sāriputta’s answer.

This episode, which has been recorded as a discourse in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, was put into story form in the *Dhammapada Commentary*. As the story goes, there were thirty forest dwelling monks who had come to see the Buddha, and were present when the Venerable Sāriputta had given his answer to the Buddha’s question. When they heard that answer, they misunderstood the Venerable Sāriputta, and thought that he had no faith or belief in the Buddha.

So they said, “The Venerable Sāriputta is still a *micchādiṭṭhi*. Because he came from a *micchādiṭṭhi* family, he has no faith in the Buddha yet,” and they reported it to the Buddha. Then the Buddha said no, what Sāriputta meant was this—and here the explanation that is given in the *Dhammapada Commentary* is somewhat different from the text. . . .

The Buddha said to them, “What I meant by that question was, do you believe that people can get enlightenment without developing the five faculties? Then the Venerable Sāriputta said, ‘I do not believe it.’ ” This is the explanation given in the *Dhammapada Commentary*, and it is a little off the mark.

I think that when the Buddha asked the question and Sāriputta gave his answer, Sāriputta wanted to emphasize that we are not to go by faith or believe anything just by faith, not even by what the Blessed One taught. We should also rely on our own experience before making any belief our own. Sāriputta had no doubt about the fact that the five faculties, when developed, lead to emancipation, because he himself had experienced this truth.

After the Buddha's words to the forest monks, he uttered a verse to them. I want to give you this verse, but it may be difficult for you to appreciate without understanding Pāli. This verse is like a riddle, and there are puns in it, words having two meanings. One is the apparent meaning and the other is a hidden meaning. The sense and meanings of puns are usually lost when translated into other languages. To appreciate them, knowledge of the original language is needed. But I will give you the meanings in English.

People will understand the apparent meaning when they hear the verse for the first time. So I will begin with the apparent meaning. The Buddha said, "A person who is faithless, a person who is not grateful, a person who breaks into houses, a person who has destroyed his opportunities, a person who eats what has been thrown away by other people—that person is noblest of persons." This is the meaning that would come to anybody who reads the verse at face value.

The hidden meanings are: A faithless person means one who does not have to go by faith; he has no faith in the Buddha. That does not mean that he has no devotion for the Buddha, but he does not have to go by faith on those matters that he has experienced or realized himself. He can be called a faithless person in that sense.

The next on the list, *akataññū* in Pāli, means an ungrateful person. It also can mean one who knows *Nibbāna*. So the hidden meaning is the person who knows *Nibbāna*, who has realized *Nibbāna*. The hidden meaning for one who breaks into houses is one who breaks the round of rebirth. And one who has destroyed his opportunities means one who has destroyed the chances to be reborn, one who is not going to be reborn.

The last is one who eats what other people have thrown away. I have softened this a little—the real meaning is one who eats what has been vomited by other persons. The hidden meaning is one who has vomited the taints or mental defilements, one who has destroyed the mental defilements. Such a person is the noblest person. If you know Pāli, you can appreciate this. At the end of this verse, the thirty monks became enlightened Arahants with the four kinds of analytical knowledge.

What I want to point out in this account is the Venerable Sāriputta's answer, "I don't have to go by faith in the Blessed One." It would be very good for us if we also could say, "I don't have to go by faith in this respect to anybody." In order to be able to say that, we just need to practice. If we practice and see for ourselves that the five aggregates of clinging are impermanent, and so on, we too can say "I don't have to go by faith. I have seen for myself that the five aggregates are impermanent, and so on."

When you practice *vipassanā* meditation, you are trying to attain such a state. Many of you have reached some of those stages of knowledge where you have seen mind and matter clearly. You have seen the conditionality of mind and matter; you have seen them arising and disappearing. You have come to understand that they are impermanent,

and always oppressed by rising and falling, and are insubstantial. And you see that you have no authority over them.

The Buddha's teaching is called *sandittika*, "to be seen by oneself" or "can be seen by oneself." We do not have to take by faith whatever the Buddha taught. His teaching can be, and should be, seen by oneself. We must make effort to see for ourselves that mind and matter are impermanent. We need to see it for ourselves, not by faith, not just by book knowledge, not by borrowed or second-hand knowledge.

To gain direct knowledge of these teachings, you must practice. Through practice, you too will be able to say, "I don't have to go by faith." In this center the teachers can help you to reach that stage. There are many other centers you can go to as well, but this is one where you can reach the stage when you can say, "I don't have to go by faith." If you can say that for at least something, it would be very good. But don't get trapped into being very proud of yourself.

Today is the last day of our retreat, and this is the closing session. I am glad you are able to take the retreat, and I hope you have gained something so you can say, "I don't have to go by faith." Every day yogis reported their experiences to me, and most of them are inspiring. So I am glad that you are getting results from the practice.

Although I usually caution you not to think of results, now you can think of them. While you are engaged in the practice, it is not good to have expectations, but now you can have them. So I hope that you gain moments of peacefulness and gain more insight into the five aggregates of clinging or into mind and matter, and that you are getting closer to the goal.

Mahāsi Sayadaw once said, “Suppose you have to make one hundred thousand notes and you will gain enlightenment. If you have made one thousand notes, that means you are one thousand notes closer to enlightenment.”

I hope you are going closer and closer to your goal. It is important that you keep up the practice of *vipassanā*. I have said many times that this practice is not to be done just once in a while. It is a lifelong practice, so you have to do it every day. Just as you eat daily and sleep every night, you should practice every day.

Many people ask me how they should practice when they go home after the retreat. The intense mindfulness that you practice here is very difficult to practice, especially when you are at home taking care of your daily activities. I always advise people to observe two levels of practice each day. One is intense practice, like the sitting meditation you do here. It should be done for an hour or half an hour.

I want you to make time for it. Do not say, “I am busy, I cannot find time.” If you really want to practice, you will find the time. You can cut your time spent in aimless conversation, watching television, oversleeping, and so on. It is not difficult to get half an hour a day. Even one hour a day is not difficult. During that time you can practice intense mindfulness, as you do here at the retreat.

At other times you can practice mindfulness on a lower level. This means being mindful of what you are doing at the present moment, but not going into the small details of your activities. For example, when you are driving, be mindful of the driving, without going into details such as the moving of the wheels, looking at the scenery, watching the clock, and so on. If your attention is on small details, you will cause accidents. But you can be mindful of driving,

just driving. Or suppose you are washing dishes. You can be mindful of washing, without going into details. If you are cleaning the house, just be mindful of cleaning.

Although it is not a very deep and intense attention, if you can keep that much mindfulness it is still mindfulness, and it can give you many worldly results in this life. You can get things done better when you are mindful of your activities. You will make fewer mistakes. (I am ashamed to confess something now. I am teaching mindfulness to you, and have forgotten to bring some papers with me. I will have to bring them later.)

So please practice mindfulness in your daily activities. When you practice in this way, keeping it up everyday, it becomes a habit. And when you have the chance to take a retreat such as this or a longer retreat, you will get into the practice very easily. Most yogis have to spend several days of a retreat just getting into the practice. They are too tired, too sleepy, or their minds wander too much, so they struggle with the practice for two or three days. If it is a one-week retreat, there are only a few days left, so their minds are on the end of the retreat. But if you keep your practice every day, you will carry its momentum with you, and when you go somewhere to practice meditation seriously, you can get into it more easily.

It is good to keep mindfulness with you, even when you are not practicing sitting meditation. In fact, it can be of great help to you, and can even save your life. For example, during the holiday season there are many car accidents, and many people are killed in them. Why are there so many accidents? Because the drivers are not mindful. If they were, there would be very few accidents. One cannot control mechanical failure, but if drivers were mindful there would be fewer accidents on the roads and fewer deaths. If you are

a mindful driver you can save your own life and the lives of others also. Mindfulness can give you many good results.

To practice mindfulness you don't need to spend a penny. It is yours, it comes with you, you can practice any time, and it doesn't cost anything. And don't tell me you have to pay for the retreat. The cost is not for the teaching, not for the practice—it is for the facilities you use here. Actually, you can practice mindfulness without any expense, and gain an abundance of results.

So mindfulness should be incorporated into our daily activities, and should be our way of life. The Buddha was very wise in discovering the value of mindfulness. Though it could be the property of everybody, it is so simple and ordinary that people don't recognize its worth. But the Buddha saw and discovered its importance, and gave us ways to use mindfulness for our own benefit as well as the benefit of others.

It is by using mindfulness that the true nature of things, the secret of mind and matter, can be discovered. Through mindfulness we build up concentration, and through concentration the true nature of things becomes clear. And when that happens, we come to the realization of our ultimate goal. So mindfulness should be kept always. Do not give it up, do not hang it on the gate when you leave a retreat.

Credit cards have a saying "Don't leave home without it." I would like to say the same thing for mindfulness—don't leave home without it. Take mindfulness with you always, wherever you go, or wherever you are. It can pay you rich dividends. My advice is not to stop meditation practice after leaving the retreat. Please carry on, and keep it always fresh and alive, so when the opportunity arises, you can catch that opportunity and practice in a more serious



way.

This practice taught by the Buddha is very beneficial to all of those who practice it. We are very lucky to have the chance to understand the value of mindfulness and to put it into practice. If the Buddha had not taught mindfulness, who would be able to teach us? We cannot find this practice of mindfulness in other teachings.

Nowadays there are computers, and most religious teachings, including the Bible, are now on CD-ROMs. Curious whether the word mindfulness appears in those teachings, I searched for the word in the Bible and didn't find it. There is not a single instance of the word mindfulness in the entire Bible. The word "mindful" appears on various pages, but "mindful" just means awareness, understanding, or knowing something. That is not the mindfulness we practice.

So do not think that it is easy to know about mindfulness or to have the chance to practice it. Only when you meet a Buddha or are born when the teachings of the Buddha are available, and only when there are teachers to teach you, can you learn about mindfulness, practice it, and enjoy the results. It is a rare opportunity to be able to practice mindfulness.

We will die after some years, and we do not know where we will be reborn. We may not get another chance to practice mindfulness for many years or many lives to come. So this is the time to practice—do not put it off by thinking that you will practice when you are reborn as a *deva*. This life is a very rare chance to do something for your own benefit and the benefit of others as well.

Some people may say that you do it just for your own benefit, and that you are selfish. As meditators, we must

admit that we are interested in improving ourselves, but in doing so we also do a kind of service to society. We become good people, and as a good person, you do not give trouble to other people. You do not become a criminal and a burden for society and the government. So do not waste time wondering whether you are selfish to be practicing for yourself only. Just practice.

You have to be perfect before you can make others perfect. You have to be a doctor first before you can treat patients. This is the way we have to do things. When you have a rare chance to help yourself or others, do not let it go. Do not miss the present opportunity to practice *vipassanā* meditation, but maintain it with constant practice throughout your life.

Now I wish that all of you may soon realize the goal. May you all be able to attain your goal with ease, and may you all be well and happy!

\* \* \* \* \*

## X. Instructions for Vipassanā

Take the posture that is most comfortable for you, preferably the cross-legged position. And keep your back straight. Keeping it straight means not leaning forward or backward. Your back should feel comfortably straight, so do not make it rigid or tense.

Just be relaxed and breathe normally. Do not try to control the breath in order to make it longer, shorter or deeper. Let each breath go as naturally as possible. Now focus your attention on the breath. Keep your mind at the entrance of the nostrils, being mindful of in-breath and out-breath. When you breathe in, be mindful of it from the beginning to its end, its whole duration. A breath lasts about four or five seconds. During these four or five seconds try to be really mindful of it.

Pay close attention, so that you are fully aware of the breaths. You may make mental notes such as “in” when you breathe in. Making mental notes helps to keep your mind on the object, in this case the breath. If making mental notes interferes with your practice, you don’t have to make them, but just try to be really mindful of the objects. In the same way, when you breathe out, be mindful of the out-breath for its whole duration from beginning to end. Again, pay close attention so that you are fully aware of the out-breath. And you may make mental notes such as “out” when you breathe out.

Try to see the nature of the breath rather than its shape or form. Breath is air. It has the characteristic of extension

or support, and it has the function of moving. Try to see one of these aspects rather than its shape or form. In the beginning, sometimes you may be mentally seeing the air, and sometimes the shape or form. But with practice as your concentration improves, the shape or form will gradually fade away. Only the reality, the ultimate truth that is the air element, will remain.

Do not let your mind go into or outside of the body with the breath. Your mind should be like a gate-keeper standing at the gate and making notes of people as they are entering and leaving. Try to be mindful of the breath as much as you can.

If it is difficult for you to keep your mind at the entrance of the nostrils and be mindful of the breath, there is an alternative method. You may try keeping the mind on your abdomen and being mindful of the rising and falling movements as you breath in and breath out. In this case, keeping your mind on the abdomen, when it rises as you breath in, be mindful of the rising movement from the beginning to the end. Pay close attention, so that you are fully aware of the movement. And when the abdomen falls as you breath out, be mindful of the falling movement from the beginning to the end.

You may mentally note “rising” when the abdomen is rising, and “falling” when it is falling. But if making mental notes interferes with your practice, you don’t have to make them. Just be mindful of the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. If you feel either tension or pressure in the abdomen, you may concentrate on it. Here also, the emphasis is to be mindful of the movements rather than the abdomen’s shape or form. Whether you are mindful of the breath or the movements of the abdomen, you are actually being mindful of the air element.

You may try both methods and stick to the one that is easier for you.

If your mind can remain on either one, it would be very good. But mind has a tendency to wander quite often. So when you are keeping it on the breath or the abdomen, be mindful if it wanders. Do not blame yourself or feel guilty. Just be mindful of its going out, or mentally note it as “going out, going out, going out” or “wandering, wandering, wandering.” And when the wandering disappears, go back to the breath or the movements of the abdomen.

I will call the breath or the movements of the abdomen “home objects” because we always go back to them after paying attention to any other object that becomes prominent at the present moment. If you see something in your thoughts, be mindful of seeing, or make mental notes as “seeing, seeing, seeing” until that object disappears. Then go back to the home object.

If you hear something in your thoughts, be mindful of hearing. And if you hear actual noise, keep your mind inside the ear and be mindful of hearing, or make mental notes as “hearing, hearing, hearing” until the noise disappears. Then go back to the home object.

If you remember something from the past, be mindful of remembering, and if you think of the future, be mindful of thinking of the future. Or if you make plans for the future, be mindful of making plans.

When you practice *vipassanā* meditation, try to be in the present moment; try to live in the present moment, and try to be mindful of the object that is prominent at the present moment. Noting the object of the present moment is the most important, so try not to miss being mindful of it. But if you miss it or forget to note it, and later remember that you

missed it, be mindful of that missing or forgetting. Make mental notes as “missing, missing” or “forgetting, forgetting” before going back to the home object.

If you speculate on something, be mindful of speculating. If you are analyzing, be mindful of analyzing. And if you make judgments, be mindful of making judgments. When you practice *vipassanā* meditation, pay bare attention to the object as it is, without adding anything of your own. It should be a simple awareness or mindfulness of the object, a simple but intense awareness.

Whatever you do, you do with mindfulness, and whatever mental state arises in your mind, be mindful of that mental state. If there are thoughts of attachment, craving or desire, be mindful of them. Do not feel guilty, but just be mindful of them or make mental notes of them as “attachment, attachment” or “craving, craving” or “desire, desire.” And when they disappear, go back to the home object.

If you are upset, or angry for any reason, be mindful of being upset or angry, or make mental notes as “upset, upset” or “angry, angry.” Or you can take the anger itself as the object of your attention. In that case, concentrate on the mental state, which is anger. Be mindful of it or mentally note “anger, anger, anger.” When it disappears, return to the home object.

And if you are discouraged because you cannot concentrate, make this discouragement the object of your attention. Be mindful of it or make mental notes as “discouraged, discouraged” or “discouragement, discouragement,” and when it disappears, go back to the home object.

Whatever you do, however the small activity may be,

do it with mindfulness. If, for example, you need to swallow saliva, first be mindful of the intention to swallow, or make the mental note “intention, intention, intention.” And when you gather the saliva in your mouth, be mindful of gathering it. And when you swallow it down, be mindful of swallowing, and then go back to the home object.

If you want to make any movement, first be mindful of the intention to move and then make the movements slowly, one at a time, and with mindfulness. If you have an itching sensation somewhere in the body, concentrate on the place of that itching and be mindful of it, or make the mental note “itching, itching, itching” until it disappears. And when it disappears, go back to the home object.

If it doesn't disappear but becomes more intense, be patient with it and make mental notes of it as long as you can. But if you think you cannot bear it any longer, and have to scratch, first be mindful of the intention to scratch. Then move your hand slowly and with mindfulness to the area of itching, making mental notes as “stretching, stretching.” When your finger touches the place, be mindful of touching. When you scratch, be mindful of scratching. And when you move your hand back to its original place, be mindful of moving. When the hand touches the other hand, your lap, or your knee, be mindful of touching, and then go back to the home object.

If you have pain in the body, treat it in the same way. Concentrate on it and be mindful of it, or make mental notes as “pain, pain, pain.” And when it goes away, go back to the home object. If it doesn't go away, but becomes more intense, be patient with it, try to be with it, and make mental notes of it as long as you can. But if you think you cannot take it any longer, you may make changes in posture.

Before making changes, be mindful of the intention to change, or make the mental note “intention, intention.” Then make the changes slowly and with mindfulness, one at a time. If, for example, you want to stretch out your hand, first be mindful of the intention to stretch. Then stretch the hand slowly with mindfulness, or make mental notes as “stretching, stretching, stretching.” After you have made the changes, go back to the home object. There may be stiffness, numbness, heat or cold in the body. When you have any one of these sensations, treat it the same way—concentrate on it and be mindful of it, or make mental notes of it.

It is important not to identify these sensations with yourself. Regard them as sensations apart from you. So you are like a spectator watching something happening at a distance—you know what is happening, but are not involved in it. If you have pleasant sensations, be mindful of them also. Whatever the sensation, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, if it becomes prominent you have to be mindful of it.

In brief, be mindful of the object you have chosen as the home object of meditation—either the breath or the movement of the abdomen. Try to be with it as long as you can. But also pay attention to your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and noise, as and when they become prominent at the present moment. Let your mindfulness be precise in going concurrently with the objects.

Sometimes the mind will wander when experience is gained in noting the breath as “in-out, in-out.” In his mind a yogi may be saying “in” when the breath is out, and “out” when it is in. So try to be precise. You should be saying “in” only when it is in, and “out” when it is out. So pay close attention, and don’t let your mind wander.



Focus on only one object at a time. The mind cannot take two or more objects at one time. If you try to take more than one at a time, you will become agitated and unable to concentrate. So take the object that is most prominent, be mindful of it, and then let it go. If you cannot decide which is most prominent, just take any one of them, be mindful of it, and let it go.

What is most important in this meditation is to be mindful of the object rising at the present moment. That object may be the home object or other objects. As long as you are mindful of it at the present moment, you are doing the right thing—you are practicing meditation.

Mindfulness of other objects is as much meditation as mindfulness of the home object. Objects may be different at different moments, but there always should be mindfulness, mindfulness of this object or mindfulness of that object.

And do not have expectations. Expectations are good when they motivate us to practice, but when we are engaged in the practice, they become obstacles to concentration and obstacles to the practice.

Expectations are actually a mild form of greed, which is unwholesome. So do not expect to get results, do not expect to get enlightenment, do not even expect to get concentration. Just leave them alone and be mindful of the object at the present moment. But expectations may arise in spite of yourself. If they come up, do not be irritated by them, do not fight them; but just watch and be mindful of them or make mental notes of them and let them go away by themselves.

There will be many distractions during practice, but regard them as friends, not as enemies or intruders. Although they are not welcome, do not be irritated by them. Just accept

them, be mindful of them, and let them go by themselves. Do not be tight in your mind or have worries or anxieties about not getting results or not getting concentration. Keep your mind free from these worries and anxieties, and just watch or be mindful of the object at the present moment. You should be relaxed in both body and in mind.

When practicing sitting meditation, you may keep your eyes either closed or open. If by keeping your eyes closed you can avoid distractions, then keep them closed. But if keeping the eyes closed makes your mind distracted, then open them slightly and look at the floor or the ground about one or two feet in front of you. For most people, keeping the eyes closed is good, because they can avoid distractions in this way.

In *vipassanā* meditation there is no rigid rule for the position of the hands. You may keep them your hands anywhere you like and in. You may keep your hands on your lap, on your knees, or anywhere you would like. What is important in this meditation is to be mindful of the object at the present moment. If you are mindful of the object at the present moment, you have done what is to be done. You are doing the right thing.

When at a retreat like this, you should keep mindfulness with you always. Whatever you do should be done with mindfulness. But you cannot sit for the whole day because your body needs some kind of movement or exercise. This problem is resolved by the practice of walking meditation.

In order to practice walking meditation, you must change from the sitting posture to the standing posture. Before getting up from the seat, be mindful of the intention to get up, or say to yourself “intention, intention, intention.” Then get up slowly, keeping your mind on the whole of your body, and

concentrating on its upward movement. When you have stood up, be mindful of standing, and then practice walking meditation.

To practice walking meditation, choose a path and walk back and forth on it. When walking, you make steps. When making a step, you first lift your foot, and then move it forward and put it down. Then sway your body a little to shift weight. While practicing walking meditation, try to be mindful of these movements. Your mind should be kept on moving of the foot. So you don't have to worry about being mindful of the breath or the movements of the abdomen when you are practicing walking meditation.

So keep your mind on the foot. When you lift the foot, be mindful of lifting. When you move it forward, be mindful of moving, and when you place it down, be mindful of placing. Pay close attention, so that you are fully aware of these movements. After putting one foot down, sway your body slightly as you shift your weight. And when you shift weight, be mindful of shifting, keeping your mind on the whole of your body. Then make the next step, being mindful of lifting, moving, placing, and shifting.

Walk until you reach the end of the walking path. Stopping there, be mindful of stopping. And when you have the intention to turn, be mindful of that intention, or make the mental note "intention, intention, intention." Then make the turn slowly, with mindfulness or with the mental notes "turning, turning."

While walking, keep your eyes slightly open and fixed on the path three or four feet ahead of you. Do not look up or glance around here and there. But if you do happen to look up, you must be mindful of that looking or seeing. Do not keep your eyes closed, or you may fall. Keeping them

open a little and looking downward, pay close attention to the movements when you make the steps.

If you are a complete beginner and have no experience in walking this way, you may begin with mindfulness of just stepping. In this case, you can walk a little faster and make the mental notes “stepping, stepping, stepping.” When you have become comfortable with noting the stepping, you will have seen that a step is a compound of smaller movements, one of which is lifting the foot.

Every time the foot is lifted, be mindful of the lifting, or make notes as “lifting, lifting, lifting.” When that feels comfortable, you may note another movement, such as moving the foot forward: “lifting, moving, lifting, moving” and so on. And when you are comfortable with noting those two stages, then add one more—placing the foot down: “lifting, moving, placing; lifting, moving, placing” and so on. Play close attention to these movements. In this way you can adapt to the practice little by little.

If you really pay close attention to these movements, you will find yourself slowing down automatically, but do not force yourself to slow down. Just pay close attention to the movements, and the slowing down will happen automatically. Then, if you pay close attention, you will notice many more things than I can include in these instructions.

Whether you are practicing sitting meditation or walking meditation, you are just watching, you are not making anything up. If you are mindful only of the object of the present moment, you are not imagining. Do not look for objects, and do not imagine them. Watch or be mindful of the object at the present moment. Pay attention just to what is there.

Walking meditation should be practiced when you are entering the meditation hall and when leaving the hall. You also have to pay attention to the related activities, such as opening and closing the door, or taking off shoes and putting them back on. These activities must be done with mindfulness. These activities must be done with mindfulness.

Since you have to keep mindfulness always, you are also to be mindful when eating. It is very likely that you may lose mindfulness while eating, so pay close attention to the small activities involved. There is more involved than just the one act of eating food with a spoon. There is looking at the food; getting hold of the plates, spoons and forks; putting the food on the plate; placing the food on the spoon; bringing the food to the mouth; opening the mouth; the food touching your mouth; putting the food into the mouth; chewing the food; swallowing the food, and experiencing the taste.

So there are many activities involved. Be very patient. In the beginning you will miss being mindful of many of them, but do not feel guilty. Try to be mindful of as many of these activities as you can, and with practice you will be able to be mindful of more and more of them. The purpose of eating with mindfulness is to keep your mindfulness intact, and to avoid being distracted by other objects.

So too, when you drink something, drink it with mindfulness. And if you have to do dishes, do them with mindfulness. According to Mahāsi Sayadaw, “the time a yogi rests is the time when he is asleep.” During waking hours you are expected to be practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness of the practice of meditation does not mean only when you are in the meditation hall.

Wherever you are during retreat, you have to be

practicing mindfulness. Bathroom activities must be conducted with mindfulness. You go to bed with mindfulness, and wake up with mindfulness. And practice begins with the first waking moment in the morning.

When you go to bed, go to bed with mindfulness or making notes of the activities involved, such as lowering yourself down, lying down, feeling parts of your body touching the bed, placing your head on the pillow, and covering yourself with the blanket. When you have done all these things mindfully and are finally settled in bed, resume watching the in-and-out breaths or the rising and falling of the abdomen. Let sleep come to you while you are practicing mindfulness.

Do not worry that you will be unable to sleep if you are making mental notes while going to bed. When you are tired and your body really needs to sleep, then you will go to sleep. But you go to sleep with mindfulness. The next morning when you wake up, try to be mindful of that first moment of waking up, and then be mindful of getting up from the bed, going to the bathroom, and so on.

During a retreat, always keep mindfulness with you, as the mindfulness will gain momentum. You develop mindfulness this way in order to gain concentration, and once you have concentration, you begin to see objects clearly. You begin to see the nature of the objects, and also their arising and disappearing. So always there should be mindfulness

In order to avoid being unmindful, do nothing that would distract or disturb you or the other yogis. Talking is a distraction, so it is important to keep “noble silence,” not talking unless it is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, just remain silent. This is for your own sake as well as for the

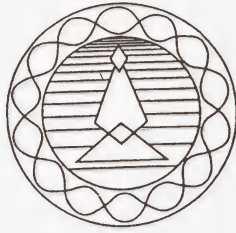
other yogis. If you practice in this way, mindful of the object of the present moment, and master of whatever arises in your mind, concentration will become strong. And in time you will be able to penetrate the true nature of things.

Now it is time for walking. First be mindful of the intention to get up. Then get up slowly and practice walking meditation.

\* \* \* \* \*







The Dhammachakka Meditation Center logo, designed by Ven. U Silananda, symbolizes the development of mind through Vipassana Meditation.

The interlocking lines circling the seated figure represent the entanglements of life. The figure itself is composed of three shapes:

- 1). The triangular base represent *Sīla* or moral purity, a necessary foundation for mental culture;
- 2). The center shape represents *Samādhi* or concentration which can only be built on moral purity .
- 3). The diamond represents *Paññā* or penetrative wisdom, a state achieved only when moral purity and concentration are present.

The background lines represent the increasing intensity of concentration needed for insight to occur.

## *Sharing Merits*

May all beings share this merit  
Which we have thus acquired  
For the acquisition of  
All kinds of happiness

May beings inhabiting space and earth,  
Devas and nagas of mighty power  
Share this merit of ours  
May they long protect the Teachings!

*The following is a list of donors who so graciously contributed to this book.*

- Bhikkhu Dhammacakka, Bhikkhuni Vien Thanh, Bhikkhuni Gunasari.
- Bùi Duy Tân, Cao thị Cúc, Clarinet Systems, Đào Trọng Hiệp, Đặng Ngọc Sương. Diệu Hạnh, Dhammika, Đào Hữu Phan, Đoàn Kiều Ngân, Đỗ Đình Lộc, James Kline, Jack Buktenica, Jia Jia Chen, Jing Lu, John Trương, John-Marian Thein, Judy Lu, Hla Min-Yie Sein, Huynh Thanh-Xuan, Karuna Rakkhita, Kinkin-Ronald Min, Lloyd Haanstra, Nita Truitner, Ngô Liên Hoa, Phạm Hoàng, PhạmKevin, Phạm Phú Luyện, Sam-Kanthi Hettiarachchi, Sarah Marks, Soe Kaufman, Rachel Nyaing Misfelolt, Sue-Tony Wang, Trần Du, Trần Đình Kham, Trần Minh Lợi, Trương Điền, Thomas Mee Lu Hwin, Trang Anh-Viên, Trương Hùng Family, Từ Cát Family, Tin Tin Aye, Vũ Bạch Tuyết.

