



We Live With Dhamma Knowledge

Institute of Dhamma Education
Dhamma-Sahāya Sāsano Centre
Aungchanthar, Pyin-Oo-Lwin
Myanmar

A Collection of Dhamma Talks (I)

Venerable Sayādaw Dr Nandamālābhivaṃsa
Aggamahāganthavācakapaṇḍita
Aggamahāpaṇḍita

8 & 1

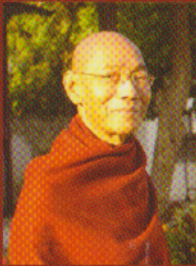
Exits of the Mind

Vipassana of Venerable Ananda

Happiness Forever With Dhamma As your Friend

A SBVMS PUBLICATION
For Free Distribution





Venerable Sayādaw Dr Nandamālābhivamsa
Aggamahāganthavācakaṇḍita Aggamahāpaṇḍita

"8 & 1"Only one in nine can follow the Buddha's Noble Path, and opportunity knocks only once.

"Exits of the Mind" 6 kinds of exits of the mind the Buddha taught in Nissaraṇa Sutta. The mind without a safety outlet is likely to explode and could be driven mad when a person's stress is overwhelming.

"Vipassanā of Venerable Ānanda"..... understand the outstanding characteristics of Vipassanā practice.

"Happiness Forever with Dhamma as your friend"
.....understand and realize this profound teaching in order to pass beyond the suffering found in saṃsāra.

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Happiness Forever With Dhamma As your Friend

Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti
The Gift of Dhamma excels all gifts

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**Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato
Sammāsambuddhassa**

**Veneration to the Exalted One, the
Homage-Worthy, the Perfectly Self-
Enlightened.**

The Buddha is an Arahāt and he is worthy of the highest veneration. All beings including devas and brahmās venerate the Buddha because the Buddha is the Supreme One, who has extinguished all defilements, who has become perfectly self-enlightened through the realization of the Four Ariya Truths, and who is endowed with the six great qualities of glory, namely, Issariya (supremacy), Dhamma (knowledge of the path to Nibbāna), Yasa (fame and following), Siri (noble appearance), Kāma (power of accomplishment) and Payatta (diligent mindfulness).

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A Brief Biography of Dr. Nandamālābhivaṃsa

Ashin Nandamāla was born on 22nd March 1940 at the village of Nyaung-bin in Sint-ku, Mandalay, the Union of Myanmar. His parents were U San Hla and Daw Khin, who were pious Buddhists.

At the age of six, he was sent to the monastic school to learn the three R's (Elementary reading, writing and arithmetic) in the Myanmar language.

He was ordained a novice at the Sagaing Hills when he was ten years old. His preceptor was Sayādaw U Canda, wellknown as the "Sankin Sayādaw", the presiding monk of the prestigious "Vipassanā" monastery. He was given the ecclesiastical name of "Nandamāla".

Ashin Nandamāla started to learn the Pāli language and the basic Buddhist scriptures under the tutelage of his own elder brother, Sayādaw U Nārada.

Ashin Nandamāla is one of the founders of the Buddhist Teaching Centre, Mahā Subodhayon, in Sagaing, where about two hundred monks receive education in Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist literature. Ashin Nandamāla serves as a religious

worker to promote and propagate the Buddha's teaching, both in Myanmar and abroad. Since 2003 he has given Abhidhamma courses in Europe, and 2005 Abhidhamma courses to Malaysia and Singapore.

In 1995, Ashin Nandamāla was conferred the title of the Senior Lecturer, "Aggamahā gantha vācaka paṇḍita" by the Government of Myanmar and in 2000 the title "Aggamahā paṇḍita". He wrote his ph.D. - thesis about Jainism in Buddhist literature.

He is Rector of the Sītagū International Buddhist Academy (SIBA) in Sagaing and, after being a Visiting Professor at the International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Yangon since its opening in 1998, in 2005 he was appointed the Rector also of this University. In 2003 he founded "Dhammavijjālaya - Centre for Buddhist Studies (CBS)" in Sagaing, connected to Mahāsubodhayon monastery.

He established IDE, Institute of Dhamma Education, in Pyin Oo Lwin in 2013 and since then he has been holding courses for both local and overseas students and the response for his lectures in IDE has been overwhelming and many students have to be turned away.

Ashin Nandamāla is the author of the following books written in Myanmar, Pāli and English languages:

1. The Biography of the Master (1970)
2. The Life and Literature of Shwehintha Sayādaw (1979)
3. The 90 Years of Life of Daw Malayee (1975)
4. The Hundred Verses on the Life of the Master (1970)
5. The Hundred Verses on the Life of the Thera (1985)
6. The Exposition of True Meaning (Paramattha dīpanī) with Critical Introduction to the Text (Thesis for the degree of Master of Philosophy)
7. Buddhism and Vegetarianism (1990)
8. The Three Meritorious Actions in Buddhism (1992)
9. Mettā (1994)
10. The Fundamental Abhidhamma (including a chapter on the History of Abhidhamma) (1997)
11. A Study of Jainism according to Buddhist Literature (Thesis for the degree of Ph.D., 2001)
12. Patthann Myat Desana (Discourse on Paṭṭhāna, 2004)
13. The Dhamma mirror (2004)

Introduction

The material in this book is a series of talk given by Venerable Sayadaw U Nandamala which he entitles "A Collection of Dhamma Talks" and with a serial No.1. Only 4 talks are covered in this Collection.

He aptly presents "8 & 1" Only one in nine can follow the Buddha's Noble Path, and opportunity knocks only once.

In "**Exits of the Mind**", Sayadaw introduces students to the 6 kinds of exits of the mind the Buddha taught in Nissaraṇa Sutta. As we all know, the mind without a safety outlet is likely to explode and could be driven mad when a person's stress is overwhelming.

Sayadaw gives a succinct account of Venerable Ānanda's life in **Vipassanā of Venerable Ānanda** and wants us to understand the outstanding characteristics of Vipassanā practice.

Sayadaw congenially shares with us some of his experience which is very touching in "**Happiness Forever with Dhamma as your friend**". The Buddha wants us to understand and more importantly realize this profound teaching in order to pass beyond the suffering found in saṃsāra.

Venerable Sayadaw U Nandamala's skills are many. He has great expertise in Abhidhamma studies and this is reflected in this series of talk. He manages to present all these topics in a precise, understandable and accurate manner. His teaching is knowledgeable, deep and clear. The reader will be challenged and stimulated by this presentation of the Buddha's teaching.

It has been my honourable task to write this **Introduction** though the credit goes to the transcriber, a Malaysian Sayalay, and others who help to vet the work. We who offer this work presenting the materials in their pristine original condition. I apologise to the readers for any shortcomings. Nonetheless I am certain that readers will obtain abundant benefit from this series of talks.

May these discourses serve as great support for those who strive for realization along the Noble Way!

Sādhu ! Sādhu ! Sādhu !

With Metta
Pauline Chong

8 and 1

***"Only one in nine can follow
the Buddha's Noble Path."***

My Dhamma talk tonight is titled "8 and 1". Eight and one equals nine. However why I did not say "9" in the first place you will understand soon.

You will have to ask yourself: "Am I among those eight or am I that one?"

There are eight kinds of persons who have lost their good opportunity due to their bad *kamma*. So in *samsāra*, the endless cycle of rebirths, these eight beings face ill-luck and bad conditions. Only one person has the luck to have good conditions through good *kamma*.

Opportunity knocks only once

Opportunity comes through various ways and means. Let's say you want to watch television. So you buy a set. But if there is no electricity in your area or if there is a power failure, can you watch TV even if you own a set? It is only when there is

electricity that you can do so. So you do not have the opportunity to watch anytime you like.

In remote areas where there is no electricity, villagers have to depend on light from the moon and the stars, especially to travel at night. In former times people in Ayeyarwaddy Division could travel by boat along the creeks only at high tide. They could not go anywhere anytime they liked. Their opportunity to travel was limited by the tide.

So opportunity is not for always. Even in life nobody can expect to meet with good opportunities all the time – only sometimes. Therefore when you are given a lucky break, you have to seize it immediately or else it will go to waste. You might not have another opening like that again. Opportunity also does not last, that is, it is not available forever. It arises within its own period and phase.

How can someone who is blind be able to see anything even though there is so much to look at in the modern world? He has no chance to view anything. In the same way a deaf person has no chance to enjoy any kind of music or audio programmes, even the pop songs of today.

Comedians still joke about King Mindon: Even though he is credited with holding the Fifth Great Buddhist Council in Myanmar, he had never even tasted *faluda* (a rich dessert) or watched TV (simply because in his time they were not available!).

So opportunity comes only once in a while. There may be no second opening. Not all the living beings in *samsāra* can have this good opportunity. Indeed many were unable or failed to grab the chance when it appeared. These form the group of eight. Who are these unlucky ones without opportunity?

Those who lost their opportunity

When the Buddha appeared over 2,550 years to teach the true Dhamma which could liberate one from suffering, many people at that time had no opportunity to see Him, to listen to His discourses, and to practise the Dhamma.

After His enlightenment, He began to teach. His first discourse was the Dhammacakkavattana Sutta at the Deer Park in Isīpatana. How many people had the chance to listen to Him? Apart from *devas* and Brahmas, and the group of five

ascetics (*pañcavaggi*), no one was there to receive the first teaching.

According to the Buddha, there are eight kinds of individuals who have lost the chance to free themselves from *samsāra* through Noble Practice. Only one has the opportunity. Let's see who lost the chance.

1 Born in hell

During the Buddha's lifetime, were there no unfortunate beings who had ended up in hell due to their bad *kamma*? There was no hope that they could listen to Him, to practise the Dhamma, and realise *Nibbāna*. Thus these persons born in hell are the first type among the eight.

"Hell" in Pāḷi is *niraya*,¹ meaning a place where there is no comfort or happiness, only just suffering. Even though beings born in hell have eyes, they get to see only horrible and fearful sights, never anything pleasing. Our human eyes see both kinds of objects – what is desirable or undesirable, pleasant or unpleasant, beautiful or ugly. In hell though, whatever is seen is only awful and undesirable.

¹ *Nir* means "no" and *aya* is "pleasure".

Similarly what is heard is only distressing. Beings there never get to hear sweet and agreeable sounds; or to smell nice odours. Instead the stench is enough to make you want to close the nose. What they taste is never good; what is touched also is never pleasant. All the sense objects in hell bring only suffering. There is nothing pleasing or desirable.

How then can one listen to the Dhamma in hell? Not only that, being unable even to have pleasant thoughts, how can one appreciate the Dhamma? So even with the Buddha's enlightenment, this person born in hell lost a good opportunity to listen to His Dhamma.

2 Born as an animal

Consider the second individual who became an animal. Though life cannot be compared to that in hell, it is still miserable enough. Consider being reborn as a cow, a dog, a chicken or a pig at the time the Buddha became enlightened and began His teaching.

Animal lives are full of suffering. People ill-treat them and in the end slaughter them for food. Even on my way here I passed by some villages

where chickens were being raised. Seeing them a thought entered my head that they would eventually end up in the cooking pot as curry. There was yet more to see on the way: some chickens, still alive with their legs tied together, were being carried at the back of a motorcycle. No one can save them. See how cruel people can be. These animals were happily living their lives – but not for long. Without mercy people would kill them to eat.

Not only chickens, I have seen pigs too, their legs tied together, being hung upside down. I have also seen chickens in caged baskets being thrown from the roof of a bus. Indeed, there is no one to save them.

The Buddha described the life of animals in these words: "*Aññamañña khādikā. Dubbala khādikā.*" Animals eat up one another. The bigger or stronger one eats up the smaller or weaker. Frogs eat other frogs; fish eat up other fish. The situation in the animal world is very fearful.

You may have watched the Discovery Channel on TV about the wildlife in Africa. During my stay in the US I watched this programme now and then

to gain general knowledge and *sarivega* or moral fear. In one programme you see a herd of grazing deer. All of a sudden a tiger springs to attack. The deer have to run for their lives. The slowest to run is caught and eaten.

Then another episode shows a herd of buffaloes. Soon after a lion appears and gives chase after the animals. Separated from the others, the last in line is caught and killed.

In another instance, some animals – tired and thirsty – wade into a stream to drink, unaware that hidden in the water crocodiles are waiting. With their powerful tails they lash to wound and then bite their prey. The air is filled with cries of pain, and soon the water turns all bloody.

Truly, animal life is pitiful with no possibility of escape. These poor creatures usually end their lives, eyes wide-opened, in the jaws of a lion or a tiger.

In one episode I watched some lions jump on a large buffalo trapped in mire. He is bellowing loudly as they bite into his back and hindquarters. In the end even the thighs were gone. Such an existence really calls for compassion.

According to the Buddha, the animal world is the worst next to hell. Some people may think otherwise when they see how cats and dogs are cared for as pets. These domesticated animals have nothing to do except eat and sleep comfortably. Some special breeds kept by rich people are fed with special dog food. They go here and there by car. They also get to sleep in bed. Such animals have the luck to lead a life of luxury cared for by the well-to-do.

However, would these animals be able to understand any discourse on the Dhamma? They lack the intelligence to do so. Whatever thought they have concerns eating, sleeping and enjoying themselves. Then when another animal invades their territory, their thought is to fight to defend their home ground. That covers all that they think about. They have no opportunity to have even a meritorious mind, not to say an opportunity to carry out wholesome deeds. Therefore this second individual of the group of eight lost his chance to follow Noble Practice during the Buddha's lifetime.

3 Born as a *peta*

The next individual did not fall into hell or entered the animal kingdom. Where did he end up? He entered the world of *petas*. People call these beings ghosts, and are afraid of seeing them. Their life is very harsh with its various forms of suffering. *Petas* are always starving because they rarely get to eat. There is never enough food to fill their bellies. As they have no shelter they have to stay in bushes, near trees or even rubbish dumps. These beings depend on what people excrete for food, searching in dirty areas for impurities like excrement, snot and spit to eat. Living this way and always hungry they suffer a great deal.

The Commentary² gives a story about a one such Kāḷakañcikā³ *peta* during the Buddha's lifetime. This ghost greatly suffered, needing to quench his thirst all the time.

One day he was on the bank of the Ganges, searching for water to drink. A group of monks on

² *Aṭṭhakathā* (Exposition of the Doctrine).

³ A kind of *peta*.

their way to a village for almsround passed by the river. They met the *peta* who was running up and down the bank. So they asked him,

“Why are you running here and there? What are you searching for so intently?”

“Venerable Sirs, I’m looking for water to drink. I’m so thirsty I could die. My whole body has become very hot.”

The monks pointed out to him, “Nearby there’s plenty of water in the river. Can’t you see it? Drink as much as you want.”

“Venerable Sirs, I can’t see the water. Even though I hear the sound of running water, when I approach, there’s no water to be seen,” replied the *peta*.

On hearing this, the monks were filled with compassion. So they told him,

“Lie down here on your back. We’ll give you water to drink.”

They fetched water from the river with their almsbowls to pour into his mouth. Not just one monk, but 30 of them took turns to empty their bowls into his mouth. An hour later, the monks told him,

“Well, it’s time to leave for our almsround. We’ve been pouring water into your mouth until your whole body’s soaking wet. You should have had enough to drink.”

The still thirsty ghost replied that not even a drop had entered his throat:

“Venerable Sirs, may I not be freed from such a life of suffering, if what I said is not the truth.”

With so much suffering in his life, under such miserable conditions, how could he listen to the Dhamma and be liberated?

Drifting about in *samsāra*, one can end up in hell, become an animal or a *peta* and thus lose one’s chance to follow the Noble Practice. This is really a fearsome situation.

A flying skeleton

One day the Venerables Moggallāna and Lakkhaṇa walked down from Gijjakuṭa (Vulture’s Peak) to go to Rājagaha for their almsfood. On the way Venerable Moggallāna with his divine eye and ear saw and heard the pitiful wailing of a skeleton ghost. It was a flying past in the sky, pursued by vultures, crows and hawks pecking at

him. In that state of suffering, how could that *peta* listen to and practise the Dhamma? Because of his *kamma*, his bones were very sensitive to touch, causing him great pain.

In his previous life he was a butcher. He would slaughter cows and scrape the meat off the bones. Doing it his eyes were always on the pile of bones. At his death he was reborn in hell, suffering there until the energy of this *kamma* was exhausted. Because he was used to seeing heaps of beef bones daily as a butcher, on leaving hell he became a skeleton *peta* without any flesh.

Once a person reaches the *peta* world, is there any way he could listen to and practise the Dhamma? Thus this third person is one who has lost his opportunity to follow Noble Practice.

4 Born as Brahma and *asañña-satta*

At the time the Buddha appeared to propagate His teaching, where was this fourth person? He lost his chance to listen to the Dhamma by being born in the *arūpa* and *asañña-satta* worlds. The *arūpa* Brahma has no material body, remaining only with mind. He is no ordinary individual. In

his past life this yogi had practised *samatha* successfully and attained the fifth *jhāna*. However, he considered the faults of possessing a material body:

“Because of this body, there is suffering when I have a headache or stomachache. I have to eat and sleep due to this body. All suffering is the result of having this physical body. How good it would be to have only the mind without the body.”

He then made a wish, “In my next life may I have only a mind without a body.”

Accordingly he was reborn in the *arūpa* formless plane after death. As a Brahma he has lived happily for many aeons. He has missed the opportunity to see the Buddha, to listen to his Dhamma. He thus lost the chance to free himself from *samsāra*.

After renouncing worldly life in his search for the truth, the Bodhisatta approached many famous teachers to study their techniques of meditation. One was the well-known Ājāra Kālāma who with his *samatha* technique had mastered the four stages of *rūpa jhāna* and then achieved three

arūpa jhāna levels. The future Buddha studied under him and attained up to His teacher's level of third *arūpa jhāna*.

Another great teacher was Uddaka Rāmaputta. By the time the Bodhisatta met him, he had already mastered seven *jhāna* stages. Although he knew the way of attaining the fourth *arūpa jhāna* (*n'evasañña nā saññāyatana*), he himself had not yet achieved that stage. He explained the technique to the Bodhisatta as he had learnt from his own teacher. The Buddha-to-be practised and succeeded readily. Uddaka Rāmaputta surprised at his pupil's power, at once tried to appoint Him as the great teacher of their group. Eventually He himself reached this eighth and highest stage of *arūpa jhāna*.

The Bodhisatta did not continue with His two teachers' techniques. He chose to go His own way. Not much longer He became the Buddha through His own means. When He wanted to begin teaching the Dhamma – the Dhammacakkappavattana sutta – He first considered Āḷāra Kālāma. Unfortunately the great hermit had died a week earlier, and had been reborn in the third *arūpa* plane. Indeed it was a

great loss for him to be in that non-material world. If he had both body and mind, the Buddha would have given him the first discourse to show His gratitude. Thus the teacher lost the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma.

Then the Buddha considered His other great teacher Uddaka Rāmaputta. He too had died only the night before and had also gone to the fourth *arūpa* plane (he had achieved that *jhāna* level before dying).

These two teachers had narrowly missed meeting the Buddha: one by seven days, the other by just a day. Thus both had no more chance to see Him and to listen to His teaching. Why this is so is because their lifespan is extremely long. Even when the next Buddha Ariyametteyya manifests in this world, they will still be in the immaterial plane. They will be unable to hear the Dhamma – being formless beings, they have no ears. See how much these two great persons have lost.

Similarly some yogis – with lesser attainments than these two teachers – in their practice of *jhāna* come to hold wrong view. They see the disadvantages of having a mind: "Due to this

mind, I want to eat, to sleep or to move. How peaceful it would be to be without a mind, to have just the form." With that notion, they make a wish, wanting only a material body: "In my next life, may I be reborn without the mind."

Because they have attained the highest *rūpa jhāna*, at death they appear in the Brahma world as *asañña-satta* beings without mind and mental states. These Brahmas are exactly like statues – very much like those statues you see in the city or town square of today. They cannot talk or be aware of heat or cold, or of anything at all, like a real statue. Their pose depends on whether these yogis in their previous lives died sitting or lying down. Now they will remain in this posture for the next 500 aeons. Within their lifetime though a Buddha may appear, they will have no chance to hear His teaching. It is a great loss for them.

When the time comes, as the Brahma's life is not eternal, these beings have to reenter *samsāra*. As the saying goes, "Shining brilliantly in the Brahma world, grunting and gobbling at the pig's trough." Having been radiant Brahmas, they cannot be reborn directly as a pig because of the great power of *jhāna*. But after one or two lives, it is

possible to reach the *duggati* or woeful state. Why this is so is because these beings still have mental defilements. Therefore those in the *arūpa* and *asañña-satta* planes, despite any Buddha's manifestation, have lost whatever chance they have to hear his Dhamma. They then belong to this group of eight.

So far we have covered four types of individuals among these eight – hell-beings, animals, *petas* and Brahmas with either a material body only or just mentality – who missed their chance to listen and practise the Dhamma when the Buddha appeared in this world.

5 Born in a backwater area

Now who is the next one among the eight? During the lifetime of the Buddha, it is the person who was born in an area too far away to have any chance of hearing His discourses or beyond the reach of the Buddha's doctrine. Thus he had no opportunity to receive the Dhamma. In this world today there are still such tribes living in remote forests and hills.

When I was studying in Sri Lanka, I came to know about an aboriginal tribe called Weata. The

island is small: about 150 miles from east to west, and 200 miles north to south. Until today its original natives are still living there in the forest. These aborigines are unclothed; they use the bow and arrow or spear to hunt for food. Though they have been given housing and clothing, they prefer to return to their way of life in the forest.

Australia too has her aborigines who also hunt animals for food. How could these people possibly get to know about the Buddha then? They would have no interest about His teachings as their concern is with food and merry-making. Isn't it so then that such people had no opportunity to listen to and to practise the Dhamma?

6 Holder of wrong view

Next, the sixth person who lost his great chance is one with wrong view. As a contemporary with the Buddha in that same region, he would have been able to meet Him and hear what he taught. For instance, when the Buddha was residing in Sāvatti, so was this person. However, if he did not believe in *kamma* and *kamma*-result, would he have gone to listen to the Buddha? If he was a

follower of Makkhali Gosāla⁴ or Purāṇa Kassapa⁵; or if he maintained that what the monk Gotama was teaching was incorrect, would this person have paid heed to the Buddha? No, he would not. People with wrong view reject that *kamma* and its result exist, and that *dāna* or the act of giving brings good benefits. They think that there is only this present life in this world with no next existence after death. They reject the idea that *kusala* and *akusala* produce good and bad results respectively. In short, *natthika vāda* or nihilism is what they believe in with its 10 points⁶. Such beliefs are a form of mental misconduct.

⁴ He held the view of *ahetuka diṭṭhi* and of *saṃsāra suddhika* (that all beings in *saṃsāra* would eventually be liberated once their time allowance of about 8 million aeons is used up).

⁵ His view of *akiriya vāda* states that there is no such thing as *kusala* and *akusala* (good and evil) in nature. So *kusala* and *akusala* cannot be carried out; and both bear no effect.

⁶ 1. *Dāna* or offering has no effect. 2. Similarly for gifts. 3. Also for sacrifice. 4. There is no result of *kusala* and *akusala*. 5. *N'atthi ayaṃ loko*, there is no present world. 6. *N'atthi paro loko*, there is no other world. 7 and 8. *N'atthi māta, n'atthi pitā*, there is no mother or father. 9. *N'atthi satta opapātika*, there is no such being who will be reborn.

Would such people avail themselves of the Buddha's presence and teachings to try free themselves from *samsāra*?

If only they could discard their beliefs, only then would they be able to hear what the Buddha was teaching – provided they had the intellect to understand. But lacking confidence, they were not interested. As a result they lost the chance to liberate themselves from the cycle of rebirths. For this reason these believers of wrong view are among that group of eight.

7 Born with little intelligence

Then there is another individual who could not understand what the Buddha was teaching due to his low intellect. Nowadays we would say he had a low IQ. Such a person would not be able to grasp whatever was taught because of dullness. Though he might meet and listen to the Buddha again and again, he lacked the capacity to realise the Dhamma.

So far we have come across seven kinds of individuals. These examples show that in *samsāra*

10. There is no noble person such as the Buddha who can talk about the world through realisation in practice.

even though one is lucky to be born a human, it does not mean that one will naturally meet with good opportunities.

8 Born before the Buddha's time

The next individual was fortunate to be born as a person with intelligence. However he lived at a time before the Buddha appeared in this world. So he too was deprived of the opportunity to benefit from the Buddha's presence and discourses, and from Dhamma practice.

In all how many individuals had lost their chance to follow Noble Practice at the time of the Buddha? There is a total of eight. But of course some of them could still have mundane prospects of becoming rich and successful in business and career, or in creating new things for example.

9 The one and only

Who is that individual? At the time the Buddha and the Dhamma came into prominence, this person was there. Being intelligent, he had great opportunity to practise the Dhamma.

Such was Venerable Koṇḍañña. When the Buddha began to teach, he was the first to benefit from

this great opportunity. At the Buddha's first discourse of the Dhammacakkapavattana sutta, the only people there were the group of five (*pañcavaggis*): Koṇḍañña, Vappa, Bhaddiya, Mahānāma and Assaji.

After the Bodhisatta renounced worldly life, these five became His followers. They attended to Him when He took up the practice of austerities in Uruvela. He trained in self-mortification by practically cutting off food and water. Then, realising that such means did not enable knowledge to arise, the Bodhisatta abandoned this path. From then on He followed His own way. Those five ascetics headed by Koṇḍañña misunderstood the Bodhisatta's motive, thinking He had given up striving for the Dhamma. Having lost faith in Him, they left Uruvela to go to Isipatana.

Left alone in Uruvela, the Bodhisatta went back to a regular diet of food and water to let His body regain health. Following His own approach, He chose the middle way of practice or *majjhimāpaṭipadā*. When His concentration based on *ānāpāna* was strong enough, He attained absorption stage by stage up to the fifth *jhāna*. At

this point due to *jhāna samādhi* He obtained the higher knowledge of *abhiññā*.

With that the Bodhisatta stepped on the *vipassanā* path, leaving *samatha* behind. This was by shifting from the *ānāpāna* object to a real one of mind-and-matter. He gained stepwise the four levels of path and fruition (*magga* and *phala*), beginning with *sotāpatti magga*. In reaching arahantship, He gained the omniscience of a Buddha as well, which allowed Him to know everything which He wished to know.

The Buddha then wanted to teach the Dhamma, "Who'll understand what I teach?" He considered who should be the first to hear His discourse. In the end He saw that the *pañcavaggis* were living together in Uruvela. Using His powers the Buddha scrutinised their minds to assess their intellect and knowledge for understanding. He then decided, "They'd been helping and attending to me. They'll be the first ones to receive my Dhamma talk." Thus the Dhammacakka discourse was for the benefit of these five in gratitude for their past service.

You see, these three factors were in place: the Buddha being newly enlightened was about to set in motion the wheel of the Dhamma. The *pañcavaggis* had the intellect to grasp what He would teach. Under such conditions, wouldn't they have the chance to gain higher knowledge?

Indeed at the end of the discourse, among the five monks Koṇḍañña was the first to realise the Dhamma as a *sotāpanna*. He thus belongs to that category of the "one and only" individual. The rest of the *pañcavaggis* are also included. Within the Buddha's lifetime the others were Yassa together with his four friends. The Venerables Sāriputta and Moggāllana too belong to this category as well as the 80 great disciples of the Buddha. In brief all those who had the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma, to follow Noble Practice and attain *Nibbāna* make up this unique class of individuals.

You can be one too

Now you are here in this life as a human being when the Buddha *Sāsana* is still flourishing. Up till today the various ways to practise the Dhamma are still available. That is to say both the Buddha and the Dhamma are still present. As long as the

Dhamma remains with us, so will the Buddha – can we say this?

Before passing into *parinibbāna*, the Buddha said,

“*Yo kho Ānanda mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto, so vo mamaccayena satthā*⁷.
Ānanda, the Dhamma I taught and the Vinaya I established will be your teacher when I’m gone.”

The Dhamma taught by the Buddha even now is flourishing. So it is as though the Buddha is still alive and teaching. Then if you have the intellect to understand the Dhamma; if you can distinguish between good and bad as well as between cause and effect through your own knowledge, then you still have great opportunity to take up Noble Practice. However, not all people have the same level of intelligence.

⁷ “*Yo dhammo* – The Dhamma, *yo vinayo ca* – and the Vinaya, *mayā* – [which] I, *desito* – had taught, *paññatto* – [and] had established; *mamaccayena* – at the time after my *parinibbāna*, *so vo... satthā* – these [will be] your teacher who will admonish [you],” *bhagava* – the Lord, *avoca* – said.

The one with the highest level is called *ugghaṭitaññū*⁸ with a very sharp intellect. Just the briefest of explanations about the Dhamma is enough to make him realise *magga* and *phala*, that is, to become enlightened. Such was Upatissa or the Venerable Sāriputta-to-be. Searching for the truth, at first he became a disciple of the great teacher-Wanderer Sañjaya Belaṭṭhiputta. Though he took on the robes of this sect, he found nothing satisfying to learn. So he continued his search for the one who could teach the real Dhamma.

By chance in Rājagaha, he came across one of the *pañcavaggis*, Venerable Assaji, going about on almsround. Struck by his composure and bearing, the future Venerable Sāriputta followed him. He thought this monk possessed the Truth he was looking for. So he attended to this Venerable during the meal. Afterwards, he asked, "Venerable Sir, who's your teacher? What does he teach?"

⁸ *Ugghaṭita* = just talks briefly + *ññu* = understands.

"I recently joined the Order, so I can't explain much in detail. But I can tell you in brief the Buddha's doctrine," replied Venerable Assaji.

Upatissa then said, "Venerable Sir, tell me in brief as much as you know. The meaning is more important. There is no need for detailed explanations – many words are unnecessary."

With this the monk recited just four lines of a verse:

*"Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā
tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha.
Tesañca yo nirodho
Evam vādī mahāsamaṇo."*⁹

The dhammas that appear originate from their cause. The causes of these dhammas are taught by the Buddha; and the way to realise their cessation the great Monk has taught.

⁹ *Ye dhammā* – Whatever dhammas
hetuppabhavā – that arise are based on their causes;
tesaṃ – [concerning], their *hetuṃ* – true causes,
tathāgato – the Tathāgatha, *āha* – has spoken.

Hearing the first two lines –about cause and effect with regard to the first two Noble Truths – Upatissa became a *sotāpanna*. He was rid forever of his doubts or *vicikicchā* and wrong view, understanding cause-and-effect through right vision and right understanding. This is no easy matter to achieve. My dear listeners, you should try and strive to see cause-and-effect yourself.

How to see cause and effect

Everyone has eyes. When you open your eyes, don't visible objects appear? Take for instance a flower. When the eye and flower come in contact, doesn't the sight of a flower appear? What causes this eye consciousness to arise? Without a cause it would never occur.

The Buddha explained,

*“Cakkhum ca paṭicca rūpe ca
uppajjati cakkhuvīññāṇam.”¹⁰*

Depending on eye and visible form,
eye-consciousness arises.

¹⁰ *Cakkhum ca* – [Given] the sensitive matter of eye that enables vision, *rūpe ca* – and form, *paṭicca* – by means of [these two] , *cakkhuvīññāṇam* – eye-consciousness, *uppajjati* – arises.

Eye-consciousness arises due to its cause. Thus it is *hetuppabhava*, that is, it is the result of a preceding cause. For seeing to occur, there must be two causes as the Buddha explained. One is the eye; the other is the visible object. Depending on both, eye-consciousness arises. So there is cause and its effect. When you close your eyes, does eye-consciousness appear? Without any visible object to be reflected on the eye, will eye-consciousness arise? No it will not. You need at least two causes to see – eye and visible object.

In many suttas the Buddha mentions only these two most important causes. Yet there are also other conditions. For example, if it is totally dark, can you see this flower? So light is a necessary condition. On a dark night you need a torch to light the way if you are going somewhere.

Another necessary condition is attention or *manasikāra*. Without it, you will notice nothing. There is this saying: "Without paying attention, you won't notice even the cave." This is to say, without attention you will not see even a big object. Being attentive you will notice even a tiny particle.

The eye, visible object, light, and attention – four conditions are needed for seeing to occur. Because of them, there is the effect of sight.

In that case, before the coming together of these four factors, where is the eye-consciousness? It is nowhere.

Let's use an example of a harp. But nowadays people would be more familiar with the guitar. Before you pluck the guitar string, where do you think the sound is lodged? Is it in the string? Is it in the body of the guitar or your finger? It is not anywhere – not in the string, the guitar body or your finger. Only when these three come together that sound appears. In the same way when the eye, visible object, light and attention coincide, eye-consciousness arises. Before that it was nowhere in existence.

Consider another example: a gas lighter which smokers usually carry in their pocket. In that lighter, does fire exist? If so it will burn a hole in the shirt. Yet we can produce fire from it by giving other conditions. There is gas inside the lighter, and a mechanism that can produce sparks. Then you need to press or flick the

mechanism for the flame to flare up. Fire did not exist inside the lighter before that. It only arose based on these conditions.

Seeing *anicca* through the Noble Truths

*“Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā,
tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato āha.”*

(The dhammas that appear originate from their cause; the causes of these dhammas are taught by the Buddha.)

In these two lines Venerable Assaji was referring to the first and second Noble Truths:

Ye dhammā Whatever effect [of *dukkha sacca* or the truth of suffering]
hetuppabhavā originates from its cause.

Without a cause these effects can never occur. Anything that takes place in our physical-mental continuum depends on a cause. Before its occurrence it is not found existing anywhere. So this is how we should understand Venerable Assaji's verse according to the nature of impermanence.

As discussed earlier, eye-consciousness is nowhere to be found in the body. Only when the eye, visible object, light and attention come together that this consciousness appears. You should note that it is the same for that of the ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind.

In the Visuddhimagga it is said:

*Hetum paṭicca sambhūtā.
Hetubhaṅgā nirujjhare.*

Dhammas appear depending on their cause.
They disappear when their cause ceases.

This is what *anicca* is:

Ahutvā Not having existed anywhere before,
sambhoti. [a dhamma] occurs due to the meeting
together of causes.

Hutvā Having appeared [through the
combination of right conditions],
paṭiveti it disappears, not being permanent.

Just like eye-consciousness – is it always there?
Once it occurs, it ceases.

Just reflect on what happens when you pluck at a
harp-string: a sound is produced only to die
away. When you do it again, another note

emerges, and so on. If you play on the instrument for an hour, for an hour sounds will keep on arising. However these sounds do not remain. Once they emerge, they vanish. This is the meaning of *anicca*.

What it means to meditate

The Buddha's teaching is so practical. What He taught about the laws of nature can be known by everyone. Contemplation of these natural laws is what meditation is about. It is not enough to sit with closed eyes to call this meditation. It is only meditation when you contemplate the dhammas that appear in your mind and body, whatever posture you are in. You can sit with your eyes shut but if your mind is wandering here and there, then you are not meditating.

What is occurring naturally in our mind-and-body shows only the Dhamma. Meditation to note and contemplate on these occurrences is to know the Dhamma. Practising this way you will come to realise about the sense-door consciousness which I had spoken about: "Oh, there's the eye; there's the visible object. When the two come in contact, eye-consciousness comes into being." By reflecting this way continuously on the various

dhammas, greed and anger will not have the chance to arise, whatever the object you see. They only come into being if you have unwise attention on seeing something. By not contemplating the nature of the object, then *moha* or delusion has the chance to arise. You should clearly come to realise that these dhammas appear based on their respective causes. This kind of knowledge cannot be obtained by those eight individuals, but only by that one kind of person.

Your interest matters

Nevertheless it does not mean that everyone who has that unique opportunity will be able to make use of it. Why is this so? In daily life people do not usually think about the Dhamma. Practically all their time is spent on buying and selling, on business matters, errands and trips, besides social matters. How can they possibly acquire knowledge of the Dhamma? Despite their capacity and potential they have given up that good opportunity due to their disinterest. They can be said to have joined that group of eight who have lost their chance. They have turned

their face towards worldly affairs, not the Dhamma.

You should reflect on yourself, and bear in mind, "Though the Buddha-Dhamma remains, yet if I'm not interested in it, then I'm just like those eight individuals, even though I belong to that single category. So if I fail to take up the opportunity to attain such knowledge, I will also lose the chance like those eight."

Rarity of human rebirth

The Buddha said, "*Manusatta bhāvo dullabho.*" Human life is hard to obtain. If you ask why, consider this: To be reborn a human depends on *kusala kamma* or wholesome deeds. Ask yourself: "Does *kusala* mind arise often or only seldom in me?" You should check your mind from the time you awake till the time you shut your eyes and fall asleep in bed – excepting sleep when there is only *bhavaṅga* or inactive mind. With what kind of *cittas* do you live with the whole day? Which is more, *kusala* or *akusala* mind? You may find that the wholesome mental state is quite rare. Since a human rebirth depends on *kusala* – and since *kusala* mind is hard to come by – therefore human life is hard to get.

Some people might disagree by pointing out that the human population is increasing all the time. With over five billion in the world, human life doesn't seem difficult to obtain after all, they say. In that case we should compare it with the population of the animal kingdom. Then it is nothing compared to the numbers of animals there, even that within one species.

You need meritorious deeds to be reborn as a human being. Yet isn't it so that the time you have for *kusala* mind is only a little? Try and look at your own self, and not at the others. Examine your own life: which is more, time spent with a *kusala* or an *akusala* mind or in sleeping? You will probably find that the *kusala* mind does not take up much of your waking hours.

Then consider whether this simile is right: There are two needles. One is placed upright in the human world. The other is dropped from the Brahma world. It is easier to have their two needle tips touch each other than it is to be reborn as a human. Why this is correct is that hardly much time is spent with a *kusala* mind. For this reason the Buddha warned,

*"Manussattalābham laddhāna,
saddhamme suppavedite.
Ye khaṇam nādhigacchanti,
atināmenti te khaṇam.¹¹"*

If those who are born as human beings do not know that they have the good opportunity to listen to the Dhamma, then they have wasted their human life.

This opportunity cannot be retrieved

This precious opportunity is not forever. It lasts only a while. Now while the Buddha Sāsana is still thriving and while you are in good health and in a good situation to practise the Dhamma, you are not doing so. Instead you waste your time with unnecessary matters. You have let this opportunity pass you by.

¹¹ *Ye* – Those who, *manussattalābham laddhāna* – in having obtained human life, *nādhigacchanti* – [do] not know that they have a good opportunity, *saddhamme suppavedite* – at the time during which the true Dhamma is taught by the Buddha, *te* – they, *atināmenti* – cause to go to waste, *khaṇam* – the valuable human life [they have] obtained.

There will be no next chance once this opportunity is gone. If you do not make use of it now, it will go to waste. There is a Myanmar proverb about doing something once the opportunity for doing it is over: "When the rainy season is over, one starts to plough the field. One spreads the paddy to dry after sunset."

Once the chance has gone, whatever you do is futile. That is why as long as we are not included among the eight kinds of individuals but are part of that unique category, we have to do what is needed while there is still a chance. Otherwise we will just be like those eight.

Ledi Sayadaw advised, "You are wise to seize the opportunity when it comes. But if you fail to take up that chance, there is no other more foolish than you."

The Buddha too said that as long as opportunity is there, you should make use of it. What should be done? You should follow the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. In His teaching there is no other path apart from this one.

No other noble practice

The basis of this practice lies in everyone's mind and body. You should practise to see the Dhamma as it is. Scrutinise what is there in your body and mind. We have a physical body called *kāya*, a mind that knows the object, feeling or *vedana* that experiences, perceptions and mental formations. We must try to see them as they really are: this is cultivating the Noble Path.

For instance, if you focus and contemplate on the in-and-out breath, this is *kāyānupassanā*. *Vedanānupassanā* is when you focus on feelings like sadness and happiness, pleasure or displeasure. Then focusing on your consciousness – whether it associates or not with *lobha* or greed, with *dosa* or anger, or with *moha* or delusion – your contemplation of the consciousness is *cittānupassanā*. But if you focus on other natures such as the dhammas of the five aggregates, 12 *āyatana*s (sense bases) and 18 elements, your contemplation is *dhammānupassanā*.

You need to see rightly the natural phenomena taking place in your body and mind. In this practice seeing things as they really are is *sammā*

diṭṭhi or right understanding. What should you do to see correctly?

You need right thought (*sammā saṅkappa*). To think rightly, there must be right effort or *sammā vāyāma*. At this time in making an effort, right mindfulness (*sammā sati*) is important. Right concentration or *sammā samādhi* then comes when you are mindful as your mind, focused on the object, becomes still. Adding them up, you have the five factors of *magga*, or the basis of the Noble Eightfold Path to *Nibbāna*. They are otherwise called *kāyapaka* or *kāraka magganga*. In practice if these five are in balance, you will be able to see things as they really are.

Let's say you are contemplating the breath. Trying to realise its nature is *sammā vāyāma*. Being always mindful of the in-and-out breath is *sammā sati*. Concentrating on the breath as the object is *sammā samādhi*. The thought about its nature is *sammā saṅkappa*. With the help of these four factors, *sammā diṭṭhi* comes into being. Through it you see with right view: that the breath is just a natural process and a material quality. "This I am not. This is not my property,"

you realise. You see it arises depending on its cause.

Once you come to see all conditioned things as they really are, you will find no enjoyment with such things even with your own body and mind. You are able to remove your attachment. Without it your mind is freed.

To attain such mental freedom in progressive stages, the Buddha expounded the four meditation objects: of the body, feelings, consciousness and the dhammas. At anytime, wherever you are, when you are free to systematically work with these objects, you can attain knowledge. With it comes this mental liberation or *vimutti*.

What will happen to those who do not meditate? If they have attachments, there will be *soka* or anxiety. Connected with it is physical and mental suffering enough to make them cry.

That is why the Buddha gave the way out of such a problem by encouraging us to follow the *satipaṭṭhāna* practice of the Noble Eightfold Path:

*"Ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo sattānaṃ
visuddhiyā, soka-paridevānaṃ samatikkamāya,
dukkha-domanassānaṃ aṭṭhaṅgamāya,
ñāyassa adhigamāya, nibbānassa sacchikiriyaṃ,
yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā¹²."*

O Monks, this single path of mindfulness practice, which is established on four foundations, is the only way to free beings from mental defilements; to pass over sorrow and lamentation; to overcome physical pain and mental unhappiness; to approach and to attain *Nibbāna*.

Only when the dirt of mental defilements called *kilesas* is removed, when their heat has cooled, can the mind be at peace. People live with anxiety in their daily lives. When this condition worsens, they start to cry.

¹² *Bhikkhave* – O monks,

ayaṃ maggo – this path [of mindfulness meditation on]

yadidaṃ cattāro satipaṭṭhānā – the four foundations

ekāyano – [is] the only way

sattanaṃ visuddhiyā – [for] beings' purification;

soka-paridevānaṃ samatikkamāya – for getting over sorrow and lamentation;

dukkha-domanassānaṃ aṭṭhaṅgamāya – for the cessation of physical pain and mental unhappiness;

ñāyassa adhigamāya – for knowing how to reach *Nibbāna*;
nibbānassa sacchikiriyaṃ – [and] for realising *Nibbāna*.

Consider what anxiety is. You worry over something: that it might become damaged or spoiled. You also become troubled when it is already that way. You are also anxious that it might get stolen and then cry over its loss.

Conclusion

The unlucky ones who lost their opportunity are eight in number; only a lucky one has that great opportunity. We should try to be that lucky one by following the Noble Eightfold Path so as to become truly fortunate.

My dear listeners, as it is a great chance to follow Noble Practice, may you all be able to strive for it and not lose your opportunity.

Sādhu ! Sādhu ! Sādhu !

Exits of the Mind

In an emergency or a difficult situation people usually search for an exit. If there is no way out or if one chooses to ignore or repress the problem, the situation will only worsen. An over-inflated balloon will burst as the air has nowhere to escape. In the same way the mind without a safety outlet is likely to explode when a person's stress or other unwholesome emotions become overpowering. One could be driven mad as a result.

Therefore it is essential to find mental exits. The Buddha used the Pāḷi word *nissaraṇa* to mean an exit. He pointed out its use as a means to get rid of strong emotions and stress -- by teaching us methods which are easy to remember and to practise. In our daily life when we meet with mental hindrances we must try to find and use these exits. In doing so, we can be relieved of our problems. We might even in the end reach a state of mental liberation. At that point our mind will never find itself in a tight corner again. Never will it

be oppressed by stress or other mental problems again.

Nowadays many people strive hard to do well and be successful: to reach world class standard and affluence, to rival this person or that person's status. Many end up with stress and other emotional problems. Many things have been invented which bring us comfort and convenience in our daily living. Now we can travel in comfort to anywhere within our homeland in a short time, or to this or that country anywhere in the world. The variety of luxury and consumer goods is ever increasing. Yet the more plentiful they are, the more common stress has become among people.

With the advances of this modern age, has happiness also increased in the mind? Rather than happiness, stress and its related illnesses are on the rise. Why is this so? It would be good to find out the cause.

According to the Buddha, people's craving or *lobha* can never be satisfied. Trying to fulfil one's craving is like walking on a path that has no end. Human beings are always desiring this or wanting that. "*Atitto lokd*" was what the Buddha said. Humans are never satisfied. No matter how fulfilled they are

materially, they are not content. However much they strive to do even better to get even more, their need remains everlasting.

So along with the increase of consumer goods and affluence is an increase of stress and stress-related problems. Take a look at the world: this is what is happening everywhere.

Luckily there is the Buddha with His effective methods taught in His Dhamma discourses. Those who have the opportunity to learn and to practise accordingly are able to relieve their condition.

In present times stress is increasing in those economically developed countries. Not having come across the Buddha's way, people have had to search for all sorts of stress-reduction techniques. Experts have come up with a variety of methods. One way is through psychotherapy and psychiatry practised by therapists and psychiatrists. Given that the Buddha's teachings are well-spread throughout Myanmar, it is common for Buddhists to meditate for tranquillity and thus relieve their stress and its related illnesses. This is through their right thought about what the Buddha taught.

How are Myanmar Buddhists able to cure themselves of this problem? Almost all of them have such a right thought: "*Sabbe sarikhāra anicca,*" that all conditioned things are impermanent. These Buddhists know too that their wishes cannot always be fulfilled, and so on. What the Buddha taught has been slowly seeping into their heart and mind ever since the Pagan era when the Buddha-Dhamma first arrived in Myanmar. From parents, relatives and teachers, generation after generation have come to hear the Buddha's advice.

Through such thoughts "Conditioned things are impermanent," "Everything cannot be according to one's wishes," or "Everything is in the nature of *anatta* or uncontrollability," those with stress are able to recover. In this way they have found a mental exit.

There are some visitors who come to Myanmar and observe that the people here seem to be living happily without much mental stress and strain. Why are they happy? Simply put, it is because of the Buddha-Dhamma. By taking refuge under the shade of the Buddha's teachings, the Myanmar people have found a mental exit.

In some countries people have to learn about stress reduction, taking it as a subject in university: MBSR in short for Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction. Connected to psychology, it is a part of modern education.

The equivalent of MBSR in Myanmar is the Buddha's discourse on *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna*. As the people here have the opportunity to follow His technique, they hardly remain stressed for long. This is because they make use of mental exits that the Buddha had shown in His suttas.

In a huge building where crowds usually gather such as a hypermarket or an airport terminal, exits are essential, especially emergency exits. Those who have travelled by air would probably have come across them. Should any unexpected or dangerous situation arise, people can escape by using such exits. Mental exits are just as important. When the means to relieve mental strain and tension are unavailable, the problem can only worsen. The right exit to take is to contemplate to see things as they really are.

For this reason today I am explaining about where these "Exits of the mind" can be found. If someone inside a big building wishes to find a way out, he

only has to search within that building. Finding the exit he can get outside. Similarly if someone is suffering from stress, where has he to look to find a way out of his condition? With the mind blocked by stress, how does he escape from it? Like that person in that big building, we have to search within our mind, and not elsewhere outside.

Nissaraṇa Sutta

In this sutta the Buddha taught about the six kinds of exits of the mind. Should the mind come under any form of mental stress and strain, the Buddha has shown us the right way to get out of it. By following His technique no one will explode and go off one's head.

Many people in this world -- having no opportunity to find out about the Buddha's teachings -- are unaware that such exits exist. Whether they disregard or are ignorant of what the Buddha taught, they follow their own ideas instead. They follow what they imagine wrongly to be the way out of their mental problems.

Nowadays some among the younger generation are prone to suffer from stress and depression when they do not get what they want or when things do not go their way. Then as they do not

know how to control or restrain their mind, they explode or go haywire. Faced with mental stress and strain, what do they do? Not finding ready solutions, some take to drugs, sleeping pills, and intoxicants, or drink alcohol as a means of escape.

They try to escape from their problems without searching for the root cause. They find temporary relief instead of addressing their difficulties directly. This kind of exit is not a genuine one as it cannot solve their troubles. Instead another problem comes into being, to be followed by more. The situation bad as it is becomes even worse: what was firstly one problem now becomes two or more – all because the right exit was not chosen.

Take for example a person who has the habit of chewing betel nut. He wants to stop this habit but finds that it is not easy. He tries to substitute with cigarettes, thinking that smoking can replace betel chewing. In this way he becomes addicted to both. Now he not only chews betel, he also smokes.

In searching for an exit of mind, if we take to drinking alcohol or abusing drugs, we will create more problems for ourselves. Such temporary means are not true exits for stress and other emotional problems. Only what the Buddha taught

is subtle and effective enough to help solve the problem.

The exit of hate

Sometimes things do not happen according to our wish. If our dissatisfaction then develops, the mind can blow up with hatred and ill-will. Peace of mind is destroyed. In a rage we lose our bright and pleasant expression. The face turns ugly.

When hate and ill-will appear in the mind, some people choose the wrong exit – by doing something unwholesome – to satisfy their anger. Hating that person they shout abuse or even beat him up. These people might think their conduct is the exit for hatred but another problem has come into being. The Buddha said, “The true exit for ill-will and hatred is *metta* or loving-kindness.” We should develop *metta* for the person we hate. Only *metta* can remove hate smoothly and thoroughly.

In the *Dhammapada* the Buddha advises us, “Hatred cannot be removed by hatred.” Take an example of something that is covered with filth. To clean it, if we use more dirt to do the job, it will become even filthier. Only water can wash away

the dirt. In the same way with hatred and ill-will appearing in the mind: we need *metta* to remove them. It is the real exit for hatred.

What the Buddha actually said was, "*Nīssaraṇam etaṃ byāpādassa yadidaṃ metta ceto-vimutti.*" Metta that relieves hatred is the exit for this emotion.

When hatred appears within us it burns our heart. We dislike this burning feeling as it is uncomfortably hot. If we prefer to be ever-peaceful instead, then we should replace this heat with *metta* as it is the true exit for hate. By cultivating it, hatred and ill-will cannot remain in the heart. This is the practical method taught by the Buddha over 2,550 years ago.

You should note that *metta* has different degrees and levels of power. The *metta* that appears among people for one another is the basic or common form. Though it is not strong it is still necessary. However through systematic practice, a powerful type can be obtained.

Physical exercise is necessary to strengthen the body. Sportspeople like footballers and runners need such regular training. Similarly regular

practice is essential to develop *metta*. First it should be nurtured in the heart. Then its power is developed through mental exercise.

What is *metta*? How to develop it? Loving-kindness is similar to love with craving or *taṇhā-rāga*. Therefore it can be mistaken for *taṇhā-rāga*. It may also be mixed with love with craving. When two people are in love, they favour each other. *Metta* gives preference too except that it is to all sentient beings – that is its nature.

Because *rāga* and *metta* are quite alike, it is extremely difficult to have genuinely pure loving-kindness. Sometimes *rāga* can appear as *metta*, deceiving us into thinking that it is *metta*. There are many mental states that are evil disguised as good.

According to Shwegyin Sayadaw¹, "*Rāgo mettaya vañceti*," that is, craving deceives one into thinking that it is *metta*. So we must be careful about what is *rāga* and what is *metta*. *Metta* is for the benefit of all others. *Taṇhā* on the other hand is for only

¹ In his book *Vañcana Dīpanī* (Exposition of Deceit), written in northern Mandalay during the reign of King Mindon.

oneself. *Metta* is able to make sacrifice for others unlike *taṇhā*.

There are two kinds of love: that of *taṇhā* burns the heart, while *metta's* love tranquilises it. *Metta* has no attachment. It only wishes for the welfare and happiness of the others. Loving-kindness is for the others; *taṇhā* is for oneself only.

Try and consider: when people say, "I love you," is that really love? Basically it is not love they have for that person. Actually it is their own happiness they love. Most people misunderstand this point. For example, Mother loves her child and so does Father. However if that son or daughter so dearly loved by the parents does not obey them, would they still continue to love that child? They would not be able to do so as they really love their own happiness – this happiness they obtain as a gift from their child. Should this child spoil his parents' happiness, they might even be led to announce in the newspaper, "So-and-so is no longer my son." Why do they disinherit their child? It is because he can no longer fulfil their happiness, indeed he has ruined it. As they can no longer find contentment with their child, "Go away!" they say as they drive him out.

Thus *taṇhā's* love is quite different from *mettā's*. *Metta* never considers its own happiness, only that of the others. It wishes for the others' well-being without attachment or self-concern.

What is the root meaning of *metta*? The word is derived from "*mitta*" or friend. *Mitassa esā metta*, that is, *metta* is the attitude of a friend.

Practically everybody has a friend. We are happy to see a friend. It is somebody we like to chat with, share a meal or stay with. We have our friend's interests at heart. This is what loving-kindness is about. Its nature is *adosa* or anti-hatred, being free of hatred. It naturally exists within people's hearts. But only with practice can its power increase. Without practice it cannot become powerful.

How to practise loving-kindness? It has to be applied on an object. In order to increase the mind power, we must practise with an object. To sharpen a knife, we need to use a whetstone or a knife sharpener. In the same way, *metta* is "sharpened" on an object.

How it is done is clearly explained in the *Visuddhimagga*. It is one thing to systematically

develop *metta* using a technique. It is another thing when people say, "May you be well and happy" which is the common way. Developing metta methodically is not through the usual wish "*Sabbe satta avera hontu,*" or through chanting in front of the altar.

To develop loving-kindness you have to follow the meditation on *metta*. First you choose your object. Selecting the person is important for the meditation practice. It should be someone you care about, for instance, a close friend.

That person must still be alive to be the object. Never choose or send *metta* to someone who has died. He or she is no longer in the life you know, but is already in another life. Therefore your *metta* will be off the mark. You will then not succeed in attaining absorption or *jhāna*.

In your choice of people still alive, there are three categories:

- a well-loved person
- a stranger or someone you are indifferent to
- an enemy or somebody you hate.

Generally speaking, everybody has these three types of people. Of these three, which should you first choose to begin with? Don't start with an

unknown person to cultivate *metta*. It may be difficult to develop loving-kindness for him or her because of your indifference. So don't choose a stranger as your first object. Also if you choose an enemy or somebody you hate, your hatred will grow instead. You cannot sow loving-kindness on him or her. For easy cultivation of *metta*, choose one who is dear to you. But you must be careful to choose one of the same sex, not the opposite sex. If you are male, choose one of your male friends, for example. A female should choose a female friend. If a male selects one of the opposite sex, instead of *metta* there is a risk that *taṇhā-rāga* will arise.

After making your choice, you are ready to start sowing *metta* in your heart with this person. However at first it is helpful to have a comparison that would enable you to have a right attitude. As most people consider themselves first and foremost, so at the very first, you should regard your own self: "May I be well and happy," and so on.

Then consider your chosen object by focusing in your mind your friend's face. If necessary, use a photograph which you place in front of you to help

you visualise the face – smiling or with a kind look. Looking at it you wish thus: “May you be happy,” “May you be healthy.” You can use whatever words you find suitable: for instance, “May you be able to smile always, to be happy, healthy and successful.” This is done by repetition. Once is not enough. Just as a song has its refrain, *metta* also has the same in its repetition. How many times should you repeat? If you work on it for one hour, it means that you repeat throughout that hour. In this way like applying a knife on the whetstone to sharpen it, you apply your *metta*: “May you be happy” and so on in your mind.

By constant practice you reach a state where you see that person in the mind wherever you are. Even before you fall asleep you still see his face, so that you do not notice much of anything else. Focusing on it as a *nimitta* or mental image you can thus concentrate your mind. This way it becomes still. At this point if you continue to apply *metta*, the growing power of *samādhi* or concentration, can bring about *jhāna*, absorption state.

Some Myanmar people have the impression that *jhāna* is about flying in the sky. But that is not

really so. *Jhāna* is the concentration power that accumulates by focusing on the object. When there is enough concentration, it leads to the first absorption state.

Jhāna in metta bhāvanā

The mind is always able to focus on your friend's face through *vitakka* or initial application. It cannot go off elsewhere. *Vicāra* or sustained application also keeps it fixed on your object. The mind has *pīti* or zest as well as *sukha* or happiness about this object. Because of *ekaggatā* or one-pointedness the mind cannot separate from it. When these five factors are harmoniously working together, the result is the first *jhāna* or first level of absorption.

As your power of concentration increases, *vitakka* or initial application is no longer needed as the object cannot be detached from the mind. The remaining four factors collectively form the second level of absorption.

Next, by increasing your power of *samādhi* or concentration there is no more use for *vicāra* or sustained application to bind the object to the mind. The state with the remaining three factors

resting together on your friend's face is called the third *jhāna*.

So this is how you can cultivate *metta* up till the three *jhāna* stages are reached when your concentration becomes strong. At this stage the mental state of *metta* is called *ceto-vimutti*. It means that the mind is totally free from hatred. Just ordinary *metta* alone is without *ceto-vimutti* as it is not strong unlike that in *jhāna*.

Reaching the third stage you should test your *metta* this way: you transfer it from your dearly beloved to somebody you neither like nor dislike. If your attitude of loving-kindness changes for that person, then your *metta* is not strong enough. You need to practise some more on your dear friend. If there is no difference in your attitude between the two persons, then your *metta* has become firm.

Then try to shift the *metta* on to the next one – your enemy or someone you hate. It may be that hate or anger arises. If so then you need to practise again on your beloved person. As loving-kindness develops, hate no longer appears for your enemy. Your *metta* is strongest at this stage when you cannot see the difference among these four: yourself, your dearly beloved, a stranger, and your

enemy. You see them as one. At this stage your *metta* has broken the barriers. Now it is borderless: there is no discrimination as all are equal under the power of your *metta*.

Let me give you an illustration. In former times forest-dwelling priests used to practise human sacrifice. Let's say that they approach this group of four people including you to ask for one victim to be delivered to them. Out of these four – you, your dear friend, someone whom you are indifferent to, and your enemy -- whom do you choose? If you think, "Oh, let the other three remain. I will become the sacrifice." This shows that you have less regard for yourself, that your *metta* is not equally shared. If your choice falls on your enemy, it shows that your hatred for him still remains.

Or you say, "It's not possible to select anyone. As all are the same, no one can be chosen."

Your *metta* has passed over the barriers. You are able to spread loving-kindness towards all living beings. Hatred cannot arise in you.

Switching to *vipassanā*

At this stage with the base of *metta* concentration, you can move to *vipassanā* or insight meditation. You then need to change your object. Metta's object is a concept of a sentient being. It cannot serve as a *vipassanā* object. Therefore the mind should focus on that mental state of *metta* which is mainly *adosa* or anti-hatred. This mental state of *metta* is *nāma* (mentality) with its individual characteristic of inclining towards the object. This mental state of *metta* arises depending on its material base called *hadaya vatthu* or heart base. This *vatthu* is *rūpa* or matter. Noting at the present moment you come to understand the difference between *nāma* and *rūpa*. By clearly comprehending *metta's* mental state as *nāma* and the base where *metta* appears as *rūpa*, you are seeing things as they really are. Your knowledge is called analytical knowledge of mind-and-matter (*nāma-rūpa pariccheda ñāṇa*).

After that as your knowledge increases, you come to see clearly the cause of *metta's* mental state and the cause of the base of its material qualities. This knowledge is *paccaya-pariggaha ñāṇa* or knowledge of causality.

Depending on these two kinds of knowledge as a base, you clearly see more and more that all kinds of mind and matter are impermanent. Their perpetual arising and falling is disturbing. You have no power to stop this situation. You realise *anicca-dukkha-anatta* or impermanence unsatisfactoriness - non-self clearly. This knowledge is *sammasana ñāṇa* or knowledge of examination. Then you can note every moment of arising-falling of *nāma-rūpa*. This is *udayabbaya ñāṇa* or knowledge of rise and fall. After that you see only falling quickly. Knowledge at this stage is *bhanga ñāṇa* or knowledge of dissolution. It is the highest level of anicca or impermanence.

Following it, you realise not only that *nāma-rūpa* is *anicca-dukkha-anatta*, you see it as fearful *bhaya ñāṇa* or knowledge of things as fearful, as dangerous *ādīnava ñāṇa* or knowledge of things as dangerous, as non-enjoyment *nibbidā ñāṇa* or knowledge of disenchantment, as wishing to abandon *muñcitukamyatā ñāṇa* or knowledge of desire for deliverance, and as recontemplation of the situation *paṭisaṅkhā ñāṇa* or knowledge of reflection.

Then you get equanimity in examining the nature of *saṅkhāras* or conditioned things. The knowledge is *saṅkhārupekkhā ñāṇa* or knowledge of equanimity toward conditioned things. As you attain this stage, step by step your knowledge becomes mature. Through this *ñāṇa* you can attain *sotāpatti magga* and *phala*, or Path and Fruition of Stream-enterer, *sakadāgāmi magga* and *phala* or Path and Fruition of Once-returner, and *anāgāmi magga* and *phala* or Path and Fruition of Non-returner.

When you attain *sotāpatti magga*, hatred which can lead to *apāya* or rebirth in the woeful states is removed. At the *sakadāgāmi* level, the remaining hatred is reduced even more. When you become an *anāgāmi*, all traces of hatred in the heart are eradicated. Totally emptied, nothing remains.

So just through *metta-jhāna samādhi* hatred is subjugated. However it is still in a positive state in the heart. When you attain *anāgāmi magga* it becomes negative – there is no more chance of it ever arising again.

Therefore *anāgāmi magga* and *phala* are the exit of hate. By then you will own an ever-peaceful

mind minus the hatred. That is why the Buddha calls it "*metta ceto-vimutti*" – the exit of hate.

The exit of cruelty

Next we turn to look for another exit. Now and again people get angry; it is an emotion common to all. Parents get angry with their children; brothers and sisters lose their temper with each other. In their anger they have no such idea: "I want to kill him (or her)." Despite their anger they never think of such a thing. No cruelty appears in their mind.

It is only when people cannot control their rage that cruelty arises. This emotion is called *vihimsa* or cruelty. In the mind there is the thought to be cruel, to ill-treat or to torture. It must be subjugated. Otherwise it will lead us to hit or even kill another person. When cruelty occurs in the mind, what is its exit?

Karuna or compassion is the way out. In such a case we should develop compassion for those who are unfortunate or in trouble; to those who suffer from diseases or are unemployed and destitute, and who lack food and shelter. By considering their

situation, we should adopt this attitude: 'May these people be free from such suffering.'

When compassion has been successfully developed within us, *jhāna* stages can be attained just as in the practice of *metta*. It also leads to the elimination of cruelty as *karuna* is the exit of cruelty.

The exit of jealousy

People always compare themselves with the others: be it their opponent, neighbour, acquaintance or even a stranger. The emotion called jealousy then starts with thought. In a competition if the rival beats him or if a neighbour succeeds in business, then an unhappy feeling called *issa* or jealousy appears in the one who did not succeed. This mental state dislikes another's success. If left uncontrolled, it can cause harm to the others.

There is a true incident reported in the newspapers: In a women's ice-skating competition in the US, the current title-holder became jealous of another skater. This rival being better qualified posed a threat to her crown. So the current champion hired someone to break her rival's leg so

that she could not compete for the title. Jealousy led her to harm another.

When this afflictive mental state influences our mind, we cannot tolerate another person's success. How then do we find its exit? The Buddha said, "It is the practice of *mudita* or appreciative joy that is the true exit of jealousy."

If you want to cultivate *mudita* you have to focus on those who are successful or are accomplished. You should hold this attitude: "May they never lose their good fortune. May they be forever happy. May they be forever successful." Such an attitude should be cultivated repeatedly until you attain the third *jhāna* level. Then jealousy cannot appear in the mind, preventing you from speaking positively of those who have done well. Thus appreciative joy is the exit of jealousy.

The exit of love and hate

The next exit concerns such passions like love and hate. Everybody feels one or the other at different moments. Gripped by love, you feel its passion. Seized with hatred, you feel its fury. These two emotions are the extremes because there is no balance in the mind. At such times the mind is not

tranquil. To be free from such mental extremes, what should be done? You should cultivate *upekkhā* or equanimity. How do you develop such a mental state?

Focusing on sentient beings, you contemplate thus, "*Sabbe satta kammassaka*. All beings have their own *kamma* as their property. Following their own *kamma*, they have to wander around in *sarīsāra*. If I love them, they will still have to depend on their own *kamma*. Similarly if I hate them, they will also be according to their own *kamma*. I should avoid loving and hating them. Doing so, I would keep my mind calm and peaceful."

This is the state of *upekkhā*. Maintaining such an attitude towards living beings is a noble practice. As it avoids the two extremes of love and hate, it is the exit of these strong passions.

You should develop equanimity up to the third *jhāna* stage. At this point by succeeding in your practice, the *upekkhā* you have becomes *ceto-vimutti*. The mind is then free of craving or hate. By following systematically this practice, you can find the exit of love and hate.

The exit of the perception of permanence

The next exit is about *vipassanā* (insight meditation) practice. Whatever we see – whether it is ourselves or our surroundings – we think it is permanent. Thus perversion of thought has appeared in our mind. If we follow the *vipassanā* technique in meditation, we can find that every conditioned thing is changing second by second. In this way we realise that all conditioned things are impermanent.

We need to develop the perception of *anicca* or impermanence. By seeing *anicca*, we can remove the perception of *nicca* or permanence. When *anicca saññā* (perception of impermanence) has developed strong enough, the perception of permanence cannot come into being. *Anicca saññā* is the exit of the perception of permanence by means of the matured insight of *vipassanā*. Through this knowledge we can reduce or remove attachment or worry.

The exit of *māna*

Māna is a mental state called conceit. When it appears it causes us to think, "I am." This "I am" is

based on one's qualifications or qualities. In the Pāli text *māna* is called "*asmi māna*", meaning the conceit which considers "I am".

Māna is not only about one's superiority over others. It covers both of these contrasting attitudes: "I'm so clever, I can understand," and "I'm so dull, I can't understand." Similarly, "This is too advanced for me," and "This is too simple for me." All these attitudes show *māna*.

In brief *māna* arises in us based on our qualifications and qualities – good or poor. Such an attitude hinders higher knowledge. To remove such an attitude we need to follow *vipassanā* practice.

Through insight meditation we can attain up to the fourth *magga* and *phala* (path and fruition). Only by means of the fourth path can *māna* be totally removed. Therefore the fourth path is the exit of *māna*.

Conclusion

The exits of the mind as taught by the Buddha in the Nissaraṇa Sutta are real techniques that can be taken up in practice. By following these ways we can be led to liberation.

My dear listeners, you should make use of these mental exits. If you do so, you will be able to free your mind from any affliction due to excessive emotions of love and hate, cruelty and jealousy for instance. You will be able to realise the nature of *sarikhāras* or conditioned things where there is no sign of permanence. You can follow the way out of *māna*.

You will come to know for yourself through your own experience that what the Buddha showed is correct, practical and beneficial.

You will realise that by following His techniques, you will surely attain this perpetual happiness. May you all be able to gain this peace by following the Buddha's exits of the mind.

Sādhu ! Sādhu ! Sādhu !

The *Vipassanā* of Venerable Ānanda

Practically every Buddhist has heard about Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha's cousin, as he was one of the most prominent among the disciples. He followed the Buddha everywhere for 25 years as His personal attendant. The Buddha ranked him foremost¹ in five qualities: "Ānanda is the top among those who are learned in the Dhamma, among those who are bright and with knowledge, among those who put in great effort, among those with great memory, and among those who have attended to me."

On the Buddha's first visit to Kapilavatthu after His enlightenment, King Suddhodana urged the Sakyan princes to ordain and serve as the Buddha's retinue. As a result six princes renounced family life to enter the Order. Among

¹ *Etadagga.*

them was the Venerable Ānanda. The others were the Venerables Anuruddha, Bhaddiya, Kimila, Bhagu and Devadatta. Then following the Buddha, they left the royal capital to go to Vesālī.

When he was ordained, Venerable Ānanda was 37 years old, and there were 7 born-mates with the Buddha². (The Buddha had been enlightened at 35 and by the time He visited Kapilavatthu, He was 37.) Within that year during his first rains retreat or *vassa*, the Venerable became a *sotāpanna*.

How did it happen? Whose Dhamma discourse did he listen to? If you were to search the Piṭaka text, you will come across Ānanda Sutta in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. In this sutta, the Venerable related his experience of listening to the Dhamma which led to his enlightenment. At that time he was living in Jetavana Monastery in Sāvatti.

² Venerable Ānanda belonged to seven born-mates who shared the same birth date with the Buddha. The others were Kāludāyī, son of a Minister; Channa, the horse-keeper; Yasodharā, the cousin-sister of the Bodhisatta; and Kaṇḍaka, the Bodhisatta's favourite horse. Also on that day a Bodhi tree and four golden pots filled with gold appeared in the vicinity where the Bodhisatta was born.

There was also Venerable Puṇṇa who had been declared the most excellent Dhamma speaker (*Dhammakathika*). He was a nephew of Venerable Koṇḍañña. Venerable Koṇḍañña was the first human who became the first *sotāpanna* in this Gotama Buddha's dispensation. He was listening to the Buddha's first discourse, the Dhammacakka, and became enlightened. This person was extremely brilliant. Similarly, by listening to Venerable Puṇṇa's discourse, Venerable Ānanda became a *sotāpanna*.

Venerable Ānanda later spoke to the other monks in Sāvatti about it, "My Venerable friends, Venerable Puṇṇa is really of benefit to us who are new to the Order. He is someone to be relied on. Listening to him explain the Dhamma in detail, I realised the extraordinary Dhamma."

He then went on to describe how Venerable Puṇṇa started his discourse by saying simply, "The view 'I am' appears depending on something, not depending on nothing."³

³ "Upādāya āvuso asmīti hoti no anupādāya."

Venerable Puṇṇa then continued, "Friend Ānanda, on account of what does the notion 'I' and 'mine' arise? It arises depending on the aggregates of feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. Without depending on these five aggregates, the view 'I am' never appears."

This idea of an 'I' is really thought with conceit (*māna*), while the view of 'mine' is really thinking with craving (*taṇhā*). Wrong thought with *māna* and *taṇhā* arises due to one's thinking which holds on to the five aggregates.

Venerable Puṇṇa used a simile to make clear the meaning: "Young people like to look at themselves in the mirror to check on their appearance. Without the mirror, can their facial image appear for them to see how they look? The mirror is the means for the reflection to appear. In the same way, such a view 'I am' appears when one depends on the five aggregates of one's mind-and-body. Without this dependence, the view does not appear."

We should contemplate what our life is composed of. What are these material qualities that we are made of? Don't we have eyes, ears, a nose,

tongue and body as material qualities? All matter is based on the primary elements of extension (*pathavī or earth*), cohesion (*āpo or water*), heat (*tejo or heat*) and motion (*vāyo or wind*). Dependent on these *mahābhūtas or 4 great elements*, other material qualities remain in our body.

Contemplation of material qualities

Because the notion “I am” arises depending on material qualities, we need to examine and mindfully contemplate them. First, we must be able to see the nature of these material qualities concerning us. Having done so, we need to contemplate whether these are permanent or not.

According to Venerable Ānanda, Venerable Puṇṇa asked a question to clarify the meaning: “My Venerable friends, are these material qualities, which form the basis of the wrong view ‘I am’, permanent or impermanent?”

All the listeners including Venerable Ānanda replied, “They are impermanent.”

It is quite clear that matter is impermanent. If we were to look at ourselves within a time frame of a

decade, we can detect a definite difference in us. We emerged from our mother's womb just as little babies, but did not remain so for always as there was a continuous change. If you try to view your life decade by decade, you will be able to see a contrast between the ages 10 and 20, between ages 20 and 30, and so on.

Second by second these changes taking place in us are not apparent. However, decade by decade the transformation becomes obvious. It does not occur in one go at one time only. Changes in material phenomena go on all the time without a break, not even for a minute or a second.

Look at the current of a river as an example. There is never a moment when the flow of water stops. Moving on nonstop, the water we saw a moment ago is not the water we are seeing right now because it has moved on. It is because water looks alike that we cannot tell the difference. We might think that – whether it is yesterday's water or today's water – it is still the same river water. Actually today there is no more of yesterday's water, having already run on. Our physical body is like that, subject to perpetual change. Today there

is no more of yesterday's body. Now what we have is a copy though we cannot tell the difference. However, it is a new one due to the endless transformation going on.

If you can contemplate this way, ask yourself, "Is this body permanent or impermanent?" It is impermanent (*anicca*). As you continue to contemplate matter, ask yourself again, "If material quality is impermanent, can it be assumed to be happiness or suffering (*sukha* or *dukkha*)? It is really unsatisfactory, being painful or *dukkha*. With its nature of constant change, no one can be delighted with it.

Since this ever-changing matter is painful, should it be recognised as an "I"? No, it should not. Thus in this way Venerable Puṇṇa explained the Dhamma to Venerable Ānanda and the others.

He went on, "My Venerable friends, since this matter has the nature of ceaselessly altering itself, we should not keep in mind that 'It is mine' or 'It is my self or soul (*atta*)'. You should see this material quality as it really is with this knowledge, *yathābhūta ñāṇa*. Once you see material quality as

it really is, you cannot find enjoyment with it anymore. You become weary of it (*nibbindati*)."

Contemplation of feeling

Not only do we have matter, we also have mental feelings (*vedanā*). There are pleasant and unpleasant feelings; there is happiness or unhappiness. However, we do not remain happy (or unhappy) all the time. Depending on their cause such mental states appear in the mind. Since any feeling is subject to impermanence, we should not identify it as "I" or "my property".

"My dear friend, is feeling permanent or impermanent?" Venerable Puṇṇa put a question to Venerable Ānanda.

Venerable Ānanda answered, "It is impermanent."

"If it is impermanent, is it *sukha* or *dukkha*?"

"It is *dukkha*," replied Venerable Ānanda.

"If it is *dukkha*, is it proper to regard feeling as 'I' or 'mine'?"

"No, Venerable Sir."

Therefore you should regard feeling with right understanding. All types of feeling are subject to impermanence, suffering and non-self. They are

neither "I" nor "my property". On seeing this way through *vipassanā* knowledge, attachment to feeling will no longer come into being.

Contemplation of perception

We have another mental state called *saññā* (perception). People are referring to *saññā* when they say, "He remembers everything," or "His memory is very poor. He easily forgets." Perception arises in the mind depending on its conditions. Once arisen, it ceases. Thus *saññā* is subject to impermanence. What is impermanent is only suffering. It is improper to consider such a dhamma as "I" or "mine". Instead you should regard perception as impermanent, suffering and non-self. Never think of it as "I" or "my property". That way you would have no attachment to it anymore. You would find nothing enjoyable about *saññā*. Seeing it, you would get weary of it.

Contemplation of mental formations

Besides *saññā* other activities take place in the mind, such as thought, effort, stimulation, and so on. These create various phenomena, so they are called mental formations or *sarikhārās*. They also

arise depending on their conditions. Therefore they are subject to impermanence. Whatever that is impermanent is suffering. Whatever that is suffering is non-self. You should regard none of the mental formations as "I" or "my property". By means of right vision you should bear in mind that they are neither "I" nor "mine". This was how Venerable Puṇṇa explained *sarikhāras*.

Contemplation of consciousness

Consciousness or *viññāṇa* is just bare awareness of an object. It acts as the base of all mental states. Relying on it, mental states arise. Consciousness arises and falls at a very fast rate, depending on conditions. Being so, it is impermanent. All that is impermanent is suffering; and anything that is suffering is non self. "With right view, *viññāṇa* should not be assumed to be either 'I' or 'my property'," said Venerable Puṇṇa.

Benefits of contemplation

He then concluded his teaching this way, "What are the benefits of contemplating the five aggregates in this way? My Venerable friends, by viewing them thus, craving for and attachment to

them will no longer come into being. Not only that, wrong view of these aggregates as either “I” or “mine” will also no longer appear. Then enjoyment concerning them does not occur. You become dissatisfied with these five aggregates as your attachments are gone. At the same time the mind is freed from the bond of mental defilements.”

Listening to Venerable Puṇṇa, Venerable Ānanda obtained the eye for the Dhamma (*Dhammacakkhu*) and became a *sotāpanna*.

The Venerable’s tasks

At that time Venerable Ānanda was 37 years old. At about the age of 50, he became the Buddha’s personal attendant on a permanent basis. For the next 25 years, wherever the Buddha travelled, he would follow like a shadow. While carrying out his duties as an attendant, the Venerable found time to memorise whatever the Buddha taught. In this way, he could recite eventually a total of 84,000 Dhamma aggregates⁴, which he had been

⁴ *Dhamma-khandhas*: the main portions or articles of the Dhamma.

compiling for study. Occasionally Venerable Ānanda would not be present when the Buddha taught the Dhamma. At his request, the Buddha would later brief him about the discourse given in his absence. To show how much effort Venerable Ānanda put in his work: everyday he would recite the discourses he had memorised – altogether 84,000 Dhamma aggregates.

Whenever he listened to the Dhamma, he would consider the meaning thoroughly, investigating it with knowledge. So verbally he would recite; mentally he would bear them in mind all the while; and without fail he would make the effort to clearly understand the meaning. That is why there was nothing Venerable Ānanda did not know about the Dhamma. He was thus considered the top among the monks who were greatly learned. The Venerable himself acknowledged his ability: "I can recite the 84,000 Dhamma aggregates taught by the Buddha: 82,000 of them I learnt from the Buddha Himself, the remaining 2,000 from the senior monks like Venerable Sāriputta. So in total 84,000 main portions of the Dhamma are in my heart."

Venerable Ānanda put in just as much effort in attending to the Buddha, as though He was not any ordinary Buddha he was taking care of. The Venerable never shared the same building (*gandhakuṭi*) with the Buddha, but would always stay somewhere nearby. Every night he would get up to keep watch by circling the Buddha's residence. Why he did this nine times during the night was in case the Buddha called him. In this way he would readily hear and attend to Him. This showed how much care he took.

So that was how for over 40 years the *sotāpanna* carried out his twin duties – of taking care of the Buddha and of looking after the Dhamma through his daily memorising and learning.

The Venerable's meditation request

One day Venerable Ānanda, then in his fifties, approached the Buddha with an earnest request: "Venerable Sir, please teach me in brief how to meditate. I want to live in solitude with only one objective – that of freedom in *Nibbāna*. Without considering my life and body, I shall follow this practice."

The Buddha then taught him the method of *vipassanā* based on the sense bases with respect to the other four groups of dhammas as *vipassanā* objects⁵:

- * the six sense objects
- * the six types of consciousness
- * the six kinds of contact
- * the three types of feeling.

The Buddha explained the sense bases, relating each of the six in turn to the other four groups of dhammas. I shall give a condensed treatment of His talk.

Contemplation regarding the eye-door

The Buddha started His discourse by asking, "Ānanda, what is your opinion: is the eye permanent or impermanent?"

⁵ This discourse is entitled Saṅkhittadhamma Sutta of Saṃyutta Nikāya, in Saḷāyatanaṣaṃyutta.

“Venerable Sir, it is impermanent.”

The Buddha continued, “If impermanent, is it pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Venerable Sir, it is unpleasant.”

After that the Buddha asked, “Then, is it proper to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change as ‘This is mine; this is me; this is my self?’”

“It is not proper, Venerable Sir.”

“Are visible objects permanent or impermanent? Is eye consciousness Is eye-contact Is feeling that arises with eye-contact – which could be pleasant, painful or neither of both – permanent or impermanent?”

“Venerable Sir, it is impermanent.”

“If impermanent, is it pleasant or unpleasant?”

“Unpleasant, Venerable Sir.”

“Then is it proper to regard what is impermanent, unpleasant and subject to change as ‘This is mine; this is me; this is my self?’”

“It is not proper, Venerable Sir.”

When we open our eyes, visible objects come into view. On seeing, how many dhammas arise in the process? Let us consider: when a visible object is reflected on the sensitive eye, eye-consciousness (*cakkhu viññāṇa*) immediately arises as contact or *phassa* comes into being. Depending on contact, pleasant or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant feeling occurs in the mind.

This process involving five dhammas takes place in everyone. You should try to see this happening in yourself.

Though you may search everywhere for the Dhamma, you will only find it in yourself. The dhammas to be contemplated lie within your own mind and body.

The difference with Paṭiccasamuppāda

In the way of Paṭiccasamuppāda, the Buddha had said, "*Salāyatana paccayā phasso, phassa paccayā vedanā*. Depending on the six sense bases (*salāyatana*), contact (*phassa*) arises. Depending on contact, feeling (*vedanā*) arises."

So only three dhammas are given as *vipassanā* objects:

*sense base

*contact

*feeling

There is no mention of sense objects and consciousness.

Here the Buddha directly links up the eye-base with *phassa* without mentioning the two intermediate dhammas as taught in His discourse to Venerable Ānanda:

* The visible object that comes into contact with the sensitive matter (*cakkhu pasāda*) of the eye-base.

* The eye consciousness that arises as a result of that contact.

What comes first in the series is the eye-base, followed by the visible object. After that what arises is eye consciousness, followed by contact. Only with contact feeling appears.

The nature of these *vipassanā* objects

These five dhammas are *vipassanā* objects. If you were to apply strong mindfulness (*sati*) and

concentration (*samādhi*) to look, you will find that this is how the process works. On the other hand, you cannot observe this if you are careless and unmindful.

Not one of these five dhammas is stable or lasting: not the eye or the visible object. Eye consciousness appears only to vanish. Contact with the object also arises only to cease. It is the same for feeling. As not even one is stable, they are impermanent.

Whatever that has the nature of impermanence: is it happiness (*sukha*) or suffering (*dukkha*)? It is *dukkha* because anything that is impermanent is always unsettling. It is *sukha* when there is nothing disturbing.

Can we take something that causes suffering to be an "I", or "mine" or "my soul (*atta*)"? How can it be said that we make *dukkha* "my property" or even "my soul"? The Buddha instructed Venerable Ānanda to strive to see these five dhammas as impermanent, suffering and non-self (*anicca-dukkha-anatta*).

My dear Dhamma listeners, if you ask what should be contemplated in *vipassanā* practice, there is the sensitive **eye** and the visible **object** that is reflected in the eye. With these two getting in touch, seeing **consciousness** appears together with *phassa* or **contact**. As a result of contact, **feeling** arises. These dhammas are to be noted with *vipassanā* insight.

First, what is to be observed? You should start with their individual characteristics (*sabhāva lakkaṇā*), and not the universal characteristics of *anicca-dukkha-anatta*. Look for the sensitive eye's natural characteristic. At the meeting of visible form and the eye, try to observe the eye consciousness that arises.

Physical contact is very obvious unlike mental contact (*phassa*). Try to consider *phassa's* nature. How does it make its impact felt without actually touching the body? Let's say that you see someone eating a lime or a sour pickle. You find your mouth beginning to water. This occurs though there is no actual contact – being a characteristic of *phassa*. Also, a timid person on seeing someone climb up the roof will start

trembling with fear. This is when *phassa* is most prominent.

Next to appear is feeling, whether pleasant or unpleasant. You need to contemplate its individual characteristic. Doing so, you will come to realise that both the sensitive eye and the object that impinges on it are impermanent. Eye consciousness too lasts only a moment only to disappear. It is the same for *phassa* and feeling. Thus you become aware of their transient nature which is a universal characteristic. This is how the Buddha taught Venerable Ānanda to contemplate the dhammas relating to visible objects.

Contemplation regarding the ear-door

It is the same for sound when it enters the ear. Hearing consciousness then comes into being. With it *phassa* arises. Based on it, feeling appears. So, whatever the sound, these five dhammas take place in everyone, according to nature. If the sound is pleasant, one is happy. If it is unpleasant, one is unhappy. The mind is pleased to hear what it likes to hear and not otherwise.

All these five dhammas are impermanent. Being so, they are thus suffering. What is suffering is non-self. Since they are non-self, they cannot be seen as “I” or “mine”. This was what the Buddha said to Venerable Ānanda.

Contemplation regarding the nose-door

Smell is detected through the nose. When cooking is going on in the kitchen, the nose can tell the difference whether fish or chilli is being fried. Their smell is not the same: whether it is fried chicken or a dish of fried roselle (a sourish vegetable).

As soon as an odour reaches the nose, the process occurs without a break with the arising of nose consciousness, given the contact of the smell at the sensitive nose. Based on *phassa*, feeling is produced. So, there is altogether a group of five dhammas. Not even one of them is permanent. They remain only a moment before passing away. Since they are impermanent, they are *dukkha* or suffering. Having this nature of suffering, they are non-self. By seeing with right vision what is non-self, you also realise, “This is not me; this is not

my property. It is only a natural process that is taking its course.”

You should try to see in this way the five dhammas taking place whenever you open your eyes, prick your ears to listen, or detect an odour.

Contemplation regarding the tongue-door

Let's say that you are having breakfast or lunch. What happens as you eat: there is the tongue, the taste of food, tasting consciousness, the contact of the tongue with the taste, and there is feeling as a result. You should try to discover these dhammas taking place, and to see their impermanent nature. If you do, you would also come to realise that being impermanent, their nature is suffering. Consequently you should understand that being *dukkha*, they are not-self. This is by contemplating with right view. Not even in one bit of these dhammas can an "I" or "my property" be found. Depending on conditions, they arise for an instant, only to disappear again. For what reason should you speak of these dhammas as an "I" when it is not so?

Contemplation regarding the body-door

Supposing something or other comes to touch your body. At the time of contact of this tangible object with the sensitive body, there will be a total of five dhammas occurring. If it is hot, you will feel the heat. While it is cold, you will feel the chill. Now it is stifling, being high summer, isn't it? If you fan yourself, won't you feel the cool air against your body? Observe what happens at the time the air touches your body. The current of air is tangible object. As it contacts the *kāya pasāda* or the sensitive matter of your body, awareness of the cool touch occurs. *Phassa* also arises, followed by feeling. This process is the same, whether you are feeling hot standing in the sun. Then because it is so hot, you take a bath. Don't you enjoy the cool water as you bathe? It is natural to like it. Can't you observe these dhammas through *vipassanā*?

These five dhammas can be contemplated in any place or situation. Don't be heedless. With heedfulness or *appamāda* you will always be mindful. In this way wherever you are, there will

only be *vipassanā* objects appearing. If you do not find any, it is because your knowledge and mindfulness are also missing. In this case you should endeavour to find them: only then is this meditation.

Meditation does not only consist of sitting still. It can be carried out anywhere in all postures, for example, in walking. If you do, you will come to see only these natural processes occurring all the time. Only then you will realise that not even one bit is permanent. This is how you should contemplate.

Contemplation regarding the mind-door

There are times when the sense-organs (of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) are not involved as the mind is wholly involved in thought. You could be thinking about an incident that happened yesterday or about your plans for tomorrow. What has happened is that your mind (*mano*) came across a dhamma object. Besides the visible object, sound, smell, taste and tangible object, the remaining objects are altogether classed as

“dhamma objects”⁶. These appear at the mind-door which is the *bhavaṅga citta*⁷.

When a dhamma object strikes this door, mind consciousness arises. With *phassa*, feeling then occurs. Due to thought of certain things, we become happy. Even when we are alone, our thinking can make us smile. At other times some thoughts can make us look grim. Try and see for yourself when these things happen.

The way to develop *vipassanā* knowledge

With repeated contemplation, there comes a time when you will no longer identify these dhammas as “I”, “mine” or “my self”. At that time there will not be a trace left of clinging or attachment to them. Instead you become disillusioned or weary with these *vipassanā* objects. With no more

⁶ These are classified in six groups: sensitive matter (*pasāda rūpa*), subtle matter (*sukhuma rūpa*), consciousness (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasikā*), *Nibbāna*, and concepts (*paññatti*).

⁷ The passive mind that usually occurs when we are deep asleep.

attachment, mental defilements also cease. This is the time when your mind is said to be liberated.

The way to *magga-phala*

Mental liberation step by step takes you to *magga* and *phala* at the end. *Kilesas* and their flux called *asavas* are given up; attachment and clinging (*tañhā*) no longer occur. Similarly, wrong view or *ditthi* and conceit or *māna* do not take place. The mind is in *vimutti*, being freed of any trace of defilement. At this time you clearly realise its liberation:

"There is no more coming to be in existence next time. I have completed what should be done. The noble practice has been accomplished. There is no more to be done as all has been carried out."

Put it this way: a traveller who has reached his journey's end knows there no further destination for him to reach. Well, in the same way someone practising the Dhamma knows when he has reached his goal. For this end the Buddha taught Venerable Ānanda the *vipassanā* method.

However, during the Buddha's lifetime, Venerable Ānanda attained no further knowledge though he

had every intention of trying. Yet, he had little opportunity to practise meditation given his twin responsibilities of giving service and Dhamma education. So, as the Buddha's time of *Parinibbāna* drew near, he became very sad. The Buddha then was lying on a couch, waiting to pass into final *Nibbāna*.

The Venerable thought to himself, "I'm still only a *sotāpanna*. I've yet to become an arahant." He then began to cry. (In this day and age I would think there are hardly anyone who would cry in getting nowhere in the practice of the Dhamma.)

The Buddha asked, "Where has Ānanda gone?"

"He's over there, crying," said someone.

The Venerable was called to the Buddha's side.

"What has happened?"

"I was thinking that the Venerable Sir will soon attain *Parinibbāna*. I was also thinking that I have yet to realise the noble Dhamma. So my heart became heavy."

The Buddha then consoled Venerable Ānanda, "Ānanda, you have a lot of perfections or *pāramīs*. Strive to meditate. When you do, you will become an arahant in no time."

After the Buddha had passed into *Parinibbāna*, plans were made to hold the First Great Council (Saṅgāyana) soon. All that the Buddha had taught would be collated and verified. Those selected to attend were 500 arahants with the exception of Venerable Ānanda who was still a *sotāpanna*.

On the eve of the Great Council, thinking that, "The rest of the assembly will be arahants except for myself only," Venerable Ānanda put all effort to strive in meditation. Even after midnight, he carried on the practice of walking and sitting alternately, following the Buddha's *vipassanā* technique. Yet realisation did not come. (Being over-zealous was the cause.)

Dhamma knowledge makes contemplation easier

He had to find out the reason why by himself. This was a person who was most familiar with all the Buddha's discourses. Some people would claim

that knowing too much of the teachings would hinder realisation of the Dhamma. Was it so with Venerable Ānanda? Because he had the knowledge, he was able to take stock of the situation. What he had learnt was not an obstacle. He asked himself, "why am I not able to realise the Dhamma?"

It was way after midnight and morning light would be approaching soon. Then it dawned on him, "Oh, I've been too intense. As my effort is way in excess, concentration or *samādhi* has slackened."

When people have too much zeal they become unbalanced. Take the case of an electric bulb. If there is an excess of electricity, the fuse goes, isn't that so? If the current is weak, the light becomes very dim. In the same way the mind has to be in balance. This was what Venerable Ānanda realised. His effort or *vīriya* was too much in excess that restlessness or *uddhacca* arose. As a result his *samādhi* became weak.

How Venerable Ānanda became an arahant

So the Venerable decided to let up on his effort a bit by taking a short rest. He stopped his walking meditation to go to his couch. Reaching it, he turned his body and sat down sideways. Then he leaned backwards to lie down. At that moment in that position – his feet having left the floor, his head yet to touch the pillow – Venerable Ānanda attained arahantship.

His manner of becoming an arahant was very peculiar. You should try it out for yourself on reaching home: sit down sideways on your bed. Then recline your body backwards as you lie down. Within that brief moment, the Venerable realised *arahatta-magga*. At that time he did not lose his mindfulness.

Try to be aware at the time you are sitting down. What are you aware of? At the time when your buttocks touch the bed, what we had been discussing just now comes into play: *kāya pasāda* or sensitive body, tangible object, body consciousness, *phassa* and feeling. These five dhammas should be noted. It was in this way that

Venerable Ānanda contemplated – with his head yet to touch the pillow, his feet lifted off the ground.

At that time, being over three months after the Buddha's *Parinibbāna*, he was 80 years old. He would live on till a ripe old age of 120. This was to the benefit of the Buddha's Dispensation or *Sāsana*. To the best of his ability, he served to upkeep the Dhamma that the Buddha had taught.

In his last years, he lived in Koṭṭigāma, near the Rohinī River. People of the two neighbouring villages situated on either bank served and attended to him.

The Venerable's *Parinibbāna*

When he reached the age of 120 years, the villagers from one side of the bank came in supplication: that the Venerable would pass into *Parinibbāna* at their village. Then those from the other side of the bank also made the same appeal.

Said Venerable Ānanda, "My dear supporters, those whom I have become well-acquainted with come from both sides of the river bank. So it would be difficult to choose either this side or that

side to attain *Parinibbāna*. My choice will be right in between: mid-river in the sky above."

The way the Venerable achieved *Parinibbāna* was just as extraordinary as the way he became an arahant.

After he had passed into *Parinibbāna*, in mid-air above the river, his body burst into flames and was consumed by fire. The bone relics began falling: half on this side of the river, and half on the other side. So the two villages had an equal share. This was how by means of *vipassanā* Venerable Ānanda ended his life.

Conclusion

My dear Dhamma listeners, you have now come to know about Venerable Ānanda's *vipassanā*. His way was no other but contemplation of the five aggregates, following what the Buddha had taught in connection with the six doors, sense objects, consciousness, *phassa* and feeling. As a result *vipassanā* knowledge increased step by step until his defilements (*kilesas*) and cankers (*āsavas*) became extinct on his becoming an arahant. May each of you, having known about with confidence

this way of contemplating *vipassanā* objects, be able to strive and, like Venerable Ānanda, thus gain realisation of the Noble Dhamma.

Sādhu ! Sādhu ! Sādhu !

Happiness forever with the Dhamma as your friend

As we walk along life's journey we need to keep in mind that "Happiness is forever with the Dhamma as your friend" – the theme of this Dhamma talk.

Usually people need company to be happy. Look at all the creatures of this world: the majority do not live in isolation. They belong in groups and colonies. The human being is also a social animal who in his community has his own family, friends and associates. It is only human nature.

What are the benefits of living this way? You should give serious thought about your life's situation. To obtain lasting happiness what sort of companionship should you rely on? At a time of crisis who among your circle do you turn to? Whenever you meet with danger, a companion's help is important. You both struggle together for mutual protection. So his or her presence is important when something goes wrong in life.

When everything is running smoothly, you can pass your life agreeably with whoever you find pleasing – your family, friends, or associates. It cannot be said that going through life this way is not good. Not all the people that you relate to are bad. On the contrary many are good. So there is mutual benefit in going through life together.

However, can the company you keep provide you with life-long happiness or not – especially when things go wrong? Give yourself some time to reflect deeply on this. What the Buddha taught is very helpful in this respect. If you listen to and contemplate the Dhamma, you will come to find His advice and instructions significant and relevant. These have nothing to do with what is nowadays called “Religion”. Instead these serve to counsel you on how to live your life, to teach you the art of living. Many people by adopting the various ways and means found in the Buddha’s teachings are able to carry on living happily and with ease.

Nonetheless, in life not all your dreams can be realised, nor can you have everything you wish for. Especially in the latter part of life, many of your wishes and wants are usually left unfulfilled.

Let's say you have come finally to face old age. At this time it is typical of *dukkha* or suffering to pay you a last visit. At this stage who can save you? No one can do that. This is a matter for the individual. What you experience is personally yours which cannot be shared. It is the same when you come finally to meet death. You alone have to face it.

So in the event that you are confronted with *dukkha* or suffering -- which cannot be shared with or experienced by the others on your behalf -- you need to consider who should keep you company then.

Who's our real friend for life?

We usually share our lives with the others, depending on as well as giving help and support to one another. Such relationships with good people work for our mutual welfare and happiness. This way with the support of teachers and elders, parents and relatives, friends and associates we are able to thrive and improve ourselves.

Yet with such companionship in life, can we count on remaining happy till the end? As we approach old age and sickness, only we ourselves have to bear whatever suffering there is. We cannot share our distress with our relatives and friends. Can our mother or father looking on say, "Let me be the one to suffer instead of him. I can't bear to see him suffer so. I want to take his place." However much they desire to help, they are not able to do so. None of them can suffer on our behalf. They can only give *karuṇā* or compassion.

So long as we have a body, we will without fail meet with such *dukkha* one day. At that time nobody can be our resort. Only the Dhamma which leads to perpetual happiness can do that. However, if we turn to it as a last option near our last moments of life, it is not likely to show up. Though it is true that the Buddha's teachings are beneficial for everybody, the Dhamma is not easily acquired. It needs time and effort to cultivate it as a friend.

Otherwise, near death we will be agitated and shaken with pain and misery like many people. So as not to be like them – before age, sickness and

suffering come into being – we should prepare ahead to cultivate the Dhamma in our heart, to make it as our friend.

Search to end loneliness

Consider the nature of the world. Practically the living beings of this entire globe enjoy being with companions¹. At the very least there must be another for company to make life more pleasant. If not, whoever lives alone is likely to become bored.

At the beginning of the universe, there was at first only one Brahma who lived alone for a great length of time. His loneliness was a cause for unhappiness. Wishing for company, he thought, "It would be good if others were to appear here." As soon as he had this thought, another being, according to his *kamma*, was born there. This led the first Brahma to assume thus, "I must have created this new Brahma because I made a wish." This is how the belief of the Creator God started in this world. In reality though, the real Creator is only the action you perform as *kamma*. However,

¹ *Dvayaṃ dvayā rāmo hi ayaṃ loko.*

nowadays a great majority of people have come to accept the existence of God the Creator.

The human mind is very funny. It is usually the case that many people find it difficult to stay alone for long without any company. Yet there are times when a person wants to be by himself, getting weary of his companions or group. "Leave me alone!" he cries, driving off anyone in his vicinity. In spite of that, after some time what happens is that he becomes lonely. Staying alone has put him in low spirits. Then what is the result when a person – who by nature is sociable – finds himself staying alone? Since he cannot get to see anyone, he makes use of the phone to reach out, calling this person or that person. That is his remedy for boredom and loneliness: he talks over the phone or sends messages.

Piling more *dukkha* on *dukkha*

Without the Dhamma to uplift us, we are unable to bear *dukkha*. For this reason we need the encouragement and support of the others. This explains why most of us prefer to live in company of others, and not by ourselves.

We usually get disheartened, especially in illness, when we are in pain and think that the condition is hopeless. Those at the bedside try to comfort us: "Don't be unhappy. You'll get better." Despite their encouraging words, there is no certainty that we will get better. Lacking the Dhamma in our heart, our discouragement could even sink into a depression, bringing with it more suffering.

Therefore before we come to such a situation, from now onwards we should seek the Dhamma and cultivate its friendship. To do so when *dukkha* has already arrived would be very difficult. By then we would probably be in no condition to do anything. We would not even have the strength to ward off the suffering. And why not? In our misery we become short-tempered and burst out in anger at the others. So on top of *dukkha* we pile more and more *akusala* or unwholesomeness.

How does the Buddha describe the situation of the ordinary person (*puthujjana*)? When he becomes sick, he experiences physical pain or *kāyika dukkha*. This leads to mental pain (*cetasika dukkha*) as well. So on top of physical suffering,

he also suffers mentally. It is like being shot by one arrow, then by another.

In this way, pierced by two arrows, what does the victim do? He immediately thinks of a way to find relief from the pain. Anger next appears. Not only that, he yearns to be happy and well. Another arrow of *tarīhārāga* has wounded him. That is how a *puthujjana* would react. When something is already not right, he finds another thing just as bad to add to it. This only increases the load he has to bear. Then he makes matters worse by continuing to think further how to ease his condition.

It is not so that the Buddha and the arahants do not undergo physical pain – they do. When it happens, they contemplate it with restraint and patience. “Oh, woe is me!” – no such thought occurs to them. Instead they reflect, “This is the nature of things. It’s only *dukkha vedanā* (physical suffering). Pain can’t be avoided.” Their mind does not run after the physical suffering. It remains firmly in check as they contemplate the individual characteristics of the sensations. The unhappiness or mental pain does not follow

because their mind can detach itself from the painful feeling. This is through having the Dhamma as their good friend.

Our choice of companions

Instead of the Dhamma, suppose we choose to rely on some persons for companionship. Usually we only feel secure when we are able to find suitable companions to live with. We believe life will be peaceful this way. However, as we approach old age, we come to realise that what we had assumed to be a benefit and a support is not really so.

Consider what might take place when this arrangement does not work out. As we find things to be unsatisfactory, we become short-tempered. With anger and discontent (*dosa* and *domanassa*): in this way our life ends. There are many people like us.

Then again some people might find life satisfying. Who have they chosen as their companion? It is attachment or craving.

You might think that, wandering about in *saṃsāra*, you have to do it alone by yourself. In a sense it is not so. Craving or *taṇhā* is your travel companion.

You need not actually be a loner – you could be living with others – to have attachment or craving for company. You could lead a solitary life but remain contented with the thoughts and ideas in your head. Or your contentment is based on something else. Both have the nature of attachment.

Your live-in friend called *taṇhā* has this habit of occasionally inviting guests to come since you wish for company – the wrong kind. This is only too obvious from what we observe in this world. With your guests, delight and attachment, you end up clinging to property or people. Based on this comes the notion of 'I' and 'mine', bringing with it conceit (*māna*).

Who else does your friend *taṇhā* invite? It is *soka* or grief whose partner is the attachment that you have. Let's say you are clinging to someone, or to some property of yours, whatever it is. When the time comes for you to give it up, you become

troubled. At this time *soka* arrives. It is the same when you lose that person or property. Who invites *soka* to come? It is your clinging or attachment. Try to observe and reflect on your own experience to see whether this condition is so or not.

Who guides the way?

Shouldering our own load, we proceed on our way through *samsāra*. Each of us has to go singly by ourselves in this never-ending journey. But what is guiding us along all this while? It is *taṇhā* that is showing us the way. This *bhavataṇhā*, the craving for life, leads everybody on and on.

Motivated by delight and attachment we perform *kamma*. *Avijjā* or ignorance deludes us into going wrong by concealing the dangers of life. *Taṇhā* creates the pleasure and craving for life. Then *kamma* pushes us into the next life. These three mental states – *avijjā*, *taṇhā* and *kamma* – combine to create and guide our new life. We are led to think that whichever life there is will be good. This is due to *avijjā* which deceives us into thinking this way. Take for instance the purpose why many people do *dāna*. They wonder, “In my

next life will I be born rich? I would be very happy.” Therefore in doing meritorious deeds, they make a wish for the next life: to be born a human with wealth and happiness, and with a happy family life, without anxiety and want. Or they wish for birth in the deity world.

Who is really making the request? It is ignorance or *avijjā* due to its conjuring trick. It is *taṇhā* who then craves for this delusion. Due to this desire, intention comes into being. To carry it out needs effort – this creates *kamma*. Through this *kammic* action, there is a new becoming in life.

A perfect life comes true?

So then a new human birth has come to be. This person’s life is fulfilled even at a young age according to what he had wished for: a mansion, wealth and property. Together with his family he lives in happiness and enjoyment.

Yet there comes a time when finally that happiness and enjoyment again has to end. This is when he has to confront old age again. The perfect life he had wished for – how does it end?

It only concludes with the suffering of old age, sickness and death.

In any existence there is always opportunity for finding joy and delight. This is because *assāda* (enjoyment) is an inherent part of living. Based on life we feel happiness and satisfaction through various experiences. Within a lifetime we can enjoy accumulating general knowledge and education, or travelling overseas to learn about and experience different cultures. There is satisfaction through achievement of our goals and desires. We can enjoy fame and success due to our learning and knowledge. For this reason the others try to emulate or compete with us.

However in life is there only satisfaction to be obtained? You should look at its other side. Isn't there dissatisfaction too?

On growing old

No matter what kind of individual, no matter how good-looking and rich, or educated and successful, unsatisfactoriness is still present. Even for such a person, one problem still remains. He is slowly getting older and older: experiencing its many

changes that affect his life. Over such a distressing condition he has no power of control. There is nothing he can do.

As for me, I am getting on in years. Now I have come to reach over 70 years. At this time I have much *sarīvega* or moral fear when I consider life's situation. Why this happens is that when I was small, I never considered about the question of growing old. Not only that, when I met elderly folk, I now recall that I had this impression: "Hmm ... they must've been born like this – the way they are now." Aging was a subject to be left alone. I had no thought that one day I would become just as aged as they were then. I could hardly see that I was getting older and older. Yet I could see the others becoming aged, "Look at him! See how old he has become now." It is only natural. We do not see ourselves, only the others.

Very often I get a visit from elderly people. On seeing them I am filled with compassion. In their happier days they were famous personalities. Looking at these well-known actors and actresses, I thought, "Oh, how shrivelled and frail they've become." Also meeting those high-ranking

individuals was a good occasion for *sarṁvega* to arise, "Hah, at one time, with their chests thrown out, they stood at the top of society. See how far they have fallen today." With retirement they lost their position along with their importance.

Jarā or aging not only destroys our beauty, it also subjugates by removing our rank as well as by cutting down our pride. Because of our condition, we need help to rise up. So we no longer can sit on the floor but on a chair instead. This is the sort of state we are reduced to.

I am also in such a situation – a very unsatisfactory one. Everybody would like to avoid getting old but it is not possible. Like it or not we have to arrive at this stage called "old age", only to lose practically everything then: our strength, agility, alertness and memory. The hearing is not good; and the eyesight has weakened. How do we lose our good looks and bright complexion? The skin has shrivelled, much hair has fallen out, and so have the teeth, making the chin jut forward. Age makes all of us ugly no matter how handsome or pretty we were in the past. Nobody can believe so-and-so was very good looking as a youth

because nothing of his looks has remained. This is a flaw of life.

On getting ill

Then later should we fall sick, we have to be sent to the hospital. There, a feeding tube is inserted up a nostril. The relatives at the bedside look on with concern. They have doubts that we can pull through. Their eyes also show misgiving: is the treatment really that good?

At this point in our sickness what do the relatives do? For our benefit a monk is invited to come and chant *parittas*. A set of monk's robes is offered on our behalf. In our suffering would these be beneficial for us? Hearing the *parittas* being chanted could set our mind at ease. Similarly the offering of robes could bring us some joy. It would not have been right for our relatives not to do so.

Only a few of the aged can go home happily from the hospital, compared to the many who depart secretly, leaving their bodies behind in the mortuary.

However, at present what is more important for us is to be attentive and heedful where such matters are concerned. When it is the turn of the others in grave times like this, we give them a helping hand. When it comes to our turn, what is essential? "Whether there is anyone to help me or not, I've made the Dhamma as my companion and for as long as I live I will rely on it." This should be our attitude as we try to anticipate and make suitable arrangements beforehand. Look at this world: not everybody is born together with good companions. Some are by themselves without any relatives.

At times like this life's defects are exposed clearly. If you already know what lies ahead in the years to come, would you still get attached to life as it is? Nobody would. Only because you – like the majority of others – never consider the flaws of life, that you find existence enjoyable and worthwhile. To keep you happily ignorant, *avijjā* conceals the true nature of life from you. Therefore attachment to life comes into being. You then act in various ways to have a better life. Through your actions you create the *kamma* for the next life. Then being reborn you put all effort

into fulfilling your desires and happiness. Yet at the end you come to encounter old age or *jarā* even before your happiness can be fully satisfied.

Don't pride yourself on your youth, health or longevity

I have met all sorts of people: during my youth some were powerful officials, others were renowned scholars, and a few were celebrities, so good-looking that everyone wanted to have a look at them. Now they have reached a grandparent's age, all withered and feeble.

Don't expect that it is only the others who reach that stage, by thinking, "I'll never get to be that way." The right way to think is, "One day all of us will be old like them." This thought is based on the Dhamma. Even the Buddha advised, "On seeing an aged person, you must have right thought: 'I too have the nature of aging. I won't be able to pass over such a stage. A day will come when I'll be just as old.'" Having such a view is beneficial.

Don't be heedless. You may even feel self-satisfied thinking that you are still young. Right thought can reduce this: "One day I'll also be just as

feeble.” It can give rise to *samīvega* or moral fear by making you realise the impermanence of your condition. Otherwise without such reflection you can become intoxicated with your own youthfulness². Such excessive pride can lead to misconduct in whatever you wish to do or in whatever sensual pleasure you like to indulge in.

You are thinking rightly this way: “Before I become old, I should do some meritorious deeds. If not I might not be able to practise the Dhamma then at that age.” This way you become interested in doing wholesome actions and behaving with mindfulness.

You should visit hospitals and clinics. On seeing the sick and unhealthy patients, without fail reflect this way: “My body is also subject to illness. One day I’ll also have to face this problem.” This is not said with discouragement and pessimism. This way your contemplation can lessen extreme conceit about your own health and wellbeing³. If

² *Yuvānamada* = *yuvāna* (young) + *mada* (intoxicated with).

³ *Ārogamada* = *āroga* (healthy, free from sickness) + *mada* (intoxicated with).

not, under its influence, you will not be able to think correctly. Convinced that "I'll always be in perfect health," you can be led to do unwholesome actions.

"At the time when I'm in good health, I must do good deeds. Before ill health comes into being, I must make use of this time doing *kusala*." Having such thoughts brings benefit and happiness.

Then again you can pride yourself on the number of years you have lived⁴, "I am long-lived. I shall continue to carry on and I shall outlive the others." Excessive conceit about your longevity can result in misguided action. "Actually life is uncertain. Death is certain. I could die at any moment. Before it happens, I must do wholesome deeds." This is not only the correct and beneficial way to think, it also can remove your conceit.

A proper perspective of life

This is how the Buddha teaches us to think appropriately. His teachings are always meant to be put into practice. Don't think that these ways of

⁴ *Jīvitamada* = *jīvita* (life) + *mada* (intoxicated with).

having right thought are not part of the Noble Practice. These are Dhamma. You do not need to search very far for the Dhamma. You only have to turn to your own body and mind and look to see them as they really are. Thinking rightly is already a part of the Noble Eightfold Path as *sammā saṅkappa*. If you have right thought concerning life, you will have right vision or understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*). By seeing rightly, you will act correctly. One is linked to the other.

That is why you should not be heedless. Life is made up of three different parts: enjoyment (*assāda*), faults (*ādīnava*), and its exit (*nissaraṇa*). Thus it has both its pleasures and its faults. By observing and contemplating on these aspects of *dukkha-sukha*, you will come to think that there are too many flaws in life. The main one is its impermanence: with birth life has to end in death. Because of this, you might then realise that only by freeing yourself that happiness is obtained. So you strive to find its exit.

In any place there is always an exit. Without an exit no one would be able to get out especially in case of an emergency. In the same way there are

also exits of the mind. These enable you to cut down clinging and attachment to your life. If you cannot, then you will not be able to find mental liberation. Therefore in whatever life you have, it is most crucial first of all to contemplate in the right way.

The three thoughts of Venerable Sivali's mother

Should you be in suffering, you should consider the mother of Venerable Sivali as a role model to follow in her way of thinking. Among the women in the world, she must have gone through the worst suffering in order to bear a child. It is said that her pregnancy lasted seven years when normally it would take at most nine or ten months. Some women deliver even before the expected time – weeks or days ahead.

So consider how the Venerable's mother must have suffered during this period. Then when the baby was due, it took her seven days to give birth. Nowadays medical science has made advances in surgery. She would have been operated on and the baby removed by Caesarean. It probably would have been for the better.

However being of a much earlier era, she had to accept whatever chance dealt her. You can only sympathise with her being unable to give birth. This is *kāyika dukkha* or physical suffering. I have had that experience with gout attacks. What happens is that you no longer know how to position your leg. No matter where you put it, there is no relief. Whether you stretch it out with the foot on a pillow, or let the foot rest on the ground, it still hurts. In this way with medication and without complaint, I live with the pain. This is how I experience *dukkha*. When it arrives, I get by, wry-faced. Then after it is gone, I am back to smiling again as before.

Therefore when suffering occurs, how do you pay attention to it? Venerable Sīvali's mother had a good way of attending to her great pain. It is a good example to follow. But then she was no ordinary person: she was a *sotāpanna*, besides being the daughter of the king of the Koliya clan, which was related to the Sakyas. When this princess Suppavāsā married and settled down, she became pregnant with the future Sīvali for seven years. Then undergoing severe suffering during

her seven-day childbirth, what did Suppavāsā think about?

Her three thoughts were very effective to help her bear the *dukkhā*. At first she thought, “The Buddha is really the Sammāsambuddha who truly knows the truth. In order to remove suffering – what I am experiencing right now – the Buddha taught the Dhamma⁵.”

As long as there is a body, *dukkhā* is to be experienced. So to prevent *dukkha* from ever arising again, the Buddha explained the Noble Eightfold Path that would lead us to realise *Nibbāna*. By thinking of the Buddha in this way, Suppavāsā could bear her pain patiently.

Secondly, she thought about the Noble Saṅgha: The Buddha’s noble disciples have walked the right way⁶. Why this is so is because they follow the Noble Practice to remove such suffering. Thus whoever wishes to be free of *dukkha* practises like

⁵ *Sammāsambuddho vata so bhagavā. Yo imassa dukkhassa pahānāya Dhammaṃ deseti.*

⁶ *Suppaṭipanno vata Bhagavato sāvakaṣaṅgho.*

this⁷. This is a fact: since we are displeased with *dukkha*, we are unable to strive like them. So, various kinds of suffering will continue to afflict us without fail.

“Suffering is not able to reach me, as I reflect on the Noble Saṅgha,” said Suppavāsā to herself. Then she had another thought: “In the state of *Nibbāna*, there is no suffering. Whatever pain I’m experiencing right now is not found in *Nibbāna*. That state of *Nibbāna* is real happiness.”⁸

Venerable Sīvali’s mother is a good example of the Buddha’s noble disciples who had indeed practised the right way to be rid of suffering. Another good example is Venerable Sāriputta.

Why Venerable Sāriputta returned home

It was not to be that Venerable Sāriputta would attain *parinibbāna* untouched by sickness. Seven

⁷ *Yo imassa dukkhassa pahānāya paṭipanno.*

⁸ *Susukham vata tam Nibbānam, yatha īdisam dukkham na vijjati.*

days before the full-moon day of the month of Tazaungmon⁹, he knew that he had only a week left of his lifespan. So he approached the Buddha to ask leave to return home to teach the Dhamma to his mother. This was because his mother had no faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Saṅgha. Only Brahma she thought highly of and would look up to the sky to make her aspirations to him.

At that time the Venerable was in good health. So he could cover a *yojana*¹⁰ a day, resting at intervals, till he reached his birthplace in Nālaka Village. (It should not be confused with the present-day site of Nālanda University, though it could possibly be somewhere in that area.) In the late afternoon of the full-moon day of Tazaungmon he finally arrived home. Venerable Sāriputta told his relatives that he would only spend the night there, asking them to clean up and prepare the old bedroom where he had been born.

⁹ Around November.

¹⁰ A distance of about 8 miles.

Later that evening Venerable Sāriputta gave a discourse to admonish and advise the Saṅgha in that area. Only after the first watch of the night did he leave them. It was then that he suddenly became ill. His younger brother Cunda had to empty one pot after another as the disease was causing him to pass out blood.

Around midnight bright lights illuminated the place all around. These signalled the arrival of a group of Brahmas and deities like King Sakka who came to pay respect. Though the Venerable's mother was in a state of anxiety and grief, thinking "My son's condition is not very good," she could not help but notice the lights. All her life she had never seen such brilliance. Even the house inside was flooded with brightness. The whole night she could not sleep, what with her worry and grief and curiosity about what was happening.

Near dawn she went to Venerable Sāriputta for an explanation about the strange goings-on. Who were the visitors and what were these lights? Learning that they were deities including King Sakka and Brahma kings who came to pay homage at his last stage, she thought, "My son

really has great power. Even Brahma Gods came to worship him!" Only then did she begin to have esteem for him. People can be quite difficult. In the beginning she did not think much of her son. Not even that, she thought badly of him.

She then had all the young people in the house assembled together. All seven of the Venerable's nephews and nieces were ordained. Still their grandmother was not satisfied. In her mind she was wondering, "Why did her son return home only now in his old age?"

At that time Venerable Sāriputta was 75 years old, five years younger than the Buddha. His mother was still reproachful that he had waited till such a late age to return home. But then she had seen with her own eyes the brilliant lights of the *devas* and Brahmas coming to visit him. Hearing his explanation, she became interested and then he went on to speak the Dhamma to her. In this way his mother became a *sotāpanna* before the break of dawn.

How did Venerable Sāriputta put up with the suffering till dawn? He entered into the state of

*samāpatti*¹¹. Through this he could push aside the disease, and remain unaffected by the pain. In this manner the Venerable entered *parinibbāna* at the first light of dawn.

This is what it means to have the Dhamma as your friend so that you can remain happily at ease.

When we become sick, do we contemplate like Princess Suppavāsā? Or do we note the in-and-out breath mindfully as well as increase our concentration? To strengthen the power of *samādhi* or concentration, we could try to follow the example of Venerable Sāriputta who got rid of *dukkha* with *samāpatti*.

We should find out first something that is good and suitable and prepare for this eventuality. If not, we would have nothing to withstand the suffering. Can we count on Sakka, the king of the deities, to come and help us with medicine? No, we can't. Will the Brahmas come too to chant mantras? No, they won't. As for your remaining

¹¹ An attainment of mental absorption.

companions, they can only inquire about your condition. No one can help. At this time you can only count on the Dhamma.

The Buddha postpones his *parinibbāna*

Look at the case of the Buddha. When he reached the age of 80, he was suddenly stricken by a deadly disease that could only end in a painful death for anyone else. What did the Buddha consider then?

“If I were to enter *parinibbāna* now, Subhadda¹² will lose the chance to attain higher knowledge. Now his mental faculties are still immature. In ten months’ time they will be ripened enough for him to understand the Dhamma. For his sake I must remove the disease for this period.”

What the Buddha then did was to enter the absorption state of *phala samāpatti*¹³ to prolong

¹² A wandering ascetic.

¹³ Sustained attainment of state of *phala* (fruition consciousness).

his life. He then practised *vipassanā*, scrutinising each dhamma in detail. Through such powerful contemplation, the disease vanished. Very quickly the Buddha regained his health. Such a *samāpatti* is known as *ayusanikhāra*¹⁴ *phala samāpatti* which takes care of one's life.

The Buddha was able to do this by developing these mental factors to the highest level: the wish to do (*chanda*), effort (*vīriya*), investigation (*vīmaṃsa*) and consciousness (*citta*). Through these four means of accomplishment (*iddhipāda*) he could preserve his life process for another 10 months.

In our own case as we draw near death, what do we do?

People who have no Dhamma as their companion as a result usually end their life with worry and unhappiness. Therefore before we reach our last breath, we must from now on make Dhamma our friend. Whoever may be – as long as one is still

¹⁴ It is the vital principle that determines life.

alive – it is never too late to have the Dhamma as a friend.

Thinking of 'I' and 'mine' adds to your suffering

By nature human beings live in hope about the future. They expect to live long though this is never a certainty because of unexpected obstacles such as illness.

Illnesses when they come are of two kinds. Some are incurable; in others there is still hope of a cure. So when people find out their condition is hopeless, anxiety invades their mind, "Oh, soon I shall die!" They worry with the thought of 'I' and 'mine'. "*My* life will soon end and *I* will have to abandon everything!" Their thought is with the idea of 'me' and 'mine'. Thinking this way only adds to their worry and distress.

In such a situation we should think in other ways, instead of in terms of 'I' and 'mine'. For instance, "This disease is based on the five aggregates. These aggregates are not 'I' or 'my' property. Depending on their cause and condition, they naturally arise and cease. Only these aggregates

are subject to suffering. In no time they will cease to be.”

Reflect on what the Buddha said: “*Aciraṃ vata yaṃkāyo, paṭhavim adhi sessati*. Before long this body will be buried in the ground.”

You should realise that it is just the aggregates that will die, not an ‘I’ who will die. In the ultimate sense there is no ‘I’ or ‘mine’ as the Buddha taught. There are only *sarīkhāras* which arise only to cease. Your thinking this way combined with *vipassanā* practice can cut down your anxiety.

Instead you think, “*I* am the one experiencing the illness. *I* will be separated from *my* children and *my* property.” You think that it is happening to ‘me’, that there is an ‘I’ who undergoes and who will overcome the disease. This kind of thought only brings more *soka* or grief.

Reflect instead that the body-and-mind – following their nature, having come into being – is soon coming to an end: that is all. Rather than the physical aspects, you should pay heed to sharpen your mindfulness (*sati*), effort (*vīriya*) and

knowledge (*paññā*). With this you are keeping company with the Dhamma. If not, the situation can become distressing.

Yet is there no one who can meet death with strong mindfulness and serenity? Of course there are such individuals. Having placed the Dhamma in their heart, they pass away peacefully. At the same time there are those who die without mindfulness.

Bearing life's great burden

At times life indeed can be fearsome, as though one was bearing a mountain on top of one's head¹⁵. One can only cry about its crushing weight.

In Sagaing hills there is a Sayadaw who has been suffering from Alzheimer's disease¹⁶ for two years now. Because of this, there is nothing he knows anymore. That is how he will end one life.

¹⁵ *Bhārito bhava bhārena. Giriṃ uccārito yathā.*

¹⁶ A serious disease that prevents the brain from functioning normally, resulting in memory loss, loss of ability to speak coherently, and so on.

Life truly is frightening, being unpredictable. This Sayadaw was a well-known *Dhammakathika* (lecturer) who would travel throughout the country to give Dhamma talks.

Then there is a layman I met who seemed to be in good health. What happened was a stroke left him with a paralysed tongue. It also left him with anger and frustration because now despite his intention, he could no longer speak. He took it out on the people nearest him.

As a stroke victim, though you want to talk or move about, you cannot. At this time without the Dhamma as your friend, you can only have anger and grief for company. How much *dukkha* has arrived: you want to do *this* but your helpers, not understanding your intention, do *that* instead for you. At such a time what you wish for no longer has any priority. Instead of your wants and desires, try to bear the Dhamma in mind instead. Your attitude should be, "As long as I live with only the Dhamma, death can come at any time. So be it." Otherwise anger or sorrow will arise. Some people live with such unwholesome mental states.

This was the case with a layman in the United States who is in a real sorry state. The first attack of stroke paralysed his arms and legs. After the next attack he could only blink as he could not speak anymore. When friends came by to ask how he was, they noticed as he blinked, teardrops appearing between the eyelashes. Consider what his experience must be like and why there were tears.

Then there was an old Sayadaw in Sagaing hills who was staying not far off. When he became unwell, a doctor was called in. Saying that this tonic with vitamins would make him well again, the doctor then set up a drip. Although the Sayadaw refused, his attendants helped put him on the drip by force. It was done for his good, they said. The monk did not say a word after that, though his face became stiff and taut. I saw for myself this expression of displeasure, as though he was saying, "You all do as you like. As for me, I've nothing more to say." In that frame of mind he passed away: with anger and dissatisfaction. Where he ended up is anyone's guess.

I know of a donor from Taunggyi who had been attending to one Sayadaw. As death approached, the old monk became annoyed with him and the other helpers. True or not, according to the donor, after his death he remained in the vicinity as a ghost or *peta*. So the donor carried out a wholesome deed by offering a set of monk's robes. Through the sharing of the merits, the ghost was able to be reborn in the deity world. This account seems credible.

When we are about to die we should not become unhappy with those looking after us. We should not vent our frustration and dissatisfaction on our care-givers. Along with other unwholesome mental states such as worry or grief, it may become *āsanna kamma* – the *kamma* accumulated near death. Since this *kamma* has the chance to produce its effect in the next life, our anger or worry, being *akusala*, will lead us to a rebirth in one of the woeful states. So as death draws near, we should be careful about our frame of mind. It has to be pure. Only a pure mind leads to a happy state.

Conclusion

For this reason, my dear Dhamma listeners, as you walk along life's journey – when you are still young and healthy – ask yourself who should accompany you? It is for you to make that choice. I am not saying that your usual companions are unreliable. On the contrary you can depend on them. But you should realise that there is no absolute guarantee that someone will remain your friend forever. On the other hand you need one more companion to walk the concluding stage of life with you. The best company you can have is only the Dhamma: the one who is forever good to you without fail.

To do that it is vital that you contemplate the Dhamma: whether you follow Suppavāsā's way or whether you practise to gain *vipassanā* insight knowledge to reduce or remove your mistaken identity of the aggregates as an 'I' or 'mine'. So long as you hold on to such a view of self or *atta*, you cannot remove worry or grief as you reach life's conclusion. By means of wise attention or *yoniso manasikāra*, you must contemplate only the Dhamma. Only then can you obtain perpetual

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Dear members/Dhammaseekers,

*The Gift of Dhamma
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happiness. That is to say, if you have the Dhamma as your friend, you will be happy forever.

Sādhu ! Sādhu ! Sādhu !

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