

MESSAGE OF THE BUDDHA

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INTRODUCTION

Buddhas arise in the world once in a very long time, at a time when the world is plunged in the darkness of ignorance of the Reality or Truth of existence. Self-enlightened by their own ardent efforts, they bring the light of knowledge to the world. A Buddha is one who is 'awakened' or 'enlightened' to the Truth concerning the universe. Although born as a human being, after his enlightenment a Buddha cannot be considered as a human, heavenly being or any type of being. This is because he has totally relinquished the ego or Self¹ which all beings cling to. His state surpasses all beings in the universe.

All Buddhas preach the same message: "Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind."² This is also known as the threefold training to gain blessings/merit. His teaching is known as the *Dhamma*, while the *Sangha* refers to his monastic disciples,³ ideally those who are noble (*ariya*).

1. AVOID EVIL

This means not to harm oneself or others. The criterion of good and evil in the Buddha-*Dhamma* is what benefits and harms respectively, oneself or others. To avoid evil means to practise moral conduct (*sila*), i.e. to uphold the precepts.

¹ *Atta*, often translated as Soul, Self, and assumed to be unchanging, eternal, not subject to conditions.

² *Dhammapada*, Verse 183.

³ *Majjhima Nikaya* 142.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

There are five basic precepts which everyone is urged to uphold for their own welfare since the violation of them can lead to very sorrowful consequences. The five precepts are:

(i) Abstaining from Killing

One should not intentionally deprive any living being of its life. Life is the most precious thing to every living being. The greatest fear is felt by every living being when its life is endangered. For example, shooting of animals for sport is very much to be deprecated. It is just this type of cold indifference to other beings' welfare that leads to our greatest harm. There is no offence if there was no intention to kill.

It is true that it is sometimes difficult to practise this precept, e.g. concerning rats, cockroaches, and ants in the home. However, wisdom should be exercised to arrive at the best solution, like preventing their access to food and ensure that food particles are swept away.

The Buddha in his wisdom, however, allowed meat-eating on three conditions: one did not see, hear, or suspect (that the animal was specifically killed for oneself). Thus one is allowed, for example, to buy cold meat from the market, but not order a live chicken to be slaughtered.

Causing or recommending euthanasia (mercy killing), abortion, and the use of post-fertilization type contraceptives are also generally not allowed.

(ii) Abstaining from Taking What is Not Given

For one to break the precept the object stolen must belong to someone and one knows of this, and had the intention to steal. One should not even pick up something that had been left behind by someone if there is a possibility that he will return to look for it, unless for safe-keeping, intending to return it to the rightful owner.

(iii) Abstaining from Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct means engaging in sexual relations with someone else's spouse or fiancé/fiancée, someone under-aged, or barred by law/convention (e.g. close family member, monk, or nun).⁴

Excessive lust is a cause for rebirth in the animal realm.

(iv) Abstaining from Lying

Sense of shame and fear of blame are the two guardians of the world, according to the Buddha.⁵ The Buddha said that if a man could lie deliberately, there would be hardly anything he would be ashamed to do. A man is judged by his word.

In addition to lying, evil speech to be avoided are malicious tale-bearing (which promotes disharmony), coarse speech, and idle gossip.

(v) Abstaining from Intoxicants

One should not drink liquor or take drugs because this dulls one's faculties resulting in lapses of memory, inalertness, sloth and torpor, and becoming generally more dull-witted. It also leads to failure to fulfill one's responsibilities, wasting of wealth, quarrels, and even fights, as well as general inconvenience and annoyance to others.

THE EIGHT PRECEPTS

Also, the Buddha taught laypeople to observe the eight precepts. The third precept is modified here to "Abstaining from sexual conduct". The other three are abstaining from eating after 'noon', from watching shows and adorning the body, as well as from using luxurious (high and broad) beds. These eight precepts are to be practised on the 8th, 15th, 23rd, and the last day of the lunar month, i.e. about one day a week. Their observance brings great blessings which can result in rebirth in the heavenly realms.

⁴ *Majjhima Nikaya* 41.

⁵ *Anguttara Nikaya* 2.1.9.

ADVANTAGES OF UPHOLDING PRECEPTS

The merit of upholding the precepts depends on the degree of purity of our practice. The Buddha enumerated five advantages of precepts:⁶

(i) Conservation of Wealth

A man who does not uphold precepts would very likely squander away his wealth through frequenting night-clubs and brothels, gambling, drinking, etc., which a moral man would not indulge in.

(ii) Good Reputation

A moral man who does not kill, steal, commit adultery, lie or drink would obviously be highly regarded by others.

(iii) Dare to Face Assemblies

A moral man has no cause for shame or guilt and would have no fear when called upon to face or address assemblies.

(iv) Dies Clear-minded

As death approaches, a moral man is unafraid because the thought of his purity gives him great confidence and joy.

Many people, however, die with great fear and terror for having lived an immoral life, especially those who broke any of the precepts in severe degree, e.g. a butcher.

(v) Good Rebirth

A person who has upheld the precepts would have lived a harmless life and would be destined for a good rebirth.

The Buddha said that a man who has unwavering faith in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sangha*, is virtuous, controlled in the precepts, may declare with certainty that he has won to the Stream, bound for enlightenment. He will never fall into the woeful planes of rebirth again, i.e. the ghost, animal and hell realms.⁷

⁶ *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.213.

⁷ *Samyutta Nikaya* 55.2.

GUARD SENSE DOORS

One way to help us avoid evil and uphold our precepts is to guard our sense doors and be mindful. Our six sense organs of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body (tactile base) and mind, cognize the six sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste, touch and thoughts. On cognizing any sense object, a feeling is automatically generated. Up to this point we do not have control, but beyond this, how we react is entirely up to us. Here is where *kamma* (intentional action) is generated because our will comes into play.

Thus we have to be mindful so that we create good rather than evil *kamma* for which we will regret later. For example, someone speaks some unpleasant words to us and immediately an unpleasant feeling arises. If we are mindful, we are aware that an angry feeling can lead to something harmful. So we either immediately abandon our anger, or if unable to, walk away. Vision is another sense door that easily leads to evil *kamma*, e.g. the sight of a pretty girl can fan the flames of desire in a married man. If he is mindful he will remember his responsibilities and refrain from doing something which he may regret later. Thus, we should constantly be mindful of our feelings, and not get carried away.

INCONVENIENT TO TAKE PRECEPTS?

Some people do not like to observe the precepts or listen to *Dhamma*. They think that by doing so they are bound to uphold the precepts, and should they break them the consequences will be grave. They think that if they did not promise to observe the precepts, the offence (sin) will be negligible should they break them. In the case of those who do not listen to *Dhamma*, they think they can submit a plea of ignorance.

Bound by fixed Laws of Dhamma. What they fail to understand is that the Law of *kamma* is a Universal Truth which applies equally to all living beings irrespective of whether they 'take the precepts' or not, and whether they know or not. The Buddha did not preach only for Buddhists but for all beings. Also, the Buddha said whether a Buddha appears in the world or not, there are these established

conditions of *Dhamma*, these fixed Laws of *Dhamma*, eternal Truths which apply all the time. It is because living beings are unaware of them that the Buddha teaches and reveals them to us. Whether we listen to *Dhamma* or not, we are still bound by these fixed laws. Anyone who does evil and harms has to suffer as a result, just as anyone who does good and benefits reaps a happy consequence.

2. Do Good

This means to be of benefit to others, or to practise charity. Buddhists express it as “practise *dana* (giving)”. It is the nature of man to be selfish. This can be observed in a young baby who has to be coaxed and taught to share and give. Unfortunately, most people retain this selfish trait even after they grow up. We have to make the effort to give constantly until generosity becomes part of our nature.

Ways of giving. Generally the practice of *dana* means the giving of material things. But one can also give one’s energy in physical labour, or kind words of sympathy, appreciation, and advice. Some people also give their whole life of selfless dedication to a worthy cause. The giving of knowledge can be of great benefit to others. For example, rather than give a man a meal which helps him for only one day, if one teaches him a skill by which he earns a livelihood, one helps him for a lifetime. Of all the gifts, the gift of *Dhamma*,⁸ is the highest. The *Dhamma* teaches us the laws of existence which is important to know so that we can live in accordance with them and thus avoid pain and suffering in this and future lives.

Proper use of wealth. The Buddha said that a man should use his wealth fittingly in four ways:⁹

- Make himself, family, dependents, and friends happy.
- Secure himself against all possible misfortunes.

⁸ The Buddha’s teaching — about Reality or Truth.

⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.61.

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- Make offerings to relatives, guests, rulers, heavenly beings, ghosts, and share merit with them.
- Make offerings to virtuous monks and recluses who sincerely live the holy life.

Results of giving. The worthy man gives clean things, what is choice, proper, with care, with his own hand, and he gives repeatedly. He also gives with deference, in good time, ungrudgingly, and without hurt to himself or others.¹⁰ One who gives without deference, with disrespect and even contempt, reaps wealth but being often not respected and even held in contempt. The gift given in good time, bestows wealth in good time. The gift given grudgingly (unhappily), bestows wealth and a mind not inclined to its enjoyment. The gift given without causing hurt results in wealth and property that are never harmed by fire, flood, rulers, thieves, etc..

The Buddha said that if a man gives a gift thinking selfish thoughts of reaping its reward, it bears little merit. One who gives without selfish thoughts begets great merit. The reward is also great if one gives when one is poor, and if the recipient is a virtuous person.

Four fields of merit. There are four ‘fields of merit,’¹¹ i.e. the Buddha, *Sangha*, mother, and father, the giving to whom yields great merit. The Buddha is no longer with us. Monks and nuns represent the *Sangha*.

The basic essentials are food, clothes, medicine and lodging. These are also the four requisites of a monk. The giving of food provides long life, strength, beauty, and happiness. So the giver will reap the same benefits in the future. Of these four requisites the offering of lodgings for the monks of the four quarters, i.e. the building of a monastery, yields very great merit. This merit is even greater than feeding the Buddha himself with his monks because it helps to perpetuate the Order of Monks (*Bhikkhu Sangha*).¹² Further, the Buddha said that a giver of a requisite, which a monk uses and is able to attain and abide in unbounded concentration, will reap a flood

¹⁰ *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.147 / 5.148.

¹¹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.4.

¹² *Anguttara Nikaya* 9.20.

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of merit, incalculable, immeasurable, leading to the heaven world, to what is dear, delightful and pleasant.¹³

Our parents are those to whom we owe very much. Failure to care for our parents would earn us great demerit.

Sharing of merits. When we do good, it is proper to be considerate of the unseen beings by sharing our merit with them. Ghosts tend to stay near humans and normally return to the homes of relatives and friends, hoping for a share of merit which they need badly. Also, the Buddha advised that we should share merit with our household spirits (deities) so that they would protect the household from evil external beings.

WHY DO GOOD?

Salt and water analogy. Someone might well ask, “Why should I do good? Is it not enough if I do not do evil and harm others?” In our countless past lives we have accumulated much evil *kamma* which tends to create problems in this life. The Buddha taught that the way to reduce the effects of evil past *kamma* is to create much good *kamma* in this life.¹⁴ He likened the evil *kamma* to a lump of salt, and good *kamma* to water. If the lump of salt is added to a cup of water, the water would be salty. However, if it is added to the water in a river, its saltiness would be very much diluted. Similarly, doing good *kamma* now dilutes the effect of past *kamma*, except those very grievous ones, e.g. killing our parent.

Theft analogy. Further, the Buddha said that a trivial evil act committed by a person who is undeveloped in moral conduct, mind, and wisdom, may lead him to a woeful rebirth. If one who is developed in moral conduct, mind, and wisdom, commits the same act, the negative effects ripen in this life and will not manifest after death. This is just like the case of a poor person who is cast into prison for the theft of one, ten, or a hundred dollars, whereas one who is wealthy and powerful is not imprisoned for the very same theft.

¹³ *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.51.

¹⁴ *Anguttara Nikaya* 3.99.

Advantages of giving. There are many advantages in giving: one is good and dear to many folk; one is dear to virtuous and wise men; a good report is spread abroad about one; one approaches any gathering with confidence; one obtains a good rebirth.¹⁵ If besides doing good ourselves, we encourage, approve or praise the doing of good deeds, then even more merit is attained.

3. HEAVEN

Through meditation the Buddha attained enlightenment and smashed all darkness of ignorance. With the mind that is radiant, strong, imperturbable, he could see all the realms of existence in the universe. According to the Buddha, living beings of each world system may be divided into three realms: Desire Realm, Form Realm, and Formless Realm. The human world lies within the Desire Realm where desire and lust dominate all beings. The Form and Formless Realms can only be attained by beings who develop the meditative absorptions (*jhanas*). Beings in these two realms are not differentiated into male and female since they are not interested in sex but are preoccupied with the higher bliss of *jhana*. The natural result of doing good and avoiding evil is rebirth in one of the six heavens, still within the Desire Realm.

Heavenly beings. Birth in these heavens is by direct transformation into a *deva*¹⁶ or *devi*.¹⁷ A *deva* or *devi* appears like an extremely handsome or beautiful sixteen year old youth and this form is retained until they die. There is no apparent aging throughout their lives. Their bodies become more refined as they progress higher. In the sixth heaven,¹⁸ their bodies are extremely clear and clean, unlike our

¹⁵ *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.34 / 5.35.

¹⁶ God, celestial being, with a shining body.

¹⁷ Goddess.

¹⁸ The sixth heaven is called *Paranimmita-vasavatti*, while the fifth is *Nimmana-rati*. In the sixth heaven, heavenly beings employ other beings to create for them things that they desire. And in the fifth heaven, they can create things that they like, e.g. a mate, food.

foul human bodies. They live in grand heavenly palaces and enjoy a life of gaiety amidst sensual pleasures, since sensual desire dominates all beings in the Desire Realm. The Buddha said that having lordship over all the sixteen kingdoms in India could not compare to one sixteenth the happiness of a heavenly being.¹⁹

Heavenly life not eternal. Life in the heavens is long. In the lowest, the heaven of the Four Great Heavenly Kings, one celestial day equals fifty human years and their lifespan is five hundred celestial years or nine million human years. Lifespan increases with the higher heavens. In the sixth heaven, one celestial day equals 1,600 human years, and their lifespan is 16,000 celestial years or 9,216 million human years. The lifespan of beings in the Form and Formless Realms are reckoned in terms of world cycles, which are uncountable in terms of human years.

Every time a Buddha appears in the world, heavenly beings experience great fear upon hearing the *Dhamma*, because they realize they do not have eternal life but will eventually die.

4. DANGER, FOLLY AND DEPRAVITY OF SENSUAL PLEASURES

DANGER

The danger of sensual pleasures is that it leads to craving for more and more of it. When the flames of one's desires are whetted, they increase even more rather than decrease. Also sensual pleasures are not permanent but will end one day when one's blessings are used up.

FOLLY

The folly or vanity of sensual pleasures is that the desire for it cannot be satisfied. Living beings immersed in sensual pleasures have a one sided view of life as only pleasurable. Not knowing that there are sorrowful places of rebirth that await them, they do not see the urgency to cultivate blessings, by doing good and avoiding evil, or to strive to get out of the cycle of rebirths; instead they continue to use up the blessings they have accrued. One day when their blessings are

¹⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 8.42.

exhausted they will fall from the heavens to the lower planes of existence.

DEPRAVITY

Simile of the Leper. The depravity of sensual pleasures is that it is a 'disease'. The Buddha gave a striking simile of living beings being diseased like a leper.²⁰ The sores on his body are so itchy that he has to scratch until they are bloody, infected and foul. But even this is not enough. He has to find some burning embers, which he uses to cauterize his sores. Only then does he find relief. But the more he scratches and cauterizes, the more bloody, infected and foul they become; yet he continues to do so because he gets a certain measure of satisfaction from it. Such scratching and cauterizing on a normal healthy person would only cause much pain and suffering. Yet the leper only recognizes it as pleasurable.

Desire breeds pain and suffering. Living beings are like the leper, said the Buddha. They are diseased with craving for sensual pleasures, burn with fever for sensual pleasures, and seek for satisfaction. But the more they immerse in sensual pleasures, the more diseased they become. The flames of their desire become still greater instead of abating. So they continue to burn with the flames of desire, not recognizing the pain and suffering they undergo.

And because of wanting to satisfy their desires, living beings labour and toil. Sometimes in the process they have to undergo great hardship, exposure to cold and heat, wind and rain, mosquitoes and insects, and even danger. If his work comes to be fruitless, e.g. crops are destroyed by extreme weather, he sorrows and grieves. If his home and property are destroyed by fire, floods, or even stolen, he sorrows and grieves.

Inflamed by desires, men quarrel, fight, and killings arise; even nations go to war resulting in useless mass slaughter. And because of desires, beings turn robbers, seducers, etc., and receive their due punishment according to the law. Because of such misconduct, they

²⁰ *Majjhima Nikaya* 75.

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suffer again after death when they obtain rebirth in the realms of suffering. Such is the pain and suffering living beings undergo.²¹

No safety, even for heavenly beings. As for the beings in the heavens of Desire Realm, even though their lives appear long to us, they think it is short when it comes to an end because they have not had enough. They know when death is near due to certain signs, like sweat coming out of their armpits, their brilliance fades, etc.. They become very worried and restless. Their death is normally due to the exhaustion of merit or the ripening of heavy evil *kamma*. But sometimes it could be due to forgetting to eat, being immersed in sensual pleasures, or extreme anger. Most of these beings die unsatisfied, with ambitions unfulfilled. They then take rebirth in a lower plane of existence.²²

Untold suffering, life after life. Once a being falls from the heavens, it would generally take an extremely long time before he can be born in the heavens again. This is because the heavy desires of living beings lead them to do evil naturally. And so they continue to turn in the cycle of existence, usually in the Desire Realm, and especially in the woeful planes. Untold suffering is experienced life after life. Few human and heavenly beings after death will be reborn into the human or heavenly planes, most will fall into the woeful planes. Few of the beings in the woeful planes will be reborn into the human and heavenly planes; most will be reborn back into the woeful planes.²³

5. RENUNCIATION

The Buddha said we have passed through innumerable lives in the cycle of existence, and the tears we have shed in pain and suffering are more than the waters of the four oceans. One day we will realize

²¹ *Majjhima Nikaya* 13.

²² Below the human world are the three woeful planes — ghost, animal and hell worlds — where beings experience much pain and suffering (later books added a fourth plane of *asuras*). These three together with the human world and the six heavens make up the ten planes of existence in the Desire Realm.

²³ *Anguttara Nikaya* 1.19.2.

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that the only way to escape from this unsatisfactory cycle is to renounce all desire for worldly pleasures.

Simile of the four thoroughbred steeds. There are four types of thoroughbred steeds in the world.²⁴ The first type gets restless and ready for action as soon as the shadow of the goad stick is sighted. The second is not stirred at the mere sight of it but becomes restless and ready to go only after his skin is pricked. The third is not ready to go even after being pricked with the goad but only after his flesh is pierced. The fourth still will not go after his flesh is pierced but only after being pierced to the very bone.

So too, said the Buddha, there are four types of thoroughbred men in the world. The first when he hears of the affliction or death of some person or other, he becomes anxious and realizes that affliction and death will come upon him too. So he renounces all attachment to the world to cultivate the holy path. The second type is ready to renounce only when he sees with his own eyes the affliction or death of some person. This shocks him and makes him see the impermanence of life. The third type is still not ready to renounce the world when he hears or sees the affliction or death of some person, but only when his own relation is afflicted or dead does the pain and sorrow make him see reality. The fourth type is still not willing to give up the world until he himself becomes sick with a serious ailment which pains him to the point of death. Only then is he alarmed and ready to renounce the world. It is worthwhile to note here that what makes beings to finally wake up and turn their back on the world is pain and sorrow.

Going forth. So such a person, dejected and sick at heart, begins to renounce his attachments and desires for the world. *The Buddha said no one has ever liberated himself from the cycle of existence while living amidst sensual pleasures, enjoying sensual pleasures, without abandoning craving for sensual pleasures.*²⁵ At first perhaps he may not be ready to go forth into the homeless life. He may live at home but abstains from sexual conduct and affairs of the world. He begins to cultivate the holy life at home. Then one day he may come to

²⁴ *Anguttara Nikaya* 4.113.

²⁵ *Majjhima Nikaya* 75.

realize the truth in the Buddha's words that "it is difficult to live the holy life as pure and polished as a conch-shell in the home."²⁶ It is then that he goes forth into the homeless life to cultivate the Way. And one day, after much diligent effort, he comes to realize for himself directly the *Ariyan* Truths proclaimed by the Buddha.

6. THE FIRST ARIYAN TRUTH: DUKKHA

"All existence is *dukkha*". This is the first *Ariyan* (Noble) Truth proclaimed by the Buddha. *Dukkha* is often translated as unsatisfactoriness, suffering, or sorrow. It encompasses all these meanings and, for lack of a precise equivalent translation, we continue to use '*dukkha*', the meaning of which will become clearer below.

The arising of a body and mind is the arising of *dukkha*.²⁷ There is no existence without *dukkha*. The difference between an *Ariya* and an ordinary person is that the *Ariya* suffers only bodily *dukkha* whereas the ordinary person suffers both bodily and mental *dukkha*.

ASPECTS OF DUKKHA

- Existence signifies the presence of life, which means the presence of life-force or energy. Energy implies motion, change and restlessness. Thus because of motion and change, i.e. impermanence, all beings are subject to the continued process of birth, ageing, sickness and death.

Birth is *dukkha*. The baby experiences discomfort and jolting in the womb, and birth into the world is a sudden shock. Ageing is *dukkha*. Sickening is *dukkha*. Dying is *dukkha*. *There is no being with eternal life*. "All that arises is subject to dissolution" is a basic teaching of the Buddha.

- Because of impermanence, there is parting from loved ones. This is *dukkha*. The Buddha said that loved ones bring us pain and sorrow, while meeting with enemies is also *dukkha*.

²⁶ *Majjhima Nikaya* 36.

²⁷ *Samyutta Nikaya* 22.30.

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- Living beings are dis-eased. We cannot maintain our postures for long, whether standing, walking, sitting, or sleeping. We need to continually change postures. This too is *dukkha*.
- To lament over the past is *dukkha*. To worry about the future is *dukkha*.
- Not to get what one wants is *dukkha*. To have what one dislikes is *dukkha*. Not to have enough of what one wants is *dukkha*. To have what one wants but not long enough is *dukkha*.
- To crave for sensual pleasures that cannot be satisfied is *dukkha*.²⁸
- To be subjected to our constantly changing moods is *dukkha*. Always feeling restless too is *dukkha*.
- To be generally discontented is *dukkha*.
- Even happiness and joy are intrinsically *dukkha* because they are short-lived.

Dukkha and its ending. All beings that live are subject to *dukkha* and the only way to be liberated is to walk the path that leads to the end of *dukkha*. This path is the *Ariyan* Eightfold Path which will be discussed in Section 9.

7. THE SECOND ARIYAN TRUTH: CAUSE

“The cause of *dukkha* is craving”. This is the Second *Ariyan* Truth proclaimed by the Buddha.

“From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear. For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief, much less fear.”²⁹

Craving unquenched. The restless nature of living beings makes them discontented and they crave to satisfy their desires through the senses. However these desires for sensual pleasures cannot be satisfied, and so they continue to crave for more. Among sensual pleasures sex is probably the most desired, followed perhaps by food. Our mouth is

²⁸ Refer to Section 4: The Danger, Folly and Depravity of Sensual Pleasures.

²⁹ *Dhammapada* verse 216.

like a bottomless pit. We gorge ourselves full and after only a few hours we are hungry again.

Even millionaires are not satisfied with their lot and continue to crave for more. Heavenly beings, with lifespans of millions of years, also die unsatisfied with ambitions unfulfilled, according to the Buddha.

Besides craving for sensual pleasures, living beings also crave for existence and non-existence, which produces clinging or attachment, especially at the dying moments. When beings die discontented, their flames of desire are unquenched. Thus rebirth occurs and the cycle of existence continues.

8. THE THIRD ARIYAN TRUTH: CESSATION

“There is a state of cessation of *dukkha* called *nibbana*”. This is the Third Ariyan Truth proclaimed by the Buddha.

*Nibbana*³⁰ literally means extinguishing, and is the only state free from *dukkha*. *Nibbana* can be experienced in this life itself, or after death when it is often called *parinibbana*. While existence, conditioned by causes, is impermanent and *dukkha*, *nibbana* is unconditioned, permanent and *sukha*.³¹ All conditioned things have the characteristics of arising, changing, and ceasing, but *nibbana* is birthless, decayless, and deathless. It is a unique state.

The Buddha declared “*Nibbana* is the highest bliss” even though there is cessation of all perception and feeling when one experiences *nibbana*. The Buddha explained: “Nay, monks, the *Tathagata* does not recognize bliss merely because of pleasurable sensation, but monks, wherever bliss is attained, there and there only does the Accomplished One recognize bliss.”

Parinibbana. In passing into *parinibbana*, nothing is eternalized nor is anything annihilated because even here and now in this very life

³⁰ Or *nirvana*, in *Sanskrit*.

³¹ Happiness which is the opposite of *dukkha*.

there is no core of unchanging self³² — this body and mind is a constant flux.³³ The Buddha likened the passing into *parinibbana* to a fire burning dependent on grass and twigs which is extinguished when they are depleted. To ask whether the fire has gone to the north, south, east, or west would not fit the case.³⁴ Similarly, to ask whether passing into *parinibbana* a being is reborn, is not reborn, is both reborn and not reborn, is neither reborn nor not reborn would also not fit the case. Just as the fire continues to burn because of grass and twigs, so too a living being continues to turn in the cycle of existence because of greed, hatred and delusion. *Nibbana* is realised by the complete cessation of defilements (*kilesa*), eradication of the imaginary unchanging self, and the destruction of greed, hatred and delusion. This is the complete deliverance from *dukkha*.

9. THE FOURTH ARIYAN TRUTH: PATH

“There is a path called the *Ariyan* Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.” This is the Fourth *Ariyan* Truth proclaimed by the Buddha.

ARIYAN EIGHTFOLD PATH

(i) Right View

Right View is the understanding of the Four *Ariyan* Truths. It includes having the right view or understanding of the law of *kamma-vipaka*.

Right View is the most important factor, and is the condition for entry into the *Ariyan* Eightfold Path. Right View is attained by (listening to) the voice of another (teaching the *Dhamma*), and having thorough consideration or attention.³⁵ A person with Right View is already an *Ariya*.

³² *Samyutta Nikaya* 22.85.

³³ That is why Buddhism is neither Eternalism nor Nihilism.

³⁴ *Majjhima Nikaya* 72.

³⁵ *Majjhima Nikaya* 43.

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In Samyutta Nikaya 55.24 the Buddha declared that Sotapanna (First Fruit Ariya) is attained by listening to and understanding his words. Thus we find in the *Suttas* (discourses) and *Vinaya* (monastic code) that everyone who attained the Vision of *Dhamma* or First Path/Fruit did so by listening to the *Dhamma*. Hence the importance of listening to the Buddha's discourses, and this is why the Buddha's disciples are called hearers or listeners (*savaka*).

Vision of Dhamma means that one has a basic understanding of the Four *Ariyan* Truths, and realises that "All that is subject to arising/birth is subject to cessation/death." Such a person has understood the (basic) *Dhamma*, crossed beyond doubt, and has become independent of others in the Buddha's teaching. He sees impermanence in everything in the world, and that existence is *dukkha*. Thus he becomes spiritually mature, no more worldly like before. He possesses unshakable faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha and upholds Ariyan Sila (Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood).

Kamma-Vipaka. Another aspect of Right View is understanding *kamma-vipaka*. Any intentional action by body, speech, or mind, is *kamma*. Thus all moral and immoral volition is *kamma*. "I declare, monks, that volition (or intention) is *kamma*. Having willed, one acts by body, speech or mind."³⁶ Thus intention is the most necessary condition for the performance of *kamma*. The law of *kamma-vipaka* states that each kammic deed has its corresponding fruit (*vipaka*).

"Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox."³⁷

"Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one even as one's shadow that never leaves."³⁸

The Buddha said that those things that are sought after in the world but hard to get cannot be obtained by vows, prayers, or by

³⁶ *Anguttara Nikaya* 6.63.

³⁷ *Dhammapada* verse 1.

³⁸ *Dhammapada* verse 2.

thinking about them, otherwise why are living beings suffering here?³⁹ What we seek for in the world is obtained by working for it, creating the right causal condition (*kamma*). It is all in our hands. If we seek for long life, we should not kill; for health, we should not physically harm others; for wealth, we should practise giving; for influence and power, we should not envy the gain of others; for wisdom, we should frequently approach the learned and virtuous for their counsel, refrain from intoxicants and practise meditation; for beauty, we should be amiable, not prone to anger and ill-will. With the right *kammic* condition, we will reap the fruit at the proper time.

However, what we reap now is very much connected to our past *kamma*. There is nothing we can do except to ameliorate its unpleasant effects by performing much good *kamma* now, and working hard. We should not pray to some ‘super being’ for help because no one can help us, even our Buddha, as he said plainly: “Striving should be done by yourselves; the *Tathagatas* are only teachers....”⁴⁰ *If any super being can help us, it means that he can override the workings of kamma, which is not possible according to the Buddha’s teaching.* The perfectly enlightened Buddha, complete with all the supernormal powers, did not go about healing people’s sicknesses and diseases, or resurrect the dead, and he forbade his disciples from doing so. This is because of his thorough understanding of *kamma-vipaka*.

The Buddha always preached a message of urgency, that life is short and we are at a critical place of existence. The heavens are above us but below us the gates to the sorrowful places of rebirth are wide open. Life has no shelter and no protector, we have to depend only on our *kamma*. And because his message was urgent, even princes, noble men, and wealthy merchants, gave up their lives of luxury and lived the life of a homeless and penniless alms-beggar. They understood the Buddha’s message and were willing to walk the Noble Path to end *Dukkha*.

(ii) Right Thoughts

Right Thoughts help develop the right mental state and there are three components:

³⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.43.

⁴⁰ *Dhammapada* verse 276.

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- Thoughts of loving-kindness, and benevolence towards all beings.
- Thoughts of harmlessness and compassion towards all beings.
- Thoughts of renunciation of worldly pleasures because they lead to pain and sorrow.

Right Thoughts should also be fostered to avoid wrong thoughts, i.e. thoughts of ill-will, harming and greed, which frequently arise. Right View and Right Thoughts begin to counteract greed, hatred, and delusion, the three roots of evil. To control these roots of evil we need to constantly observe our thoughts to know the real motive behind our speech and actions.

(iii) Right Speech

Right Speech is to abstain from the four types of wrong speech:

- Abstain from lying — this helps to develop straightforwardness which is necessary for eradicating selfish desires.
- Abstain from malicious tale-bearing which causes disharmony among people, and slander.
- Abstain from coarse words — ever speak gentle words.
- Abstain from frivolous talk — speak only useful and beneficial words.

The Buddha said that the well-spoken word is timely, truthful, beneficial, spoken gently, and with a mind of love.

(iv) Right Action

Right Action is to abstain from the three types of wrong bodily conduct.⁴¹

- Abstain from killing.
- Abstain from taking what is not given.
- Abstain from sexual misconduct.

(v) Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood is livelihood which is not evil. Laypersons are advised by the Buddha to refrain from trading in five things:

⁴¹ Refer to 'Section 1: Avoid Evil' for explanation of the terms below.

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- Human beings — although slavery is now uncommon, sale of humans still occurs in the world.
- Flesh — one should not breed animals for sale to be slaughtered.
- Arms — weapons that kill.
- Intoxicants — liquor, drugs, etc..
- Poisons — which are used to kill, e.g. insecticides.

The Buddha advised that wealth should be earned by legal means, without force or coercion, honestly, and without causing harm to other beings.

(vi) Right Effort

Here onwards we begin the cultivation of the mind, to ‘purify the mind’ which is the third part of the Buddha’s message. Only one who purifies the mind has a chance to end the cycle of existence. The training to purify the mind consists of Right Effort, Right Recollection, and Right Concentration. Right Effort has four components, and they are the effort to:

- Discard evil thoughts already arisen.
- Prevent the arising of unarisen evil thoughts.
- Develop unarisen good thoughts.
- Promote good thoughts already arisen.

Evil thoughts are thoughts of attachment, ill-will, shamelessness, conceit, aversion, envy, stinginess, restlessness, etc..

Good thoughts are thoughts of non-attachment, moral shame, confidence, mindfulness, loving-kindness, composure, etc..

When one practices Right Effort, one’s character can be seen to change for the better, i.e. greed, hatred, delusion decreased.

(vii) Right Recollection⁴²

Right Recollection is constant recollection of:

- Body — the nature of the body. They include the 4 elements, the 32 parts of the body, decay of the body and the different types of corpses.

⁴² For detailed explanation of Recollection and Concentration, see “Mindfulness, Recollection, and Concentration” by the author.

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- Feelings — the arising and ceasing of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings.
- Mind — the state of the mind, whether concentrated, scattered, sleepy, bright, etc..
- *Dhamma* — the Buddha's teachings, which concern the five aggregates, six sense spheres, Four *Ariyan* Truths, etc..

Constant contemplation of these four things without allowing the mind to stray will compose the mind, leading to Right Concentration, and make one understand the nature of the 'self'. Here is the real renunciation of the world of the five senses as one withdraws more and more into the mind.

(viii) Right Concentration

As stated throughout the *Nikayas*, Right Concentration means the attainment of the four *jhanas* (meditative absorptions).⁴³ *Ariyan* Right Concentration is the four *jhanas* supported by the other seven factors of the *Ariyan* Eightfold Path.

Taming the mind. The untrained mind is wild and restless like a wild horse. It needs to be tamed before it can be useful. The Buddha likened the ordinary mind to six animals⁴⁴ tied together, and always pulling in different directions. They have to be tied to a stake to tame and restrain them.⁴⁵ Similarly too, we tie our mind to only one fixed object of meditation, instead of allowing it to be pulled by the six sense objects. Eventually the mind will settle onto the object of meditation. This is the only way to tame and control the mind.

The main method of meditation taught by the Buddha was recollection of the breath (*anapanasati*), which was also the very method used by the Blessed One himself.⁴⁶ It is a universal method suitable for most people. The sitting and walking postures are most common in meditation. One fixes the attention on the breath so that the mind gradually settles onto it. With constant practice, the breath gradually attains calm until it is almost imperceptible. Eventually it

⁴³ States of mental brightness. Here it refers to the four form (*rupa*) *jhanas*.

⁴⁴ Snake, crocodile, bird, dog, jackal, and monkey.

⁴⁵ *Samyutta Nikaya* 35.206.

⁴⁶ *Samyutta Nikaya* 55.8, 54.11

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brings one into the first *jhana*, a state where one is totally awake and alert. When one practises meditation one will realize the importance of renunciation. A mind that is concerned with affairs of the world is always led away by extraneous thoughts and cannot become concentrated.

Fruits of the holy life. When *jhana* is attained, the mind becomes one-pointed. One experiences a bliss surpassing all worldly pleasures. Thus it is easy to forsake worldly sensual pleasures.⁴⁷ This is the first distinction/attainment of the holy life higher than the human state. When one attains *jhana* one is also beyond the range (reach) of Mara, according to the Buddha.⁴⁸ The Buddha said that sensual pleasures should not be indulged in but *ghanic* bliss “should be pursued, developed and made much of” because it results in the attainment of *Ariyahood*. The Buddha praised the attainment of *jhana* thus: “Monks, if even for the lasting of a finger snap a monk should practise the first *jhana*, such a one may be called a monk. Not empty of results is his *jhana*; he abides doing the Master’s bidding; he is one who takes advice and he eats the country’s alms food to some purpose. What could I not say of one who makes much of the first *jhana*?”⁴⁹

When the mind calms down even deeper, one progresses into the second, third and the fourth *jhana*. The fourth *jhana* is a deep state of concentration which the Buddha said is imperturbable, and the breathing ceases. At this stage the mind becomes “bright, malleable, pliant, and wieldy”, and “has complete purity of recollection (*sati*)”.

The natural result of this powerful state of mind is liberating insight. One is able to recognize that this “I” and the world is basically a projection of the mind. Whereas most people think that mind is inside the body, one begins to realize that the body and even the whole universe is a projection of the mind, since it is only a perception of our consciousness. One may also realize the arising and passing away of phenomena, and other penetrative insights. Also, with such a clear, bright mind, when one listens to or studies the *Suttas*, one can immediately fathom them and attain liberation. Thus

⁴⁷ *Majjhima Nikaya* 14.

⁴⁸ *Majjhima Nikaya* 26.

⁴⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya* 1.20.2.

we find that the first 1,060 *Arahant* disciples attained *Arahanthood* just by listening to the Buddha's discourse.

The Buddha said that after attaining Right View, five other factors assist the attainment of liberation: moral conduct, listening to (or studying) the *Dhamma*, discussion of the *Dhamma*, tranquilization of mind (*samatha*), and contemplation (*vipassana*).⁵⁰ Thus we see here the importance of investigating the *Suttas* from the first step to enter the *Ariyan* Eightfold Path until the last step in attaining liberation.

ABSENCE OF THE UNCHANGING SELF

The five aggregates are impermanent. The Buddha realized by his enlightenment that there is no permanent, unchanging self to be found anywhere in the universe. This fact is hard to understand and equally difficult for most people to accept. This is because we have been clinging to this belief in an unchanging self from the infinite past, and it is just this 'ego' that has caused us to turn in the cycle of existence life after life, experiencing anxiety, fear, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

A being is basically body and mind. In Buddhist terminology we often speak of the five *khandhas* or aggregates, which are the body, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness. This is also body and mind.⁵¹ This 'self' is impermanent, changeable, subject to conditions, but living beings conceive a 'Self' which they cling onto as permanent, unchanging, eternally abiding. They generally take the five aggregates to be Self, as belonging to the Self, the Self as being in the five aggregates, or the five aggregates as being in the Self.

Body is not-self. The body is easier to understand to be without a Self. Modern science shows us that it is made up of millions of cells which are constantly changing. Old cells die and new cells grow, and no two moments is the body the same; hence there is no permanent

⁵⁰ *Majjhima Nikaya* 43. *Samatha* and *Vipassana* are also explained in "Mindfulness, Recollection, and Concentration" by the author.

⁵¹ Mind consists of feeling, perception, volition and consciousness.

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thing called the body, it is a constantly changing entity, a flux. The Buddha likened this body to a lump of foam, where old bubbles break up and new bubbles form, with no unchanging core.

We have no control over it at all. Uncalled it came into the world, grew up naturally and after about twenty eight years, it begins to grow old. To our great consternation, one day it dies. How can this body be ours when it is beyond our control?

It is highly unstable. A man might think he is strong, in the prime of health, but one or two weeks later a serious sickness could reduce him to mere skin and bones, a living skeleton. Our lifespan is uncertain and we could die any moment. Hence the Buddha said this body is diseased like cancer.

We have to nurse it all the time. Every few hours we have to feed it, yet it never gets satisfied; we have to often clean it otherwise it stinks, and visit the toilet every now and then to dispose of its filthy waste products; then there are endless other duties like having to dress it up, trim our nails, brush the teeth, and dress our wounds. The body is maleficent, having the natural tendency towards evil actions that harm us later. Yet to restrain it is so difficult. Thus the Buddha said this body is an affliction, not self.

Mind is not-self. It is harder to understand the mind as being not Self. Mind is basically consciousness because consciousness is present in all mental activities. There are six kinds of consciousness, namely, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile (touch) and thinking. According to the Buddha, all conditioned things arise from causes. The six types of consciousness arise from conditions;⁵² seeing consciousness arises because of visible form and the eye organ; hearing consciousness arises because of sound and the ear organ; smelling consciousness arises because of an aroma and the nose organ; tasting consciousness arises because of flavour and the tongue organ; tactile consciousness arises because of tactile object and the body; thinking consciousness arises because of mind-object and the mind-base.

These six consciousnesses arise and pass away extremely fast, appearing like an unbroken, permanent, ever-existing consciousness.

⁵² As stated in the *Chachakka Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 148) and *Mahatanha Sankhaya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 38).

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Only the perfectly enlightened Buddha saw it clearly as a series of different types of consciousness, arising dependent on conditions. Thus the mind is a flux of changing conditions, there is no permanent entity called the mind. Whence the Self nature? Furthermore, in deep meditation, the mind can be even made to cease and arise again. If the mind is Self, when it ceases, where is the Self?

Science begins to verify. Science tells us that all the cells in our body are made up of atoms. Now we know that atoms are basically void like space, 99.99% of it is void, with particles of energy moving here and there. So our body is no different from the air around us, basically emptiness. How come we see ourselves as solid human bodies?

Science is just beginning to understand that this 'emptiness' is actually consciousness. Without consciousness there is no world. A pure mind creates a happy world, an evil mind creates a woeful world. Hence the importance of cultivating a wholesome mind.

CONCLUSION

Life appears to be a spiritual evolution for each living being. We are supposed to learn and understand better the laws of existence with each life. If we understand and live our lives according to these laws, we will be reborn into a higher, happier existence. If we break these laws by harming others, we are reborn into a woeful existence to learn from our mistakes.

Human life is at a precarious level of existence. Directly below us are the doors to the sorrowful places of rebirth. This is why holy men have come and will continue to come to warn us, a voice in the wilderness. Human life is very unique in that we create much *kamma* here, unlike other planes of existence where beings mostly reap the fruit of their past *kamma*. We can see *dukkha* more clearly than in the heavens, and thus the urgency. And we possess the blessings, unlike lower planes of suffering, to strive to end the cycle of existence which is difficult to endure. The Buddha said it is extremely rare to be born as a human being. It is as difficult as a blind turtle in the wide ocean, which surfaces once only in a hundred years for a gulp of air, to be

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able to put its head through the ‘eye’ of a wooden yoke floating on the wide ocean.⁵³ It might be an extremely long, long time before we can obtain this human form again.

Life is short, the average age a person lives is about seventy years. If one is forty years old, he would expect to live about thirty more years. This would not seem a long time if he realizes he can celebrate New Year only thirty times more! If we wish to live the holy life and cultivate the Path, we should know also that the Buddha said old age is a wrong time to strive,⁵⁴ since one is no more efficient physically and mentally. Death is like a murderer on our heels everywhere we go. If we cling to our loved ones, their death will bring much pain to us, unless we pass on first. Death will come, as sure as night follows day. We have to help ourselves, no one can help us. We have to rely on our own effort, our own *kamma*. The Buddha’s message is clear: “Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind”. If we cannot fulfill the whole message, at least “Avoid evil, do good”.



Ciram Tītthatu Saddhammo

⁵³ *Samyutta Nikaya* 56.5.7.

⁵⁴ *Anguttara Nikaya* 5.54.

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