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I. IDAPPACCAYATĀ - The Buddhist law of nature.

In this first talk we'll concern ourselves with 'idappaccayatā,' the highest, the most important aspect of the Buddhist religion, and attempt to explain just why we think it so.

It's observable that, although it's the heart of the religion, we've never yet shown much interest in it, and, what's more, in its 'dependent origination' mode it's talked about in such a way that it results in misunderstanding and argument. It's as if there's not enough disagreement around already we have to argue about this too, which is damaging. Hence, we should take a look at this subject and try to come to a proper understanding. So, be interested, pay attention and we'll concern ourselves with this unusual word 'idappaccayatā,' unusual even for Buddhists, albeit Buddhists who don't yet know the heart of their religion.

The first point to deal with is that of idappaccayatā as the Buddhist god. Some will immediately object to this and point out that Buddhism doesn't have a god. They say this because they don't really know what god is, for one thing, and because they're still ignorant of the heart of Buddhism for another. 'God' can be simply defined as the highest, the ultimate. People are accustomed to god as defined in everyday speech: god with this or that appearance, dwelling here or there, the creator, the

controller of the world who made all the many and various things, who rewards when pleased, etc. For now we'll take the word 'god' to mean the highest thing, the ultimate.

Now, the story goes that the Buddha-to-be donned the yellow robe and practised assiduously for a long time until finally becoming perfectly awakened. He was seeking for the fundamental truth - idappaccayatā. It was during the night of his awakening that he sought thus: What does dukkha come from? He realized that it came from jāti, from birth. Jāti, 'birth,' what did that come from? 'Birth' comes from bhava, from becoming. Becoming arises from upādāna, from clinging. Clinging comes from taṇhā, from craving, from desire. Craving, comes from vedanā, from feeling. Feeling comes from phassa, from contact. Contact comes from the āyatana, from the senses. The senses come from nāmarūpa, from name and form. Name and form comes from viññāna, from consciousness. Consciousness comes from sankhāra, from the power of concocting. The power of concocting comes from avijjā, from ignorance. He investigated and reviewed this business back and forth, back and forth during the night. What he investigated and reviewed was the arising and the going down of dukkha, which is more usually referred to as paṭiccasamuppāda, or 'dependent origination.' Paṭiccasamuppāda and idappaccayatā are really one and the same, in truth there's only one law of nature, but if we're dealing with human dukkha in particular, then it's called 'dependent origination,' if it's the general form of dukkha that attracts our attention then it's called idappaccayatā. Anyway, to cut a long story short: he finally broke through to the deepest truth of paṭiccasamuppāda/idappaccayatā and became awakened. At about the same time doubt arose as it occurred to him that, knowing this truth, who, or what, was there left for him to look up to, because he couldn't live reverencing nothing. In the end he decided on the Dhamma he'd awakened to, he'd take that as his refuge.

Now, consider: that which the Buddha discovered and revered, should that be called 'god,' or not? Well, should we do that it would be a god unlike any other, because, for one thing, idappaccayatā isn't any sort of a person so it couldn't be the same as those gods who talk, who feel, who like and dislike, who experience love and anger just like people do, who even have homes to live in. People-type gods are that way. But idappaccayatā isn't a person, it's a law, the law of nature, so, why shouldn't we call it god? After all it's the ultimate, it creates and controls everything, exists in everything, thus performing precisely the same duties as the gods of any religious system we care to mention. It's usually believed that god can do anything - creating, controlling, destroying - and that god is everywhere, knows everything, has power over everything, and so on and so forth, but it's not often acknowledged that it's really the equivalent of god, that is, the law of idappaccayatā, which is actually responsible for all of that.

This is the beginning of the understanding that the Buddhist religion has something that can do all the duties of a god but which isn't a person, or anything like a person, which means that there can be two kinds of gods, those that are people-like, and that which isn't. Which would be better?

Well, a god that's actually the law of nature would, for instance, be acceptable to the scientist, because it would have a scientific basis, and, as the Buddha taught that nothing escapes *idappaccayatā* - happiness, suffering, all that changes and transforms, in fact everything in the world operates according to, and is intertwined with this law - then it makes for a scientifically credible kind of god.

Idappaccayatā can be understood as the god of the Buddhist religion in the same way as those other gods: Jehova, the god of the Jews and Christians, Allah of the Moslems, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva etc. of the Hindus, and so on. Whatever the religion it will have an ultimate, a highest thing, a god - well, Buddhism has a god too, but one which is more so, more skilful, more capable, a truer sort of a god. So, be willing to allow that the Buddhist religion has a god just as other religions do, the difference being that those gods are people-like, whereas the Buddhist god is the law of nature.

This is the first point for Buddhists to realize, that their religion has a god, has a deity, but that it's not of the person-type. So don't bother with those who say that Buddhism doesn't have a god and who arrange all religions into two types, those with gods (theistic) and those without (atheistic), and who then label the Buddhist religion as 'atheistic,' as 'god-less,' and who stir things up even more by saying that if there's no god there's no religion either, so that Buddhism then becomes a philosophical system and not a religion at all. However, according to what they themselves say, a religion is a system of practice which allows mankind to reach the ultimate, a system of practice which allows mankind to enter into relations with the highest. If it's put in that way then the Buddhism is a religion because it does have a system of practice which, when properly developed puts human beings into relation with the highest thing, with *nibbāna*, and, as *nibbāna* is the ultimate, beyond anything else, then it follows that the Buddhist religion is actually more of a religion than any other.

Anyway, this is something that we should be aware of, that Buddhism does have a god, namely, the law of nature, which is the ultimate, the highest, hence Buddhism is a religion in the fullest sense and not just a philosophical system as some claim. This, then is the first point to acknowledge, that Buddhism has a god, a 'god' called *idappaccayatā*, the law of nature, a god with scientific credentials.

Now, point number two: *Idappaccayatā* isn't restricted to being just the god of the Buddhists, it's also god of the universe, the whole universe. Notwithstanding that the law of *idappaccayatā* is simplicity itself: *when there's this thing, there's this thing too; because this arises, this can arise also; when this isn't, then this isn't either; when this quenches, then this quenches too*. This is the essence of the matter, that there isn't anything that is self-existent, there's mutual dependence, cause and effect, that is, everything is a condition for something else, all things operate in dependence on supporting conditions. The law of 'conditionality' is the highest of laws, the law that makes everything work, and this we call *idappaccayatā*. We're surely familiar with the term 'universe,' how vast it is, and so on, well, we can have as many universes as we like, but every one, and the numberless stars and worlds that group together to form one, will all be composed of tiny parts called particles, and the particles will group together into atoms, the atoms into elements, and the elements into systems. One such system is that of the mind and body, so people, but also

animals, plants, trees, or whatever, are all formed from atoms grouping together, and in every atom will be found the law of idappaccayatā. There's no need to just believe, take a look at this through the eyes of knowledge, recognise that every atom coming together to form a world, to form a universe is created and controlled by the law of nature. Idappaccayatā is present in every atom of everything that comes together as a universe. Think about that: every universe, and every atom in every universe is thus under the control of the law of nature, the law of idappaccayatā. That's the case because the law of idappaccayatā was around before anything else, before everything. If someone should ask about nature, for instance: where does nature come from? We could say, without having to think too much, that nature comes from the law of nature, from that which has the power to make natural things arise, which means that it – the law - must pre-exist nature itself. Idappaccayatā then is the pre-existing law of nature. Pre-existing from precisely when? Well, who could say, that's impossible to know given our current knowledge. At present we don't know with any certainty when the solar system first arose, so when all systems whatsoever first came into being, this no one knows, let alone when the law itself originated.

So, the law of nature, idappaccayatā, pre-exists all things in the universe and is the reason for the existence of the universe itself. That being so, can we, or can't we look on idappaccayatā as being the 'creator'? In the theistic religions they say that it's god who creates. We say that the god idappaccayatā is the creator, and the preserver and destroyer of everything, it's what causes all things to arise, to persist for a time, and then to cease: arising, persisting, and ceasing, arising, persisting, ceasing, under the power of idappaccayatā. This is nature: arising, persisting, ceasing; arising, persisting, ceasing. There isn't anything that doesn't behave in this way. Idappaccayatā causes everything, every universe that ever exists to arise, undergo change and transformation, and then to disappear, to cease. So, as everything is under it's the power, we feel that we can call it the universal 'god' possessing the triple characteristics of *omnipresence*, that is, it exists everywhere in every single atom wherever it may be; of *omnipotence*, that is, it's the law that makes all of nature arise and function, that which exercises supreme power over everything; of *omniscience*, that is, because everything arises from and through it therefore it must be all-knowing: it 'knows' everything: the creation of the sun, the moon, the world, of the elements of earth, water, fire and air, of everything that mankind has knowledge of. These days we brag about going to the moon and so on, but the level of knowledge involved in that sort of thing is trifling, not even remotely equal to the all-knowing of idappaccayatā. Behold, idappaccayatā, the law of nature, the 'lord' of the universe, the universal 'god.'

We've looked at two points: idappaccayatā as the universal god, and as the god of Buddhism: idappaccayatā, that which ignorant Buddhists don't know about even though it's in their scriptures, because they've never taken much of an interest in it. They hear it as something odd, strange, as if we're talking about something from the Zen discipline, from the Mahāyāna. But in truth it's textual, it's in the scriptures, hence we talk about it.

To summarize: the Buddha sought until he found what he was looking for and was awakened by his discovery. He then taught it so that others could understand and practise for the final quenching of dukkha too. Dukkha can be quenched if we can live in harmony with the law of idappaccayatā. Because dukkha arises in accord with the principle of idappaccayatā it necessarily follows that it can be quenched by the same means. We feel bold enough to say that all of humankind, no matter that we be Chinese, Indian, from the west - whatever nationality, whatever religion we adhere to, dukkha must quench in accord with the principles of the law of nature. As mentioned, it's a matter of dependent origination, so, don't go wrong at the moment of contact, when the senses meet their objects, and dukkha won't happen, if there's dukkha it's because of being careless at such times. There are those who believe in life after death and those who don't, but both sides of that argument will have to quench dukkha in accord with the principle of idappaccayatā, the law of Nature, there is no other way.

The third point to look at is the actual meaning of 'idappaccayatā.' Idappaccayatā means 'conditionality,' that is: *with this as condition, this arises; because there is this thing, this thing arises.* Things without sentient life - a stone, metal, wood, how do they come to be? They depend on prior conditions: because there is this as condition, this arises - which also applies to all the multitude of things in this world that aren't sentient. So, because this is a condition this comes to be, perhaps, then, we might realize that everything around us is, in a sense, 'flowing.' A Greek philosopher contemporary with the Buddha uttered wise words when he said '*everything flows.*' '*Pantarhei*' is Greek for 'everything flows.' He saw the truth but didn't say anything more than 'everything flows.' This is the Buddhist understanding too, it's the meaning of anicca: everything changes, thus 'everything flows.' Now, we have to say that, if Buddhists don't see this too then they're less wise than that Greek gentleman. That 'everything flows' is the essence of idappaccayatā: because there is this as condition, this arises, and then becomes the condition for something else to arise, and so on, and so on.

So much for that without sentient life, now we can take a look at that with sentience - ourselves. We can divide our physical selves into hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, and so on, into many, many parts, and see conditionality in everything: because there is this as condition that which hair is composed of arises as hair, it must do so, and then something else will arise from the hair, because hair is the condition for something else, even if it's only a nest of lice. Because there is this, this can arise: hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, everything material, everything that is a 'rūpadhamma,' that is, physical, comes to be in this way. That which is mental, nāmadhamma, is the same, whether it be the mind, consciousness, mind-contact, feeling, or whatever. If you can really see this then you'll know that in the body and mind everything is flowing, spinning in a way which is quite amazing: there is this, therefore this can arise; because there is this, this can come to be. It's possible to divide the body into many hundreds of parts but they'll all exhibit the condition of flowing on according to conditions, of changing and flowing - which is worth a twinge of fear actually. But it's the same for all creation: the beasts, the animals, for

pigs, dogs, crows, chickens, all are like this; trees are like this, everything that has life is like this, and everything that doesn't have life is like this too. This is idappaccayatā, the law of nature, that which makes things work, which controls the entirety of Nature. All of the many and various things that exist are the fruit, the produce of the law of idappaccayatā which we, here, call 'god,' the god of Buddhism, the god of the universe.

Now, idappaccayatā is, as mentioned, the law behind all things, behind everything, but where it concerns people, and especially when it's a matter of peoples' dukkha, we change the name and call it paṭiccasamupāda, or, to give its full title, idappaccayatāpaṭiccasamupādo. If we just say 'idappaccayatā' it applies to everything without exception that either has or doesn't have life, to everything that is concocted, conditioned, but if we're only concerned with people, and particularly with the arising and going down of their dukkha, then we change the title and call it 'paṭiccasamupāda.' So, we know that idappaccayatā is the general law of nature, covering everything that happens, while paṭiccasamupāda is the law of nature where it concerns human suffering.

The essential import of paṭiccasamupāda is: 'in dependence on this, this arises,' thus there's dependent arising, or dependent co-arising, paṭiccasamupāda means 'dependent co-arising,' or 'dependent co-origination.' 'Paṭicca' means dependent, 'samupāda' means arising, or origination, thus dependent arising, or dependent co-arising. Idappaccayatā means 'because this is a condition, this arises.' Paṭiccasamupāda means 'in dependence on this, this arises.' The meaning is much the same, but there's a difference in the breadth of the meaning.

There's always a cause for the arising of any new thing. This characteristic is very important, anyone who doesn't see this isn't really a follower of the Buddha. Buddhists ought to recognize this basic characteristic common to all things: people, dogs, cats, whatever: *because there is this, this arises; because there is this thing, this thing can arise.* True Buddhists are those who know this, who are awake to it, who dispel ignorance when they 'see' it. When 'seeing' in this way it's called seeing according to the truth of nature, and seeing the truth of nature is to see 'tathatā.' 'Tathatā' means '*just like that.*' In the Pali there are three forms of this word: 'tathā,' meaning 'like that,' 'tathatā' meaning 'just like that,' and 'tathātā' which means 'just like that' too - all of which makes it easy to remember: 'like that!' 'just like that!' 'just like that!' If we're ignorant we won't see everything as being 'just like that.' If we're wise enough then we will. Look into hair and see that it's really 'just like that,' consider body hair, nails, teeth, skin, bones, see each of these as 'just like that.' Contemplate vedanā, feelings, as 'just like that,' see perception, saññā, as being 'just like that,' see happiness as 'just like that,' suffering as 'just like that,' pain as 'just like that,' death as being 'just like that,' and so on. If someone is wise to this truth in any one thing then they'll know everything else as being the same. This is 'seeing' idappaccayatā, or 'seeing' paṭiccasamupāda, or, as it comes to the same thing, 'seeing' tathatā - seeing things as being 'just like that.' Supposing a husband doesn't love his wife, then it's not a matter for crying over, it's 'just like that.' If the husband goes and takes a new wife it's 'just like that' - or perhaps the wife has a lover and the

husband says it's 'just like that.' No one needs to kill anybody, and no one needs to get angry, to be surprised or puzzled, even over those kinds of things. 'Seeing' in this way is recognizing idappaccayatā, seeing the highest god. We see 'just like that,' we see idappaccayatā in all things. There are words we can use instead of idappaccayatā - tathātā, 'just like that,' or anattā which means 'non-self,' that there isn't an abiding 'self' in anything, only a flow of conditions, only that which is 'just like that,' just the flow of idappaccayatā. The body and the mind are no more than a stream of conditions, of idappaccayatā. The Buddha had said that all dhammas, all things are anattā, without anything that could be called an abiding 'self.' A more elevated word would be suññatā. Suññatā, again, means free, or void, of 'self,' that there isn't anything that could be called a 'self,' if there's anything at all it's just the flow of idappaccayatā, the endless flow of concocting within which there isn't anything that abides, hence it's said to be 'void,' or 'free.' That doesn't mean that there's nothing at all, rather it means that all things are flowing on in accord with the law of nature, so are void, free of any *abiding* essence, of a 'self,' or anything that could be clung to as being such.

Now, the Buddha had said that whether there are Buddhas or not that 'Dhamma element' just exists, that 'Dhamma element' is *idappaccayatā*. The law of idappaccayatā simply is, whether the Buddha does or doesn't arise isn't a problem, this law pre-exists everything and anything. Something that pre-exists all else is the rule in every religion, as in Christianity, although there it's not called 'god' it's called the 'word' : *'in the beginning was the word.'* Then it's said that *'the word was with god,'* and subsequently that *'the word was god.'* In the Indian scriptures, in the belief system of the Sikhs it's much the same : in the beginning was the 'word,' they use the Sanskrit version of 'word,' but whichever language is used the 'word' was first. As for us, the law of idappaccayatā becomes the 'word,' or, if we prefer, the 'command,' or the 'commander.' Christian, Sikh, or Buddhist, in the very beginning the 'word' was.

To sum matters up: idappaccayatā is something that we hardly know anything about, something that some people won't even accept as being a basic truth of Buddhism, while others, because it sounds strange, look on it as coming from outside the religion. People in this world can hold to any religion they like but they really should know about idappaccayatā - they should because it is them, it's what controls them, idappaccayatā is the law through which all things arise and operate.

Before going on here's a little light relief: usually the deity is called 'god,' but we call it 'got' ('got' is the romanized version of the Thai word for 'law,' as in 'law' of nature.) Some friends of ours, Christians, came here and discussed this matter with us, and we told them that the Buddhists have a god just as they do, but that in our language the word 'god' is pronounced as 'got.' It's amusing, and entirely accidental that in the Thai language the word 'got' can be understood in such a way that it corresponds to the English word 'god.'

Anyway, to continue: idappaccayatā is the second of the four meanings of Dhamma. Dhamma (here with the meaning of the ultimate truth - the way things really are - hence it's spelt with a capital 'D') has four meanings : nature itself; the law of nature;

the duty to be done according to the law of nature; and the fruit, or result arising from doing or not doing that duty. If we want to understand Dhamma in its fullest sense then we should see it in these four ways. The first meaning is as 'Nature.' There isn't anything that isn't Nature, whether physical or mental, all there is of us, for instance, is Nature. The second meaning is the 'law of nature,' that which controls all those natures. We are Nature completely under the control of the law of nature: we develop, undergo change, that is, we're born, we grow up, and we perform the various functions of life as we grow: we eat, bathe, excrete, etc. etc. all under the power of the law of nature. Because there is the law of nature controlling us we pass through the stages of life: youth, old age, and death all happen according to the law. The third meaning of Dhamma is 'duty.' We need to understand this point, that is, the necessity of doing our 'duty,' of living correctly in accord with the law of nature, otherwise there'll be problems. The fourth meaning concerns the fruit, or result arising from how the duty is performed, if it's done wrongly then the result will be wrong too, if correctly then the fruit will also be correct. The 'fruit' or result of practising according to the law of nature is also referred to as Dhamma. Dhamma thus has four meanings: nature, the law of nature, the duty according to the law, and fruit, or result arising therefrom. The second meaning, the law of nature, is *idappaccayatā*, but *idappaccayatā* is also intertwined with the other three meanings, inasmuch as nature itself is under the control of the law of nature, while 'duty,' no matter how performed, and the result or fruit coming from the doing of duty also come forth according to the law of *idappaccayatā*.

So, in Buddhism there's a highest thing which accords with the meaning of 'god' as used in other religious systems, but it isn't a person, it's the law of nature. As is their wont people will see god as being some sort of a person, but the Buddhist religion has something able to do the duties of that sort of god and in just the same manner, but it's a law – *idappaccayatā*, that's the Buddhist god.

Let's finish with this matter by saying that the feeling of things that can sense, that is, of things that have life, have mind, that can think, will always be that there's some highest thing: ants, insects, crabs, fish, or whatever, will feel this. It would seem that this god concept arises from an instinctual feeling that there is a something, a highest, an ultimate something that we should fear. Thus, whether it be of the base, childish sort, of the more exalted, or of the most high, the ultimate kind, everything that has life and can think will feel that there is a 'god.' Buddhists through developing wisdom recognize in the law of *idappaccayatā* a god of the highest sort, which is also, because it dwells in every atom that comes together to form it, the god of the universe. It's also the Scientist's god: supposing some scientific person searches for the ultimate they'll finally arrive at the law of nature, *idappaccayatā*. Thus, *idappaccayatā* is the sort of god that could be accepted by Science. Some of today's scientific community can't believe in the gods of the ancient scriptures, but they could accept one that doesn't conflict with scientific principles. *Idappaccayatā* is such a god, one that is discoverable and observable by Science.

Now, *idappaccayatā* orders the world, this world operates in accord with the law of *idappaccayatā* - wrong or right activities happen, and must happen in accordance with

this law. For example: at present education is misguided and encourages the defilements, so the world is a bad place, almost at the point of calamity. Education is mismanaged and the result of that is a world of defilement, a bad, violent place. This happens in accordance with the law of nature, there must be this result. Whenever things are managed correctly, then, as a result of that, there will be an enduring peace. Now this isn't the case because we're foolish and mismanage everything.

Thus idappaccayatā is that which the human population ought to recognize as being the ultimate.

The word 'venerate,' or even a phrase like 'make an offering to' can be used in connection with idappaccayatā. In religious language they might call it 'worshiping,' as with the Christians 'worshiping' their god. Buddhists, however, say that they don't have a god so they don't need to do any worshiping. We should apologise for the ignorance of those who say that. Having a god of the idappaccayatā sort then some kind of worship is required, hence we should try our best to behave correctly in accordance with the precepts, that being the sort of 'worshiping' we should try to do. Now, the Buddha introduced idappaccayatā as the 'ādhibrahmacariya.' Ādhibrahmacariya is the well-spring from which the Brahmacariya (the pure life) comes, it's the source from which the religion for the quenching of all dukkha arises. It's said that the Buddha would recite the dhamma called idappaccayatā to himself, in much the same way that we would sing or repeat anything in order to memorize it - as in the way that children do when they memorize the multiplication table for instance. The Buddha is said to have used this method with idappaccayatā. It has it in the Pali that one day the Buddha was sitting alone reciting the law of idappaccayatā, thus: *'when the eye meets a form eye consciousness rises, the meeting together of these three is contact, phassa; contact conditions feeling, vedanā; feeling conditions craving, taṇha; craving conditions clinging, upādāna; clinging conditions becoming, bhāva; becoming conditions, birth, jāti; birth conditions ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure and despair, etc.'* The Buddha was sitting alone reciting and, on turning around, saw a monk standing behind him listening, and remarked that it was good that he'd come there, that what he was reciting was the ādhibrahmacariya, and that he, the monk, should take it away, learn it, and put it into practise. 'Ādhibrahmacāriya,' according to the books, means the basics, the rudiments, the fundamentals of the brahmacāriya, but that's not quite right, it's actually the origin, the source from which the brahmacāriya comes. Idappaccayatā is the same, being the fundamental Dhamma, the starting point for anything and everything, and which is omnipresent, is always around. Idappaccayatā is thus comparable to the ABCs of Buddhism. So, study the ABCs, because, although we may be experts in some other way we perhaps still won't be beyond the ABC stage in this matter. Get to know idappaccayatā as the ādhibrahmacāriya.

At present some, according to their tastes, don't study idappaccayatā, they study the Buddhist religion but they don't bother with the ABCs. They start to study the history of India, the philosophies of India, or whatever, spend half a lifetime in study of that kind, but don't bother with idappaccayatā, or its partner, paṭiccasamuppāda. They study sila, samādhi, and paññā, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha from another

angle, not from the viewpoint of idappaccayatā, so they don't really know the Buddhist religion. They don't know about the heart of the religion so they can't really understand it. But still they write a lot of books, and there are serious mistakes, especially where kamma and 'rebirth' are concerned. 'Rebirth' is Hinduism; while kamma taught as 'do good, get good, do bad, get bad' means that one is unable to make use of the law of idappaccayatā to live above the concepts of 'good' and 'bad.' Some people understand the Buddhist approach to kamma only as 'do good, get good, do bad, get bad,' and aren't aware that idappaccayatā, when well comprehended, would enable us to live above, to escape from, to cancel out good and bad kamma completely. Studying Buddhist matters in a half-baked way, seeing kamma as 'do good-get good, do bad-get bad' means that there's no understanding of how to live above it, and then writing about swimming around in death and birth after the Brahman fashion, seemingly unaware that we don't have a 'self' to swim around in anything.

To continue: idappaccayatā forms the universal basis for the quenching of dukkha. 'universal' means that, be they devas, human beings, Brahmas, whatever - or, in this world, be they Chinese, Indian, European, adhering to the Christian, Islamic, or whatever tradition, the work of truly quenching suffering must be a matter of idappaccayatā, that is, through knowing directly how it is that dukkha arises and how to operate so that it doesn't arise. Thus, no matter who it may be, whatever belief they may have, whatever ideology they may adhere to, the arising and going down of dukkha must happen in this manner, and there is no way other than by behaving correctly at the moment of sense contact and not allowing foolish feeling, desire and attachment to arise. No matter what religion we prefer, the arising and quenching of dukkha must take place in this way. There is no other way outside of doing the right thing at the moment of sense contact.

Now, looking at idappaccayatā as being ever-present and existing in all things. The most important characteristic of god is that, if it's to be a true god, it must really be found in all things at all times. Idappaccayatā fulfils this requirement because it's to be found in every atom that goes to form everything. Everything operates, that is, everything arises, persists, and ceases in accordance with this law. Idappaccayatā is thus ever-present in every atom, in every particle of a human being. It controls every atom of everyone who's ever been born, of everyone who will ever be born. Now, those scriptural gods, are they the same? Because the god idappaccayatā is to be found in every atom of a pile of excrement. Can any of those scriptural gods be found in a pile of dog's excrement? Idappaccayatā can, because it's in everything, in every atom, even in every atom of excrement. We say that idappaccayatā is the true god, even existing in and controlling a pile of excrement, which is something that cannot be said of Jehova, Brahma, Shiva and so on. Idappaccayatā is thus a more complete, a more genuine kind of god. Know it as the one thing which dwells in and has power over every single atom of everything in the universe.

Dividing things into the material and the mental: every atom which goes to create materiality does so according to this law, thus all the material elements in the universe operate according to the law of idappaccayatā. All the laws of materiality, the laws of

physics, of chemistry, of whatever technology, all derive from the law of idappaccayatā. Everything non-material, everything 'mental' also arises through the law of idappaccayatā, thus any state of mind will be the handiwork of this law, any consciousness arising at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or the mind, any contact, feeling, perception, any thought of whatever kind, all of this will be the fruit of idappaccayatā. Everything psychological falls under the power of idappaccayatā, operates according to the law of nature.

Now, that which is a problem for us, for everyone in the world, the matters of happiness and suffering, of sukha and dukkha - in this world there isn't anything so important as people's happiness and suffering - both sukha and dukkha happen in dependence on the law of idappaccayatā. The Buddha clearly taught in this way. Some people believe that the happiness and suffering we have to experience now are the result of old kamma, (of deliberated activities done in some previous life) but that's a wrong understanding occurring because they don't see that they actually arise in dependence on the law of idappaccayatā. If our happiness and suffering was the result of old kamma it couldn't be made to cease, but right now we can use the law of idappaccayatā to put an end, to put a complete end to its results - or, we can make old kamma give its result immediately. We can, through the law of idappaccayatā, resist kamma by controlling contact, feeling, etc., so that there isn't any suffering, so that old kamma becomes sterile old kamma. If anyone believes that sukha and dukkha are the result of old kamma they're naive. That sort of thing belongs in some other creed, not the Buddhist religion. In the Buddhist religion it has to be idappaccayatā controlling the things that can cause happiness or suffering. Suffering comes from wrong doing at the moment of phassā (sense contact) within the flow of dependent origination; sukha comes from doing the right thing at phassā - behaving correctly in the moment of sense contact brings sukha, behaving incorrectly brings dukkha. Therefore the phrase 'it's the fruit of old kamma' isn't right and comes from something other than Buddhism.

We could resist the consequences of old kamma, could chase them away by living correctly according to the law of idappaccayatā. If anything really was the result of old kamma then we'd have to put up with it, it would be useless to resist. But we don't need to put up with anything at all, we can get rid of any suffering, we can create dukkha-less-ness, can create sukha. Thus idappaccayatā is what causes dukkha and sukha to happen depending on how we behave.

Now, some hold that happiness and suffering are creations of a god, of Shiva. There are people who believe this, so they pray to that god, but they don't know the god idappaccayatā. Thus is superstition: worshiping some form of god that isn't real. Any god can do anything they like, but if we operate correctly and encourage the form of idappaccayatā that quenches dukkha, then Brahma, Shiva, or Narayan together couldn't make dukkha arise, it can't arise as long as we do the right thing where the law of nature is concerned. Yet others hold that happiness and suffering arise by themselves, that they don't have a prior cause, but this is sublimely stupid - to believe that something can arise without a prior cause. The law of idappaccayatā is the law of conditionality: because there is this, this therefore arises; because there is this, this

arises. Thus dukkha and sukha have prior causes and conditions, if we can deal correctly with them we can attain our heart's desire. Misapprehensions such as that happiness and suffering are caused by old kamma, or are the creation of a god, of Shiva, or that they arise by themselves and don't have prior causes come from another creed. To say that happiness and suffering are due to wrong or right action in accord with the law of idappaccayatā, this comes from Buddhism. Thus, sukha and dukkha become things that we can control, that we can manipulate, can even relinquish, can let go of. This is the power of idappaccayatā - power over the happiness and suffering of humankind.

Essentially, it's the duty of any human being to maintain life correctly. If they don't then they must - in accordance with the law of idappaccayatā - experience the result, the punishment: suffering, ranging from being unable to sleep, to nervous disease, to deadly pain.

The last thing we need to bear in mind, need to understand, is that the human mind can evolve, can reach the path, it's fruit and nibbāna by way of the law of idappaccayatā. The ultimate goal of the Buddhists is nibbāna, which is to be 'above' suffering, 'above' defilement of any kind. This evolution happens according to the law of nature: making the mind, making life prosper by living correctly with the law of idappaccayatā always in mind culminates in the attainment of nibbāna.

Idappaccayatā existed before anything and can be found in all things. This is still the case and thus there can still be the aspiration to attain nibbāna, to attain the path, fruit and nibbāna. Practising for nibbāna isn't out of date, neither is it impossible, because we have knowledge of the law of idappaccayatā to aid our practice. Idappaccayatā is timeless, so, regardless of time or place we can always make use of it to bring about the mental evolution and, perhaps, attain the goal. The foregoing examples illustrate what we ought to know concerning the law of idappaccayatā.

Now, please, everybody, get to know the god idappaccayatā as the highest, the ultimate. Don't let this word be something unfamiliar, something alien, know it as the heart of the Buddha's teaching, as the 'all' of the religion. Know it as the starting point for Dhamma study, as the ABCs of Buddhism, that which we need to learn about first of all, and then, perhaps, we won't waste the opportunity of having been born human and having met with the Buddha's teaching.

Idappaccayata

II. VOID MIND.

Here we'll take a look at the 'void,' or 'free' mind, something much misunderstood even though it's an important matter, the heart of the Buddhist religion.

There are those who misunderstand the 'void' mind concept, those in opposition to it, those who make a joke of it, those who criticize it, those who slander, say unpleasant things, those who pretend that it's something bad, and so on. There are some who say

that the mind can't be void, that there must be some thinking, that if the mind is void there won't be any thought so that the body will be like a piece of wood and incapable of doing anything. We say, however, that all activities should be done with a void mind, but some people don't understand that. There are even those who claim that if the mind is void of 'me' and 'mine' then there's no-one to be responsible for anything, no-one to try to do anything, to develop anything, and that we'd be somehow imperfect as people because of that. Some also say that if the mind is void there won't be any patriotic feeling, no regard for religion, even for our own family. There are even those who charge that the void mind isn't a Buddhist principle at all, rather it's something made up by the writer to fool people with.

So, we can see how this concept is misunderstood, even though it's very important, because people need to be aware that if the mind isn't sometimes void then the results can be terminal.

People survive because the mind is void from time to time and they can then rest, can relax. If mind's troubled, depressed by the feelings connected with the 'me' and the 'mine' then madness is a possibility, or some nervous disease, and, if the mind can't stop, can't relax at all there could even be death. This is something we need to know - that we can survive in a reasonably sane manner because the mind naturally experiences voidness from time to time, and at such times there's physical relaxation, contentment, and the mind's best able to think, to function.

Now, the 'void,' the 'free' mind, we'll split the matter up into three: voidness by way of samādhi; voidness by way of vipassanā; and voidness by way of nature, which is that voidness which occurs quite naturally.

The voidness of samādhi occurs when someone is in any level of jhāna. When fully concentrated there's freedom from defilement and the mind is fixed on the on the sign of concentration. At such times the 'self' thought is absent, there's no thinking that 'I' have entered jhāna, or that 'I'm' concentrated, if there is then there's no possibility of it really being samādhi. So we need to forget the 'I' completely and leave the mind to fix on the nimitta, on the object of samādhi until the factors of jhāna arise fully.

In all levels of jhāna the mind has the characteristic of being free of the 'self' idea. In the Pali it's called 'inner voidness,' at which time there isn't anyone doing the experiencing, which is freedom. At such a time there's no defilement, no *nivarana*, the thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' are absent and there's concentration. In this kind of experience there's contentedness, purity and stability, but there's also agility of mind (*kammaniya*), that is, mind is nimble, quick, able to do its proper duty. Such a mind can do anything well. If mind isn't like this then it isn't samādhi and won't be able to function properly. Hence we can work with a void mind, especially where it involves the mental work connected with attainment of the path, fruit, and nibbāna.

It's said that if the mind's not void, not free then it's not samādhi, and if it is samādhi there's freedom. This is the mind made void by way of concentration.

Now, voidness arising through the practise of vipassanā, that is, through clear seeing into the Dhamma, into the way things really are. This is about investigating anything to see it as it actually is, to contemplate the world, for instance, and see it as void of any meaning of 'self.' As the texts have it: *attena va attaniyena vā suñño loko*: the

world, the entire world is void of ‘self,’ there’s only a flow of *idappaccayatā*, there’s no ‘self’ entity involved, nothing that could be clung to as a possession. This entire world is just a *paṭīccasamupannadhamma*. A *paṭīccasamupannadhamma* is something arisen in dependence on other things. The world, because it’s not ‘self’-existent must have come to be in dependence on other things, so it’s called a *paṭīccasamupannadhamma*. Mutual dependence, see it in everything, in all things in the world at large: a stone, a grain of sand cannot exist by themselves and must arise in dependence on something else. For a tree, for an animal to exist these depend entirely on the necessary conditions being present. Even us, we’re born and we continue to live out our lives in dependence on a certain set of conditions being present. The world, the solar system, the sun, the moon, the stars, everything, the entire universe, all are like this, all are dependently arisen.

Suppose somebody believes that god makes everything happen, which would be sort of right, but we’d rather say that things happen in dependence on the law of nature, the law of *idappaccayatā*, the law of conditionality, which is the same as any god. The law of *idappaccayatā* makes everything happen. There wasn’t a sun or a solar system until the law of *idappaccayatā* caused them to appear. When the globe of a world forms then it supplies the causes and conditions for the arising of everything that will populate it. First a world is a ball of fire, which gradually cools down, gradually hardens, morphs into the various elements and then into the myriad variety of things. All of this happens in dependence on the conditions being present for it to happen. Try to remember these words, even if they are a little strange: *paṭīcca* means ‘in dependence on,’ *samupanna* means ‘arisen’ – *paṭīccasamupanna* means something dependently arisen. There isn’t anything that isn’t dependently arisen, except for one thing that is, except for the experience of *nibbāna*, but apart from that all things are so. In this body every cell is dependently arisen, every particle, every atom, everything that we believe to be ‘me’ or ‘mine.’

Now, this ‘me’ and the ‘mine’ belief, is it right, or is it wrong? Do we believe in something that disagrees with the truth of nature? Well, Dhamma represents the fundamental truth of nature, and the truth of nature is that everything is actually dependently arisen. When we manage to ‘see’ in this way then we know that all things are void of ‘self,’ that there’s only the flowing on and spinning around of *paṭīccasamupannadhammas*, all dependently arising and ceasing without end. If we see like this then we see voidness through *vipassanā*. If we have true wisdom we’ll see all of the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind objects, all of those sense objects as dependently arisen, as void. So, don’t fall in love with anything that’s void, don’t fall for the beautiful forms, sweet sounds, fragrant odours, delicious tastes, soft touches, and the sort of feelings that delight the mind. Know the sense organs, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind as being void too. In reality the eye isn’t self-existent, doesn’t have a ‘self,’ it’s basically the natural element called the *rūpādhātu*, the material element, which forms the eyeball, the nerve of the eye, and everything to do with the organ called the eye. Then there is the wonderful element called the ‘*viññānadhātu*,’ the consciousness element which, whenever the eye sees a form will come to do its duty, will arise to know the seeing. This is the way it is

according to nature. There isn't a 'self' who sees, there's just the seeing taking place according to basic, natural principles: because there is the eye which is complete and there is an external sense object, that is, a visible object to meet the eye, then the consciousness element will come and do its duty at the eye, and the eye will see the form. The particulars of that then go to the mind to be processed. The mind, however, isn't a 'self' either. If we know in this way then we know voidness through the vipassanā method. Observe anything, observe all things together, observe them separately, observe the body internally, the body externally, observe other people, the whole world. When we see this internally then we'll see it externally too. If we see voidness in ourselves we'll also see it in others, we'll see how this world is void, how other worlds are void, we'll know voidness by way of the clear seeing that gives rise to wisdom.

Now, the voidness that occurs naturally: here we need to understand that the 'normal' mind - the mind when there's nothing interfering with it, when it's without the nivarana, the hindrances, without the kilesa, the defilements - is 'luminous.' At such times it could be called the 'original mind,' as it was in the womb. The intermittent disappearance of that luminosity happens because defilement enters bringing with it the feelings of 'me' and 'mine.' For example: mind meets anything that causes satisfaction and there's desire, taṇhā, then there's clinging, upādāna to the idea that there is a 'desirer,' a 'me' who desires. It's in this way that the 'self' sense arises, that there comes to be a 'me' who desires, who desires to get something so that it can be 'mine.' 'Me' and 'mine' are really vain, nonsensical, but not in our understanding, there isn't anyone who would allow or could easily accept that the 'me' and 'mine' aren't realities because they're the most powerful feelings in the minds of human beings. But observe how terrible the arising of the 'me' and 'mine' is, and recognize that they aren't permanencies, know that they come and go, come and go, that they arise intermittently, and know that if they don't arise then the mind's in its original, luminous, naturally void state, and without us having had to do anything at all. If there isn't any reason for the mind to lose its luminosity then it will be in its original state quite naturally, it will be naturally void.

So, the free or void mind can arise in different ways: void because of samādhi, void through vipassanā, or void because it's returned to its original state quite naturally. However, it needs to be said that the samādhi mind - the void mind fixed on an object of samādhi - still feels, so it's not that there isn't any thinking, at that time there'll still be feeling so there will be some form of thinking too. The mind void through the power of vipassanā considers, investigates, penetrates, intuitively into the reality of things, so it isn't 'void' in the way that a stone, for instance, would be. The luminous, the original mind still thinks and feels too, but without the defilements it's naturally clean, unblemished and can think and feel in the way natural to it. The Pali word for 'mind' means 'think' so if the mind can't think then it isn't really a mind at all, thus 'void' here doesn't mean that there's no thought or feeling, it means void, or free of the sort of feeling and thinking that causes trouble, that brings upset. After all, who likes trouble and strife? The troubled mind can be compared to a fire, in that it's hot in the way of being tense, unbalanced. Now, who likes that? Who likes stress and

tension, trouble and strife, unhappiness, depression? Nobody at all! That stress, trouble, depression is a 'me' and 'mine' affair, and when 'me' and 'mine' are gone then there is the 'normal' mind, a mind without stress, without depression. This mind we call 'void,' but it's not void in the same way that a stone would be. The normal mind is contented, cool, a useful mind, and, better still, it's able to understand everything deeply, to know aniccaṃ, dukkhaṃ, and anattā, to know the deep dhammas, and thus is able to escape from suffering.

Hence the mind free from the defilements, from the feelings of 'me' and 'mine' is very useful because it allows us to live contentedly, to think well and clearly, to advance in deep matters so that we can, perhaps, realize nibbāna, or - if we prefer - come to know god. Consequently, we consider this to be important, necessary knowledge, which is why we offer it to you.

There's another form of naturally occurring 'voidness' which manifests when we sleep, because at such times the mind is void, but as there's no thinking when we're asleep then it's another kind of voidness, not the one we want here. Dogs and cats can experience this kind of voidness too, so it isn't a matter of skilful, virtuous living, nonetheless it does help life to be restful, relaxed and not too crazy. This sort of voidness, however, isn't enough to normalize the mind, for that to happen it needs to have the voidness that arises through it being well and correctly controlled in accordance with Dhamma, through not allowing the nivarana, the kilesas to arise, because if the mind is full of defilement it can't rest, there's sleeplessness, and there can be madness. The nivarana, the kilesa cause sleeplessness, bring a shortfall in rest and relaxation, and such a state of affairs can end in insanity or death. So recognize that voidness is a necessity, something human beings must have, something that sustains the mind, allows it to be normal, to be cheerful and bright, to grow and prosper, to be luminous, to become superb. Whenever the mind is fresh and bright, cool and happy, peaceful, then take good note of it because this kind of mind is without the defilements, it's not being worried by 'me' and 'mine.' Perhaps when we know this void mind as something beneficial, then we'll try to sustain it.

So, it's not that the void mind doesn't think about or feel anything, that it doesn't feel responsibility, doesn't recognize good and evil, or whatever. That's a counter-argument of the foolish void-mind contingent - because there are those who really don't understand this at all and talk about the sort of void mind that would, for instance, understand killing things, killing people as not being an evil matter, who make out that the void-minded would be incapable of doing anything useful, beneficial. But they misinterpret the meaning of the void mind.

This, then, is the matter of the 'free,' or 'void' mind. If the mind is void there's contentment, freedom from depression or anything of that sort, there's normalcy, well-being, calmness, and then, when we think or do anything, we can think and do whatever we have to do well. We'll also be in a position to experience deep truths, because when the mind is void then its one hundred, one thousand times more skilful than, for instance, a computer. If the mind's troubled however, if there's the heat of suffering, tension, depression then we can't think or do anything particularly well. Most importantly, however, this voidness sustains our lives, if we were without water

to drink we'd soon die, and, in the same way, if the mind wasn't sometimes void, wasn't ever free we'd soon go mad - there has to be enough voidness to slow down thinking and relieve unhappiness, to allow the mind to relax, to become normal again. If there were a depressed mind, a hating mind, a troubled mind for just one day – it would be different for different people – we could go mad, and if the mind was like that for several days then we'd probably go completely haywire and might even die, simply because we'd suffer too much.

So, maintain the mind well, allow it to develop the characteristics of a 'void' mind.

We'll take the opportunity here of talking about the word 'void' a little more. 'Void' is a rendition of the Pali word 'suñña,' while suññata means 'void-ness.' Previous generations heard these words quite a lot because they frequently cropped up in sermons, but these days they're not often mentioned and hadn't been much preached about until we brought them out again. Now, we say that the word suñña is misunderstood and that it actually means 'void' in the same way that the word '*vacuum*' means 'airless.' A vacuum is without air, is 'void' of air, but that doesn't mean that there's nothing at all. People interpret suñña according to their tastes, and they do translate it as 'void,' but as 'void' in the sense of 'nothingness.' Thus it's translated partially correctly because it does mean 'void,' but not 'void' in the sense of there being nothing at all, because that would have no value, have no use. Suñña means 'void,' or free in the same way that a vacuum is free of air, hence it's the sort of 'voidness' that has use. We ought to understand this word properly. In the Pali texts it has: 'nibbānaṇṇaparamaṇṇsuññaṇ,' which translates as 'nibbāna is the ultimate voidness' - now, would we translate that as 'nibbāna is the ultimate nothing'? Nibbāna is the ultimate freedom, the ultimate voidness, but what is it void of? Well, ask yourself the question: what do people want to be free from? They want to be free from the undesirable, from the kilesa, the defilements, from dukkha, from all that troubles, that disturbs, from all of the various problems. Nibbāna represents absolute freedom from those things. The people who interpret nibbāna as the ultimate nothing destroy its meaning completely.

In the texts there are many other passages that reveal this 'void' as something other than mere nothingness. The Buddha's mind dwelt in the 'suññatā' abiding, that is, he dwelt with his mind touching suññatā, free from any disturbance, knowing all things as they really were, as void of 'self.' Now, if it were said that the Buddha dwelt with an empty, a vacant mind experiencing nothingness that would make the Buddha worthless, or make him out to be mentally deficient. The Buddha dwelt in the void, free from the things that disturb, entirely free of the 'self' delusion.

We should understand the meaning of 'suññatā' properly, it means free, or void of 'self,' that everything is void of 'self,' of 'me' and 'mine.' Something that we can grasp easily is the voidness of a stone: a stone on the ground doesn't have a 'self,' it's obviously void of the meanings of 'me' and 'mine,' however, when we come to consider our offspring or ourselves we don't see this voidness, we see a 'self,' we see 'me,' we see 'mine.' The 'me' and 'mine' happen in accordance with natural principles, but they aren't real; the mind can think in any way at all, but when it thinks wrongly the results are going to be wrong too, and it's then that there can be taṇhā,

ignorant desire, and upādāna, clinging to the desire as being ‘me,’ or as being ‘mine.’ These concepts can easily arise from any appropriate experience. ‘Void’ means free from the meanings of ‘me’ and ‘mine.’ Void of the thought, the perception of ‘me,’ of the understanding that this is ‘me,’ of the clinging to the idea of a ‘self,’ of the underlying tendency of the mind to ‘self’ belief, void of the familiarity with ‘me’ and ‘mine.’

There’s voidness on all levels: mind is void of defilement, and void of dukkha, of suffering - this is worthy of our interest.

The kilesa, the defilements are well known as the location of selfishness. The ‘root’ defilements, loba, dosa, and moha: loba, greed, leading to the desire to get something to be ‘mine,’ dosa, aversion, leading to desire again and, perhaps, to anger because of not getting something to become ‘mine,’ and moha, delusion, a spinning around, an uncertainty about how to act in any given situation. All the forms of defilement are a matter of ‘self.’ As for dukkha, the word has two basic levels of meaning and if they get mixed up there can be problems: it’s said that all sankhāras (anything ‘conditioned,’ anything arisen in dependence on a cause) are dukkha, which means that all conditioned things are impermanent, prone to change, and thus quite naturally dukkha. A stone, for instance, as an impermanent thing must have the characteristic of being dukkha. As for dukkha as suffering, that only appears if clinging occurs, because then it will be a matter of mental dukkha, of stress and tension, for whoever does the clinging. Even a stone, if we cling to it as ‘mine,’ means stress for the mind to bear with.

Dukkha in its first meaning accords with the principle that if anything is unstable, changeful, impermanent, then it’s dukkha. This isn’t mental stress but the basic characteristic of dukkha, that which can give rise to stress and tension. So, ‘dukkha’: one meaning is to have the quality of being dukkha, another is of pain in the mind, mental pain. If the mind is void it doesn’t have the suffering, the mental pain, because there’s the knowledge that all things have the basic characteristic of being dukkha and that to cling to them will be a problem. Thus there’s recognition of the benefit of not clinging, which is what prevents suffering from arising.

The void mind is free from foolishness and able to think intelligently in conjunction with full mindfulness and right knowledge. When the mind’s depressed, unhappy then whatever mindfulness and wisdom we possess is forced, halting and sketchy. When mind is void, without depression, without unhappiness it has the attributes that allow it to perform perfectly: full mindfulness and a clear understanding. Foolishness comes from the defilements, from loba, dosa, moha, from greed, aversion, and delusion, but sweep out the defilements completely, the mind clears up completely, and mindfulness and wisdom return to guide our activities. Thus voidness is useful, endowing the mind with the attributes that allow it to do its duties properly. Mind freed from the defilements is more mindfully aware than at any other time.

We can experience normal mindfulness and clear understanding on condition that the mind remains undefiled. Thus observe that the mind, when it’s freed from that which makes it unhappy, when it’s free from the defilements, free of ‘me’ and ‘mine,’ is bright and contented and exhibits what we might call ‘normal’ awareness

Now, let's suppose for a moment that a pill could be made for us to swallow that would produce the void mind, even if that could be done, however, it wouldn't produce the sort of void mind we're talking about. Even if scientists could make a medicine for us to take which, once taken, produced voidness, so that there was no *dukkha*, no heat at all, it wouldn't be the voidness we're talking about here, rather it would create an addiction which would prove ultimately very harmful. We shouldn't look for quick fixes, like some kind of pill that will easily bring us the free mind, bring *nibbāna*, it would be madness to do that, and it can't happen. If there's to be the voidness of the Buddhists then it must be a matter of mental correctness.

So, looking at the benefits of voidness – the voidness of the void mind, what is its value? What is its use?

From what's already been said we know that there'll be contentedness along with the efficiency peculiar to the void mind, but now we want to point out the advantages clearly: making the mind void will be the same as getting a taste of *nibbāna*, a sample of *nibbāna* from time to time, because whenever the mind is free from the *kilesa* then we get a touch of the ultimate, we experience a little *nibbāna*, a sample of it, just for a time, and perhaps this might happen several times during the course of one day. Hence we have temporary *nibbānic* experiences to sustain us. It's necessary that we experience this form of *nibbāna* often enough during the day and night for us to stay reasonably normal, otherwise we'd have nervous problems and perhaps become really mad. So, having some mental freedom is the same as having a little *nibbāna* infiltrate life every day. We'd also have above average mindfulness and wisdom. Generally speaking, people have average mindfulness and wisdom, but if we want to upgrade, to have miraculous mindfulness and wisdom, then we need to make the mind void, let the mind be free. If we want to study well, want to speak well, to write well, to compose well, to do anything well, then let the mind be void and mindfulness and wisdom will do their various duties marvelously. Deep, wonderful thinking can happen when the mind is void of defilement, when the mind gets out from under the pressure of the *kilesa*. If the defilements still have the mind by the throat then there's no possibility, no way that it can think freely, or do anything particularly well, and then even writing a letter properly will be difficult - even talking will be difficult. Hence, we'd have the power of the free mind to enable us to do our duties well. Now, here's something funny: when the mind is void then the King of death won't be able to find us; the King of death will search for us but he won't find us. When the mind is freed from of the feeling of being 'me' it doesn't feel that 'I' will die, thus it doesn't know 'death.' The Buddha said this: *one who has mindfulness and sees the world as void, then the king of death seeks for, but doesn't find them*. Dwell seeing all worldly things as void and we won't entertain any fear of death, then the King of death won't be able to find us, we'll have escaped his grasp. Let him seek wherever he will, as much as he wishes, but he won't find the void-minded, because such an one is free of 'me' and 'mine' and dwells 'above' birth, ageing, sickness, and death. In Thailand we chant about how we ordinarily have sickness, old age, and death and cannot escape them, which is true: because we're ignorant and have 'self' belief then we get what we deserve, that is, we get 'born' to age, get sick, and die. It's what we deserve:

we have a 'self,' a 'me,' so we're not free and have to be born in order to die over and over again. The Buddha once told his attendant, Ānanda : *Ānanda, whenever anyone dwells with us as their kalyānamitta, (kalyānamitta means 'good friend') they, being ordinarily subject to birth will escape it, being ordinarily subject to ageing will escape from it, being ordinarily subject to sickness will escape it, being ordinarily subject to death, will escape death.* But, how is it that we can escape birth, ageing, sickness, and death by taking the Buddha as our good friend? Well, the Buddha taught freedom from 'self' belief, he taught how to let go of it, and being free of 'self' then birth, ageing, sickness, and death may search for us but they won't find us, that is, we won't have a 'self' to be born, to age, to get sick, and to die. Make the mind free of 'self' and birth, ageing, sickness, and death won't be able to dominate it. This will be a benefit of voidness.

The mind free from the influence of defilement, without the nivarana, the hindrances, without the upakilesa, the defilements, without the anusaya, the underlying tendencies of mind, without the āsava, the inflows, is a powerful mind.

Some schools of thought hold that the void, the free mind is an impossibility and that we must have the defilements throughout our lives, that there isn't going to be any time when the mind will be free from them. Now, we say that they aren't always present, because there isn't anything that's permanent, there isn't anything that's eternal, that's truly unchanging. The defilements come and go from the mind in dependence on the causes and conditions being present, so, end the causes and conditions and the defilements will end too. Through developing sufficient mindfulness and clear understanding we could live producing the right sort of conditions, live in such a way that the defilements that would normally arise wouldn't get the opportunity, and even the smaller problems, like the five nivarana wouldn't happen. The mind of an ordinary, worldly person isn't void, isn't free because it's afflicted by defilement, by taṇhā, craving, and by upādāna, clinging, attachment. What is 'craving' like? Craving drags the mind here, there and everywhere. What is 'clinging' like? Clinging binds the mind to the object of desire. Someone who lives with craving and clinging isn't free.

Now, if we know what craving and attachment are like then we'll also know what freedom from them is like, we'll know the void mind. The void mind is 'clean,' 'unblemished.' In ordinary useage if something's blemished then it's said to be soiled, dirty in some way. In the mental world this 'dirt' is called 'kilesa,' or 'defilement.' 'Kilesa' means 'a dirty thing.' If the kilesa enter, then the mind isn't clean. Being free from the defiling things, being unblemished is another characteristic of the void mind. If there's nothing to disturb it mind is content; if there's some disturbing factor then it's not. The mind of the average person is usually uneasy, insecure, so that whenever anything a little odd occurs it's easily disturbed. If it wasn't for the defilements the mind would be at peace. The void mind is said to be 'cool,' 'cool' because of the absence of any 'heat' - the defilements represent the 'heat' that arises into the mind because of the way we deal with sense experience; it's because we're careless when we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, think, imagine or whatever, that there comes to be the 'heat' of greed, aversion, and delusion, the heat

of defilement, to disturb the mind. If there's no defilement there won't be any 'heat' either, there'll be 'coolness' instead.

Nibbāna means 'cool.' Whenever the mind is away from the kilesa it's 'cool,' and even if it's just a little touch of this coolness, lasting just for a short time, it will still be nibbāna. We could call that 'occasional,' or 'accidental' nibbāna, which, though it's just a brief encounter, yet displays the characteristics of nibbāna, of the void mind. Further, the mind stops wandering around. Essentially, it's the kilesa of taṇhā, of craving that makes the mind wander. Craving, desire pulls the mind here and there, causes it to wander after the various sense objects, the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and the mental objects arising at the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or in the mind. There's a parable in the Pali which illustrates this: go and catch six kinds of animals, a snake that lives in a hole in the ground, a crocodile that lives in the water, a bird that lives mostly in the air, a monkey that lives in a tree, a fox that lives in a cemetery, and a dog that lives in a house. These animals have their own peculiar habitats, catch them and tie them up and they'll each still be drawn towards their natural homes: the bird towards the sky; the animal that lives in a house towards the house; the one that lives in the forest towards the forest, etc., etc. These are analogies for the mind being pulled around by taṇhā, desire arising towards the things we see, hear, smell, etc. Because there's something pulling it in so many directions the mind isn't free, isn't void. When there's no more pulling then it's said to be stilled - that stillness, that stopping is voidness.

The void mind has clarity, while the confused mind doesn't, instead it's disturbed by the kilesa that come in to trouble it. So take out the things that obstruct its clarity and it can then function properly, it can do its duty. When anything is obstructed, hindered it can't act properly; the mind is the same, if it has the *kilesa* obstructing it then it's not clear, it's a stupid mind, without wisdom, not a quick or smart mind. Clarity is another characteristic of the void mind.

The void mind is also 'geplī.' This will probably be a strange word for just about everyone to hear, a word that - although it's in the Buddhist texts - is almost never heard. 'Geplī' is a *Pali* synonym for the arahant and has the meaning of being joined with, or integrated into the 'whole,' that is, being 'complete.' When the mind's free it goes to the great voidness. The mind's usually not free, rather it's imprisoned, but it can escape from prison, it can become integrated into the all-encompassing void. Voidness is the same thing as 'geplī.' Geplī is thus another name for the arahant, the arahant being void, or free. The geplī mind, freed from its bindings and without the usual causes and conditions, the sankhāras, to concoct it, is also amatā, deathless, is nibāna, gone to the other shore.

So, voidness is freedom from the kilesa, from the nivarana, and especially from taṇhā and upādāna, from craving and attachment. Without the kilesa, without suffering the mind is peaceful, undisturbed, it's cooled, without 'heat,' it's stilled, it doesn't wander around like the mind of an ordinary individual, it's clear, bright, knows all things as it should according to nature, and it's *geplī*, attained to the universal voidness. All these are characteristics of the void, the free mind.

Try to observe the mind and see if it displays any of these characteristics? Even some will be better than none. The fact is that we do, as is appropriate for us as individuals, have times when the mind has some of the qualities of voidness.

We want to give a better understanding so we'll explain the two concepts 'voidness' and the 'void mind' a little more.

Now, voidness' is one thing, the 'void' mind is another. The mind is void, or free whenever voidness enters it. Thus the void mind and the voidness aren't the same thing, but they can't be separated either - if there's both the mind and the voidness together then there's the 'void mind.' Voidness, if it does nothing is useless, but if the mind has voidness then it isn't being disturbed by the defilements and experiences contentment, so, as already mentioned, it's free, smooth, peaceful, it's cool, still, and bright - it's *geplī*. And, because mind really 'sees' voidness it's content with that and protects it, avoids clinging and grabbing at anything and protects the freedom, the voidness, so that it dwells apart from suffering.

So, the mind has voidness and is then a 'void' mind, the 'voidness' making the mind void. There's contentment because of that. There's no need for 'me' to interfere because contentment is experienced by the mind itself, and if the mind's content then that's enough, after all it's mind that does the thinking, so it's the mind, still with ignorance, that thinks there is a 'me.' Because we can think, then we think that we have a 'self,' but it's really because the mind can think that there is the 'self' thought; it's really the mind that feels it to be so. This is *māyā*, illusion. A *māyā* isn't a reality, it's an illusion that tricks the mind into seeing something unreal as real.

Now, *suññatā*, voidness, if it's the ultimate variety, is arranged into four modes and is referred to as '*jatugotikāsuññatā*,' which means 'four-peaked,' or 'four pinnacled.' The '*goti*' part of the Pāli word means a peak, a high place, like a tower for instance, thus *jatugotikā* means having four peaks. *Suññatā* then, simply put, has four modes, or kinds. If something is the ultimate it's called *gotika*, so the ultimate four-peaked voidness is referred to as '*jatugotikāsuññatā*.' The first peak, the first mode is that there isn't anything that could be called 'me,' the mind feels that there isn't anything that could be 'me.' Secondly, there isn't the anxiety usually associated with, or connected to the 'me' thought. The first peak is that there isn't a 'self,' a 'me,' the second refers to the absence of the associated anxiety. The third peak is that there isn't anything that could be called 'mine,' and the fourth peak is the absence of the anxiety generally connected with anything thought of as being 'mine.' Thus, four peaks in two pairs. It's a matter of 'me' and 'mine' again - examine and find out if these kinds of feelings are in the mind: 'me' and the anxiety that comes with it, and 'mine' plus the associated stress - the direct feelings of 'me' and 'mine' as well as the indirect feelings of anxiety coming from them. Ultimately there won't be the slightest feeling of 'me' or of 'mine' or any of the associated anxiety either. It will be absolutely, definitely finished. There won't be any doubt about it. This will be the highest voidness, the four peaked *suññatā* as preserved in the *Pāli* texts.

Now, should laypeople know about this subject or not? Think about that, because it's customary among some groups in Thailand to hold the view that laypeople don't need to know about this matter. We were criticized by a Bangkok group for teaching

laypeople matters, including *suññatā*, which, they said, were too high for them. Nevertheless, we're of the opinion that laypeople need to know about *suññatā*, after all, it's because they don't know about it that they have to suffer. *Suññatā* is useful, helpful to people who have to live in the world. Once, the head of a group of householders went to attend on the Buddha and asked him what would be most useful, most helpful for such as they, for worldly people who have families and still live the worldly life? The Buddha said that *suññatā* could be of great benefit to them.

One layman who was especially famous was *Anāthapindika*. Both the Buddha and his disciples taught *Anāthapindika* about other matters but they didn't speak to him about *suññatā*. When he was seriously ill and had reached the last days of his life, *Sāriputta* went to visit him and did talk about it, whereupon the seriously ill *Anāthapindika* bemoaned the fact that for a long time he'd listened to the Buddha and his disciples teach but they hadn't taught him about *suññatā* at all, only today had they explained it to him, just today when he was near to death, which meant that he'd only get the benefit of such knowledge for a short time. It was regrettable, but, had he known about *suññatā* earlier in his life then he could have gained more from it. So he expressed his disappointment by moaning and groaning a lot.

People should think about that and get to know *suññatā* well in advance, long before death comes, because knowing about voidness can mean being free of suffering for a good part of life. Coming to know *suññatā* only on the day of one's death means getting just a little taste of the good life, so we ought to know about it as early in our lives as is possible, then we'd have the chance to sustain the void, the free mind for a longer time. People in the world have to live with *dukkha*, in fact they have to live with the mass of suffering more than the clerics do so they have a greater need to know about its quenching. *Suññatā*, no matter how high flown or deep it may seem to be, is nevertheless a necessary matter for the layperson to know about, after all someone in great pain would need a doctor more than someone with little pain - in the same way, people with a lot of *dukkha* should know a lot about *suññatā*, that would be fair and equitable.

Now, it's predicted in the Pali that in the future people won't be interested in *suññatā*. Which will spell ruin for the religion, the Buddhist religion will be ruined: when people lose interest in *suññatā* and turn to some new thing that's not concerned with voidness, that doesn't come from the Buddha, it will signify the end of the religion. This 'new thing' is described in the texts as something put together by philosophers, by bookish people, something new, some new teaching which will be popular but will be foreign to the concept of *nibbāna*, something those who come after the Buddha will teach but which won't be the Buddha's actual words, so that they'll explain the quenching of *dukkha* by another method, not by *suññatā*, and explain it in such a manner that it will attract people. If people are interested in this kind of thing then they won't be interested in *suññatā*, and that will make a nonsense of the religion. When people are more interested in something because it sounds nice, because it's new, then it's the beginning of confusion. Things that attract foolishly tend to bring forgetfulness of the Dhamma, and when the Dhamma is forgotten the *vinaya* (monastic discipline) will go the same way. Therefore, it's necessary that we keep to

the basic principle that nothing should be clung to as ‘I’ or ‘mine,’ maintain that one important basic principle as the firm foundation of the Buddhist religion: ‘suññatā’ - nothing should be clung to as ‘I’ or as ‘mine.’ If they hold to this basic tenet then the whole of the Buddhist religion, the Mahāyāna and Theravāda, or part of them, or any branch, offshoot, group, sect or creed will retain knowledge of suññatā, without it there won’t be a Buddhist religion.

So, recognize suññatā as being the heart of the genuine Buddhist religion. If we take out suññatā and replace it with something else then it’s the end, the end of the genuine Buddhasāsanā. The Buddha offers a metaphor for this in the tale of the drum, the sacred drum of a ksatriya tribe in ancient India. The ksatriyas were warriors and this particular tribe had a sacred drum which they couldn’t replace, couldn’t make anew - because it was sacred then they couldn’t replace it because if they did it wouldn’t be sacred anymore. Now, some parts of the old drum began to decay and they replaced these with new wood, but then other parts decayed which they also replaced. They continued on like this, replacing and replacing until the drum no longer contained any of the original wood at all. The point here is that the original and correct Buddhist religion disappears because another matter that isn’t suññatā is brought in to replace it. Suññatā is then lost and there isn’t a trace of it left. Be well aware that if we take suññatā out then we let in the ‘me’ and the ‘mine.’ Taking out the matter of ‘not self’ means taking out aṇaṭṭā and replacing it with aṭṭā, which will spell the end of the true Buddhist religion.

Now, let’s look at the basis of suññatā, that is, at aniccaṇ, dukkhaṇ, and aṇaṭṭā. Aniccaṇ, dukkhaṇ, aṇaṭṭā, these three words taken together are suññatā: *aniccaṇ*, impermanent, not stable, uncertain, unsteady; *dukkhaṇ*, abhorrent, hard to bear with, and *aṇaṭṭā*, ‘not, or non-self.’ Take aniccaṇ, dukkhaṇ and aṇaṭṭā, put them together, and suññatā is born. Suññatā is aniccaṇ, dukkhaṇ, and aṇaṭṭā. Suppose someone ‘sees’ aniccaṇ, dukkhaṇ, and aṇaṭṭā fully and completely, then they’ll ‘see’ suññatā and know that whatever they experience is free, void of ‘self.’

An easy to grasp and clear meaning of suññatā is ‘void of ‘self.’’ When we’re void of the ‘me’ illusion then there can’t be a ‘mine’ either, the ‘mine’ depends on the ‘me,’ so, if we’re free from the ‘me’ that’s enough, the ‘mine’ is gone too. Now, if we have satipaṇṇā, mindfulness and wisdom, we’ll see that everything around us, both within and without, has the characteristic of being suññatā. The void mind has to see everything as void, then it stops, becomes still and doesn’t chase after and cling to anything. We can examine ourselves to see if the mind is inclined to cling to anything at all, even to nibbāna, because if mind is correct, truly correct, it won’t do that. When the mind doesn’t cling, that, then, is the nibbānic mind, the ‘cool’ mind, cool because everything that was once seen as being ‘mine’ is now seen as tathatā, as being just what it is, as being ‘just like that,’ as something that can’t be owned. So, we don’t aim to take anything to be ‘mine’ from the lowest to the highest, the mind is then free and dwells with nibbāna.

If the mind takes nibbāna to be ‘mine’ then it won’t be true nibbāna. Be well aware that the condition for *nibbāna* is to let go and not grasp at anything, so don’t take nibbāna to be ‘mine’ because if we do it will be a false sort of nibbāna. True nibbāna

can't be owned by anybody. Don't cling to anything - that will be enough. Let go! Let the mind reach the void and there won't be any suffering, the mind won't have dukkha. Don't take the mind to be 'me,' and don't take the mental freedom to be 'mine,' don't take the happiness the mind receives because it's free as 'mine' - there's no need for anything to be 'mine,' allow everything to be 'just like that,' 'tathatā,' 'just like that,' just let things be what they are. If mind sees 'suchness,' knows everything as being 'just like that' then it also knows that it can't own anything.

We'll need to know this 'suchness,' this 'just like that' well - if we can understand everything as void then all things will be understood in this way, and then the mind will be 'just like that,' the body will be 'just like that,' any feelings and thoughts will be 'just like that,' everything will be 'just like that' operating according to the law of nature, idappaccayatā.

All things are 'just like that,' just what they are and not otherwise, this is the meaning of tathatā. When mind is free, void it doesn't take anything to be 'mine' because it knows tathatā, knows that all things are 'just like that,' are simply natures functioning according to the law of nature, the law of idappaccayatā. Idappaccayatā can mean 'just like that' too, for instance: it's just like that, just like that, just like that ('just like that, just like that, just like that,' refers here to the conditions that give rise to suffering being themselves 'just like that') and the result is suffering, or it's just like that, just like that, and there's happiness. Tathatā, 'just like that,' doesn't refer specifically to happiness or suffering, but indicates the truth of both concepts as well as the true nature of the conditions underlying their arising and ceasing. Thus the conditions are 'just like that,' 'just like that,' 'just like that,' then 'suffering,' that which we don't like, appears, or, it's like that, like that, like that until happiness, contentment arises. Observe that both happiness and suffering are 'just like that,' just what they are according to nature, and that they arise 'just like that' in accordance with the law of nature, the law of idappaccayatā.

When the mind learns to dislike suffering it no longer goes in the way that allows it to happen, rather it practises to follow that mode of idappaccayatā which doesn't allow it to occur. It does this because it's gained the knowledge that there isn't anything that should be clung to as 'me' or 'mine,' that when there is clinging of this sort, it - the mind - gets bitten, it knows suffering every time, the mind is then chastened by the experience and turns into the way that doesn't bite, that doesn't hurt. Thus we come to know the need to walk in the way of correctness, to encourage the correct mode of idappaccayatā, the one that doesn't cause biting, that doesn't hurt, so that the mind is free and dwells in the void.

Some people don't understand this matter at all, and prefer captivity, like the captivity coming from indulgence in the delight connected with sexual activity, or whatever. That isn't being free. People return again and again to the delightful and don't see voidness. It would be better for us to dwell equanimous - to be above both delight and revulsion would be the proper way to live. At present, if something delights it's clung to, if it repels it's clung to; it's all clinging, all a matter of 'me' and 'mine.' Dwelling in equanimity, not clinging to anything we'd live in the middle way between the extremes. Consider, for instance, the feelings of being replete and of being

hungry, something a child could understand: a child would choose to experience the first of those two, but being full up with food, feeling replete is that peaceful? Feeling full up disturbs the mind, but feelings of hunger disturb the mind too, so it would be better to be in the middle, to be above feeling full up or feeling hungry. Hence, don't cling to those two feelings and avoid having to experience happiness and suffering. Take to the in-between, that which isn't either and which won't bite. Feeling full up isn't free, feeling hungry isn't free, feeling full of food is uncomfortable, feeling hungry is uncomfortable – if there's no 'me' to feel full or hungry, that's freedom, that's voidness.

So, don't cling to anything, don't cling to the feelings of being full up, or to those of being hungry, don't cling to the delicious or to the repulsive. We can see for ourselves how the delightful and the repulsive are able to confuse the mind - they both confuse, but they confuse differently. The mind undisturbed by such things would be a free, void mind, a mind without suffering.

Come to understand voidness well, otherwise the opportunity of being Buddhist will be missed, we'll be Buddhists who don't know about *suññatā*, who waste the opportunity of being Buddhist. It's much the same as wasting life because of not knowing what should be known. This 'not knowing' can't be excused, not knowing *suññatā* will bring an unfortunate result, so it ought to be known: 'I didn't know, please excuse me from suffering' cannot stand, the law of *idappaccayatā* won't allow it. God won't allow it.

Idappaccayatā is an immutable, unalterable law: because there is this, then this can arise, because this isn't, then this isn't going to be either, it goes along in this way all of the time.

The law of nature is present in this body of ours, so, because there is this, this arises, hence, should we do the wrong thing then some physical disorder, some form of *dukkha* will happen immediately.

It's because we cling to things as 'mine' and don't allow them to go along according to the law that we get 'bitten,' that there has to be mental suffering. If we're to avoid suffering we'll need to acknowledge *idappaccayatā* and learn to behave accordingly, that is, come to see that, whatever it is, it's *tathatā*, it's 'just like that,' so that we aren't deceived into clinging to anything. This is to know 'voidness,' when the mind doesn't cling and is freed from all suffering.

The void mind's exceedingly sharp and functions entirely according to the law of *idappaccayatā*. The void mind is peaceful, complete, and does everything in line with the law of nature. So, if we want to be free from any form of suffering then we should dwell with a void mind, we should 'abide in the void,' abide in the *suññatāvihāra*, don't allow any sense contact to happen carelessly, with a mind that isn't free. So, whether standing, walking, sitting, lying down, or whatever, do it with a void mind, do it without the feeling that anything is 'mine.' People have to work in some way, almost without exception everybody has to work, so, when we work we should do it with a clever, bright mind, a void mind, and not with a mind that's ponderous, heavy: don't work with a tense mind, a clinging mind, do it with a clear, a void mind. When resting do it with a free mind because if the mind isn't free, isn't

void there's no real rest and relaxation. When we do anything: working, meeting with people, relaxing, and so on, we do it with a free mind; if the mind isn't free, if it's irritated, disturbed by something, it suffers. Even when dealing with a troublesome matter the mind should remain still, void. We'll need to do our best when we fall ill, when we're sick it's most important to be sick with a free mind because then we'll recover quickly, or, if we should happen to die, we'll die well(!) If anyone would recover from illness quickly then they should keep the mind void, free from clinging during the time that they are ill, being aware that the malady is really 'just like that,' just 'thus.'

Sickness is *tathatā*, 'just like that,' and doesn't really have any power to oppress, to 'bully' the mind. Sickness is something quite ordinary, not anything we should be afraid of, not anything capable of creating suffering. If we recover from sickness it's 'just like that' too, there's no need for undue mental disturbance, it's not something that needs to trouble or please the mind. So, if we're ill then we let it happen with an ordinary mind, a steady mind, without the 'me' and 'mine', without the 'me' who's sick, without the 'me' who's going to die, etc.

Work with a void mind, relax with a void mind, meet people with a void mind, experience deadly illness with a void mind, die with a void mind - if we should die then let the end come with a void mind, without the 'me' and 'mine,' and there won't be any *dukkha* at all.

There's a saying that most people nowadays don't understand: 'there's sickness, but there isn't anyone who's sick' – there's the sickness but there isn't anyone who experiences it. We believe that 'I'm' sick, 'I'm' going to die – 'me,' when in truth this 'me' doesn't exist. It sounds odd: there's the sickness, but there isn't anyone who is sick; there's *dukkha*, but there isn't anyone who experiences it - there's the feeling of *dukkha*, but there isn't anyone who suffers it, or anyone who owns it, there's just the mental feeling. There's the doing of the many and various things but there isn't anyone who does them, in reality they're induced through the law of *idappaccayata*. There's walking, but no-one walks; there's walking to the temple, for instance, but there isn't anyone who does it, because the 'walker' isn't a person, it's a stream of *idappaccayatā*. If one can see in this way it's called seeing *suññatā*. Thus, try to practise so that the mind doesn't cling to anything and there won't be any problems, instead there'll be the coolness, the quenching of suffering, but there won't be anyone who is cooled, quenched.

Nibbāna is the ultimate voidness, free from suffering, void of 'self.' *Nibbāna* may be the ultimate voidness, but there'll still be the feelings normal for one who's alive and has the senses. Like the feeling arising from anything that comes into contact with the body in whatever way, there'll still be these kinds of feelings, but as there won't be any clinging then there won't be any suffering, even when there are the feelings associated with hunger, sickness, tiredness, or whatever. Life will still go along, the body will still function and must feel hunger, thirst, desire to defecate and urinate, and so on and so forth, hence there'll still be feelings because the body will still be sensitive, but there won't be a 'me' who does the feeling, so there won't be any suffering, only the disturbances natural to a living being. If hunger, thirst, eating,

excreting etc. produces a troublesome feeling then it's a natural event, just recognize that it's *idappaccayatā*, happening naturally, and don't make it into *dukkha*, don't cling and allow the *kilesa* to make it into suffering.

We should practice like this.

Suññatā is necessary for one who would be *dukkha*-free: anyone wanting to be free from suffering will have to dwell in the void, not clinging to anything as 'me' or 'mine,' with a mind in which the defilements don't arise and *dukkha* doesn't happen. Knowing this we can try to practise so that we don't waste the good luck that's brought us into contact with the Buddhist religion and with the opportunity of ending suffering. *Suññatā*, or a life lived with *suññatā*, is a matter that Buddhists, laypeople included, need to know about.

Therefore, let's help each other to learn about *suññatā*, help each other to practise and get the result, the benefit, so that we're able to 'abide in the void,' to live life with a free mind, a void mind, minus the nervous diseases we're prone to now. At present people the world over suffer from nervous disorders because they aren't *suññatā*, take a look, the human world's a nervous place.

Idappaccayatā

III. LIVING IN THE PRESENT.

Today's talk will be about staying with the present moment and not letting the past or future come to disturb us, something which goes against the grain with ordinary people because it's usually understood that we learn from past experience, and need the future as the repository of our hopes and dreams, we live with a certain longing for past times and entertain expectations about the future, and this, they say, is the way it must be. But the Buddha is on record as saying that we shouldn't do that, we shouldn't long for what's gone, nor concern ourselves unnecessarily with what might be going to happen, and that remaining fixed in the present is the way to live. But, some say that's not possible, that they can survive today because they have expectations, regarding, for instance, work, and that they delve into the past in order to learn from previous experience, and although there must be the anxieties connected with such an attitude, yet they're satisfied with it.

Now, the Buddha had a particular aim: that people be able to live without any *dukkha* at all, so, how then should we behave when dealing with the past, present, and future? Well, consider a lesson that Buddhists chant regularly called the *bhaddekarattagātā*, which begins: *atītaṇṇanvāgameyyanappatinkaṇkheanāgataṇ*, and which translates as: 'one ought not to long for what has passed away, nor be anxious over things that are yet to come' – in other words one should stay steadily in the present, experiencing the present moment clearly, and developing this ability into the years ahead. To obey this injunction can, and will, be troublesome, but, if being happy, cool and peaceful is what we want, then this is the way to go.

Bhaddekaratta: 'bhadda' means 'auspicious,' 'ekaratta' means 'one night.' In the Pali language when counting days they prefer to use 'night' as the measure. We use 'day,' as when we say that we'll be away for three days, but in the language of Buddhism they'd say 'for three nights.' Thus 'ekaratta' – 'one night' – actually means the whole twenty-four hours. Bhaddekaratta would thus mean an auspicious twenty four hours. The bhaddekarattagātā was a particular teaching taught by the Buddha for people who wished to live the 'noble' life for just one day, so, if we want to have the very best kind of life for even one day, then this is how we do it.

Now, this could be put into practise for one, or for many days, however, here and now we probably won't be able to achieve even one, let alone many days, so, we do the best we can, we practise for some length of time: for a little while, for an hour, for two or three, or five hours, even, perhaps, for one whole day; if we could live auspiciously, live the bhadda-life for one whole day, it would really be a praiseworthy achievement.

Think about it, consider: the whole time that we've been alive has there been even one day when our life could be said to have been 'auspicious,' when we could have called our life 'bhadda?' If so then we don't need to read on, if not, then we do.

The matter we'll need to understand here is time itself, the past, present, and future times. Why is it taught that dwelling in the present, avoiding past and future entanglements is the best way to live? Well, it's because entertaining the past means that memories, matters from the past will come to disturb, to break up our peace of mind. It will be the same with the future: anyone who entertains unwise expectations, who 'builds castles in the air' won't be able to experience a truly peaceful state of mind. Hopes and expectations are troublesome things. Unfortunately, at present education systems encourage people to live with expectation, we're taught to live this way, to live in hope, to build up our expectations, to expect more and more. Life becomes a life lived in hope. But take a look, observe and see how such a life is, is it cool, peaceful, or is it hot and bothersome? For so long as we haven't got the thing we want there's the feeling of expectancy, and how does that feel? Is that an easy, comfortable state of mind, or is it disturbing to live in expectation? Some people develop nervous diseases because of this kind of thing, it can torture the mind - not doing as well as we hoped to, as we expected to, can, over a period of time, lead to nervous disease. Hence, if we're looking forward to getting something then we're living in hope, so just let that kind of thinking come to a stop and get on with life without allowing expectation to disturb the mind, because when we hope to get anything we're courting disappointment straight away: we expect and we're prone to disturbance immediately, because what we want has yet to arrive, and disappointment, on any level, disturbs the mind, it 'bites,' as they say. So why hope and get bitten? Don't bother with hope. When we need something, then we think about it, think it out, then stop thinking about it and get on with life, we live with mindfulness and with wisdom. If we do this there's no biting, but if we live in hope and expectation there is. Live on hopes and expectations and they'll bite; they'll bite all the time like some ferocious animal. Thus, we try to avoid living in hope and instead try to dwell with mindfulness and wisdom remembering to act without letting expectations in to bite us.

Concerning this, the Buddha once took the example of an hen laying and then incubating her eggs. The hen lays the eggs and then she just sits on them; she doesn't entertain any expectation that the chicks will emerge from the eggs - no hen would be mad enough to do that - she just sits on the eggs; she occasionally scratches and scrapes, occasionally turns the eggs over, and generally does whatever is necessary and right, so that when the time comes the chicks emerge. Be like the hen, don't do anything with expectation, allow expectation to arise and it will bite - it will bite and there can be nervous disease, madness, even death, because brooding over what might be going to happen in the future can produce results like that. Thus we need to know how to maintain the mind correctly so that whenever we think then we do it carefully, we act with mindfulness and wisdom, with *saṭipañṇā*, not with hope and expectation. Act in expectation and we act with hunger, and hunger isn't happiness, it's suffering. This was taught by the Buddha, but people in the world now don't teach in this way, they teach children to live in hope and to get bitten. Hopes and expectations are bound up with disappointment, because if we don't get what we expect quickly then it means experiencing disappointment. When we begin with expectation there's bound to be disappointment, and, if we can't bear with that then we might steal, might do bad things because we haven't had our expectations fulfilled. Thus, we practise to make the mind normal, we don't allow the future to come and torture us.

The first section of the *Bhaddekarattagātā* runs thus: *atītaṃ nāṇvāgameyya*: 'one ought not to long for what has passed away,' that is, don't dwell in the past, it's finished, gone, why bring the *dukkha* of longing into life. Don't bring things from the past to torment the mind: if we've made a mistake don't allow it to be a nuisance, stop thinking about it and try to avoid making the same mistake again. Anything of the sort occurring in the future can be dealt with in the same way.

Now, concerning the present, how should we act? If we were students, for instance, then we'd study what we need to study without bringing things from the past or future that have no immediate relevance to disturb our cogitations. Thus we could be at ease, comfortable with ourselves. If we allow the past or future to disturb us we won't feel at ease, we'll be easily distracted and won't accomplish as we'd like. This is fundamentally true for everyone; if we haven't seen this yet then we should, from now on, try to see it. We try not to let thoughts about the past or the future come to torment the mind, instead we do our best to stay with the present, with whatever's happening here and now. If we can do this then it's said that time doesn't bite us, rather that we turn around and eat time instead.

It says in the Pali that time devours all living things. Time passes, day-time, night-time, and devours, eats all living things, that is, it allows creatures to age and die, to pass away. Time bites us when we hope, when we expect to get something and what we're hoping for hasn't arrived yet. Time bites us because we don't get the thing we want quickly enough. How do we stop time from biting us? Well, we know how time operates so we don't do anything with expectation, we act with a clear mind, with a smart mind, we act with clarity and don't allow time to interfere, to have meaning for us. Time has no meaning for us if we avoid thinking too much about past or future events, because then there's no foolish desire arising towards such things,

there can of course be desire for things we'll need at some future time, but if we don't think about them unnecessarily there won't be the sort of unwise desire that causes problems, and when there's no unwise desire there's really no time either.

Children will probably know time by the things that indicate it, that indicate the passage of time, like clocks, like the seasons, like days and nights, months, years, and so on. These are indicators of the passage of time, things that fix time. These things never bite us because they're just indicators. But time itself, what is it, where is it? Time? some people say that it doesn't really exist, but that isn't true; we don't agree with that. Time does exist, but for foolish people, for ignorant human beings. If someone is clever enough then it won't exist for them, but foolish people with their wanting this, wanting that, hoping for this, hoping for that, will have to bear the passage of time because of their desiring. Time's starting point is desire and it continues to exist until we get what we desire, that's where time 'is.' We desire – this is the starting point - then, when we get what we desire, that's the end-point. Beware of time, it will only have meaning because we have desire. If we don't desire there won't be any time, it won't have a beginning and an end. Thus time exists, but only for those who have ignorant desires, who have hopes and expectations.

Now, the Dhamma teaches non-desire, that we should avoid foolish wanting, so that anything we do, no matter where or when, should be done without desire as its starting point, then we'll get what we need to get, but we won't be bothered by the passage of time, and we won't have the associated dukkha, we'll be above time, above its meaning, it won't exist for us and we'll experience some degree of mental ease. Those who aren't bitten by time live their lives above it, live desire-less, without the foolish expectations that torment the mind, they become calm, peaceful, attractive human beings. Living that way for even one day would be a praiseworthy achievement indeed.

We're sorry to have to say that, although we chant the Bhaddekaratta sutta, chant it together regularly, monks, novices and laypeople, we still don't get the point, and some people, even though they chant this sutta everyday, still entertain doubts about how we, if we don't take an interest in the past and future, how we can live at all? So pay attention to what the Buddha had to say: he said that if we want to live auspiciously, with an elevated mind for just one day, then this is the way we do it – by not thinking about the past, and by avoiding foolish hope and expectation concerning things that haven't happened yet. By dwelling in the present moment without the meanings of 'past' or 'future' coming to disturb us we dwell with a mind that's peaceful, resolute, strong, which has energy, has the power to do things well here and now, and, what's better, a mind which is happy and contented, so that, if there's work for us to do we'll be able to do it well and contentedly, and if there's nothing that needs to be done, well, we'll do nothing well and contentedly too. Supposing someone would live the bhadda-life for one day, then, even if their whole life span should amount to just that one day, their life would have much more value than that of someone who had never lived auspiciously, even though that someone might live for a thousand years. The Buddha taught this way.

Can we live like this? Because if we live under the power of time it means we're enslaved by it, and that we get bitten, get eaten up by it. Longing for the past and hoping for something in the future bites, and, given that, how can we ever be truly happy?

Time exists only for people who desire in ignorance, they experience foolish desire and the meaning of time is immediately 'born' for them. If they don't desire foolishly then time doesn't exist for them, time isn't 'born.' So, because ordinary people have desires thus they have time too, time exists for them. Hence everybody in this world has to deal with time. When one desires, in the moment that there is desire there will be time; when there isn't desire, there isn't time either, time loses its meaning. Thus time will exist only when we desire, when we want something in ignorance. So, if we live minus desire, without foolish wanting, then time won't devour us, rather we'll do the devouring, we'll be someone who 'eats' time. The Buddha is recorded as saying that anyone who gets rid of taṇhā, ignorant desire, is someone who eats time. Usually it's time that does the eating, it, in a certain sense, eats people, it devours all living things, but anyone who puts an end to foolish desire, that one turns around and eats time. Time then becomes a small matter, something to smile at, an inconsequentiality that can't eat, can't bite us. If desire is avoided there's no time, one then eats it, which means that one makes time pass away by not giving it meaning, then it's as if there isn't any time, it's as if we live 'above' it.

We should understand that as soon as time loses its meaning then there isn't a past or a future, they don't have meaning either. Thus it's known as not having time. Clocks are devices for fixing time, for telling the time, the seasons of the year, like the yearly rainy season, are devices for fixing the time, and the rising of the sun each day is a device for fixing the time. But time itself is really the interval between ignorant desire and the acquisition of the desired. Therefore, devices for telling the time just tell one, for instance, what time to eat, but for one who doesn't have desire, who doesn't have time, like the Arahant, they don't have the same meaning. Days, nights, months, years don't have the same meaning, clocks don't have the same meaning, it's as if they're given up, relinquished, because Arahants aren't concerned with time in the ordinary sense, or with the problems associated with it. But if it's a matter of someone needing to work for a living then they'll still need to be aware of time in the usual way. The more someone is bound to society and the work connected with it, the more timepieces become necessary.

So, we know that there is the passage of time for people who desire in ignorance, clocks are for such people. For people who don't have the same problem there's no such dependency, for the desire-less, the passage of days and nights, months and years isn't a concern.

Now, to be without the pressure of passing time, how good would that feel? Suppose that we did experience a single auspicious day, it would mean that we'd tried to be Arahant for that one day. The true Arahant doesn't live the bhadda-life for just one day, however, they do it all of the time, they have a life that's cool and peaceful, that's auspicious all of the time. Thus, if anyone wants to be like an Arahant for just one day then they do it by living above time, above the meaning of time, above the

value of time, by living without desire, without taṇhā, craving, without upādāna, clinging, without the defilements, without greed, without anger, without delusion influencing their lives. They dwell above and beyond time.

Suppose that we were always Arahant, not just for one day but always, what would we have done to have achieved that? Well, it would mean that we'd given up the present as well as the past and future, that there wouldn't be a past, a present, or a future for us, for the reason that there wouldn't be a 'me' any longer, there wouldn't be a 'me' doing the living, and when there's no 'me' then there's no past, present, or future time either. Let the 'me' go completely and one is Arahant full and complete, dwelling above and beyond time. But if we're not yet fully Arahant, only bhaddekaratto, then there'll still be the present remaining, there'll still be the passage of time, because there'll still be a 'me' to experience it, even so, if while still selfish we live in the best possible way, we'll only have present time to deal with, only the here and now, not the past or the future. The Buddha said that to live for one auspicious night by staying in the present moment and avoiding the past and future, is something we can do. When we calm the mind then the past and future don't disturb it and it stays fixed in the present. One then is someone who experiences contentment while still having the 'self' delusion. This is known as having one auspicious night. The meaning of time isn't completely rescinded, in that there's still the present, but not in such a way that it disturbs.

How many years do we live for, how many tens of years, and yet we never have true peace and happiness. So we try to live one night peacefully by not allowing the past and future to interfere, and by being mindfully aware of whatever we need to think or do in such a way that the feeling of desire doesn't arise. Ultimately this means acting without the feeling of 'self' too, but, as of now, we still have the feeling of being 'me' so we have to try and stop the past and future from troubling the mind, make them leave the mind alone so that it can do what needs to be done, then there's no dukkha.

The best present abiding is samādhi, that is, the mind fixed so securely on its object that it stays fixed. Make samādhi, achieve the first jhāna successfully and receive the fruit - vitaka, vicāra, pīti, sukha, ekaggatā. Vitaka and vicāra, applied and sustained thought, pīti, satisfaction, sukha, happiness, and ekaggatā, one-pointedness, are the fruit of samādhi. Ekaggatā, one-pointedness, is the mind alone, focused on one object, free from the meanings of past or future. The mind that's stilled in samādhi is said to dwell in the present only. Now, if that still feels low then move things up until vitaka/vicāra, applied and sustained thought are gone, which would represent the second jhāna, a more intense experience of being in the present; move it up until pīti and sukha, satisfaction and happiness are gone too, until there's only upekkā, equanimity, and ekaggatā, one-pointedness. Upekkā is the ultimate experience of the present, the purest experience of being in the present minus any suffering or any reaction of the suffering kind whatsoever. The mind dwelling upekkā, equanimous towards all things, dwells only in the present, the past and future cannot come to interfere. This upekkā, this equanimity, can be made to increase until it reaches the ultimate for the still ignorant, the meditative attainment of the arūpājhānas, the

formless meditations, which are a yet more equanimous experience, a more refined experience of being in the thorough-going present - which can then be refined more and more until the highest is reached, the most rarified level where there is no possibility of the past or future arising. At such time the 'self' sense is also absent, as with the Arahant who, having nothing more to do with clinging, doesn't have a 'self' at all, ever, but for us the 'me' is absent only for the time that we can remain concentrated, when we no longer are then it comes back again.

Being someone who lives the highest way for one day, for half a day, or for one hour may be done in this way, by fixing the mind in the present so that the past and future can't disturb it, then anything that the mind takes as its object represents the present for it, and, if detachment, equanimity is the object then it will be an extreme example of being in the present. Upekkā, equanimity, has many levels, increasing accordingly as the mind is increasingly samādhi. Mind fixed in upekkā as its only object is ekagattā, one-pointed, and represents the ultimate present, without the defilements of craving and attachment, mind dwells above time, dwells defeating time.

If someone is Arahant then the past, present, and future are, for them, completely ceased. If just bhaddekaratta then there's still the present, but not the past or future. However, if someone were to strive to maintain this bhadda-condition continually that would develop the Dhamma and cut the kilesa, the defilements completely, so that they'd, finally, end up as arahant too. As yet we cannot be so, but we can try to live in the Arahant manner; we can try to be like the Arahant for just one day. This, then, would be the condition of bhaddekaratto: dwelling in the present - bhaddekaratto: dwelling with an equanimous mind.

If someone were Arahant then they'd dwell in nibbāna, which is the absolute, the ultimate present. If it should be asked what the ultimate meaning of the 'present' is, then it would have to be 'nibbāna' - nibbāna being without any form of concocting doesn't display the characteristics of arising, persisting, and ceasing, of birth, ageing, and death, thus it has the nature of the eternal present. Having nibbāna as the object of awareness, the Arahant lives always in the present moment. Hence, those capable of dwelling in the present can be divided into two groups: the Arahants who dwell quite naturally with nibbāna, which is the same as the present, and the not yet Arahants who dwell in upekka, equanimity by fixing the mind on an object of concentration.

This isn't a matter of anyone being damaged or harmed in some way, it's not because of ignorance or some deficiency that Arahants don't know the past, present, or the future. These people, if they want to, can get involved with time, they aren't foolish or subnormal. If, for instance, they want to recall past events in order to learn from them then they can, but in such a manner that it won't bring them any dukkha. Worldly people when they think about the past, when they recall past matters, they make dukkha because they make mistakes, and even though some past event was a happy one it disturbs them, makes them not-peaceful. Someone who's a bhaddekaratto type is still able to work out some future thing if they should wish to, but in such a way that there wouldn't be dukkha, because they wouldn't get caught up in hope and expectation, they'd think about how something should be done, but

they'd arrange matters so that only the necessary thinking would happen. Don't forget that such people avoid hope, avoid the defilements of *tanhā*, craving, and *upādāna*, clinging, and, even though they might think, make plans for the future, there's no *dukkha* involved because there's none of the hope, the expectation that bites.

Therefore, we, as ordinary people, can live in the present without the kind of past and future that would be dangerous for the mind. The past then is only a record - memories that we can use whenever we need them, while the future consists in just planning the things that we should do without the sort of hope and expectation that would involve the defilement of desire, of *tanhā*. For that reason we wouldn't have enough ignorance for there to be a 'me,' or for the mind to take anything as being 'mine,' so we could know all things as being 'just like that.'

'Just like that' - *tathātā*, 'just like that,' we've mentioned this many times, but remember it and it will help us to prevent the arising of foolish expectation of the *dukkha* kind, of the sort of time that bites. Whatever we experience we know it as 'just like that' so that we aren't fooled by it and don't fall into love, into hate, into anger, into fear, into being led astray in any way. *Tathātā* will help us to dwell with a normal mind so that the past, present and future cease to be dangerous. Thus, preserve the knowledge of *Tathātā*, keep it well and then we can avoid falling into longing for the past or into harbouring foolish hopes and expectations about the future, we won't 'build castles in the air,' as they say, because we know that whatever we experience is really 'just like that.' O

sees anything as 'just like that' won't have foolish desire towards it. If they can see the 'thusness' of all things whatsoever then they won't entertain foolish desire, and when they don't desire they don't have time, hence they don't have the *dukkha* concerned with time because they don't have a past or a future in the ordinary sense. This is the seeing of 'just like that' that has the most use.

'Voidness' is another way of describing the utmost present. There isn't anything that is more in the present moment than the void mind, because it doesn't display the usual concocting there's nothing changeful about voidness. As *nibbāna* is the ultimate voidness and the void is changeless, then voidness is the ultimate present. If the mind is void it doesn't give rise to desire and thus doesn't have the problems associated with the passage of time.

Modern education systems don't teach this kind of thing, they teach in another way, so we don't get the opportunity to make use of this kind of knowledge. We can have the ability to live above time, but modern education systems don't teach this, they teach people to rush around, to hurry up, get finished in time, to be quick - so we get nervous diseases all over the place. Worldly education at the present isn't elevated enough and doesn't give people the necessary understanding of how to live above the power of time; Buddhist knowledge, however, is elevated enough and does. Present worldly knowledge probably can't explain time, modern science, because it's physically based, can't tell us what time actually is, but Dhamma knowledge can and does: time is the interval between desire and the acquisition of the desired, that, in the

Buddhist sense, is time, and for so long as there's an unfulfilled desire time will have meaning, if there's no desire then there's no time, it has no meaning, for time to have a value, to have any power then people need to display foolish desires.

It's an odd thing that, although we live in the same world, some people live under the power of time and some live above it. Worldly people the world over live under its power, subject to its pressure, while the Arahant lives above it, above the pressure and biting. Well, we can, if we choose to make the effort, live above time too and for perhaps one day and night we can be bhaddekaratto, we can have the best kind of life for just a short time. Dwelling above time in the same way as the Arahant for just one day and night, or even for just one hour, would still be commendable, would certainly be better than nothing.

To get the benefit of experiencing true happiness we need to understand that we can live above the pressure of time by not allowing foolish desire to arise towards anything we experience. By dwelling above the pressure of time we'd be without suffering, and if we could do this continually, then, eventually, time would have no power over us. Or, failing that, if we could be aware enough to practise this some of the time so that it protected us to some degree and allowed us to live to some extent contentedly, then we wouldn't have to feel too embarrassed when we meet with the cat population, for instance. We've said this many times, some will appreciate it some won't according to their tastes. We ought to feel some degree of embarrassment when considering cats: we suffer from nerves and can't sleep because time pressures us too much, yet animals, because they don't desire in the same way, don't feel pressured by time. Animals don't have nervous diseases, but people do, so we should feel some shame when we consider cats and dogs, because we don't see them suffering from the nervous problems associated with time.

Anyway, it's hoped that we can take in the meaning of the Buddha's words on this subject, and that we can live an auspicious, peaceful life by avoiding longing after the past and reaching for the future. Now people don't seem to understand this, or don't agree with it, and they criticize - they don't criticize the Buddha, because they don't know that this was said by him, rather they understand that it was Buddhadāsa, and so they write criticisms in newspapers, etc. But this piece isn't about revenge or anything like that, rather it's meant to reveal that education in this world at this time is insufficient, insufficient in that it fails to reveal that by living outside the power of the past and future we can live at ease without that doing any damage, causing any loss, stopping any development from taking place, without affecting our value as human beings in any way.

So, become familiar with and try to practise this dhamma, this bhaddekaratto, the bhaddekarattagātā that we Buddhists chant together everyday. It's something we need to do, then, for one day, for one night we could be someone who lives properly, auspiciously, growing in the Dhamma. Practising to do this for just one day and one night, not all the time, would still mean that we hadn't wasted a human birth and the opportunity afforded by having met with the Buddha's teaching.

IV. BIRTH.

Now we come to the subject of 'birth.' We'll take a comprehensive look at this matter. If we split up the main question there'll be just two points to consider: one concerning whether a person dies and then is or isn't born, the other concerning the sort of birth that's dukkha, which is something that should be studied and put an end to.

Looking at the first question, that is, when someone dies are they born again or not? This question has been around since the Buddha's time and was comprehensively dealt with then. It appears from the Pali that it was examined from every conceivable angle, that there arose views, opinions, conclusions of many kinds, but that there was no general agreement. Some people held that there was death and birth, some that there wasn't, some that there was sometimes birth, others that there wasn't, and some held that one shouldn't declare on the subject at all. This was a big thing at the time of the Buddha.

As Buddhists which group would we belong to: that which holds that there is death and then birth, or to that which says that there isn't; to that which holds that there's sometimes birth, or to that which says that that's not so; to that which holds that there's neither - neither birth nor no birth?

There are those, adhering to some other religion, who believe that there's a 'self' involved here, and that it's this 'self' that gets born, while others of a different persuasion say that's wrong; yet another group hold that this 'self' is sometimes born, while others hold that it isn't - and so on and so forth. But nobody seems to say what the Buddha said: that there isn't a 'being,' a person, that there isn't anyone doing the dying or being born, there's just a stream of conditions, of idappaccayatā, a stream of dependent origination, of paṭiccasamupāda flowing on.

Another, minor, question crops up here too, as to whether one is 'self-born,' or whether there's someone or something helping the process, something else causing birth to happen. Again, the Buddha didn't declare on that sort of thing, saying only that birth happens in accordance with the law of idappaccayatā, the law of nature.

There's also that sort of 'half-birth' called 'sambhavesi' to be considered, in which one dies and, still to be born, wanders around searching for a place to be born into, then, when birth takes place one becomes bhuta, a 'fully born' being. But it depends on how the word 'sambhavesi' is understood. Sambhavesi can refer to the mind not yet risen to the point where it (the mind) feels that it's 'me,' or that anything is 'mine' - the mind which will concoct, but which hasn't yet concocted the 'me' and 'mine' scenario fully. This can be called sambhavesi too.

There's also the problem of what it is that actually gets born? People who follow the ancient doctrines of India say that 'viññāna,' consciousness gets born, but the Buddhist religion doesn't include that kind of consciousness, it only deals with the six sense consciousnesses. If, however, we allow that consciousness is born, then in the Buddhist sense it would imply the concocting of mental activity in response to sense

contact so that there occurs feeling, perception and thought, culminating in the 'birth' of the 'I' sense into the mind. This would be comparable to consciousness being 'born.'

There's yet another, large, question to consider: some creeds, some religions have the belief that when a person dies they go to await judgement as to whether they should be born in an eternal hell or in an eternal heaven. They get judged just once and then go and take birth accordingly, so that one is, for instance, born into an eternal hell – and it is eternal - or, if one is to be born into heaven, then that will be for all eternity too, without any further change. In some creeds, some religions this is believed in. There, we can see for ourselves what a complex matter 'birth' can become.

Now, concerning whether one is born or not: when we look at this in accordance with Buddhist principles, with the tenets of Buddhism as contained in the texts, then the question has to be considered from two angles: from that of those who use the language of supposition, and from that of those who use the language of ultimate truth. Simply put, it's said that a person who doesn't yet know the way things really are, who doesn't know that the 'self' is illusory, will use language in one way, while someone who has that knowledge will use language in another. All, or most worldly people will necessarily speak in the way of the world, in the language of supposition, and will accept that there's a 'self,' that there's a 'me,' a 'person' who dies and is then born. This has been repeated over and over again until there's hardly anybody who thinks that it can be any other way, and is useful on the level of siladhamma, on the level of morality, useful for people who have yet to realize truth. For those people the doctrine of rebirth is the better option, because it discourages wrong-doing and encourages the opposite - but it's not the truth. If we use the language of ultimate truth, then there isn't anything that could be called a 'self,' a 'person,' there's only the concocting of elements, of causes and conditions in accordance with the law of nature. But when we mention this people tend to misunderstand it, so we need to be careful, be reserved even with the ultimate truth, and we should talk about such things only when it's appropriate, only when the mind of the listener is elevated enough to understand properly. Usually it's more fitting to talk in a way which is going to be useful, and if saying that there is death and rebirth is useful, then that's what we should say.

Before the Buddha arose in India they held that there was death and then rebirth, that there was a 'self,' that it was consciousness that was reborn - that was the majority belief, because it was the most useful. Now, when the Buddha appeared it was into a society where this belief was firmly established, so, what was he to do? Well, he didn't try to put an end to the belief, rather he gave the appearance of subscribing to it by saying that in case one was to be born then one should know how to act so as to obtain the best kind of birth, that is, the suffering-free kind, and he then went about teaching the method of practise by which that could be achieved. Thus - in conformity with the then generally held belief - teachings for obtaining the best kind of birth are everywhere in the Buddhist scriptures, but the true Buddhist message is that there isn't a being, a person, there's only an ever changing process of concocting,

of compounding with nobody involved in it. People tend to grab at that process, call it a 'person' and say that it's born, ages, and dies, and that it's reborn. Here we need to ask if that sort of understanding can bring any real benefit; if people want to end suffering, to really not have any suffering then what sort of understanding should they have, that there is a 'self,' that there's a 'self' waiting to be born somewhere, or that there's isn't? Right now, at this moment, there isn't a 'person,' a 'someone' who was born, but nobody understands this properly: that which was born, that which is sitting here in this place right now, isn't a person, it's really just a stream of *idappaccayatā*; all of these people sitting here aren't really people at all, they're just nature, just the *khandhas*, the aggregates, the *dhātus*, the elements, the *āyatana*, the senses concocting together in accordance with the law of nature, and flowing on, continually changing, transforming, they aren't really 'beings,' aren't 'people' at all. How many of us sitting here now understand this correctly, how many? But if we don't understand it that's alright: first we hear it, and then, when we've taken it in we ought to be able to grasp that there isn't anybody living life, there's just something going along in dependence on the appropriate causes and conditions being present. Listen to the Buddhist teaching: there isn't a person; there isn't anyone to die, to be born, or be reborn, there's only the stream of concocting, the concocting of the *khandhas*, the aggregates, the *dhātus*, the elements, and the *āyatana*, the senses, in accordance with the law of nature. Clinging to these as a 'being,' a 'person' is the starting point of suffering, of *dukkha*, because when there's a 'me' and a 'mine' then there will be the associated problems - that's the beginning of suffering.

But if this isn't understood it can't be of help. So, those who still think, still cling, still have the belief that there's a 'self' which was born, will die and be born again, and again, etc., what can they do to adjust their understanding? Well, they need to acquire knowledge of just one kind, the Buddhist knowledge that can quench suffering. Understanding, or clear knowledge concerning birth is important, if understanding is right there won't be any suffering at all, if wrong it won't correspond to natural truth and there must be *dukkha*. If there's a 'person' then there must be birth and death too, if there isn't then there won't be birth and death either. Ordinarily people think that there is someone living life, so they have birth, ageing, sickness, and death to deal with, and must suffer. If they have only that sort of knowledge they must, unless they can lift themselves up a level, experience *dukkha*.

For this reason the Buddha is recorded as saying that if all beings would live with him as their *kalyānamitta*, their 'good friend,' then those ordinarily subject to birth would escape it, those subject to ageing and death would escape them, and those beings who experience sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, would escape from all of that too, that is, they'll escape from all the forms of *dukkha*. Now, any children sitting here probably won't understand how they could escape birth, ageing, sickness, and death, so, putting it in a way that will make it easier for them to grasp we'll say that it's the problems associated with birth, ageing, sickness, and death that can be escaped from - our problems are connected with birth, ageing, sickness, and death, in that those concepts cause us fear, anxiety, etc., cause us to suffer. If one can make an end of the problems that come from birth, ageing, sickness and death, one is said to

have escaped from them. At present we still have the many problems associated with these concepts: we must get sick even though we don't want to be sick, must grow old even though we don't want to, and we'll have to die whether we want to or not, we're still selfish so we can still be alarmed by ageing sickness and death – in fact by any small thing associated with death. Well, how pleasant would it be to escape from all of that? That's the aim of Dhamma study: to know the Dhamma and be able to live without, to live 'above' the problems of life.

To sum up: since olden times there've been two schools, one teaching that there is death and then birth, and one that there is death but no subsequent birth, which should we choose? We should choose the one that's useful to us. But we must choose for ourselves because nobody can help us. For those dwelling in the world the way of siladhamma, the way of birth is useful, and will also fit in with our thinking, because in truth we don't really want to disappear, we still want to be born, so then we, aiming for an elevated birth, will be inclined towards doing good and avoiding evil to whatever extent. Hence, there's some preliminary right understanding involved in regarding the concept of rebirth as useful for getting people to do the proper thing. Both beliefs, however, are really incorrect, because the fact is that there isn't anyone to be born or to not be born. But at present people tend to think in the two ways mentioned. So, choose the way that's useful.

Right now some people cannot, perhaps, understand that there isn't anyone who will be born or die, so we'll teach rebirth, and it becomes a matter of being born in a good or a bad way according to one's kamma, thereby encouraging people to behave. We don't object to people teaching in this way although, for the reasons already set out, it isn't Buddhism.

Now, we'll look at the second question, that is, how many kinds of birth are there, which kind is a problem, and which isn't?

The word 'birth' is broad in meaning: the arising of anything is called 'birth,' as with an 'event,' an event is something insubstantial, a 'happening,' something that occurs, there's this kind of 'birth.' 'Matter,' or material things are 'born,' as with a stone, a clod of earth, or whatever, the arising of anything material is called 'birth.' A seed, a tree, a creeper, when they arise it's called 'birth' too. Creatures are 'born.' A person, a human being is 'born,' gods are 'born,' and so on. Thus is the 'birth' of material things and of things that are flesh and blood. But there's another kind of birth, a birth of something immaterial, something problematic, 'mental' birth. The arising of thought is called 'mental birth,' and, if the mind is defiled, has the kilesa, it's called the birth of the kilesa. Be aware that this mental birth, this birth of the kilesa is a problem. If it's only birth of something material – a plant, an animal, a person - and isn't concerned with the mental defilements it isn't a problem. Further, whether it's a full birth or not needs to be considered. Birth of an infant from the mother's womb isn't a problem because that sort of birth isn't a full birth: a child born from it's mother's womb cannot think about anything and thus cannot have dukkha, it must be able to think for the kilesa to arise into the mind, that would be called 'full' birth. If the baby doesn't have the thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' then it isn't yet called a 'full birth' and there's just been physical birth from the womb - dogs and cats are born in

the same manner - it's when there are the thoughts of 'me and mine' that it's considered to be a 'full birth.'

We'll take some time to look over 'birth' as it occurs in the scriptures. The first kind of birth is that which takes place in water: all creatures, people, beasts, like cows, buffalo begin their lives as embryos in water in the mother's womb – this is the water-born. The second kind of birth is the egg-born, as in the case of birds. The third kind concerns the birth of micro organisms. Ordinary life arises in these ways: the water-born, in the case of people and beasts; the egg-born, in the case of birds and creatures that need eggs first, and the accumulation-born in the case of things that can hardly be seen but of which there are a great many - micro-organisms greatly outnumbering the visible kind, there being millions in even one drop of water.

There's also a fourth kind of birth which is called 'opapātika,' which is a kind of 'hidden' birth, one that doesn't need the help of a father or mother, and refers to one arisen in an already full-grown, mature condition without having had to grow up from childhood. This is 'opapātika.' There are two explanations for this word, and most commonly it's taken to mean the birth of a supernatural being, like an angel, a god, or of a preta ('hungry ghost'), a hell-being, or whatever: leaving this world one goes to be born as a god, etc., but without having to dwell in the mother's womb beforehand, without having to be born and go through the maturing process. But we don't explain it like that, we take it to mean birth in the mental sense, that is, there's thinking, concocting in whatever way which gives rise to a mental 'birth.' In this understanding there's no need for death to intervene, no need for anyone to die and then be born. Further, if the thinking is base, low thinking, if, for instance one is thinking like a bandit then one is mentally 'born' as a bandit right there and then, while still in the same human body, so, think like a robber and be 'born' as one, think like a god and be 'born' as a god - but while still in a human body - to achieve 'birth' as a Brahma god develop the mind of a Brahma, that is, concentrate it, make the mind *samādhi* and be immediately 'born' as a Brahma god, and all without having had to bother with death. If the mind is *samādhi* then one has already been 'born' as a Brahma.

Which of these understandings would be useful? Think about it: that in which one needs to die first and then get born as a god, a hell-being, a Brahma, as something or other in another world that's very far off, or the instant, mental kind of birth, where one thinks in a certain manner and however one thinks one is born accordingly, right there and then. The second option is frightening because it happens easily and often, yet it's the better choice in that it's controllable: we could restrain the mind, not let it think in such a way that it takes a low birth, as a bad person, a robber or anything like that, we could cause it to think in an elevated manner and be born as a pandit, a noble being, such a birth would have value. Thus we let the mind think like a good person and become one, let the mind think in an unskillful, a low way and be born accordingly. We can control this kind of birth: opapātika: arising without a mother and father in the usual manner, without having had to be an infant first.

Thus, the Buddha's birth into the world wasn't about Siddhartha being born from his mother's womb, it would have a different meaning. When did the Buddha arise into

the world? The usual answer would be that it was when he was born. In truth it wasn't like that, the Buddha arose into the world when he became enlightened; in the moment of enlightenment he was opapātika-born into the world. The 'birth' of the Buddha occurred when the mental defilements were destroyed and his condition changed to that of one who sees clearly, who is Sammāsambuddha. Thus birth of the opapātika kind has great value and meaning, and might be very useful for us, inasmuch as it would allow the mind to operate in an increasingly correct manner.

Here 'death' and 'birth' would have the meaning of one mind quenching and a new mind arising, of one kind of mind quenching and a new kind being 'born.' This can be called 'death' and 'birth' but it doesn't require that the body die, enter a coffin and be taken off somewhere to be cremated. The mind is born and quenches, arises and passes away – it's the same thing as birth and death but this is a 'birth' we can control, that is, we can make it happen in better and better ways, we can control the mind so that it's born in a more elevated manner, so that the kilesa, the defilements decrease, so that there's more clarity, more 'enlightenment' every time mind is born. Train the mind to function in this way; control birth so that it's useful. We know very well which kind of birth it's our duty to arrange - a better birth, a better mental birth, meaning birth as a better human being, as a god, as a brahma, so, strive to develop a higher mental birth, one that's desirable and isn't a problem, one that doesn't involve suffering.

The birth that's undesirable involves the arising of the kilesa, because when they arise into the mind then one is low, like a bad individual, like a preta, an animal, a demon, but while still in this human body. The people sitting here, if any one of them thinks in a low manner, in a way that's hot for the mind they'll be born as hell-beings – although sitting here in this human form, inside, mentally they'll be in hell, or, if they think in an ignorant, foolish way they'll be born as animals - while sitting here in these bodies - or, if they feel excessive hunger for delight, for stimulation, then they're pretas, hungry ghosts - or, if they're unreasonably afraid, if they're cowardly, then they're demons, asuras - while in this body, while sitting here. There's no need for anyone to die and be put into a coffin to be born in this way. Birth of this kind is a problem, is suffering.

Thus there are several kinds of birth, but for now we're concerned with the birth of the human mind in a desirable, in an increasingly elevated manner, and capable of quenching suffering. Birth in an undesirable way is that which is low, which is suffering. So, if the question is about which kind of birth is a problem, then it's the birth of suffering, of mental torment. Bodily pain, if it doesn't hurt the mind, isn't much. There's bodily pain which doesn't hurt mentally, and there's bodily pain which does. If the mind is weak, is foolish then even the prick of a thorn can cause mental pain. Someone with strength of mind won't suffer upon being cut or jabbed by a thorn. There's suffering for the mind whenever there's the arising of the 'me' thought, because then there's a 'me' experiencing life. The Buddha offered a useful analogy when he compared birth to two arrows: a child's toy arrow flies through the air, pierces one's body and hurts just so much, but if it's a large arrow with a terrible poison piercing one's body then it's going to hurt much, much more. Here the pain of

the first sort doesn't provoke belief that it's 'me' who's experiencing it, so it just hurts a little – like the child's toy arrow would. But if the pain gives rise to the feeling of 'me,' then it's like being pierced by the second arrow with the poisoned tip.

Hence, we're aware of the sort of thinking that gives rise to 'me' and 'mine,' so don't allow it to happen and there won't be much dukkha to experience. One must meet with pain during life, just remember that pain is a feeling arising through the nervous system, a natural phenomenon, and don't allow it to be more than that, because if anyone thinks that it's 'me' who feels the pain then there will be suffering. Therefore, when there's pain, fever, or injury of any kind, consider that it's just feeling happening naturally by way of the nervous system, don't let it give rise to the 'me' who's in pain, or will die, or whatever, and there won't be much suffering, then it will be like being hit by the child's arrow rather than by the poisoned one.

We're hit by the poisoned arrow when deep ignorance arises - when the defiled thinking that there's a 'self' occurs it's called upādāna, clinging, attachment to 'me' or 'mine,' born from ignorance. When anything comes to make contact with the senses and there's no satipaṇṇā, mindfulness and wisdom, only ignorance, then it can be a big affair, then the attractive becomes very attractive, the ugly becomes hateful, the fearful becomes the terrifying, and the 'self' on a big scale arises, clinging, upādāna, to 'me' and 'mine' occurs and there must be suffering. This matter is set out in detail in the formula of dependent origination, paṭiccasamupāda, briefly: when anything meets the eye, ear, nose, tongue or the body there's 'contact,' if at that moment ignorance is in charge there'll be one result, if it isn't and there's real knowledge instead, there'll be another. If the contact is ignorant there'll be ignorant feelings arising into the mind, from that will be born taṇhā, ignorant desire, and whenever that happens there must occur the feeling of 'me,' of 'me' who desires, who'll get, take possession of whatever's being desired. It all comes from desire, ignorant desire for ignorant feelings born from ignorant sense contact. When there's ignorant contact foolish desire arises; foolish desire having arisen there will be clinging to 'me' and 'mine.'

This is a very important but difficult to understand matter. One should study for oneself within oneself why the feeling of 'me' and 'mine' arises - the 'me' and 'mine' that are suffering. Nervous disease, madness, even death happens because of clinging to the 'self' idea. This is the sort of birth that's a problem.

The birth of dukkha happens because the mind is ignorant and misunderstands: a sense object deceives and lures mind into the misunderstanding that there's a 'me' and a 'mine' - mindfulness and wisdom are insufficient so mind is deceived into feeling pleased or displeased and the defiled thinking of 'me' and 'mine' arises. This is the arising of suffering because it's the arising of clinging to the belief that there is a 'me' and a 'mine,' happening in dependence on some experience capable of causing it. 'Me' and 'mine' are māyā, illusion, not reality, but there is suffering. There's no need for an actual, real 'self,' only wrong thinking (that there is a 'self') is needed for suffering to happen.

If the natural form of dukkha arises then understand well that there doesn't need to be mental suffering too.

How do we quench suffering? If there's the arising of suffering how will we quench it? We can quench the symptoms, or we can quench the root cause. If we have a malignant disease we can fix the painful symptoms or we can fix the root of the pain – the disease. Anyone with wisdom will see that it's necessary to do something about the root cause of dukkha, because to just treat the symptoms won't put an end to it, we have to seek out the basic cause, fix it, and then it will end, will quench; we don't just cure the external effects, we cure the internal causes, the root cause. Whether what arises will be suffering or not depends on whether we're foolish or wise: if the mind gives rise to 'birth' it will cause us to 'die' and that must be suffering, but if the mind sees how to fix the problem then it needn't give rise to suffering, and even pain, even fever or whatever, through knowing that it's simply just what it is, that it's really 'just like that,' won't create any suffering. Ordinarily, people can't do this so must experience suffering. They have the unknowing of avijjā ready in the mind to cause the feeling of 'I,' the habitual feeling that it's 'me' who will die one day, so they suffer. They're wary of death so they suffer, even though there isn't anything else happening to cause suffering, just being wary of death will be enough. The 'me' thought is always being concocted in the mind so there's always going to be suffering, quench it and there won't be. It's hard to understand, but suffering can arise even though there isn't a real 'self,' isn't a person to do the suffering. Suffering arises in dependence on causes and conditions in accordance with the law of nature: there's painful feeling in the nervous system and, given ignorance, then there's suffering; there isn't a real, thorough-going 'self' involved here but suffering arises through the ignorant mind believing that there is.

This is the meaning of anattā, of suññatā, the highest dhamma in the Buddhist religion, allowing access to the truth that whatever it is it's 'just like that,' just what it is operating according to natural principles. If a painful feeling arises we brush it off as being 'just like that,' a painful feeling arising through the nervous system in accordance with natural principles - there's no 'me' involved. The clever mind isn't concerned with the birth of 'my' pain, it doesn't allow the birth of 'my' pain, the birth of 'my' death, for that reason there isn't a 'me' who needs to die and pain is allowed to remain as just what it is, a feeling in the nervous system. If pain is such that death must happen then the body dies but there's no 'me' to make it into suffering - at the final second, when the body perishes there's no 'me' so there's no suffering either, there's just the mind without clinging. This is the ultimate dhamma, akin to the highest art, it's the most difficult, the highest ability that anyone can develop. Ordinarily artistic skills are hard to acquire, but the ability to quench the defilements, to quench suffering is - while still being within the limits of the do-able – yet more difficult. The Buddha didn't teach the impossible. But we're lazy, we vacillate and say that it is impossible; we don't want to do it so we have to put up with dukkha.

If, however, it's allowed that this is possible then we should try. While in the human condition we can do this, we can control the mind, maintain it correctly so that it remains free of selfishness, free from the 'me' and 'mine,' and then any pain will just be bodily pain occurring through the nervous system according to natural law, and whether it disappears or ends in death it will be a matter of the aggregates, the

elements, the senses, it will be a natural affair. Don't allow it to become a 'me' and 'mine' problem and it won't result in the dukkha of the poisoned arrow variety, it will be like the childish arrow that merely irritates the flesh. This is the art that conquers suffering.

The birth of suffering is a low, a most unwelcome form of birth. We know that if the 'I' isn't born in the mind it won't happen, so we know that we can be suffering-free, that we can have the mind of an Arahant, a mind without dukkha. The mind of a smart, worldly person will produce suffering, but will also be the kind of mind that can be developed, can be cooled. If we have the motivation then we can practise to develop mindfulness and the sort of wisdom that accords with the Buddhist principle of anattā, that there isn't a 'self' in the true sense, that the 'self' idea arises from ignorance, from the mental carelessness present whenever anything contacts the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or the mind: whenever sense contact occurs and ignorance is in charge the 'self' idea will be concocted, and then there can be love, hate, anger, fear, etc. – then there can be the various forms of suffering.

We know precisely where and when the arising of the defilements that cause suffering takes place, we need to be able to replace them with mindfulness and wisdom, with clear knowledge, this is the point we need to grasp.

When we know that there isn't really a 'self' at all then we don't need to ask about birth - is there death and birth? - there's no need for such a question because we know that the 'me' is a fiction, that there are only the dhātus, the elements of earth, water, fire, air, and of space, only the senses operating in dependence on the law of nature, there's no need to bring in the 'me' and the 'mine.' This is to access the final level of Buddhism: that there isn't anyone who's born or dies. Hence we come to dwell above suffering, above kamma and its fruit, above everything, and, should anything return to cause suffering we can brush it off, simply not accept it.

Thus we're able to put a stop to all deliberated actions, to kamma - if we understand that there isn't a 'me,' that there's only suññatā, voidness then we don't make any new kamma and old kamma cannot come to cause suffering. Whatever the kamma, if we allow it to fruit the result will be suffering. Now we can control suffering, not allow it to arise into the mind, so that kamma is then sterile and can't do anything to us, then we're no longer the 'site' of suffering.

The word 'we' here means the 'mind,' in reality it's the mind that does the knowing, we just say 'we,' if we don't use this word there'll be misunderstanding. What suffers? The mind suffers, but we say 'we' suffer because we're accustomed to speaking in that way. But be aware that if there really does arise the feeling of 'we' then there will be suffering. If not, then there's no way for suffering to happen, and no way for the problematical questions of death and birth to happen either; all of that's finished with.

We would take the liberty here of saying that people, no matter what nationality they are, what religion they hold to, what opinions they have, if they suffer it's because they go wrong when experiencing the world, and if they're going to quench their suffering then they'll do it through understanding how the non-arising of 'me' and 'mine' is achieved. Although they hold to another religion with another way of

teaching, still the true quenching of suffering is in the quenching of the feelings of 'me' and 'mine,' so that there isn't a 'me,' a 'me' to die, a 'me' to be reborn. The mind is then free, pure. The pure, free mind doesn't have the feeling that anyone is born or dies; if mind arises it isn't the arising of the 'self' too, mind arises in dependence on causes and conditions, but the mind only arises, not the 'self' idea.

This is the deep truth of 'birth' - that there isn't a 'self' to be born or to die. But if anyone is still unable to understand this then they won't be able to practise it either, and, for them, it will be a matter of death and birth, of dying and being born, dying and being born, which is tied up with the doing of good, and the avoiding of evil activities. However, doing good, striving to do the right thing still won't put an end to suffering, striving to put an end to birth would be better: stopping the arising of the 'me' who's born and dies is something that can be developed until suffering is finally escaped from and one can come to the lokuttara, come to dwell 'above' the world. If we're still worldly, still lokiya, then, still having the 'me' sense, we won't be able to avoid birth and death, and we'll have to do our best to get around the problem by doing the right thing whenever possible, so that there won't be any suffering. But suffering there must be because there'll still be birth, ageing, sickness, and death to experience, and even though we do good, make merit in whatever way, we're still going to be faced with the problem of death. We need to transcend the 'self' belief that brings us into contact with birth and death - escape from the evil by way of the good, and then escape even the good in order to attain the lokuttara, to come to live above suffering, be without the 'me' who's born and dies and let the problems of death and birth go.

We've said a great deal about birth, in fact enough. We don't need to argue about whether birth follows death or not, just don't allow suffering to happen. If we still believe that we'll be born again then we need to behave in such a way that it will be a good birth, even so there will be suffering because there'll still be a 'self' to be born and die.

So, put an end to the 'self' feeling and put an end to birth and death, put an end to getting or not getting, to winning and losing, and so on, then there won't be anything to cause confusion. This would be dwelling above the world, reaching the final destination. Who'll reach it first? We should vie with each other to be first, because whoever attains it will be above and beyond suffering of all kinds.

Idappaccayata

V. GOD.

Concerning god, some people, as is their wont, will express indifference, but if pressed on the subject might perhaps say that if we do wrong where god's concerned then we aren't going to enjoy much peace and happiness in our lives. Not really knowing much about god they'll talk like that, while not realizing the importance of

having a deity they won't be much interested in having one. Others will say that they don't want a god, that they don't have one, when in reality they do, although it's a god that shouldn't be, that is, they hold to some abomination as their god, and then go around saying that they don't believe in the kind of gods that other people do, the kind generally believed in. Even so, we, and the animals, beings that have a mind and can think to whatever extent, will generally have an instinctual feeling that there is some higher thing, that there is, in the human case, a 'god.'

But, what is 'god?' Well, it's generally taken to be the 'highest,' the ultimate, that which watches over us, provides us with a refuge, is something to be feared, to be obeyed. At present many people take money as their god because it's seen as the highest thing, that which they fear, fear not having, so they pursue it, attend to it assiduously - many people worship *mammon*. Some will see the aristocracy, or their employers, their superiors as being god-like. Others, those in rural areas, in the forests, who don't have an employer, an obvious superior, will turn to tree spirits and such. Because people normally can't exist without a god, then, if they have a superior, someone they feel respect for, they'll be inclined to look on them as being a sort of god. If they're afraid of their wives - so we've heard - wives, or husbands, can even be regarded in the same way. People, it seems, have the ability to look on anything that can direct, or command them as being god-like, even things that aren't properly understood - ghosts, spirits - can fill the need. It's like this everywhere: a something felt to be the ultimate, something to be obeyed, this is 'god.'

'God,' then, is the highest, the ultimate, that which is to be feared, obeyed, which we can take refuge in, can respect and reverence.

All sentient life seems instinctually to feel that there is a god, or some equivalent. Animals have things that they feel they can take refuge in, can feel safe with - why, for instance, do cats like to come and sit on our laps? It's because they want a refuge, they want to feel secure. Dogs come and lie down nearby, under this building, but they don't come to protect me, they come for the security it offers them. When they follow us around it's not because they want to protect us, it's because they want protection, and if they're around us they feel more comfortable, safer, happier. Chickens are the same, if they happen to come and perch on my knee it's because they want to feel safe, secure. Hence, living beings that have feelings and can think need a refuge, something they can depend on, feel safe with, which seems to indicate that every sentient life form, according to its level of understanding, needs a god of some sort, and that it's an instinctual need. Babies, little children, when they feel in danger who do they cry for? They cry for their mother. And who do they run to? They run to their mother. When they feel any fear they'll cry for and run to their mammy for protection. It's an instinctual response.

Thus, those who say that there isn't any such thing as a god, that there's no need for one, and that they, anyway, don't believe in such things, are probably denser than kittens, puppy-dogs, or chickens - either that or they don't understand their own instincts.

Let's get 'god' somewhere near right: it's an instinctual feeling we have that there must be some ultimate thing, something protecting, watching over us, hence we can

feel reasonably comfortable, we can rest reasonably easy. Human happiness depends on the feeling of being safe and secure, if there's a feeling of security there'll be a contented feeling too. For us to feel safe we must have something to make us feel safe, and that's where 'god' comes in. Everybody needs some sort of a god.

Now, there's one group of people who insist that they don't have a god, when, in reality, they do, they just aren't aware of the fact, because their god isn't of the usual sort, that is, it's not a person, or anything like a person.

Be aware that there are two kinds of gods, the first of which is the most popular, the most believed in, that's the sort of god that's like a person, as with *Jehovah*. Reading up on those gods one gets the impression that they have feelings just like ordinary people, that they express preferences, even display anger. Those have been around for a long time and were discovered before the other variety, before the kind that's not like a person.

If we go back to ancient times, then in the beginning man wouldn't have had knowledge of god as such, but would have felt that there was something superior, powerful, something that was to be feared. Thunder and lightning would have been fearsome, would have created awe in man, and, over time, from that base would have arisen the sense that there was something more, something behind that, thus came the fear of god; the 'god' concept appeared. As time went on it can be assumed that the gods would have developed until they became those mentioned in the various religions. All of them would have been the result of fear: fearing danger, fearing suffering people built up the various gods as their protectors, as their spiritual refuges. Hence the people-like gods came to be.

Although it would be said that god wasn't physical, was only consciousness, yet, if the consciousness revealed human traits then that god would have to be some sort of a person, and, even though it might be said that this god doesn't have a body, that it's only mind, only consciousness, yet if it doesn't get beyond knowing love, anger, hatred, fear - knowing anything in the same way that people do - then it's basically a person. Anyway, it's believed that a god of this kind is able to do this, that, and the other, until finally it comes to be believed that it must be the ultimate, the pre-existing source from which all things spring, must be the all-knowing creator, preserver, and destroyer of all there is, which goes about destroying the cosmos from time to time in order to create it anew, which possesses enormous power and exists everywhere in everything at all times.

So, god is seen as pre-existing, as creating everything, preserving, controlling everything, destroying everything whenever and wherever, and dwelling everywhere in everything in order to do all this. So it has power over everything and is all-knowing - thus is god. Now, take these attributes of god and ask yourself whether there's anyone, any person that would be capable of doing all of this? If there isn't anyone then it must be said that there isn't such a god of the person sort, and that god must exist in some other way. By simple reasoning: when god is described as possessing certain attributes then we look for someone, some person who matches the description, and if we can't find anyone then it must be that this god exists in some form other than the person-type. Hence we come to another sort of god, one that isn't

a personification but that still possesses all the attributes of a god. What is that god if it isn't a person? It's a law, the impersonal law of nature, the Dhamma law, specifically, the law of idappaccayatā - god in the fullest sense.

Now, if we're Buddhist we'll dwell according to the tenets of the Buddha, and the Buddha did have a god. Some people having never heard this sort of thing before won't believe it, won't want to believe it, because it's something novel, something new - for some - but be patient and pay attention: the Buddha had a god which he respected as the ultimate, the highest. The 'god' the Buddha revered was the law of nature - not a person, but the law of idappaccayatā, the Buddhist law of nature. The Buddha's enlightenment involved awakening to idappaccayatā as it describes the arising of dukkha, thus: what does dukkha come from? It comes from birth. What does birth come from? It arises from becoming, becoming arises from attachment, attachment comes from craving, craving from feeling, feeling from contact, contact from the senses, the senses from name and form, name and form from consciousness, consciousness from the power of concocting, the power of concocting from ignorance! These are the details, the formula of idappaccayatāpaṭiccasamupādo, the natural law the Buddha awoke to. Once awake, once he'd discovered the truth, the thought arose that now he was Buddha and fully awakened who or what should he revere? Dwelling without having anything to look up to, to reverence wasn't fitting, one must have something to respect, but the 'one who knows,' who or what should they respect? He decided to revere what he'd awakened to, the Dhamma that enlightens, the law of nature, the law of idappaccayatā, the law that causes dukkha to arise and to cease. He also declared that all past and future Buddhas, in fact all Buddhas, revere the Dhamma they awaken to, the law of idappaccayatā.

Now, how well does this law of nature fit the meaning of 'god?' Well, idappaccayatā is the law that exists before anything, it's in all things, in everything, everywhere at all times, is present in every part, in every particle, in every atom that goes to form anything, so that every world, no matter how many hundreds of worlds there are, even the entire universe and every atom in it is controlled by idappaccayatā. Remember that we're composed of uncountable atoms and in every single atom exists the law of idappaccayatā, indwelling. It's behind the creation of everything, all things arise, persist, and cease according to this law. Idappaccayatā, although it isn't a person, has power over everything. Now, these people-type gods can't be in everything; they can't be in a rock for instance, and some people believe that because god is some kind of a person it can't possibly exist in excrement, but if idappaccayatā exists in every atom of everything that arises, then it's everywhere, even in excrement. This is the true god that really is everywhere at all times, that really does have power over all things, that controls all things, allows all things to be - and, of course, is all-knowing, if it wasn't so how could it ever create anything properly? The law of idappaccayatā created the sun, the moon, created everything in the universe; could it do that if it wasn't all-knowing?

We have the law of idappaccayatā as god because the enlightened Buddha honoured it as the ultimate, revered it as 'god.' According to custom every Buddha reveres the Dhamma that enlightens, reveres idappaccayatā. Buddhists can't get away from the

fact that, when the Buddha reveres anything as god then we ought to do the same, hence we, all of us, ought to reverence the Dhamma law of idappaccayatā, the law of nature, as we would reverence god.

As for Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma and the other gods, can they do all the things we've mentioned? They can't; they can't exist in a pile of excrement, for instance, which indicates that they lack the full qualities of a true god, of the in-dwelling, all-knowing creator, preserver, and destroyer of all.

So, we get two kinds of gods: those that are like people and have feelings like people, and a god that's a law, the law of nature. Those more popular people-like gods are the first to appear, the other sort happens later when a Buddha arises, because it's then that he meets with the law, the 'law of truth,' the truth of nature. Whether there is or isn't a Buddha this law will always exist, so, respect it as god, but as a non-personal kind of god.

Which kind of god would suit us as Buddhists? In order to be Buddhist which kind of a god should we put our faith in; conversely, without which kind would we no longer really be Buddhist? If someone professing to be a Buddhist clings to some people-type god then they really cease being Buddhist. The Buddhist god is a law, the ultimate law, the law of idappaccayatā. But why argue about whether the Buddhist religion has a god or not? We ought to realize that we don't really know how many kinds of gods there are anyway, and when knowledge is incomplete there's bound to be disagreement. Even so, there'll be criticism when it's said that the Buddha's god was the law of idappaccayatā. Those who are only aware of people-type gods will dispute it, won't allow that the Buddhist religion has a god. We don't need to argue about it anymore, just let such people find out for themselves whether the Buddha believed that there was a god or not. Anyway, the Buddha didn't actually declare that there was a god, he said that he revered the one thing, the ultimate, the Dhamma that enlightens - idappaccayatā.

Unfortunately some people in their wisdom will say that, because it doesn't have a god the Buddhist religion isn't really a religion at all, and that the Christian, Islamic, the Hindu religions are religions precisely because they do have gods. But we can see for ourselves the wisdom or otherwise of that statement. We know that we have a truer, a higher god than those of other systems, but that it's not a person, it's a law, the law of nature.

Formerly Thai people weren't Buddhist but held to the religion of the time - they took ghosts and spirits as their gods, believed in such things as forest people have since time immemorial. Subsequently they came to believe in a religion that had gods of the Brahman kind, because people from India who held to the Brahman religion came here to teach before the Buddhists. Thus Thai people acquired belief in Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, in the people-type gods - Brahmin gods. Now, when the Buddhist religion arrived, according to the chronicles, it was confronted with and had to overcome the prevalent beliefs in order to gain acceptance, so when King Asoka sent his emissaries, the elders Sona and Uttara, to this country to promulgate the Buddhist religion they had some work to do before the people would accept and respect it. To effect change they had to really struggle, but they were successful, people came to

respect the Buddhist religion, and, further, to accept a god of the Dhamma kind, to take the Dhamma as god. But there are still those who don't comprehend the Buddhist religion truly, and still revere the old gods, even now. There are Thai people who still worship *Shiva*, *Vishnu*, *Brahma* and so on, just as before. We're inclined to put them into the superstitious category, not the Buddhist, because believing in people-type gods is supposition, superstition, not Buddhism.

If it's the Buddhist religion there must be a god of the kind the Buddha had. If it's the old kind, the sort which defies explanation, then it's a superstitious belief, something deeply and firmly rooted in the minds of people in this region to this day, and superstition must be regarded as a quality of people with weak understanding. There are probably many people sitting here who are still superstitious, who believe in gods of the people kind, gods that can't be explained. How can people-type gods exist before all things, how can they create everything? Being the same as people would prevent them from creating people, a god must be superior to people to be able to create them. How can they know everything, dwell within everything, have power over everything if they're the same as people? But because knowledge is often weak such are still believed in. People with weak knowledge must incline towards the superstitious. It's a long-lasting inheritance which will remain until wisdom comes to drive it out and they can come to the Buddasāsanā once and for all.

The god business is like this, so, if we would have a god then, please, let it possess all the qualities of a true god and not those of a person, or anything like that. Bear in mind that the true god must exist before all things, and must create, control, must preserve all things according to necessity, must cause all things to arise, to persist, and to cease. This god must have power over everything, everywhere, so it must be found in every atom of the universe. In this day and age it brings the computer into existence, the spacecraft - it creates everything and anything that exists, nothing is beyond it. God is all-knowing too - the Buddha just knew the quenching of dukkha; there was no need for him to know everything, he just knew the quenching of dukkha, which, in a sense, is the same as knowing everything. But if we look beyond the Buddha, go a little deeper, then it's really god that knows everything, it's only the god *idappaccayatā* that can be all-knowing, that actually carries out the quenching or otherwise of dukkha.

Idappaccayatā is the Buddhist god, the true god. The gods of other systems aren't proper gods if they can't pre-exist everything, can't create and control and destroy everything. Even so they were revered, worshiped, because, in former times, people only knew so much, were only aware of the sort of gods who were like people. Then the Buddha came to know and teach about a god that was above that, an ultimate god with all the true qualities. Thus Buddhists have this kind of god, a god of the true sort. So we don't accept it when they say that the Buddhist religion has no god: in truth the Buddhist - more than any religion - does have a god, and a truer, a more god-like sort of god too. People won't admit of that because it's not the same sort of god as in other religions, it isn't understood properly so it's claimed that the Buddhist religion is essentially god-less.

Some know the highest god as Jehovah, a god whose state is much like that of a person, in that he can be angry, and when he is it's terrible. We have no faith in this sort of thing, if god can still be angry, can like and dislike, can give rewards, can punish or whatever, can still behave like a person, then we don't accept it. Having said that however, idappaccayatā can be angry too, although not in the same way that people are angry: try to do wrong per the law of idappaccayatā and you court disaster! While sitting here try it and see, you'll court disaster. Yes, god does punish, but this god isn't a person.

Now, if we want to do as some do and worship god we can do that by behaving correctly towards the law of idappaccayatā, that is, by avoiding even the slightest wrong-doing. When we live in this way there isn't any dukkha, it's quenched. We supplicate our god by practising living correctly and we get the benefits of doing that - no suffering. Worshiping people-like gods can be an uncertain business because they have feelings like people do, so they can be prejudiced. By way of illustration we can relate a children's story that I listened to as a child and still remember: When Shiva was the chief god the animals came to him complaining about human oppression, and to ask him to arrange matters so as to put a stop to it. In the story as related the prawns went along to complain too, went to complain about humans eating them, eating them regardless of their feelings. Shiva replied that if that was so then prawn flesh was probably good to eat and, perhaps, he'd like to try some too. On hearing this the prawns didn't know what to do, so they ran away. To this day prawns act in the same way – go and look at them in the water, they'll flee in all directions because they're frightened, they think it's Shiva come to eat them. This god still wanted to try eating prawn, which was the very complaint the prawns had voiced against humans. It's a children's story but it has a meaning that we should think about: if gods still have feelings like people do then they aren't worthy of reverence; a just, impartial god that is the truth of nature would be a better choice.

If we behave correctly according to the law of nature we get the best result, if incorrectly then there's dukkha. There's no compromise, we can't cheat the law because it's everywhere, in everything, in every atom of the universe, so who can escape its attention? We have to yield, submit in everything we do. That would be worshiping god in the Buddhist sense. So we study to know how to behave properly in all situations, because worshiping here isn't about performing ceremonies, it's about practising correctly towards the law of idappaccayatā. The Buddha tells us that we worship properly by practising, not by bribery: offering flowers to images, candles, food, etc., is, one might say, a baser form of worship, the truest form lies in behaving correctly. We have the Dhamma as our god, and we worship god by doing right according to the Dhamma law. There shouldn't be any problems if we understand god properly. Problems arise when we misunderstand, when we don't know what god really is, don't know what attributes, what qualities god should possess, because then we get the ancient Brahman teaching. If anyone should feel inclined they can go and look at the jedi in the Emerald Wat in Bangkok: in the big jedi there is a cavity with a Shiva lingam and an image of Ganesh inside; the Shiva lingam and the image of Ganesh are from the Brahmanic religion yet can be found in

the *jedi* at the Emerald Wat in Bangkok, which is Buddhist; in that Buddhist *jedi* there are Brahman things too, forcing the assumption that they believe in two religions at the same time. That's probably the result of a compromise, of powerful people saying that it's possible to hold to two religions at the same time without any problems. We think that there was probably a Brahman temple in front of all Buddhist temples in former days and in the Brahman temple there would have been the usual images – Ganesh, the Shiva lingam, etc. - and that, subsequently, somebody put them together in the Buddhist *jedi* so they could pay homage to them all at the same time. They did that because their knowledge was weak. Such people could then visit and homage the lingam, or else the lingam and the Buddha rūpā together, and continue on doing that until such time as their knowledge, perhaps, became stronger. Thus, for a couple of generations our ancestors went backwards, regressed, they weren't particular and just worshiped everything, anything: Shiva, the Buddha image; that's how they were. But, we, now that we know 'what's what' can discriminate, and we can separate the gods into two distinct groups, putting the gods for those with weaker understanding into one, and those for people with stronger abilities into another. So, from now on we can choose which to worship, the feeble knowledge kind, or the other kind.

The gods of the people-sort, Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu, etc., those aren't Buddhist. The gods that are like people, even though they're described as being non-physical, as being mind only, consciousness only, if they still experience people-like feelings, they aren't Buddhist; we don't want them.

The Buddha had a god he revered and which he was the revealer of - *idappaccayatā*. He taught, revealed *idappaccayatā* to us so that we could practise according to it until free from suffering. In this way we could please the god he revealed to us. The Buddha introduced us to a god worthy of our reverence, of our adulation. If our god is a real, a true god we can worship him - there's no need to be ashamed of that, we can behave and practise so that we don't go against his ordinances, so that we don't act contrary to the Dhamma at all. This would please god, and would express our reverence for the Buddha's god, for the true Dhamma.

So, to continue: we don't need to argue, some want to believe in that kind of a god, we believe in this kind of god, each to their own and there's no need for disputes. Although some hold to another religion, to a god of another kind which satisfies them, yet they don't have any hostile intentions towards us, they're satisfied with that and respect that alone, then we, as we see it, have the right to believe in something more than that. There's no need for argument.

But don't be willing to think that there isn't a god, if anyone thinks that they're more ignorant than a cat. Cats have gods, they often come and sit in our laps because they need a god, they want a refuge, so do people think that they don't need a god: 'I don't have a god' – they're more ignorant than cats!

The god *idappaccayatā*, the law of nature, is perfect, just, and exists in everything, everywhere. The happiness and unhappiness of mankind arise because of this god. In the Pali it says believing that *sukha* and *dukkha* come from a person-type god, like Shiva, for instance, is a wrong view. The Buddha had said, somewhere, that our happiness and suffering arise according to the god *idappaccayatā*: we act wrongly in

life and we suffer, act correctly and we don't. But if we believe that it all depends on Shiva it's a wrong view. Shiva cannot control us to that extent; if we believe that he can then it goes against nature, against the law of idappaccayatā; if we allow Shiva that monopoly it's completely wrong, and we're in trouble, because then we're in the same place as the prawns. If, with idappaccayatā as our god, we live properly, there's contentment; if we don't live properly, we have problems. Our happiness and unhappiness happen in dependence on the law of nature. But if we think that they happen in dependence on the whim of some person-type god that's wrong, it can't be true because it would interfere too much with our rights as human beings, we should have the right to create our own happiness or unhappiness, just as we should have the right to cure our dukkha by turning it into sukha through our own efforts. Suppose that some god would deliberately make us suffer, then we'd need the knowledge of idappaccayatā to combat his influence, because if we can control the moment of sense contact so that there's no ignorance involved there won't any suffering either, and then the spirits, angels, destiny, luck, or whatever, won't matter. We can defy the whole legion of those that would make us suffer by always acting correctly per the law of idappaccayatā. Hence, Buddhists have a basic refuge, a way out, and really don't need to have dukkha at all.

If we act correctly per the law of idappaccayatā we won't have any illness. We experience sickness, disease because we make mistakes. If we can live wisely then we won't be sick, we can take care of any disease, no matter what it is. At present doctors, excellent, first rate people no doubt, aren't aware of how every atom depends upon the law of idappaccayatā, and, because they don't know this still cannot cure certain diseases. Through really understanding the power of the law of nature dwelling in every atom of the human creature we might be able to heal disease, or to stop people from dying.

According to the Buddha there isn't anyone who dies or is born, no 'me' who's born, lives life and then dies, only the myriad atoms, the parts that combine to make up the body and mind, operating according to the law of idappaccayatā. The god idappaccayatā is great, we need to reconcile ourselves to it, fall in with it, understand it and then we won't have to suffer, we won't have any problems. In this day and age people in the world resist idappaccayatā, preferring to follow the defilement of taṇha, of foolish desire instead, and then, when they have bodily dukkha they get mental dukkha too because mindfulness and wisdom are absent from life. Worldly people remain obstinate where the god idappaccayatā is concerned, they don't submit to it, don't behave in accordance with it, rather they give in to dukkha saying that it's 'fun.' Most people would say that some dukkha and some sukha is good, is better than nothing at all! Some of the people who come here (to *Suan Mokkh*) believe that it isn't normal for anyone to be dukkha-free, so, when we say that we teach about the complete quenching of dukkha they shake their heads, they don't want it! They hold that to not experience some dukkha is abnormal. There's a way to do away with dukkha, with ageing, sickness, and death, that is, get rid of the 'self,' the 'me' who experiences it, but they say that's abnormal, and they don't want it. So, the minds of

such people must continue to experience disturbance because the system for ending it is unacceptable to them.

Now, the miscreants in Bangkok, and elsewhere in the world, have their own version of god - the defilement of greed, of *taṇhā*, foolish desire is their god. They don't know about the law of *idappaccayatā*, so they don't try to control their behaviour. Thus they're dangerous, causing trouble and strife for their fellow men everywhere. They don't have a proper god, if they did they'd cease being a problem very quickly. Every government should train people to understand the workings of the true god, *idappaccayatā*, and then all the wrongdoers would dissolve away, would change, become decent people dwelling contentedly. But at present those with power go more towards promoting, encouraging the defilements, which is much the same as encouraging people to increasingly dislike god. People don't want the Dhamma god, they prefer defilement, they take money to be their god, and then, when they take the refuges it's '*satang saranaṃ gachāmi, satang saranaṃ gachāmi*' - *satang*, money, has become their god. Governments should help people to know the real god, that which is a true refuge, because if they take refuge in money it will steadily destroy the world until there's nothing left. Buddhists mustn't go wrong in this: the true god is the Dhamma the Buddha awakened to, that which he taught about - *idappaccayatā* - act so that we don't make any mistakes and the law of *idappaccayatā* won't create a 'me' to do the suffering - simple.

Keep the true god in the mind, don't rely on a bit of glass hung around the neck. The true, real god must be preserved in the mind. If you get the chance look at the pictures in Thai newspapers: the pictures of malefactors apprehended by the Police show that they invariably wear amulets around their necks, their god hangs around their necks, everyday, but it doesn't help them. Thus, keep the true god in mind, control behaviour so that it's always correct and put an end to problems. Humankind, if we have faith in a genuine god won't have any problems, will dwell in contentment, and then the disputes about whether there is or isn't a god, what god is, what your god is, what my god is? - the arguments can end, and anyone can hold to any kind of god they like without hurting anyone else. A God, even if on the level of a person, is still a good thing, because it allows people to have *siladhamma*, to function morally. Thus having a god is better than not having one because then, at least, there is some moral behaviour in this world.

We've looked at the variously misunderstood and disputed matter of 'god,' in order to try and bring out some understanding and put an end to, some, of the disputing. Because there's no need for disagreement; we can all live together, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Thai, Indian, etc., can live together in this world and follow our own god, whatever it may be.

When, as happens, belief in particular gods comes to an end, when they're seen as no longer viable, then there's change, people change their allegiance of their own accord. It's been the same since time immemorial, people changed, changed, changed their beliefs until they arrived at the ultimate person-type of god. Subsequently, the Buddha discovered that there something beyond, a superior kind of god: the law of *idappaccayatā*, which was what he awakened to, and, when he had, revered it as the

highest, the ultimate. We'd be bold enough to say that nobody will ever find a god anywhere higher than this law - ever. The god idappaccayatā, pre-existing all things, controlling all things - all the arising, persisting, and ceasing wherever, whenever it happens - and indwelling in every single atom that goes to make up the entire universe.

Idappaccayatā

VI. NIBBĀNA.

Today, we'll take a comprehensive look at nibbāna and, in order to allay the disagreement, try to build some understanding of this concept. To keep it brief we can limit ourselves to just two main points: the nibbāna that the ordinary individual knows, and that which they don't. 'Ordinary individual' refers to everyday people, those with an everyday level of learning.

Putting it bluntly, there's the nibbāna the ignorant know, and there's the nibbāna that they don't know.

The first kind, which everyday people know about, is the nibbāna which has almost no meaning at all and isn't really the concern of Buddhism: in this country children are taught to use certain suitable words to describe death as it relates to animals and to the different social classes, such as ordinary people, those with some distinction, monks, royalty, and so on, thus, when it concerns the Buddha it's taught that nibbāna is the proper word to use. This is the everyday understanding of nibbāna, that it means 'death,' the death of a Buddha. But, as the true Buddha can't die then nibbāna can't really be about death. Still, this is taught in Thai schools where the teachers, to inculcate the correct use of royal words, teach the children that nibbāna is death and is used to denote the death of a Buddha. This sort of thing is repeated by those who don't bother to study Dhamma and who prefer to understand nibbāna as a place, a country, to reach which it's necessary to go through an enormous number of births and deaths first. Some of them even say that the country of nibbāna isn't a 'fun' place, not worth going to, and that they don't want to go there anyway. And yet one has to wait for an excessively long time to get to it?! This is one version of nibbāna, an example of the kind the ignorant know about. It represents wrong knowledge of a foolish kind.

The second kind is the nibbāna the ignorant don't know, the kind that we don't have to wait an enormous number of lives for, that we don't need to die to experience, the kind that's always available, that sustains us, keeps us safe here and now. What is it? It's the intermittent freedom from the kilesa, from the defilements, because when the defilements don't arise to disturb the mind, there's nibbāna. If there's defilement there's heat, there's fire, and should the fires of defilement burn day and night then people would go mad, or even die. But they don't burn the mind day and night, they come and go, come and go, and that intermittent freedom from the heat of defilement

is the nibbāna which sustains our lives here and now, which allows us to live safely, to stay sane, to stay free from nervous diseases and depression. So, get to know this nibbāna, the kind that there's never much interest in, which is never much heard about, rather is it taught that only after another ten thousand, another hundred thousand lives can we hope to experience nibbāna.

Now, we'll need to be on our guard if we're to know this sort of nibbāna, so, whenever the mind is cool and peaceful, free from the defilements, take a good look, it's because we don't bother to look that we don't see, and we don't look for it because we don't think that it's there in the first place, but, please, observe, take a good look and see how the mind is when it's undefiled, when it's free from the kilesa, how is it then? It will be cool, when the mind experiences anything and the defilements don't invade, there's coolness, the absence of heat, there's nibbāna. Nibbāna appears whenever the mind doesn't have the heat of defilement. This is something people aren't ever aware of because they don't look for it. But we should be aware that the defilements aren't present all of the time, that the kilesa come and go, and when they aren't around to burn the mind it dwells with nibbāna.

So, when the mind is without the fire of the kilesa there's nibbāna, but it's a 'little' nibbāna, a temporary nibbāna, just a sample we can try. So, make a special effort, observe: when the mind is free of kilesa, how does it feel? Don't follow those who say that mind is always defiled. We say that it can be free from the defilements. The Buddha said that these defilements are sankhāras, concocted, dependent on causes and conditions, hence they come and go, arise and cease, they aren't always around, rather they arise, persist for a while, and then they quench away. Be aware when the kilesa have arisen, be aware of their presence, and be aware of their absence. When the kilesa quench from the mind pay close attention to how it feels, because it's then that there isn't the heat, the disturbance, there isn't the greed, the hate, the delusion. How is the mind then? It will be cooled, cooled just for a time because whatever came to contact it didn't concoct the defilements into activity. We might say that it's cooled by chance, or, that it's been cooled by meeting with something that caused it to happen. For instance: let's say that we go to the seaside, then perhaps experiencing the sea air might cause the mind to calm down, to be without defilement, it's a quality of sea air, that it can cause people to feel contented, can cause the mind to be free from the kilesa for a time. On the other hand, perhaps we make samādhi, bring the characteristics of samādhi to cover the mind, then the kilesa don't arise and the mind is cool, it tastes the flavour of nibbāna because of that samādhi. Any level of samādhi will do, if the mind has samādhi then it will, to whatever extent, be free from the defilements and won't be hot. Even vipassanā, a flash of insight that, just for a time, allows the mind to see clearly into anicca, dukkha, and anattā, but doesn't completely destroy the defilements, will bring the characteristics of nibbāna to the fore.

The frequent temporary experiences of nibbāna arising in dependence on created conditions are called tathanganibbāna; the temporary nibbāna that happens by chance is called sāmāyikanibbāna. The temporary nibbānas that come and go, come and go during our daily lives are, even though they don't endure, still nibbāna. If they should

endure then it would be true and absolute nibbāna, which, because it wouldn't change in the normal sense, would be referred to as anupādisesanibbāna. Anupādisesanibbāna, true nibbāna, will be attained when the defilements are completely cut and an Arahant arises into the world, but for someone still on the ordinary level of life, still an ordinary individual, there are these occasional nibbānas to sustain them, if there weren't there could be insanity, or even death. The defilements often ravage life, but the times when they don't, when there's no defilement, when there's the occasional sort of nibbāna, are frequent enough to keep us reasonably sane and free from nervous diseases. We should be grateful for these temporary nibbānas, recognising the benefits we should be thankful for the nibbāna that sustains the mind and keeps us from insanity, even if it is only the temporary kind. This is the nibbāna that the ignorant don't know, the nibbāna that everyday people are unaware of.

The word 'nibbāna' means 'cool,' it doesn't mean 'death,' it doesn't mean the death of a Buddha, the word means 'cool,' and has been used in that way since the first, since ancient times. In the Pali, or the Indian language 'nibbāna' meant 'cool,' and people would use the word to indicate coolness. It would have been common usage around the house, for instance: someone might take the tongs and remove a glowing red coal from the stove, and, when that coal had become black and cool it would be said to be nibbāna. People nowadays will smile at this, but the word commonly used to describe anything which had once been hot but had since cooled down was 'nibbāna.' When boiled rice is nibbāna it can be comfortably eaten, while it can't be if it's still too hot, thus the Cook might call to those waiting outside: 'Come and eat, the rice is nibbāna.' If one were to say this now people would die laughing, but the word was, in former times, used in this way. Anything hot, once it had cooled down was referred to as 'nibbāna.'

Thus the meaning of 'nibbāna' is 'cool.' The coolness of material things is called nibbāna, the coolness of the body, of the mind, of knowledge, of awareness is called nibbāna. Even creatures, wild animals from the forest, once trained until they're no longer dangerous, can be described as nibbāna. Observe, then, that nibbāna is something useful, something beneficial, not something useless. Nibbāna doesn't mean dead, or vanished, take the meaning to be 'cool,' the coolness of something without heat. What's a little interesting here is that people in Thailand, not in India as far as we know, but in Thailand, talk about a 'nibbāna tree,' by which they mean a dead tree, not one that's been cut down, rather a tree that's dead but still standing, so that the trunk can still be used. That tree, they say, is nibbāna. Ancient people probably knew the meaning of nibbāna better than we do now, hence they'd say that a tree was nibbāna – it was dead, but it's heartwood was still useful, thus it wasn't useless. Nibbāna isn't useless; it's beneficial.

Understand nibbāna well, it means 'cool,' 'cool' and useful, because coolness brings happiness. If the mind is cool it's comfortable, it's without suffering, there's no nervous disease, no insanity. We should be grateful for the coolness of nibbāna.

Now, nibbāna has to be discovered in the saṃsāra. Saṃsāra is the opposite of nibbāna. The saṃsāra is made up of kilesa, defilement, of kamma, the subsequent deliberated

action, and of vipāka, the results of those actions - kilesa, kamma and vipāka. Confusion through the concocting of the kilesa into kamma and vipāka, that itself is suffering, spreading out as the saṁsāra. So, in searching for nibbāna, it's necessary to seek in the saṁsāra, it's necessary to look into suffering to see its quenching. If we want to watch a fire go out where do we look? We look at the fire itself. So, where will we find nibbāna, the quenching of suffering? We look at suffering to see it's quenching, to see nibbāna. The quenching of suffering needs to be experienced right there and then, as it takes place, to believe that it will take many tens of thousands of lives for that to happen is wrong, to be genuine it has to be personally experienced in the moment that it happens, has to be sandiṭṭhiko, a personal matter, experienced by oneself there and then, as it occurs, there's really no need to talk about any passage of lifetimes. Whenever there's the quenching of suffering mind is cooled then and there, and that's experienced by oneself then and there. Nibbāna is a sandiṭṭhiko matter that one sees for oneself, there's no need to die and, after death, go through ten thousand, a hundred thousand more lives to attain it. We need to be aware that the defilements burning in the mind have been extinguished by whatever method, that's nibbāna – taṭhanganibbāna, if something has been done to assist the process, or sāmāyikanibbāna, the nibbāna that simply happens now and again. Either way it's nibbāna.

See *nibbāna* in the quenching of the defilements that blaze up and make the mind hot, as hot as hell, know this hell, know that this is dukkha, and, when the conditions for its quenching appear, the fires go out and it's cool, then know this coolness too. This is nibbāna here and now. Wherever and whenever we're able to practise for the quenching of suffering, whenever we're able to control the defilements, there's nibbāna right there. This is what we call 'nibbāna here and now' - the nibbāna that the ignorant don't know about because they only know the *nibbāna* that needs hundreds of thousands of lives to attain, or the nibbāna that has to do with the death of a Buddha.

To continue: nibbāna isn't a matter of running away, of abandoning the world, neither does it cause a weakening of development. It's often said that we need to leave home, to retreat from the world in order to attain nibbāna; it's also said that if anyone has a nibbāna mind then they won't develop, they'll be unable to progress because being nibbāna they won't want anything, won't do anything, they'll be passive, disinterested. But this is a wrong understanding. It's not necessary to abandon the world. One can live in the midst of a fire without being burned by it, live in such a way that the defilements don't burn the mind, and right there is nibbāna. There's no need to run away, to go and live anywhere else.

Nibbāna is death before dying. Death before death? If this isn't understood properly it just sounds insane, but let the 'I,' the 'me,' the defilements that are 'me' and 'mine,' let them die before the body breaks up and that's 'death before dying.' The defilements that cause the feeling of 'self' die, hence the 'me' dies and can't arise again because wisdom has arisen, there's proper understanding to prevent it, and, should it arise, it will dissolve away immediately. This is called 'death before dying.' Let the 'me,' the 'self' idea die before the body dies and there'll be ease and comfort.

If we cling to the ‘me’ idea then we have to bear life, to shoulder it, to cart it around, then life becomes ‘heavy,’ that’s dukkha. Clinging to and carting something heavy around – the five aggregates - is suffering, throwing them off isn’t, then there’s no need to talk about death anymore because there isn’t anyone who’ll have to die. Living without the weight is cool and comfortable, one might want to call it ‘happy,’ but the true Dhamma says that it’s ‘not dukkha,’ it’s ‘dukkha-lessness’ here and now. We don’t need to suffer, cause the ‘self’ to die before the body does, and there won’t be any suffering. Then Māra can seek all he likes but he won’t find us, because the ‘me’ he’s seeking will already be dead and gone.

Now, it’s usually said that one ‘goes to’ nibbāna, but this is wrong, very wrong, because no-one ‘goes’ to nibbāna. Nibbāna is the quenching of the defilements right here; there’s no need for anyone to go anywhere, just quench the fire of defilement right here, coolness arises, and that’s nibbāna right here and now. Hence, if we want to be correct we don’t talk about ‘going to’ nibbāna. If we insist on going to nibbāna we’ll never get there because, for one thing, we won’t know where to go. If, however, we just stay where we are and quench the defilements then we attain, we ‘arrive,’ and without having had to go anywhere at all. If anyone mis-hears this they’ll say that it’s more craziness, but be aware once again that the language used with nibbāna, with the lokuttara is always the opposite of that used with the lokiya, the worldly. Hence we talk about the nibbāna that the ignorant know being of one sort, and that which they don’t being of another. If someone says that they can attain nibbāna without having to go anywhere it’s the most correct way of putting it.

Now, it’s correct speech to talk about quenching the aggregates with the nibbānadhātu, with the nibbāna ‘element.’ The Buddha quenches the khandas, the aggregates with the parinibbānadhātu, full nibbāna, which he attains to at his enlightenment. When he awakens it’s said that he attains the anupādisesanibbānadhātu, meaning that he quenches the defilements, the kilesa with the anupādisesanibbānadhātu. That’s ‘death before dying,’ the complete death of the defilements, which ‘die’ before the death of the body. When, after many years, the time arrives for the body to break up then it won’t be the Buddha, it will be the body, or the five aggregates, that do the dying. If ordinary people like us die it can’t be said to be a quenching with the anupādisesanibbānadhātu, it would be death with the kilesa: anyone still with defilement dies, or quenches the aggregates with defilement. If one were soṭṭāpanṇa or sakidagami (the first two levels of ‘nobility’) it would be said that the aggregates had been quenched with the *sa-upādisesanibbānadhātu*, hence, someone who’s ariya, noble but not completely so, quenches the aggregates in accordance with their level of nobility. The soṭṭāpanna, the sakidāgāmi, the anāgāmi quench by way of the *sa-upādisesanibbānadhātu*, while the Arahant, the Buddha, or the paccekabuddha quench via the *an-upādisesanibbānadhātu*. Don’t go too far and say that nibbāna is ‘achieved,’ or that the Buddha ‘nibbānas,’ that would be wrong. That which is called ‘Buddha’ cannot die, cannot nibbāna, only the kilesa can nibbāna: the kilesa, the defilements cool down completely and there is the anupādisesanibbānadhātu. Then, until the time arrives for the body, for the remaining ‘shell’ to die, there’s quenching via the anupādisesanibbānadhātu. It’s said that the

anupādisesanibbānadhātu is attained to by Buddhas and Arahants at the moment when the defilements cease completely, and as the Buddha ends the kilesas when he attains enlightenment then the full enlightenment of the Buddha is the pari-nibbāna of the kilesa, and the parinibbāna of the kilesa while still alive is known as anupādisesanibbānadhātu - until the end of life the aggregates will quench into the anupādisesanibbānadhātu. Hence, to say that the aggregates quench into the nibbānadhātu is correct, is right speech. Ordinarily it's said that there is death with the nibbānadhātu, which is also right, after all the noble ones die, that is, the aggregates quench into the nibbānadhātu, whether *sa-upadisesa* or an-upadisesa. Worldly people, however, die with the kilesa, die with the defilements, because they're still afraid of death, etc.

Something commonly bandied around is that nibbāna is a crystal or jewelled city in some world somewhere up above. This is sometimes heard in Thai monastic discourses: 'nibbāna is a jewelled city in the world above.' This is a dangerous thing to say because it leads some to understand nibbāna as a place - rather in the way of another religion where they say that the world above – heaven - is the home of god. That nibbāna is a jewelled city somewhere in the sky is conjecture, it isn't literal truth. Nibbāna isn't a city or some world somewhere where no-one ever dies, rather nibbāna lies in the quenching of the defilements, so, to attain nibbāna achieve the quenching of the defilements, attain the undefiled state. If we call the undefiled state the city of nibbāna then, it could be said that, when the mind reaches that city it attains to nibbāna, but if we put it that way it will be misunderstood. Take care! If it's supposed that nibbāna is some place or other it's superstition. Nibbāna must be about the ending of the defilements: quench the defilements right there and nibbāna is right there – right there, but in the mind.

To say that the Buddha 'achieves' or 'reaches' nibbāna is a little dangerous, the sort of speech that can lead to wrong understanding. People prefer to say that the Buddha or the Arahant achieves or reaches nibbāna, which is very like saying that they go to, they reach the city of gems in the world up above. If one interprets that statement correctly then it's not a problem, but if it's misunderstood it leads to superstition: a city that one goes to live in, that the Buddha goes to live in is just a superstitious belief. True Arahants don't go anywhere, don't achieve anything. Nibbāna is the mind without the kilesa, the mind free of the defilements, that's nibbāna. If one uses the word 'achieve' it can lead to problems; 'attains' is a little better - the mind completely removes the kilesa, completely quenches the defilements then 'attains' nibbāna, attains 'normalcy.'

Now, to say that nibbāna isn't about dying in the physical sense, and that it has to be attained to before death happens is the proper way to state the case. Nibbāna is the quenching of the fires of defilement, it isn't the death of a Buddha. Remember that Buddha's don't 'die,' they attain the 'deathless,' the amritadhamma, the amattadhamma. Don't make the Buddha and the Arahants 'die,' that would be wrong. There's no death other than the 'death' of the defilements. Nibbāna can be attained before the body breaks up, before death, while there's still life. This is the most accurate way to put it.

Another point is that nibbāna represents the ultimate freedom, the supreme 'voidness,' that is, it's the quenching of the kilesa and thus 'void,' or free of mental heat, free of suffering, of 'me' and 'mine' so that those problems can't arise again. When both the 'me' and the 'mine' are gone that's 'voidness,' that's freedom. Therefore it's said that nibbāna is the ultimate voidness: there isn't a 'me,' there isn't a 'mine,' and there isn't the anxiety and worry associated with them, that's the supreme freedom. Remember paramatthavohāra, that is, the language of ultimate truth, the mode of speech that conveys deep meaning, hence the saying 'nibbāna is the supreme voidness' doesn't mean that nibbāna is a vacancy, a 'supreme nothing,' don't understand it as void in the material sense, as being nothing at all, because, in the Dhamma sense, it means that everything is there that should be there, but there's no 'me' and no 'mine,' there's no defilement and no suffering.

Now, another regularly discussed point concerns the conditions for nibbāna, that which is a condition for nibbāna, a condition for nibbāna being that which helps anyone to attain it. True nibbāna itself is 'unconditioned' and doesn't require any supporting conditions. However, if anyone would develop the conditions for the attainment of nibbāna then they'd need to put an end to the defilements, so destroying the causes and conditions underlying the defilements is the same as creating the conditions for nibbāna - as it's said, although it would really be a condition for someone to attain nibbāna. For instance: when we make a donation, when we make merit, if that activity were to become a condition for defilement then our merit-making would have to be motivated by the desire to be born in an elevated manner, into a paradise, or as a god, a goddess, or whatever. If, on the other hand, we make merit with the intention of making a complete end of the clinging to 'me' and 'mine,' of completely ending the defilements, then it would be the condition for the attainment of nibbāna. Anything that destroys the kilesa, everything one does that cuts the defilements is a condition for nibbāna. So get to know the conditions that promote nibbāna, make much of them and it will be more easily attained to.

Now, don't let the attainment of nibbāna lie too far in the future, don't let it be a long time coming - ten thousand lives or whatever, one cannot wait that long. So, how, where, and when will *nibbāna* be attained? It's when we behave properly that the defilements don't arise, and that any in process of arising quench away, it's right there and then that nibbāna is attained. When behaviour is correct towards phassa, sense contact, there's nibbāna. We'll mention 'phassa' again, in fact over and over again until it gets to be annoying, but it's necessary that we do because the danger lies right there, right at the point of phassa, of 'contact,' when the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind meet with the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mind objects and the appropriate consciousness, viññāna, arises to know about it. That's 'contact,' phassa. This happens to everyone, everyday, and all of the time, because the senses do their duty all the time. When there's sense contact and the mind's ignorant then the contact will be ignorant and the defilements must arise. If, however, there's wisdom, if there's sufficiently developed mindfulness and clear understanding when any contact occurs it can be a correctly managed so that the defilements don't arise, then there's the coolness of nibbāna. To put it in a nutshell: act correctly in the

moment of contact, of phassa, during the course of every day that we still have the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and there and then, in that moment, the kilesa, the defilements won't arise - the absence of the defilements is nibbāna. So, if one were to ask how and where is nibbāna attained? The answer would be 'when there's correct behaviour towards contact, phassa.' This is the nibbāna that the ignorant don't know about. They tend to understand nibbāna as being the death of a Buddha, or as a city somewhere, quite where no-one knows, but if we do a lot of merit-making we can go and live there: after tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives spent making merit there'll be nibbāna. That's the nibbāna the ignorant know about.

We're disciples of the Buddha, of the one who knew, who was awake, and we, as followers of the Buddha, should be the same, we should know the nibbāna which is right and true and cease being foolish.

Consider it as basic that if it's to be the true Buddhist religion then it must include nibbāna. This is a general and fundamental principle that needs to be clearly and certainly understood: if it's the Buddhist religion it must include nibbāna, just as, if someone is to be considered Buddhist they should know about nibbāna, if they don't then they aren't really Buddhist at all. If there's no doctrine of nibbāna it isn't the Buddhasāsanā, or if there is a form of nibbāna but it's been culled from another ideology and isn't understood in the same way, then it isn't the Buddhist religion either. Nibbāna in the Buddhasāsanā, within the Buddhist religion, has the meaning of coolness, it's coolness due to the absence of the heat referred to as defilement, kilesa. Put out the fire of the kilesa completely, destroy all of its fuel, and there is complete quenching of the heat. This is nibbāna in the Buddhasāsanā. If it's not yet final nibbāna, if it's only a temporary experience, then it can be likened to a sample of the merchandise, which is fine, because a sample of cake, for instance, is still cake, the only difference is that it's a small piece. Thus, we get a little 'taste' of nibbāna whenever there's freedom from the kilesa, whenever there's the absence of greed, aversion, and delusion. What's that coolness like? Taste it, and, if we find it agreeable, perhaps we can cause it to become complete, to endure.

Nibbāna, coolness, appears when the defilements, the kilesa, are absent. Because this can happen whenever we meet with anything at the senses then nibbāna of this type is called taṭṭhaganibbāna - temporary nibbāna - arising from anything, low or elevated. Because it comes only for a time before disappearing it's called temporary nibbāna. However, if we're clever enough we can prolong the experience, make it longer, make it last longer and longer until it's full and complete. This is the nibbāna that the ignorant don't know and which they need to know if they're to overcome their ignorance. Buddhists cannot be ignorant of this subject, if they are they're not really Buddhist at all.

We can work out for ourselves what will come from wrong or right understanding of this matter, we can observe for ourselves that a proper understanding results in the absence of disagreement, of dispute, and that the result of that is coolness, coolness through the power of nibbāna.

Think about it a little: we, at this time, are dukkha's friends, birth, ageing, sickness, and death are our everyday companions, and, given that, how can we benefit from nibbāna, how can we, everyone of us, help each other to get benefit from it here and now. Well, we can cool ourselves down individually, and, through that, help to cool down our societies, and, perhaps, even cool down the whole world! That would be the greatest benefit, that would be to extract the greatest use from nibbāna: everybody, everyone cooled, the whole world cooled, cooled on the level where we keep the defilements under control, or cooled on the level where they're truly finished with.

Have a little of nibbāna while living in this world and in the condition we're in. Strive to meet with the undefiled, to keep the kilesa from arising as often as is possible, try to dwell with a mind free from defilement. Make the effort to study. Seek the opportunity of associating with people who live restraining the defilements and join with them wherever they are, dwell trying to prevent the arising of the kilesa, do that as well as we can and we'll have the corresponding coolness. Cultivate the desire for a cool rather than a hot life, and life will become cooled. It's a certainty that life can be cooled: act wrongly and it's hot, behave properly and it's cool - life can be cooled, just be one of those people who live carefully, who pick their way carefully through life.

There's this wrong comprehension amongst Buddhists where the matter of nibbāna is concerned, and so there's abuse, condemnation, insult, disparagement: 'they're wrong, I'm right!', and so on. There's disagreement over the matter of coolness itself, which tends to make the cool into the hot. We think this is something that Buddhists ought to understand properly, then the wrong opinions can fade away and we can come to a correct understanding.

Idappaccayata

VII. SAṂSĀRAVAṬṬA

We take it that some people will have heard this word, will have used it at some time. The vaṭṭa part has the meaning of circulating, or spinning around, so saṁsāravaṭṭa refers to a 'spinning around,' or perhaps a 'cycling around' would be better, which has the power to attract, to pull in, so that anything that happens to fall under its influence will find it very difficult to escape. In the material sense it's easy to understand, being likened to a whirlpool whirling strongly round and round, which, if a boat should stray into it will cause the boat to spin around, be drawn into the deep central vortex, sink, and be lost. The saṁsāravaṭṭa, however, isn't anything material, it's mental, and refers to wrong understanding which causes the mind to spin around in defilement, sinking deeper and deeper into defilement all the time. Mentally, the unknowing stray into this cycle and, as with the whirlpool, are drawn in and sink down and down until there's no way they can get out again. It's also known as the 'cycle of dukkha' which the mind sinks into, and, because of its cyclical nature, can't easily escape from.

We need to understand the *saṃsāra* properly so that we can learn to control it, or even stop it from spinning, which would be very useful, otherwise it will become just more theoretical knowledge for us to stow away.

Now, some religious systems, lacking the necessary knowledge, don't teach the end of this problem, don't teach about when the spinning around will come to an end. Other systems do, but in such a way that it can't be pinned down, saying that it will end one day but in how many tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of years isn't known, and that, when it does end there'll be some sort of coming together with god, an integration with god in some way or other will mark the end of the cycle. Put in that way it has the flavour of myth, has the hallmark of supposition, and really isn't the Buddha's teaching. The same sort of thing happens with those Buddhists who don't grasp the concept of *nibbāna* properly and turn it into a city, claiming that we have to cycle around until we reach the city of *nibbāna*, where we can then dwell for all eternity, never having to cycle around ever again. That too has the mark of superstition, in that it can't actually be known, is unreasonable, and is something we're asked to believe in and not to question or investigate. If we have this kind of approach to the *saṃsāra* then it becomes a matter of supposition too, and doesn't belong in Buddhism, it belongs to the category of the superstitious, it becomes a belief, a blind belief, and isn't of any real use.

In Buddhism the *saṃsāra* is understood as a cycle spinning in the minds of people, causing them to experience *dukkha* repeatedly. For example: you want to come here, to Suan Mokkh, so you come, the desire causes you to come here and listen, and, suppose what you hear makes you feel contentment, then, when you go home you'll want to come here again, so you'll repeat the experience, sit, listen and feel contentment again, and so on and so forth. This would be the *saṃsāra* as it pertains to someone coming to Suan Mokkh to listen to a talk. Observe the cycle of behaviour: the desire to come to Suan Mokkh, the coming here, the satisfaction experienced, and then the desire to come again, then coming again, feeling satisfaction again, wanting to come back yet again, coming back yet again, the satisfaction arising yet again, and so on, and so forth. This would be the good, the virtuous side of the *saṃsāra*, something beneficial but which still causes desire: the desire to come to Suan Mokkh involves the need to be doing something, and if that sort of need isn't put an end to there'll be no benefit in the ultimate sense, because that 'doing,' all that coming and going won't ever lead to real happiness.

Now, supposing it's the bad side of the *saṃsāra*. For example: someone is too lazy to work so perhaps they go and steal something instead. They feel the desire to steal, so they go and steal something, they feel satisfied with what they get, but, because what they get won't satisfy them forever, then, sooner or later they'll feel the desire to steal again, so they'll steal again, feel satisfaction again, and so on and so forth, repeating over and over. This would be the *saṃsāra* too, but on the bad, the unskilful side of things.

We're probably a little perplexed by now because we normally hear about the *saṃsāra* as something bad, but in reality it's not as simple as that, and even the good, if it causes one to get stuck in a cycle, will be the *saṃsāra* too. For instance: someone

feels the desire to do something good so that they go and do some good deed, achieve an elevated, an ‘heavenly’ state of mind as a result, and then, when the experience comes to an end, feel the desire to do something good again in order to repeat it, etc. etc. Even with the Brahma realms, the rūpa- and the higher arūpa-*brahmas* (the deep and very deep states of concentration), if someone finds satisfaction and delight in them they’ll spin around too, they won’t escape the saṃsāravatṭa.

Not having to spin at all, ending the spinning, attaining cessation, peace, quenching, is to be free from the vatṭa, to get out from it. Hence, the main dhamma practise is about escaping from the spinning, be it on the good or bad side of things. We aren’t concerned with physical matters here, we’re talking about the mind, because that’s the important part of the organism. The mind spinning around like this – and quite content to do so – represents the saṃsāravatṭa on the mental side of things.

For ease of understanding we can divide this into three stages, into three parts. Stage one concerns the defilements: avijjā, ignorance being in control, allows the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion to arise. This is the defilement stage. The kilesa, the defilements are the cause of action, of the performance of any kind of kamma in accord with defiled desires, hence the second stage is about kamma, about performing deliberated activities, good or bad. We intentionally desire something and even though it’s a desire to do something good it’s going to be done in ignorance, so the defilements are involved in any ignorant activity, good or bad. When we perform kamma there’ll be a result that will be either good or bad, sukha or dukkha, depending on the kamma and the defilement behind it – this result is the third stage. Having received the results of kamma, of our actions, it won’t mean that the defilements will disappear, because they’ll still be around, in fact they’ll have increased in strength. Thus the defilements will remain for the performance of more actions and their subsequent results. The vatṭa spins around and around like this. But there’s an important hidden matter that needs to be stressed – that this is all done in ignorance, done through the defilements which disturb the mind most of the time. It will be while the defilements are active, while performing kamma or receiving its results that there’ll be the mental fatigue, the spiritual weariness that the unknowing are afflicted by almost continually: getting something brings one kind of mental weariness, losing brings another kind. Take a look, see that in the saṃsāravatṭa it’s a matter of putting up with dukkha, with the dukkha that comes from experiencing the beautiful as well as the ugly, because the defilements have the power to make us cling to those things, and, because of all that defilement promoted clinging, and with ignorance always leading the way, there must be dukkha.

Thus the cycle divides into three parts, all of which are dukkha. The first part, defilement, is dukkha; the second part, kamma, is dukkha; the third part, the result of kamma, where we cling and have to bear with the feeling of something being ‘mine,’ means yet more dukkha, and then up come the defilements all over again. We can sum it up in three words: desire, action, result: desiring to act, performing the action, and receiving the result, and then more desire, more action, more results; more desire, more action, more results, and so on and so forth, all because of incessant clinging. Clinging to being the ‘actor’ means carrying the ‘me’ around and experiencing

dukkha as a consequence, while clinging to the action as ‘mine’ is to dwell with the expectation and hunger of a preta, (a creature whose desires can never be satisfied,) not with mindfulness and wisdom but with unwise hope and expectation: we get the result, feel satisfied, and there’s dukkha, while not getting a satisfactory result is even more dukkha. All of this happens because of clinging.

Take an interest in the saṃsāravatṭa spinning in the mind, spinning within us, spinning with intensity, especially at the centre, at the deep central point of the cycle, because if we stray in and reach this point it’s going to be very difficult to get out again. One who can’t get out is said to be ‘sunk’ in the saṃsāravatṭa, they’re likened to a post, or a stake which is embedded, firmly fixed in the vatṭa, they’ve settled down into a certain lifestyle and don’t feel any need to escape - unless, that is, they have the good fortune to feel sufficiently chastened by their experience and start to think, start to struggle to escape from the predicament they find themselves in. It’s in this way that the dawning of a new understanding, of new knowledge comes to be, knowledge they’ve never had before: someone falls into the cycle and then chastened, sickened by the experience, feels the need to escape. Thus comes about a new beginning. If by good luck or by accident they meet with this sort of experience then they’re going to be able to maintain the mind, to keep it out of the whirlpool.

Escaping from the saṃsāravatṭa is about the mind losing its ignorance, losing its ability to be infatuated, to spin around in desire, to act unnecessarily and to have to receive the results those actions. The repetitious cycle of desire-action-result stops and we emerge, come out from the vatṭa. Once free the mind meets with *nibbāna* within itself, there being no need to go anywhere or to wait for another ten thousand years for that to happen, there’s just the arising of right understanding and there’s the immediate cessation of dukkha. Nibbāna is like this. Attaining *nibbāna* means no more spinning around in the saṃsāravatṭa, no more foolish desire, foolish action, no more results to cling to as ‘mine’ so none of the associated mental distress, instead there’s the ease of one who doesn’t have dukkha. Then, even though we seek for food, for work, or do anything at all, there won’t be the kilesa, the defilements, hovering behind those actions. When anyone is foolish they act with defilement, but now we aren’t foolish so we act with mindfulness and wisdom. Know the way to escape the saṃsāravatṭa, know it as losing ignorance, as gaining correct knowledge, as right understanding arising bringing with it an healthy dislike of ignorance, of the defilements that cause kamma and torture the mind. Then we won’t think, won’t feel that there is a ‘me,’ and we won’t do anything selfishly. We’ll know that this life is Nature, is of Nature, that it operates according to Nature, and that it isn’t ‘me,’ it isn’t ‘mine.’ If the mind gives rise to the ‘me’ and ‘mine’ it’s a foolish mind, a foolish mind that’s just been ‘reborn.’

A child in the womb doesn’t think ‘me’ or ‘mine,’ it doesn’t desire, feel restless, anxious, and so on, it’s simply ignorant. When it’s born from its mother’s womb it receives contacts at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and in the mind, so that when it meets with the delicious then, lacking any knowledge, it will feel liking and the desire to get more. This then normally continues and increases throughout life. Avijjā,

ignorance arises first and gives birth to the defilements, lobha, greed, kodha, anger, and moha, delusion emerge. The mother of the defilements, of the kilesa is ignorance, avijjā, the kilesa, the defilements of lobha, lust, dosa, hatred, aversion, and moha, delusion are the children ignorance gives birth to. These kilesa influence us in such a way that, whenever we meet with, for instance, the delicious, we'll fall into delight towards it, feel desire towards it, , and we'll pursue it.

Today, because many people, especially children, have come here for the first time, we want to tell a story, a story we've told before and can tell again, thus: an ignorant child abandons its mother and father to run with criminals, with bandits, it goes to live under their power. The bandits make the child do whatever they want which causes it to experience dukkha. It wants to be with the bandits but it also experiences unhappiness because of them. Sooner or later it might realise the truth of its situation, feel the need to escape and begin to seek for a way out, for a way to get rid of the bandits. Thus, because it has to live under their power, the child's true duty becomes apparent to it.

We're the same, we grey-haired children have abandoned our parents to go and live with criminals – but back to the story: children run away from their parents (which here represent the Dhamma) to go and follow the bandits (the defilements), which tells us that before that happens they aren't defiled, they aren't yet foolish so they continue to live with their parents (with the Dhamma: that is, they live properly, behave correctly, live a truly normal human life.) Subsequently, they experience the beautiful, the fragrant, the soft, the delicious and at some point they discard the Dhamma (their parents) to follow after the bandits, they experience delight and stimulation (so falling under the power of the bandits), but they must experience dukkha too.

This is the vaṭṭa. Fall under the power of bandits and we fall under the power of the defilements, because of that we perform kamma and receive the results: kilesa - kamma - vipāka - kilesa - kamma - vipāka, we can sit and repeat this all day, just these three words: kilesa, defilement, kamma, action, vipāka, the results of action. We have defilement, we perform deliberated actions, kamma, and we get the result, and, by behaving in that way we encourage the defilements to increase, which has the result of making us perform more kamma, and so on and so forth. These children ditch their parents and run away to follow the bandits, to live with the bandits, so they must experience dukkha: because of acting in the way of the vaṭṭa they spin around in the dukkha cycle. Think about that: does it serve them right, or not? They discard their parents and run away to follow the bandits and then do as the bandits wish, so they must experience dukkha. Now, if they could think, because of the distress they experience, about changing their lifestyle, if they could feel desire to get out from under the power of the bandits, it would be the same as us wanting to escape from the saṃsāra-vaṭṭa, wanting to attain the freedom of nibbāna.

Remember this analogy. Straying into the vaṭṭasaṃsāra makes life hard to bear with, so that at some later time there might be the desire to get out, and wanting to get out is like wanting to get away from the bandits and go back to our parents again. Those children abandoned their parents to follow the bandits, which brings distress, so that

they begin to think fondly of their parents, think longingly about returning to them. Now, how do they achieve that when the bandits won't allow it, when they're strongly bound by them? The only thing they can do is to kill the bandits. The Dhamma has the function of killing the bandits, of killing the defilements – by killing the defilements we come back to the Dhamma.

This story isn't meant to be taken literally of course, but it points out the fact that when we're born from our mother's womb we don't have anything, neither ignorance nor knowledge, we're neutral, as it were, normal, we're operating according to the Dhamma. But, subsequently, and still while we're children, we become infatuated with the delicious, with the beauty of the things we meet with, the mind is lulled into seeking the beautiful, the stimulating, into discarding order, propriety, and into assuming a low character, it becomes a thief, or whatever, and then follows the lead of the kilesa until it learns its lesson. If it doesn't learn then it continues to spin around in the cycle of wrong-doing, of dukkha.

Now we're, perhaps all of us, like this to some extent, that is, we're happy to pursue the beautiful, the stimulating, the delicious, instead of keeping to the correct as we should. If we must go wrong, if we can't avoid it, then we shouldn't let it go on for too long, taking just a sample, a taste of that kind of life, then turning away from it would be good. Ditching the family to run with the bandits and eventually coming to the realization that they are bandits, then rushing to get away, to go back, can be excused, and doesn't have to be heavy dukkha. Otherwise one will probably be a bad lot until one dies.

Behold the *samsāravatṭa* spinning repeatedly, a cycle of wrongness, foolishness, infatuation, of defilement. We perform kammic acts under the power of the various defilements, receive the results of them, and yet we remain infatuated, and we'll stay that way until we begin to see the dukkha involved. If anyone should start to see that then they should also begin to feel the desire to seek a way out, to seek safety; if they don't see, well, they can close their eyes and ears and continue to spin around in the *vatṭa*, because there'll be no way for them to escape. But if someone does begin to see that this *vatṭa* business is dukkha, then they have a chance of escaping it.

Hence, we'd like everybody to study the *vatṭa* well. Take the evil side first: when we desire to get anything because of its ability to stimulate us then it's the defilements making us do that, in this case making us do wrong, making us steal, cheat, be corrupt, or whatever, and receive the fruits of that – an increase in the power of the defilements so that there's the desire to go on doing the same thing over and again. Now, the good side means doing good actions to get good results, but if we still have the defilements deceiving us into delighting in our goodness then we're in the same place. Either way there must be dukkha.

The ignorant rich have dukkha in proportion to their wealth, have the mental distress that comes from having a lot of cash. If, however, they happened to be really clever rich people they could learn to avoid clinging to their wealth, then they could live coolly and even sleep well. But it's not only the rich and famous who have this problem, if someone has just a little and clings to it then there'll be suffering too. If there's no clinging there's no suffering, so a beggar has more chance of being at ease

than someone with lots of money and possessions. A beggar who doesn't cling to his meagre possessions will be happier than some rich person with hundreds of millions who does. Here's another story, a Chinese story: a beggar dwells in the basement of a rich man's house. In the mornings he goes to beg and gets a little money, gets enough for his needs, so, at dusk he goes back home, whips out his Stradivarius violin and fiddles contentedly until he falls asleep. He does this kind of thing every day. One day, however, he comes home but he doesn't play his violin. The rich man up above, not hearing any fiddle-playing comes to ask him why he's not playing, and the beggar tells him that today he got much more money than usual and, because of that, can't sleep or bring himself to play his fiddle – he's acquired the dukkha of ownership.

It's a matter of clinging or not clinging. If we fall into clinging there must be dukkha, don't cling and there won't be. Therefore, don't cling to anything. According to the highest dhamma we shouldn't cling even to life itself! We shouldn't cling to life? If we talk this way people in this day and age won't believe it. They'll say that they're not that stupid and must cling to being alive, to their possessions, to their honour and repute, that they can't let go. But then, because they're full of defilement, they must have dukkha. If they don't cling, if they can 'let go,' then they'll be allowing everything to be natural, to be ordinary, to be tathātā, to be 'just like that,' so that, if they have to do anything they'll be able to just do it, if they have to get anything then they'll just go about getting it, if they have to eat, they'll just eat, and so on, they'll be able to do everything without clinging, that is, they'll act correctly, honourably – and then they'll find that they have more than enough of everything.

So don't cling, because when we do we get bitten immediately. Be it possessions, honour, fame, or whatever, when we cling to them as 'mine' they bite us immediately. Hence we need mindfulness and self awareness to control the defilements so that they don't govern our lives. Clinging to anything turns it into something heavy, as the Buddha taught: 'the five khandhas, the five aggregates are heavy loads,' they're 'heavy' because we cling to them; the five aggregates are the locus of clinging: clinging to the body as 'mine' is heavy, clinging to the mind as 'mine' is heavy. We'll cling to vedanā, to feeling, or saññā, perception, or the saṅkhāra, active thinking, or viññāṇa, consciousness, or whatever, it doesn't matter, we cling to them as being 'mine' and they become heavy, heavy in the way of mental things. It's this mental heaviness that's dukkha.

So, we don't know and cling continually, cling repeatedly to the aggregates as 'me,' perform 'my' kamma, get 'my' results, encourage the defilements, cause the 'me' to arise more and more and spin around in the vaṭṭa more and more, ever moving towards the deep central vortex of the whirlpool. The more ignorant we are the more we're drawn into the whirlpool. Be well aware that once in we'll sink and sink until it becomes very difficult, even impossible to get out again, and that by the time we realize it will be too late, and there'll be heavy dukkha to deal with.

We should realise that the really dangerous vaṭṭa isn't in the middle of an ocean somewhere, it's in our minds – within every one of us. We can go and look at a whirlpool in the ocean and feel fear, but that's a small thing and it's in the world outside, the whirlpool in the mind is more frightening: defilement, the kamma it

provokes, the results that follow, and the satisfaction we find in them – infatuation with this cycle of events, with this mental whirlpool is a more frightening and a more difficult thing to escape from than anything spinning in the ocean.

Usually this problem arises through simple unawareness: a small child living with its parents quite by chance meets with the bandits, and, feeling the lure of banditry, abandons its family to follow them, that child really isn't aware, doesn't realise what's happening to it, if it did it wouldn't leave its parents in the first place.

Now, we want to say something that might seem a little perverse, that is that parents like to bring those things capable of provoking delight and satisfaction to give to their children. They should be aware that in doing this they're luring their children into following the bandits, because lulling little children into becoming infatuated with the stimulating and delicious is what entices them into that path. Thus, through doing this, in a subtle sense, the parents themselves become the bandits.

Anyway, if we look more closely we can see that the *vaṭṭa*, or cycle can be either a spinning around in the defilements, or a spinning around in the mass of *dukkha*, or, thirdly, a spinning around in the defilements and suffering combined. Spinning around in the defilement cycle means having the defilements repeatedly cause *kamma*, its results, and a further promotion of the defilements themselves: *kamma* - *vipāka* - *kilesa*, - action - result - defilement, so that the defilements, *lobha*, *kodha*, and *moha* – greed, anger, and delusion – are arising repeatedly. Now, when there's *lobha*, greed, there's the heat of greed, when there's anger there's the heat of anger, when there's delusion there's the heat of delusion, and all are *dukkha*, all are 'hot.' Take a look, discover the fires that scorch right here, scorch our heads, burn in our clothes, the fires that we still don't feel, don't know, the fires of greed, anger, and delusion that spin in the mind. Thus the cycle takes on a different form, becomes the cycle of greed-anger-delusion, greed-anger-delusion. Another cycle, a further result of this, is the spinning around in birth, ageing, sickness and death, which is usually understood as being a physical matter, which understanding is then put forward as *the* understanding: birth then ageing; ageing then sickness; sickness then death; death then birth, and so on; being born from the mother's womb, dying and entering the coffin, then being born again in order to experience ageing, sickness and death again. That's a cycle too, a cycle repeating from physical life to life.

But we don't look at it in that physical way, and see it as a matter of a cycle within, a cycling around in the mind of the problems associated with birth, ageing, sickness and death. Thus right now, in this life is where the problems of birth, ageing, sickness and death blaze up and scorch us, in this life, even before we enter the coffin. We don't need to die first, life is like this now: spinning around in the *dukkha* arising from the birth, ageing, sickness, and death that we foolishly cling to as 'mine.' In truth birth, ageing, sickness, and death are quite natural, but people tend to cling to them, steal them from nature, take possession of them, and experience disturbance, experience a lot of mental heat because they do: the body hasn't died yet, old age hasn't appeared yet, and there isn't any illness, but the fear of death, the fear of ageing, the fear of sickness can come and dominate life because of clinging. If we go into yet more detail, then, whenever there is one arising of 'me' and 'mine' into the mind there will

be dukkha, but the conditions for ‘me’ and ‘mine’ are of a nature to diminish, to decrease, conditions like old age, for instance, or disappointment, or pain, fade away, and then the ‘me’ and ‘mine’ which depend on them fade away too, they quench, they ‘die,’ the thoughts of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ can be said to ‘die,’ but only to be ‘born’ again a moment or so later in dependence on some other experience, then there’ll be another death, and then another arising, and so on: ‘me’ and ‘mine’ arise and then ‘wear out,’ they fade out, they arise and then die. This is a more detailed account of the matter, more detailed and more disturbing, because this business is very subtle, very quick, and troubles the mind all the more. ‘Me’ and ‘mine’ arise, then undergo change, they wear away, which is one arising of dukkha and its subsequent quenching. Then another matter comes along to promote more dukkha and its quenching, then yet another matter comes along, and so on and so forth. There are so many ways for dukkha to arise because the inner senses, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or the mind are meeting with the various forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mind objects all of the time, and any of those contacts can arouse clinging to ‘me’ and ‘mine’ and the resultant dukkha. This can also be called birth, ageing, sickness, and death. But usually birth ageing, sickness, and death are thought of as being physical matters: birth from the mother’s womb, followed by ageing, sickness, and death in the normal sense, which, providing it all happens normally, as it should, won’t involve any real problems. There’s the problem of dukkha when we take something to be ‘mine,’ for then birth is ‘mine,’ ageing is ‘mine,’ sickness is ‘mine,’ and death is ‘mine’ too. Then we get bitten. Birth, ageing, sickness and death are Nature, natural, they aren’t ‘mine.’ Providing this is understood there won’t be any dukkha because there won’t be any defilement to spin in the mind. We need to see the truth of this.

On this point the Buddha taught that if they would live with the Tathāgata (the Buddha) as kalyāṇa-mitta (good friend) then those normally subject to birth, ageing, sickness, and death would escape them; those who ordinarily have to experience dukkha would escape it. Because when anyone dwells with the Buddha as their kalyāṇa-mitta and follows his teaching they learn to avoid clinging to anything as ‘mine,’ and when there’s no clinging there’s no dukkha either, hence they’re said to have ‘escaped.’ On occasion he would also point out that if someone could live in the way of the ten sammatta, the ten ‘rightnesses,’ or ‘correctnesses,’ then that one would escape birth, ageing, sickness, and death too: from the time that anyone takes the Buddha as their kalyāṇa-mitta they come into contact with the ten sammatta and can develop them to get rid of their problems. The ten ‘rightnesses’ represent the noble eightfold path plus sammāñāṇa, right knowledge, and sammāvimutti, right liberation - take the path of eight stages, add right knowledge and right liberation, and there are the ten ‘rightnesses.’

The Buddha talked about these two matters: dwelling with him as kalyāṇa-mitta in order to escape from birth, ageing, sickness, and death, and maintaining the ten correctnesses, to achieve the same result. So, if someone fears the spinning around in birth, ageing, sickness, and death they should hurry up and take on the Buddha as their kalyāṇa-mitta, behave correctly according to the ten rightnesses, conduct

themselves in line with the eightfold path plus two – the tenfold path – and thus get out from the cycle of birth and death, escape from the mass of dukkha.

Anyway, to continue: first there's the spinning around in the defilements – lobha, dosa, moha - rāga, dosa, moha – spinning around in the fires of defilement; second there's the spinning around in the mass of dukkha, of suffering, of birth, ageing, sickness, and death – because we lack proper knowledge we take possession of birth, etc. and thus have to bear with the subsequent dukkha. The ancients had a good way of stating the case, they talked about two fires, the fire of the defilements and the fire of dukkha. We know that spinning around in the fire of defilement constitutes one cycle of behaviour, and spinning around in the fire of dukkha another, but as they're inter-related there's also the spinning around in both cycles at the same time. Thus we cycle around in three ways: in the defilement cycle, in the dukkha cycle, and in the interconnected cycles of defilement and dukkha. This is the *samsāra*vaṭṭa we ought to be aware of.

The fact that this is usually explained as something long lasting, that must extend into tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of lives, and as being external, something operating outside of us, is of little use to us here and now: we experience dukkha here and now, but our dukkha can only be quenched after ten thousand, a hundred thousand lives have passed, now how can that be anything other than foolish? Think about it: there's dukkha here and now but we have to wait for another ten thousand, another hundred thousand lives to pass before it can end. That must be a hundred times, a thousand times foolish. We need to see dukkha in our minds here and now and be able to quench or prevent it, then we can call ourselves Buddhists, disciples of the Buddha. So don't bother with external matters that are said to happen after death in ten, or a hundred thousand years' time, we say that's wrong, we disagree with it, we oppose it because it's useless trying to study and practise that – it's laughable. If we think like that we're defeated, lost in dukkha. Looked at in one way we can conquer dukkha here and now; looked at in another then it's going to be necessary to wait for ten thousand, a hundred thousand lives to pass before it can happen, which isn't much use to us right now, has little or no value, and doesn't come from the Buddha. To have come from a Buddha it must have come from a base of knowledge, from one awakened to realities, from one able to really solve the dukkha problem so that we can stop following the bandits all the time.

So, children, or whatever age we may be, take care, avoid running after the bandits, because anything tempting, anything pretty, delicious, anything that's fun, that's stimulating is the bait that lures us into discarding our parents and following the bad guys, and if we continue to do that we'll just be overwhelmed and surely get no real benefit from the experience.

The defilements combine together as ignorance to prevent us from experiencing the truth of anything; they add up to the blindness that keeps us ignorant of the mass of dukkha so that we immerse ourselves in it, so that we keep on chasing after the bandits. We don't know the defilements as dukkha; we don't know the mass of dukkha as it really is – as dukkha. The defilements make us happy to go on desiring, keep us satisfied with dukkha. The defilements conceal the true nature of life and

don't allow us to see it as it really is, as 'just like that,' hence we take it to be a 'good' and 'bad' experience. We're foolish, seeking foolishly after things that must change and transform and bringing them to be 'mine.' Think about it. We're lost for words, we could call it ignorant but that would be too mild, it's supreme ignorance to take the enemy to be a friend, to be 'mine.' But that's the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, the home of ignorance, where the defilements cause us to see dukkha as something enjoyable.

Get to know the fire inside, the fire that burns in the mind and presents a major problem. If there was a fire burning outside somewhere what would that matter, but if it were to burn on our heads, or in our clothes, what would we say to that? Think about it! If a wood fire, or a grass fire burns nearby it isn't a problem, but if a fire burns in our heads how should we react to that? We need to understand this kind of fire because we need to be able to put it out; if we don't understand it we'll continually chase after it, we'll follow the defilements and go on increasing our ignorance at the same time.

Thus this not so well understood matter of the saṃsāravatṭa can be looked at in different ways. Some say that it's an after-death affair, that for another ten thousand, hundred thousand years, another ten thousand, hundred thousand lives there'll be the saṃsāravatṭa, and that once we're free from it we can go and live in a city, a city called nibbāna, there to dwell forever and ever. If this interpretation were to be correct it would be good, but we're afraid it's not.

Now, can we make use of this saṃsāravatṭa so that it's beneficial – the negative form of the vaṭṭasaṃsāra we've been considering, can it be turned to our benefit? This is an aspect of the matter that we've been a little critical of because it hasn't been given the right sort of attention, but, the fact is, that, if we take a good look at the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, at the mass of dukkha then we're going to meet with nibbāna. But to do that we'll have to be sharp, be bright and quick, then perhaps we'll perceive the absence of dukkha within dukkha itself, the absence of the vaṭṭa, the cycle, within the cycle itself, we'll discern absence in presence, the 'is not' in the 'is.' If we can examine any 'thing' really closely then we'll find that the 'no-thing' is there too: take out the 'there is' and the 'there isn't' remains – if there isn't a 'there is' then there isn't going to be a 'there isn't' either, therefore, there must be a 'there is' for there to be a 'there isn't' underneath it. Or, putting it another way: if one would put out a fire then it would have to be done at the fire itself, because to attempt to put out a fire anywhere else would be rather more than insane. The extinguishing of the fire thus exists within the fire itself. So a sensible individual can see beforehand that the putting out of a fire must happen at the place where the fire is, ergo: if we would quench dukkha it must happen at suffering, if not then how could dukkha ever be quenched? There must be dukkha for the quenching of dukkha – nibbāna – to happen. Nibbāna is the quenching of dukkha. We say that nibbāna is to be found in the vaṭṭasaṃsāra – quench the vaṭṭasaṃsāra and that is nibbāna. So, look closely at the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, at the mass of dukkha spinning around, the dukkha that spins and spins, look closely, go deeply into it and see that if the dukkha is gone what remains? When there's no dukkha, no saṃsāravatṭa, that's nibbāna. When we said that nibbāna is to be found in the vaṭṭasaṃsāra there was some criticism because no one had said it before, or they'd

said it in such a way that was difficult to understand. But, notwithstanding the criticism, we'll say it again: the quenching of dukkha is in the dukkha itself, just as the extinguishing of a fire is to be found in the fire itself – nibbāna is to be found in dukkha, in the spinning cycles of the vaṭṭasaṃsāra.

Now, some time ago, in Suan Mokkh an effort was made, some trouble was taken, some gasoline was invested in, and a month was used to create the 'coconut pond' – a pond with a coconut tree on a small island in the middle of it. A big tractor came and dug the earth and in about one month there was this pond, which represented a big investment for just a little benefit, that is, it allowed people to come and see that in the saṃsāravatṭa there is nibbāna. The water in the pond, which the ancients would have referred to as a 'sea of wax,' represents the vaṭṭasaṃsāra; the island with the coconut tree is in the middle of the pond, in the midst of the 'sea of wax' to illustrate the point that in the vaṭṭasaṃsāra there is nibbāna. We must be ready to see this properly then it will be 'seeing truth,' seeing the truth of dukkha,, it's arising, or cause, it's end, or quenching, and the way of practice leading to its quenching. One can sit and contemplate the coconut tree on the island in the middle of the pond until it's realized how the two dwell together – the extinguishing of the fire is to be found in the fire, the quenching of dukkha in the mass of dukkha, and nibbāna in the vaṭṭasaṃsāra.

The method of practise is to allow the vaṭṭasaṃsāra to arise, let the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, the cycle of dukkha appear in the mind and watch it, just watch, observe, then wait, and one will, sooner or later, meet with a reaction as boredom, disenchantment, disgust, dislike arises. There in the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, in the dukkha, observe, just observe, and then – dislike, disenchantment, boredom with the things we've always been stimulated by might arise. If anyone experiences this kind of reaction then they're safe, they know disenchantment, know nibbidā in the spinning of the saṃsāravatṭa itself. When anyone has nibbidā, disenchantment arise into the mind, then infatuation, clinging abates, which is called virāga, 'fading away.' Because of experiencing disenchantment there is the subsiding of delusion, of clinging, and the mind withdraws, which is called vimutti, it's then purer than formerly, which is visuddhi, and is more peaceful, which is known as santi, and, when it's completely released from the vaṭṭasaṃsāra it's nibbāna.

Thus, there is the living metaphor of the coconut pond. Anyone can go and sit there, go and contemplate the 'sea of wax' (the water in the pond) which represents the mind oscillating between good and bad, happiness and suffering, gain and loss, victory and defeat, etc. These opposites they call the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, or the 'sea of wax.' The ancients were very wise when comparing the vaṭṭasaṃsāra to wax, because wax when hot is fluid, when cold it's solid, so it can be deceptive: good and bad, happiness and suffering are deceptive in much the same way, they deceive a person into falling for them and then they bite: good and bad, merit and demerit, one falls for them and they bite. Thus the vatṭa is referred to as 'wax,' and because it's vast it's referred to as a 'sea' of wax, the 'sea' of merit and demerit, good and bad, happiness and suffering, gain and loss, victory and defeat – so many, many dualities and all equally deceptive. This pond is the 'sea' of deception, the vatṭa, and the coconut tree is nibbāna, dwelling there in the middle of the sea, undisturbed, unmoved. Only someone able to

escape, able to dwell above the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, above the sea of wax, able to remain untouched by merit and demerit, good and bad, happiness and suffering, and so on, only that one can reach nibbāna. Anyone still intoxicated by merit and demerit, by good and bad, by getting this and that, by the ‘me’ and ‘mine, is stuck fast in the sea of wax, it’s only when someone escapes, particularly from the clutches of the ‘good,’ that they come into contact with the coconut tree, that one attains nibbāna.

Why isn’t it said ‘escapes from good and evil?’ The ‘good’ is mentioned because it’s difficult to escape from, the ‘bad’ being a much easier proposition. If we can escape from the power of the good we must be able to escape from the bad simply because the bad is more obvious, more frightening, and bites us more savagely, while the good bites us in a comfortable way, as when one is being massaged, for instance. The ‘good’ is deceptive in this way. Therefore it’s said that if anyone can escape from the good they can also escape from the bad, and then, dwelling in the midst of the sea of wax the rain fall won’t touch them and the thunder won’t reach them – they won’t be troubled – dwelling in the midst of the sea of wax they become those who’ve crossed over, who’ve escaped from the power of good and bad once and for all.

Still nobody makes the effort to attain, to get the benefit from this, and when we call them foolish they get angry, but if we can’t call them foolish what can we call them? People should get the benefit from, should make use of this, but they don’t.

Anyway, in the midst of the sea of wax, of the pond, one will find a coconut tree, just as in the vaṭṭasaṃsāra one will find nibbāna. So, contemplate the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, wait, and nibbidā, dispassion will arise, from nibbidā will come virāga, the fading away of desire, little by little until it’s complete, and one escapes. We’ll discover the solution to any problem in the problem itself: we scrutinize the problem to understand it and then we can find the solution. If we don’t look at the problem itself then we won’t find the way to solve it. Only a fool would go and look somewhere else. If we’re intelligent we’ll examine the problem itself, find a method, and then we can solve it. So we must look for the way to quench dukkha, for the conditions for the quenching of dukkha within dukkha itself. But nobody talks like this, and if they do then there’s criticism, criticism.

We think that this way is easier, shorter, quicker, and more beneficial, so we say: look for the escape from the vaṭṭasaṃsāra within the vaṭṭasaṃsāra, see how it arises, how it binds, how it envelops us. because when we understand all of this we’ll also know how to escape from it.

Idappaccayata

VIII. THE WORLD AND THE DHAMMA.

Things that are misunderstood can be harmful; anything that isn’t properly understood can never be really beneficial, only harmful, both for us and for other people, for those associated with us. When we don’t understand anything properly it has no

benefit, we can't make proper use of it, it gets forcibly misused and the results are detrimental. We need to understand everything we're concerned with properly so that, whatever it is, it can be useful. Misunderstand anything, misuse it, and from the misuse come harmful effects - no matter what it is: household articles, personal things, if we use them wrongly they can be harmful; if we use them properly they're useful. There's harm for others because we're all connected, we can't live alone, we're connected sometimes out of necessity, that is, in matters that we may have to help each other accomplish or be collectively responsible for, like family affairs, where, if there's misunderstanding, togetherness disappears to be replaced by arguments, by disputes - even with national matters, which are of great import, if people in a country understand anything wrongly, or in a contrary manner then it has the result we see, that is, there's no real peace.

An example occurs in the problems associated with the concepts 'world' and 'Dhamma.' It's generally said that if one wants the Dhamma, or nibbāna, if one wants the quenching of dukkha then it's first necessary that we abandon the world. This is people without knowledge talking about things they don't really understand. Everyone, all those beginning to study, even children should understand these words 'world' and 'Dhamma' properly and not just believe what people say when they tell us that we have to abandon one in order to achieve the other, who tell us that to quench dukkha completely we must forsake the world.

At present there are two languages in use: the language of worldly people who don't understand things yet, 'worldly' language, and the language of those who know the Dhamma, who have some understanding and use words in a deeper way, who use 'Dhamma' language. Each uses language on their own level and sometimes the same words and phrases can have almost opposite meanings. Worldly language when it describes the world means this earth, this physical world, the world we live in, but in the language of Dhamma 'world' refers to a mental level, to the mind still on a low, a base footing. One language describes the planet, the other the mental world of someone still dwelling on a low level. 'Dhamma' in worldly language would refer to the obvious teachings of the Buddha, to the paraphernalia of Buddhism, the books, the scriptures, the triple basket of discourses, the Dhamma talks, or whatever, while 'Dhamma' in Dhamma language would indicate an elevated, developed mind.

If it were the deep language the Buddha used then 'world' would also imply a mind prone to experiencing dukkha, the cause of the 'world,' foolish desire, would also be understood as the cause of that dukkha, while the quenching of the 'world,' would likewise be the quenching of dukkha, and the way to attain the quenching of the 'world,' would also be the way to the end of dukkha; these being the four 'noble truths.'

Referring to 'world' as dukkha means a mind still on a low, or worldly, level and going wrong all the time, thus experiencing dukkha all the time, so, if it's said that the 'world' is dukkha, it's Dhamma language and indicates a low-level mind.

Ordinarily the world, this planet earth isn't dukkha or sukha, it can't be said to be either, so if we declare the 'world' to be dukkha it means the mind operating on a low level, moving under the power of avijjā, ignorance, and full of dukkha. 'The world is

dukkha' has this kind of meaning.

Dhamma is the opposite of dukkha, it's that which can quench it, put an end to it. If, however, the 'world' is to be free from suffering, if dukkha is to be quenched then it must happen in the place where suffering is to be found, and because suffering happens in the 'world' then the Dhamma that will quench it must do so in the 'world' too. The two can't be apart. So, if anyone doesn't know where the 'world' is, or where suffering is to be found then they won't know where to quench either.

Know, then, that dukkha is in the mind, it enters and dwells in the mind which is low, without knowledge. The low mind must always suffer, that's called 'world.' Suffering dwells there, in that sort of mind, the spinning around in the mass of dukkha, the great whirlpool of all suffering is in the mind. We'll have to quench suffering at suffering, at the 'world,' and 'world' in this meaning is a matter of the still ignorant mind, the mind not interested in Dhamma.

Now, if this 'world' is to be free from suffering it will be because it has Dhamma; the two can't be apart, can't be two different matters in different places: if we want peace and happiness, if we want the quenching of dukkha, then it will happen because the 'world' has the Dhamma instead.

Looking particularly at the word 'world,' a being arising naturally but without knowledge is called 'world.' People when they're born into the physical world are without knowledge of what they are, without the knowledge they need to have concerning themselves. If they know anything they'll know that they've been born. People are born into the midst of ignorance, ignorance of themselves, so they dwell stuck, sunk in the world. Now, we - are we like this? Take a look and see. If we're still blind, still ignorant, without knowledge of anything as it really is, then we are - we've been born into the physical world and we're dwelling blindly in it, living blindly in the mass of dukkha. If we suffer it means that we're still blind to the Dhamma, that we don't know the truth of anything, hence we oscillate, we swing back and forth between happiness and unhappiness, between laughter and tears, we're someone who doesn't know what the 'world' is or what life is all about. If we enjoy living like this then we're going to be mentally up and down, up and down, up and down, and all of the time. If, however, we feel that we don't want that any more then we're going to have to begin forming a new understanding, a new way of life so that we don't have to continually swing back and forth between laughter and tears, between being happy or sad.

So, that which is called 'world' is born into the physical world in accordance with the law of nature, but blindly, without knowledge, born in ignorance - which then increases, that is, people become more ignorant as they find delight in and become infatuated with the things they experience. In the mother's womb there's no infatuation because the infant isn't experiencing anything that can delight it, but once born it will be fed, it will drink milk, hear sweet sounds, see beautiful things and so on, and will fall into delighting in those experiences. The infant meets with and feels

liking for the pleasant, it gets 'sucked in' by the things it likes, it goes into, it 'sinks' into the world of sense experience, becomes a worldling obsessed with worldly things - enslaved, it delights in them so that if it's given anything else it's not interested but wants only the sensually delightful. This is to become worldly, to sink into the world, into the delightful, into the various forms of fun and happiness we derive from the things around us.

This is the 'worldling.' How many such people are there? Think about it. Who isn't like this? If we aren't we can be sure it's because we aren't stuck on the delightful, aren't stuck on the 'fun' things we see, hear, etc. If we're really free of all that then we won't be worldlings infatuated with the world we experience. But, right now, through being unaware of what's really what we'll probably be 'sunk' in the world of sensual delights.

When we emerge from the womb we aren't like that, we've yet to become infatuated because we've yet to receive sights, sounds, smells, and so on, but in no long time, as the senses receive impressions, then, if anything delicious, delightful is involved it will cause feelings of satisfaction, there'll be clinging to it as 'mine,' and there'll be a 'me' growing up in the mind. Right here is a deep truth: it's the desire for the delight, the satisfaction in any experience that gives rise to the feeling of being 'me,' the feeling of being the 'desirer,' of the 'me' who experiences the delight and satisfaction. The 'me' arises after the 'mine,' which sounds odd but is quite normal. When we feel satisfaction in anything that's the arising of the 'me,' or of the 'world' right there; it's then that we become worldlings. The mind sinking into those things is said to have 'sunk' in the world.

This is Dhamma language, so when we say 'sink in the world' we don't mean sink into the ground in the same way that Devadatta (the Buddha's relative, the one who tried to put an end to him) sank into the earth, rather we mean the mind sinking into ignorance, into infatuation with the delicious, into clinging to the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects being experienced. Thus, if something is likeable, satisfying we 'sink' into liking, into satisfaction, if it's the opposite we 'sink' into anger, into dissatisfaction, annoyance. Someone sunk in the world will laugh, will cry, will be pleased, displeased, and so on.

Anyone who's like this ought to know it for themselves. What's most dangerous about this is that we'll become so delighted with this world we've sunk into, so infatuated with it that we won't be able to see anything as being better - because we're infatuated, then the things that we're infatuated with are, for us, the 'good.'

This is where we need to mention the concepts of 'good' and 'bad.' People addicted to cigarettes or to alcohol see such things as 'good' and don't listen when we talk about giving them up, throwing them away. They don't see any 'good' in that. Cigarettes and alcohol are, for them, amongst the most enjoyable of things. However, we should be aware that the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and mental objects that we meet with through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are things more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, but because they don't reveal the associated problems directly, because nobody dislikes them, and because they're all-pervasive, people become infatuated with them. But be aware that these things

actually torture the minds of those who find delight in them. The pretty sights, the sweet sounds, the delightful smells, the delicious tastes, the soft and gentle touches, the sensations, the pleasant thoughts, all these enslave the mind to pleasure, we're pleased every time that we get them, but when we don't get, when we get the opposite, we feel uncomfortable, irritated, disappointed, even angry.

People who live in the world, who sink in the world display just these traits, these two kinds of behaviour: now happy, now unhappy, now it's laughter, now tears. How enjoyable is that? Think about it. If we weren't like that wouldn't it be better?

It's the misfortune of children to be without knowledge when they come from the womb, so it's inevitable that when the child meets with the delicious it will fall into liking, when it meets the opposite it will dislike. If children had the right kind of knowledge they wouldn't do that, if they knew from birth that things are 'just like that,' are just what they are according to their nature, that depending on them the nervous system produces feelings, and that some things touch the nervous system and produce pleasant, some produce unpleasant sensations, but that's all that happens, nothing more than that. For ease of understanding take the experiences of 'bitter' and the 'sweet.' One feeling is called 'sweet,' another 'bitter.' Now, the nervous system feels them as they are, according to their nature, but we don't, so we fall in love with the sweet and into aversion for the bitter. Then we're mentally up and down, up and down, up and down, which is a kind of madness, one kind of madness: we stray into happiness, into unhappiness, into anger, into love, into fear, into anxiety, into jealousy and so on because we don't understand these things properly, and if it all gets to be too much there's nervous disease, insanity, and sometimes people even kill themselves, drown themselves because of their infatuation with worldly things.

So, if we understood these things in such a way that we didn't make any mistakes when we had to deal with them wouldn't that be better? It would be beneficial, it would be fortunate for us if we could avoid laughter and tears. Laughter is wearisome, tiring, if you don't believe this then try it and see, try to laugh for just half an hour and you'll probably drop dead. Not having to experience either would be better, then there'd be freedom, the freedom of a life lived beyond the things that cause laughter and tears, above the things that cause us to be pleased or disappointed. Then we'd live normally in the true sense. That would be better. But, if we wouldn't like to be normal, to be above happiness and unhappiness, then there's nothing for us to talk about. That's our choice. The aim of the Dhamma is to help us to live above the power of the things that can cause laughter and tears, until we reach the point where we're no longer affected by them at all. If anyone doesn't like the thought of that because they see it as not being 'fun' then the Dhamma has nothing to offer them. To still like laughter, 'fun,' to like lots of laughter and tears isn't anything to do with *Dhamma*. People say that they want to study the Dhamma, to know the Dhamma, to study it more and more, but we're afraid that in some cases they won't really feel a strong enough need, because if someone still likes to laugh and cry then they aren't ready yet. The Dhamma is all about helping people to rise above laughter and tears, so, do we really want this, do we really want to be above the things that make us laugh and cry? Such concepts can only have meaning in the ignorant mental world.

The Dhamma is what can help us to rise above them. But, if we don't like the thought of that then there's nothing to talk about, if we do then there is.

This is the world, the world that's full of the things that can make us happy or sad, that can make us laugh or cry, can make us spin around in suffering.

Now, the second thing is the 'Dhamma.' 'Dhamma,' here, is the opposite of the 'world' and represents the mind which is awake. 'World' represents the mind without real knowledge, which is asleep, so to speak. We're all worldly people sunk in the world, all except for those elevated beings the *Arahants*, the Buddhas, who dwell above it, and teach about dwelling above it. But we're sunk in the world, stuck with happiness and suffering. Dhamma represents the mind which isn't that way, mind that knows the world as it really is, knows the things that cause happiness and unhappiness as being 'just like that' so that it doesn't fall for them and instead goes along in the right way.

In the Pali language the word 'Dhamma' means all things without exception. Up to now we've been dealing with the dhamma which is the enemy, hence 'world' is one meaning of Dhamma, a dhamma on the side of ignorance, of wrongness. On the other side are those dhammas concerned with illumination, with awakening, with knowledge. Dhamma is thus wide in meaning, anything and everything is a dhamma, but get to know the dhammas of the dark side so that we can avoid going wrong, come to know the worldly dhammas so that we can avoid sinking into the world. Get acquainted with all dhammas, no matter what they are or what their meaning is, so that we can learn to use them properly: know the worldly dhammas and know those that lead us out from the world, out from dukkha, then we'll always be able to quench that problem no matter how it manifests. In this way the Dhamma we study won't be wasted. If we know the bad then that helps us to avoid it, knowing suffering we can avoid doing the things that cause it.

If we study the Dhamma we study the truth that will help us dwell above suffering, but it shouldn't be just an intellectual exercise, it's not just about studying so that we can answer questions or score points, that would be too little, not nearly enough. If we know the Dhamma we can control ourselves, control the mind, cause it to dwell in the Dhamma way so that there's no dukkha, no need to laugh or cry anymore. Dhamma is necessary for people living in the world. Humankind is sunk in the world and full of suffering, the Dhamma is that which will help us to escape from that predicament, just learn to behave properly towards the things of the world and there won't be any problems, that's Dhamma. Anyone studying the Dhamma should do so to get this benefit. All people should study the Dhamma so that they know how to dwell above suffering, how to avoid being worldlings sunk in the world, sunk in the mass of dukkha, and become human beings dwelling above it instead.

However, we'll have to get to know suffering before we can begin to like the Dhamma, if we don't know our own suffering yet the time hasn't arrived for us to love the Dhamma. We have to know that which troubles and oppresses us so that we can turn towards its opposite. It has to be dukkha that teaches us about dukkha. We're going to have to find dukkha sufficiently unbearable if we're really going to take an interest in doing anything about it. It's then that there can be faith, belief in

the Dhamma, in the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha which, taken together, make up the system for the quenching of dukkha.

The Buddha tells us that we should take the Dhamma as our refuge, as our guiding light, and not to rely on anything else. But this we need to see for ourselves, because we'll have to do what has to be done ourselves, no-one can do it for us, it's a personal affair. *Paccatanveditabbo viññuhi* means 'to be experienced personally by those who know,' hence we have to do this job ourselves, we have to get knowledge of just how it is that we sink into the world, sink into the mass of dukkha, so we need to feel the desire to escape, and we need to experience faith in the Dhamma in order to be able to make the effort to practise and come out safely. Hence the Buddha pointed out that one should take oneself as a refuge, have oneself as the guiding light and not take refuge in anything else. The Dhamma is a refuge, but we must realize it for ourselves, thus it's said that we should take ourselves as a refuge, and we can achieve that through learning to behave correctly.

So, now we know the Buddhist way: that we do things for ourselves, by ourselves until the result arises, until the quenching of dukkha happens – that's the Buddhist way. If we let ghosts and gods or whatever in to help then it becomes supernatural, it belongs to the supernatural and won't bring any real understanding of the way things actually are. It's taken for granted that to follow the formalities, to perform the ceremonies means that we'll have good luck, that we'll be happy, but this is superstition, superstitious belief which will have some result, some small and temporary result. If it's the Buddhadhamma we practise then it's about seeing clearly that dukkha arises from our ignorance, from our being deceived into liking and disliking, into being made happy or unhappy by the many and various things we encounter. Then we can arrive at the knowledge that whatever we experience is really 'just like that,' the loving and hating can stop and there can be normalcy, the absence of dukkha. Seeing clearly in this way at all times is Buddhadhamma.

We should avoid the supernatural, the superstitious, study the Dhamma and practise to receive the fruits of our studies. A student of Dhamma who practises in the hope of getting a result goes the way of superstition, so, come back, hurry, turn around, come back to the Buddhist religion, otherwise we'll wander aimlessly in the realms of the superstitious. Understand that since birth we've had to depend on other people for our guidance, on people who don't understand the way things really are themselves. We've received the sort of teaching that's been essentially supposition from the time we were born. But now that's past its sell-by date, we need to understand the problem for ourselves, we need to understand ourselves, understand our minds to see how suffering arises, where its roots are, and then go about destroying them. In this way our own actions will become the 'devas' that help us, the 'god' that gives us assistance. We help ourselves to quench dukkha. This is the meaning of having oneself as a refuge.

So, hurry up, go to it, do the right thing! That we did wrong before? Never mind that now because then we didn't realize, didn't know that we were doing wrong, so it can, in a sense, be forgiven. But from now on if we go wrong again we know we'll get the reward: laughter and tears - now laughing, now crying, now happy, now sad until we

become really insane. Why let that happen? Stop making mistakes and do what's right, be correct, from this time on don't let anything delight the mind or make it angry, make it like or dislike, make it be afraid, or whatever, then we'll have put things right through our own efforts so we can look on our actions as being the devas, the god, as that something holy, something sacred that comes along to help us. Thus we meet with success through our own efforts. This is Dhamma.

As for ignorance? That's the 'world' – worldlings sunk in superstition, unable to know anything correctly, even the world they're sunk in. We can compare this with, for instance, a bird that doesn't see the sky it flies in: people in former times had a saying that birds don't see the sky, although they fly in it and their eyes are open still they don't see the sky; the fish doesn't see the water even though it swims in it and the water is always right in front of its eyes; the worm doesn't see the dung it lives in; the earthworm doesn't see the earth it moves through, that it eats, and so on. Thus it's said that people live in, sink in the world but they don't see it. Are we like this? Are children just born into the world like this? Are they the same as the birds and fishes? If we could see the world as it is then we'd be incapable of going wrong and wouldn't have to suffer, rather we, dwelling always above the world, could mock at it, make fun of it. We could dwell above the world because we'd know the reality of it. If we can't do that then we're in much the same place as the bird that doesn't see the sky, the fish that doesn't see the water, and so on – we're people who don't really see the world we live in properly.

Now, if correct seeing should arise it would become a Dhamma matter. *Dhamma* is a matter of knowing, and knowing the world as it really is one wouldn't be inclined to sink into it. First people live with suffering, then they get the Dhamma as the Buddha taught it and as it continues to be taught, and knowing Dhamma they don't sink in the world so don't have the dukkha of those who do. The Dhamma and the world can't be apart, if so there are problems, don't be foolish and talk about abandoning the world to go and live with the Dhamma, because it can't be done. Bring Dhamma into life to help sustain it, don't let suffering happen, live in the world without having to sink into it, without having to suffer. We make the effort and study the Dhamma to get this kind of result – less, or no dukkha at all. Thus we get benefit, if we don't then it's not worth the time and effort. We should get the boon of a bright, clean, peaceful, clear mind so that life is cool, not dark, hot, and full of laughter and tears.

Thus we don't need to abandon the world to find the truth, just don't let the mind sink into the world, have Dhamma so that the mind doesn't do that even though we still have to live in it.

'World' is the dukkha arising through wrongdoing apropos the many and various things we have to experience. The world, the actual world, the earth, and the multitude of things in it aren't happiness or suffering, aren't 'good' or 'bad' in themselves, but if we respond to them carelessly there's immediate dukkha; if we deal with them correctly they're useful, we can use them for our benefit, as with possessions, as with money, property or whatever, we can use these in such a way that they don't have to be dukkha, but if we're ignorant and deal with them unwisely they will be. We need to know how to handle such things without letting the mind become

infatuated, delighted with them. People without such knowledge live sunk in the world and have a lot of suffering, but we won't be like that, won't have to suffer to that extent, and, eventually, won't have to suffer at all. When we want to do only what's right there's no dukkha.

Correctness is the dukkha-less. If we still suffer then we aren't operating correctly. And this 'correctness' is completely beneficial, without any bad effect, so everybody could benefit. We, all of us, living in the world where everyone has the boon of being without dukkha; that would be 'correctness,' that would be Dhamma.

Now, it's said that anyone who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha too. The Buddha said as much. If we don't see the Dhamma then hanging a Buddha image around our necks as a talisman isn't going to help. But, as already mentioned, if we see the Dhamma then we know the truth, the truth that mankind sunk in the world, suffers, so, if we don't sink into it, don't misunderstand the happiness and unhappiness that's in it then that won't be the case. Seeing the truth of this one sees the Dhamma, and anyone who sees Dhamma to such an extent that they're able to quench suffering for themselves is someone who sees the Buddha. Don't think that the Buddha disappeared with his nibbāna, or with his death, cremation, and the distribution of his remaining bone relics. Ignorant people would think that way, but not those with knowledge, because the Buddha had already made it clear that the Dhammavināya he'd revealed would represent him once he was gone, the body of the Buddha would break up but he'd continue to exist in the form of the Dhamma, so he said that *anyone who sees the Dhamma sees me*. The Dhamma is the story of dukkha and its quenching, so really knowing this is called 'seeing the Dhamma,' and when one truly sees the Dhamma they see the Buddha too.

It's a sad fact that the Dhamma is within us but we don't see it. We have dukkha so we must have the Dhamma too; suffering and its quenching are within us, both are in the mind. This being so, take an interest in dukkha, don't just let it go on and on, don't be careless, don't be indifferent, whenever suffering is present take a close interest in it, be patient, see that it can be quenched, it's then there can be satisfaction with the Dhamma.

Seeing Dhamma in this way is to see the Buddha, to have the Buddha within us, not to just talk about it. Mostly it is just talk: *Buddhaṃ, saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* - we call the Buddha our refuge and yet we don't really know ourselves or the Buddha properly, so it's just words. We need to see our suffering and the Dhamma that can quench it, then we have the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Sangha*, then we are the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. That would be the greatest good fortune, the best thing that a human being could get, that a Buddhist could have.

We're looking at the world and the Dhamma. The 'world' is an ignorant being sunk in the mass of suffering and unaware of it. Dhamma is the mind which is bright, clear, which has the knowledge and conduct necessary for the quenching of suffering. If this world doesn't have Dhamma it's a hell, if it does then it's a world of peace and contentment. The world cannot be apart from the Dhamma, if Dhamma is removed from the world it comes to pieces and hasn't any use or benefit. The world at large would have Dhamma if suffering people could conduct themselves properly - if they

could behave in such a way that they didn't let dukkha happen then there wouldn't be any problems in this world. At present everyone suffers to some extent, now laughing, now crying and so on, and the world isn't an attractive proposition, it's still a world of beings sunk in dukkha.

Living without having to experience dukkha means avoiding being sunk in the world. When anyone manages to do this they're said to dwell 'above' it instead. There's a word we ought to understand: 'lokuttara,' which is a Pali word and indicates a mind that's elevated, that isn't worldly, isn't sunk in the world. Those beings called arahants dwell mentally above the world, aren't sunk in it and don't experience suffering. We too, sometimes, can dwell above the world, it's not that we're always ignorant and sunk in it, but sometimes, for perhaps a few minutes at a time, we know what's happening, we can restrain the laughter and tears, the happiness and the unhappiness, and when that happens there's a little freedom, a little lokuttara, just a sample, what we like to refer to as a taste of nibbāna, a taste of the 'unconditioned.' Whenever the mind is elevated, dwelling above the things that cause dukkha, there's clarity, and then it's as if we dwell on a higher level from where we can look down on the ocean, on the swamp of suffering, which is an ugly, a fearsome thing. Those are the best, the most comfortable, the happiest of times, when the world doesn't lure us into suffering. It's important to realize that the world is full of 'bait,' full of things that can lure us into problems, but that it's only when we're foolish that we take the bait – it's only then that we have problems. So, if we don't let ourselves be foolish we can avoid doing the things that cause the problems. That's the benefit of Dhamma; the grace of the Buddha is right there to help us, to keep us from sinking into suffering. So, having Dhamma we have the Buddha, having the Buddha we have the Dhamma. Get to know the Dhamma so necessary for the world so that we can come to know the way to dwell above dukkha, because when we know that there's something we can do then we might feel the desire to act. That would be the beginning of faith, the faith that we can defeat dukkha and that it's the Dhamma that will help us to do that, then we can practise in the sure knowledge that it's going to be beneficial. If we don't feel this way then there's no belief, no faith, or rather there's the sort of faith that might persuade us to go and see a particular movie, but when we do see clearly what life is like and that there is a way out from that, a way to dwell above suffering, then we can have faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and the Sangha. It's then, perhaps, that we might renounce in order to study the ways and means, and, more than that, ordain to have the necessary time for the Dhamma study and practice that will bring us closer and closer to the Buddha.

These are the still misunderstood matters of the world and the Dhamma. It's still claimed that one needs to abandon the world in order to attain Dhamma, to quench suffering, but to put an end to that problem what we really need to do is to manage the world correctly: if there's suffering in life fix the part that's the problem, don't allow the causes of it to exist; be clever, get to know the causes of dukkha.

At present people aren't much interested in doing that so they suffer, oscillating between laughter and tears until overtaken by nervous disease or insanity, or, if it's worse than that and they're at their wits end, some people might even kill themselves,

take poison or jump into the water and drown. But we don't need to do that, and anyway that would be shameful - if one knows the Dhamma then one knows how to control the mind, to change it in such a way that none of that needs to happen.

The Dhamma is thus a necessity for the world; the world must have Dhamma; human kind – we, collectively - must have Dhamma so that we can rise above the world and not sink into it, so that we don't have to suffer.

Suppose for a minute that we could go and live with the 'arya,' the noble ones, then we'd be dwelling 'above' the world, that is, the mind would be above the world but the body would remain in it. The Buddha's physical body, the body of the arahant dwelt in the world, walked around, ate, drank, bathed, etc., in the world, but the mind didn't, so there wasn't anything in the world that could cause them to be happy or unhappy because they dwelt 'above' worldly things.

If the mind isn't foolish and doesn't sink in the world then the body doesn't matter; the body won't sink by itself even though it has to live in the world, even though it was born, will age, get sick and will die, if the mind doesn't cling to anything then there won't be a 'me' to be born, etc. We cling and birth, ageing, sickness, and death become 'mine,' so, let birth, ageing, sickness, and death belong to nature. The bodies of the Buddha and the arahants got old, got sick, and died, yet we say that they weren't born, didn't age, didn't get sick or die - why? because they didn't cling to anything as 'mine.'

So now, perhaps, we aren't born, don't age, get sick or die too; we live in just one way, in the Dhamma way, we aren't deceived into taking birth, ageing, sickness and death to be 'mine' so there isn't a 'me' to experience them. The mind can be this way. It can be trained, can reach this level, if we're interested in studying and practising the mind can be changed so that it doesn't cling to anything as 'mine.'

To sum up: we ought to live in such a way that we're above the world - which sounds odd: live in the world but be above its influence - remember: live in the world, but be above the world, that is, don't sink, keep the mind above the things that can cause happiness and unhappiness, that can cause dukkha, then we can live in the world but be above its power, above its pressures. The body will dwell in the world, and the mind will dwell with the body, but the mind will be above the pressures of the world, there won't be anything in the world that can pressure this mind, make it happy or unhappy, make it give rise to greed, anger and delusion, because it now has Dhamma knowledge.

The world and the Dhamma are connected in this way: dwelling in the world having conquered its influence, that's Dhamma. The matter is at an end.