



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
IN BUDDHISM - VOLUME II

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Radhika Abeysekera



# **Questions & Answers in Buddhism**

## **Volume II**

**For**  
**Chamal & Chayanika**

*If you really love someone,  
help them to realize Nibbāna.*

**Cover Design - That 2 Graphics, Manitoba, Canada**  
*When the Truth (Dhamma ) is disclosed  
its light shines the brightest.*

## Questions & Answers in Buddhism

### VOLUME II

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*One should not accept  
anything out of emotional faith:  
One should use one's common  
sense and understanding before  
accepting anything.*

**Gotama Buddha**  
*Majjima Nikāya II, 170*

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





## Questions & Answers in Buddhism

### Volume - II

#### Foreword

It is a pleasure to read Mrs. Radhika Abeysekera's second volume of *Question and Answers in Buddhism*. It brings to mind her first book where she had discussed some essential questions that had arisen regarding the Buddha Dhamma.

Most Buddhist are familiar with and understand the questions which were discussed by Venerable Nagasena Mahā Thera and King Milinda. These complex but enlightening questions were compiled under the title *Milinda Panha*, which means Quest of Milinda. From the time of the Buddha the question and answer format has been used for teaching the Buddha Dhamma.

At the time of the Buddha, many people came to Him and asked various types of questions. In replying, the Buddha's responses became known later as discourses. As such questions and answers have become a traditional way of teaching the Buddha Dhamma. Buddhism places a high priority on Dhamma discussion. It is also what the Buddha encourages in the Kalama Sutta. The Buddha declared that when the Dhamma is disclosed its light shines the brightest. When it is hidden as a secret it sheds no light (*Vivato'va dhammo dippati, no paticchanno*). What better way to disclose the Dhamma than by encouraging questions?

Throughout the Tripitaka literature, it is clear that uncertain or doubtful concepts were well discussed by the Buddha as well as by latter commentators. In the canon, commentaries, and sub-commentaries known as tikas, there are abundant discussions. This tradition of discussion can also be seen historically throughout Sinhala writings on Buddhism. The intent is to clarify, verify and highlight the complex Dhamma points which are required for deeper understanding. For this reason Buddhists need not simply

rely on faith and belief. Their confidence in the Dhamma should be built upon analysis and understanding which in turn will affirm their confidence (Saddha) in the Buddha Dhamma.

The more we have the mental factors of Saddha, (Saddha Cetasika) the higher will be the results of our good kamma. These results will bear fruit in this life as well as in future births in samsara.

It is pleasing for me to see the attempts made by Mrs. Radhika Abeysekera to bring your attention to the Dhamma, to develop and strengthen your understanding of the Dhamma and to vitalize the wisdom of the Dhamma. This will bring greater happiness to all your wholesome kamma. It is also pleasing to see her untiring effort to develop your knowledge of the Dhamma. In spite of a busy schedule caring for her day-to-day responsibilities, she has found the time to fulfil this aspect of her Dhamma work. My wish is that she and her family will have the opportunity to continue and do more Dhamma work for all who are in need of the Dhamma. Their work will cause all of us to acquire more and more wholesome thoughts, words and deeds. In turn this will bring us closer to the happiness of Nibbāna. May all beings be well and happy!

Kurunegoda Piyatissa (Nayaka Mahā Thera)  
New York Buddhist Vihara  
January 22, 2001

## Questions & Answers in Buddhism

### Volume - II

#### Preface

**T**his book is a continuation of the book *Questions and Answers in Buddhism - Volume I*. As Students found *Volume I* easy to understand, I decided to continue using the same format for *Volume II*. The questions contained in this book were taken from speaking engagements at Interfaith conferences, University seminars, and my Dhamma classes in Winnipeg. The questions and answers in *Volume II* are more advanced than in *Volume I*. As such this book is for an advanced student of the Dhamma.

People often ask me how I find the time to teach and write books on Buddhism. I work full time as a Manager of Finance at the City of Winnipeg and have all the responsibilities of looking after two children and a household. Despite the fact that my husband and children help out, it is still a big commitment. The answer is very simple. I find the time because I believe in what I am doing and because the Dhamma gives me immense joy. Many of my research and rough notes have been done while waiting for my children at swimming, music, skating, badminton and gymnastic lessons. While other mother's chat and socialize, I read and write on the Dhamma. I also often work through my lunch hours.

However, they are correct in assuming that teaching the Dhamma is a difficult task. It is a difficult task because I am not an ordained nun who has given her life for the spiritual welfare of others. How do you help to pull some one else out of the mud when you yourself are stuck in the mud? I often reflect on the enormity of the task I have undertaken. The Buddha has made it clear that the best way to teach is through experience. Do I then qualify to teach when I myself have not experienced the Truth? Is it not like the blind leading the blind?

As the twenty-first century dawns over Winnipeg, Manitoba we are still without the Sangha. And I know that in many Western Cities, others face the same dilemma. Is the preservation of the Dhamma the sole responsibility of ordained monks and nuns? I do not think so. I feel that the time has come when lay devotees have to teach in order to ensure the preservation of the Dhamma. We each have to do our part for the wellbeing of the next generation. And if the determination and energy is present it can be done. This is my sixth publication. I now teach every other Sunday (we alternate with meditation classes) and often am the guest speaker at the religion class at the two major Universities in Manitoba. When I started ten years ago, having attended a Christian School, I will truthfully say that I did not know the Dhamma. Looking back I am happy that I had the courage to start. I began by buying books on the Dhamma, which was the only way I could learn. With the help of my private library of over 400 Dhamma books and tapes, and the help of many people I have overcome my initial doubts.

One day the Buddha approached his personal attendant and said: “Truly Ānanda, it is not easy to teach Dhamma to others. In teaching the Dhamma to others, establish well five things, and then teach. What five? Teach Dhamma to others thinking,

- I will teach Dhamma in a gradual way
- I will teach with the goal (Nibbāna) in mind
- I will teach with kindness and compassion
- I will not teach as a means of gain
- I will not teach so as to harm any body (teach only to enlighten)

For truly Ānanda it is not easy to teach Dhamma to others. So in teaching Dhamma to others establish well these five.”

*Anguttara Nikāya III: 183*

I have established well the Buddha's advice to Ānanda. And every time I have doubts or face challengers I think of the alternative. A barren land without the Dhamma. I now encourage the Buddhist laity in all Western countries to take the challenge. Our children need your involvement in the Dhamma. If you do not get involved, who will? I have received many e-mails and phone calls from concerned parents in the West. The books you require are now available on the Internet. The Buddhasasana web site, Pariyatti web site and the access to insight web site, which houses some of the tripitaka, (<http://www.accesstoinight.org/canon/>) are but a few of the excellent sites that are available. My books too are available on the Internet. Almost everything I have taught my students are contained in these books. I just start the lesson with a story from the Jataka or the Dhammapada, to make it more interesting for the class, and then draw them into the Dhamma with a lesson from one of my books. If the lesson is complex I cover it over two or more days. I then enhance their knowledge with practice by encouraging the students in charitable events organized by the community, the practice of compassion in their daily life, and meditation. The alternative is a generation of Buddhist children growing up without the Dhamma. Parents and elders should first establish the Dhamma in themselves for one can not give to one's child what one does not possess. Start gradually. Work together with your community and give the gift of Dhamma that surpasses all gifts to the next generation.

As in the past many people have helped with this publication. Venerable Piyatissa, Nayaka Maha Thera of the New York Buddhist Vihara, has written the foreword and reviewed the book for accuracy. His encouragement, patience and quiet strength are a constant source of inspiration in my work. He has worked tirelessly in New York and in other areas of North America to preserve the Dhamma for future generations. His example and encouragement are greatly appreciated.

My friend, Jay Jorowski, has very generously designed the cover of this book at a time when there were great demands on her time. Her beautiful work and generosity are greatly appreciated.

When my Dhamma friend, Matthew Gindin, heard that I needed help with the editing of this book he offered his assistance. Matthew first came to the Dhamma at the age of thirteen. When most other children were playing soccer and skating Matthew poured over books on Buddhism. Starting with Zen Buddhism, Matthew moved onto Mahayāna, and later Theravāda Buddhism by systematically reading and analyzing numerous books. He enriched his wide knowledge of Buddhism and the monastic order by speaking with well-known Buddhist monks in North America. Four years later he was contemplating ordination as a Buddhist monk.

Matthew leaves Winnipeg shortly to be ordained as a Buddhist monk. After visiting and experiencing many forest monasteries in North America he has selected the Metta Forest Monastery in California and Ajahn Geoff as his spiritual teacher. The editing of this book was one of his last acts of great generosity to our community in Winnipeg. Matthew had come back to Winnipeg for two short weeks. During this period he found the time to enrich this book with his editing. He also encouraged our community with a moving talk on *his reasons for accepting the Dhamma and ordination as a Buddhist monk*. We will miss his wisdom and gentle nature. We share his joy in his chosen vocation and wish him every success in his spiritual development. The blessings of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, the warm regard of our community, and my grateful appreciation for his kindness accompanies him to California.

As with all my Dhamma work my family, Sarath, Chamal and Chayanika, and best friend, Adrienne Bouchard Langlois, have contributed greatly towards the research, writing and quality of this book. This book was possible only because of their support, patience and sacrifices. Their generous contribution is often not

seen. The value of their contribution, however, cannot be measured. Their support is a constant source of strength and inspiration. May their continued support of my Dhamma work lead to their own emancipation.

May all beings be happy and at peace!

Radhika Abeysekera  
Manitoba, Canada  
Dhammadenna.com  
February 20, 2001



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## CHAPTER 1

### **Who was the Buddha and what is the essence of His teaching and contribution to mankind?**

*“Whatsoever treasure there be  
Either here or in the world beyond, or  
Whatsoever precious jewels there be  
In the heavens or Brahma realms,  
There is none comparable with  
The Fully Enlightened One.  
With confidence I say,  
In the Buddha is this precious jewel.  
By this Truth, may there be happiness to all.”*

*Ratana Sutta*

**Question** - Many in the Western world have no knowledge of the Buddha. Who was the Buddha and what is the essence of His teaching and contribution to mankind?

**Answer** - Over 2500 years ago, a young prince by the name of Siddhattha Gotama was born to King Suddhodana and Queen Mahā Māya of Kapilavatthu, India. The prince led a luxurious but sheltered life, shielded from the knowledge of the hardships and sorrows of mankind. Then, for the first time, He saw an old and feeble man who could hardly walk, a sick man in great pain, and the funeral of a man amidst his weeping relatives. The prince realized that the happy life He had led was but a mirage. Suffering existed all around Him. The compassionate prince was deeply moved by the suffering of others. What was the cause of this suffering? Was there any way that He could help suffering humanity? The young prince pondered.

When He saw a calm and serene ascetic, Prince Siddhattha decided to give up His wealth and kingdom and seek a path to end suffering. The ascetic’s serenity and inner peace inspired the young prince. Wearing the simple garb of an ascetic, He practised self-

purification of mind, speech, and action. Using insight meditation, He penetrated the true nature of self and realized the Truth. This Truth He called the Four Noble Truths.

**The First Noble Truth** that the Buddha realized is the existence of suffering – birth is painful both for the baby and the mother. Similarly, old age, sickness and death cause suffering. Under normal circumstances, all living beings go through these processes. In addition, not getting what you want is suffering, association with the unloved is suffering, and separation from loved ones causes suffering. And all around us we see the suffering caused by poverty and physical and mental abuse. Even the many happy instances in life cause suffering because they all come to an end, because all things are impermanent. The Buddha realized that the only way we could have eternal happiness was if there was a lasting condition, but all things come to an end. The Buddha realized that suffering existed in this world because of the impermanence of all things (conditioned phenomena).

**The Second Noble Truth** that the Buddha realized was that the cause of suffering is craving or grasping. The Buddha said that the cause of suffering is one's response to the event (as opposed to the event itself): one's strong, conditioned response of craving or grasping which the Buddha called *tanha*. Think about it. A death occurs in our community. Do we all suffer? Do we all suffer to the same degree? No, we don't. This is because it is one's response to the event rather than the event itself that causes suffering – one's strong response of craving, clinging or grasping.

**The Third Noble Truth** that the Buddha realized is the extinction of the cause of suffering and the resulting absence of suffering. The cause of suffering was craving. The destruction of craving led to the absence of suffering. The Buddha called the absence of suffering, Nibbāna.

**The Fourth Noble Truth** that the Buddha realized is the path leading to the destruction of suffering that all Buddhists follow – The Noble Eightfold Path. A path of self-purification comprised of generosity, morality and wisdom. A path of infinite compassion and loving kindness that teaches one to let go. A path that leads to real happiness through the absence of craving.

From this point onwards He was known as the Buddha. The term Buddha means the Enlightened One or One With Wisdom. He

called His teachings the Dhamma, which in English means the Law or the Truth.

The Buddha was a human being. He realized the Truth and liberated Himself by His own efforts. The Buddha understood that others too could realize the Truth and be liberated if He showed them the path. For the next 45 years, until His passing away the Buddha taught the Dhamma to humans and divine beings (devas) so that others too could liberate themselves by realizing the path to the total destruction of suffering.

The path has been shown to us by the Buddha. The effort must be our own. The Buddha was a great teacher – a teacher of men and devas. He was not a saviour. **In Buddhism you are your own saviour.** In fact, this was reflected in His last words. In the Parinibbāna Sutta the Buddha said:

*“Be a refuge unto yourself,  
Seek for no refuge in others.  
Subject to change are all component things.  
Strive on with diligence.”*

In the Mahāvagga the Buddha said:

*“It is through unshaken perseverance that  
I have reached the final goal and enlightenment.  
Through unceasing effort that  
I have reached the peace supreme.  
If you also will strive unceasingly  
You too will in time attain the highest goal of bliss.”*

In effect His teachings say, **“What I have achieved you too can accomplish. For what a man has done, a man can do.”**

From this stems a very important aspect of Buddhism. In Buddhism you are not commanded to do anything. You practise the Buddha’s teachings after careful examination and study and only if you find that they are to the benefit of yourself and others. In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha said:

*“Do not accept anything on mere hearsay, tradition,  
rumours, inference, preconceived notions, supposition,  
or because it seems acceptable.  
Do not accept anything thinking*

*the ascetic who taught it is respected by all. ”*

As such, you practise His Dhamma after careful examination, only when you feel that it is to your moral benefit and the moral benefit of others to do so. This scientific approach is found throughout His Teachings and led the great scientist, Albert Einstein, to proclaim:

*“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God, avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.”*

Prince Siddhattha gave up His kingdom, wealth and beloved family for one purpose. To seek the path for the total destruction of suffering for all living beings. As such His teachings are for all beings who experience suffering. If I were to summarize the teachings of the Buddha I would say that He advised us to:

*“Do no evil  
Do good  
Purify and discipline our minds  
through mental development (meditation).”*

The teachings of the Buddha are deep and vast. I have attempted to capture a few of His teachings that highlight His contribution to mankind. One of the salient factors that weaves its way throughout His entire teachings is the Buddha’s infinite compassion for all living beings. In the Dhammapada the Buddha said:

*“Hatred is not appeased by hatred  
Hatred is appeased by loving kindness.”*

In the Dhammapada the Buddha said:

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

In the Metta Sutta the Buddha said,

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

By helping murderers such as Angulimāla, cannibals such as Ālavaka, slave girls such as Punṇā and destitutes such as Sopāka, over 2500 years ago the Buddha, through example, promoted peace and loving kindness to all of mankind.

Dr. Oscar Arias, former president of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace prize winner, gave some startling statistics in his speech, *“Moral Governance and Public Service: Lessons from the Central American Experience,”* presented in Winnipeg, Canada in June, 1999. Four percent of the world’s annual military budget would reduce world global illiteracy by half. Eight percent would stabilize the world population by 2015. Twelve percent would ensure the health care of the entire world population.

Over 2500 years ago the compassionate Buddha included ‘right livelihood’ in the moral code of conduct of His followers. Not only are Buddhists to refrain from killing any living being, but they are instructed by the Buddha to refrain from any livelihood that includes the selling of animals for killing, the manufacture and sale of weapons and armaments used in warfare and destruction, the manufacture and sale of drugs, alcohol, or any other product harmful to living beings, and the profiting from the exploitation of man such as through the practice of slavery. If the compassionate teachings of the Buddha were practised universally, we would not have had the slave trade and the resulting civil war in America, or apartheid in South Africa, and we would have solved the problem of world hunger and sickness, because the money spent on armaments could instead be channelled towards the betterment of mankind.

The Buddha also attempted to abolish the degrading caste system that existed in India. At the time of the Buddha there existed four distinct castes. The Brahmins, who considered themselves as the chosen ones of the creator God Brahma, and as such the nobility, treated the low caste Chandālas with enormous disrespect and cruelty. The Buddha said:

*“By birth is not one an outcast  
By birth is not one a Brahmin (noble man)*

*By deed is one an outcast  
By deed is one a Brahmin (noble man)."*

By treating all persons with fairness and respect, by opening His Holy Order to all persons irrespective of their caste, by appointing both the high caste and the low caste to positions of honour in His Noble Order, over 2500 years ago the Buddha promoted peace and loving kindness to all of mankind.

The Buddha also raised the status of women in India at a time when they were treated as chattel. Women were often treated as objects created for the pleasure of men. Against this backdrop, the Buddha consoled the distraught King Pasenadi Kosala at the birth of his daughter by saying, *"A female child may prove even better than a male offspring"*.

The Buddha was the first religious teacher to form the order of the nuns, where the nuns, like the monks, were trained to reach the highest goal. He made it quite clear that women were as capable as men of attaining spiritual development. In His Noble Order the Buddha had two female chief disciples to help with His growing congregation of nuns, just as He had two male chief disciples to help with His monks. In the Sigālovada Sutta the Buddha taught the obligations of the wife to the husband and the obligations of the husband to the wife which would result in a happy marriage. The Buddha recognized that both parties had an obligation towards the success of the union. And so we have in the teachings of the Buddha not only peace and loving kindness to men, but also peace and loving kindness to women.

The Buddha taught us to be especially mindful of the needs of the sick and infirm. When the monk Tissa was afflicted with a life-threatening disease that resulted in large pus-filled boils covering

his body, his fellow monks deserted him. The Buddha gently tended the sick monk and encouraged others to help the sick by saying, *"Those that tend the sick, tend (follow) me."*

The Buddha taught us to venerate and serve our parents as we would Brahma the Creator God of the Brahmins. Stating that Brahma is in your home, the Buddha compared the qualities and characteristics of Brahma - loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity - and showed us that these

qualities were present in our parents<sup>1</sup>. Over 2500 years ago the Buddha, with compassion and foresight, taught us to take care of the parents who had taken care of us with love when we were too little to take care of ourselves.

The Buddha's respect for His foster mother, who nursed Him and brought him up, was seen at her funeral. The Buddha never walked behind anyone. But at Mahā Pajāpati's funeral the Buddha respectfully walked behind her carriage. With compassion He taught His father and foster mother the Dhamma, to end all suffering. He later visited the Tāvātimsa Heaven to teach the Dhamma to His birth mother, Mahā Mayā (Mātu Deva Putta).

The Buddha taught us to be grateful to those who have been of assistance to us. The Buddha attained enlightenment on His own through His own effort, with no divine intervention or assistance, but the Bodhi Tree under which He attained enlightenment provided Him with shade and shelter from the elements during His struggle. In the second week after enlightenment the Buddha stood motionless for one week, gazing at the Bodhi Tree in gratitude, respecting the Great Bodhi Tree that had assisted Him in His endeavours by giving Him comfort. The Buddha showed gratitude to the Bodhi Tree – an inanimate object that had assisted Him by providing shelter during His enlightenment. He taught us by example that we should show gratitude to all who have helped and assisted us in our endeavours.

The Buddha also taught us to be tolerant of the beliefs and faiths of others. He said:

*“Insulting a religion of another,  
Is like looking up and spitting at heaven,  
Because you do not believe in heaven;  
The spittle comes back and soils your own face.”*  
In the Anguttara Nikāya the Buddha said, *“If you can find truth in any religion accept that truth.”*

The Buddha's tolerance of other religions is seen clearly in His instruction to Upāli the millionaire. On hearing the Dhamma, Upāli wanted to give up his former teacher and seek refuge in the Buddha. The Buddha instructed Upāli to examine His teaching

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1. See chapter 9 for a comprehensive explanation.

carefully before he made such a decision by saying, “It is well for a distinguished man like you to make a thorough investigation before you change.” Upāli, overwhelmed with joy at this unexpected statement said, “If I had become a follower of any other teacher they would have proclaimed the fact that I, Upāli the millionaire, had changed teachers. The more pleased am I.” Upāli became a Buddhist by conviction, but the Buddha, with His boundless compassion, advised him to support his former religious teacher as before.

Some world religions claim that the heavens are open only to those who profess their faith. All others, about 80% of the world population, are bound for eternal hell. Such beliefs have resulted in some well-meaning missionaries using force, coercion, trickery and psychology to convert people to their faith. Religious structures were destroyed, good schools and jobs were accessible only on conversion, and titles were taken away to induce people to convert to their faith. More recently, in some countries, conditional help is being given to the poor. The condition: conversion. Such beliefs have resulted in untold suffering and bloodshed and have led to belief in exclusive heavens, not unlike the society that Hitler was trying to create through the Jewish holocaust. The compassionate Buddha taught that the heavens are open to persons of all faiths, and that entrance is dependent not on faith or belief, but on righteousness. What is important is not that you are a Buddhist, but that you are a compassionate, loving, generous, and tolerant person.

His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, captures the Buddha’s sentiment on conversion as follows:

*“Remember our purpose here is not to make more Buddhists, it is to make more enlightened beings. When you teach Buddhism don’t encourage people to become Buddhists, just encourage them to cultivate the qualities of love, compassion, universal responsibility and wisdom within themselves. If some special people with strong karmic connections want to formally become Buddhists then that is acceptable, but in general the emphasis should be on a commitment to inner spirituality, not to any specific religious traditions.”*

Buddhism is a non-violent, compassionate religion, and throughout its peaceful existence of over 2500 years, not a drop of blood has been shed in the name of the Buddha. No mighty

monarch has wielded his powerful sword to spread the teachings of the Buddha. By fostering understanding and respect for the faiths of others over 2500 years ago, the Buddha promoted peace and loving kindness to all of mankind.

The followers of the Buddha's teachings have incorporated the Buddha's infinite compassion, understanding, and tolerance in their daily life. The freedom that the Buddha gave to women has had far-reaching results. Dr. Dewaraja presented a research paper at the University of Western Australia on "The Position of Women in Buddhism". She studied the women of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma and Tibet over a period of time before the impact of Western influence and compared them to women in other Asian countries.

Dr. Dewaraja concluded that, *"Buddhism saved the daughter from indignity, elevated the wife to a position approximating to equality, and retrieved the widow from abject misery."*

The application of religious tolerance is also very apparent when you look at Buddhist countries. Not only has there been no bloodshed, coercion or force used in the Buddha's message of peace, but with compassion and tolerance Buddhist countries have encouraged those of other faiths in the practice of their religion. Approximately 80% of the people of Sri Lanka are Buddhists. The rest belong to other major religions. In addition to Buddhist festivals, we celebrate religious holidays for Christmas, Hajji and Depāvali, the Hindu festival of lights. Nestled between the temples in Sri Lanka, one finds exquisitely carved Hindu kovils, ornate churches which serenade us with church bells on Sundays, and the resonant prayers of the Muslim mosques. In fact, the community is so well-integrated that one often hears of Buddhists going to Kataragama to the Hindu God Skandha's shrine, or to church for midnight mass on Christmas eve. And the festivities of the lanterns and pandols for Vesak, the celebration of the birth of the Buddha, is a spectacular event that people of all faiths enjoy.

In the past, Buddhist monks and nuns concentrated their efforts on helping suffering humanity by teaching the Dhamma, for the total destruction of suffering, while the Buddhist devotees concentrated on the physical needs of the poor and the sick. Over time this has changed and we now have monks and nuns who also devote their lives to the welfare of the poor and the sick. Understanding that it is necessary for a person to have the basic comforts of food,

clothing, and good health prior to being able to focus on their spiritual development, and reflecting on the Buddha's instruction, "He who tends the sick tends (follows) me," many monks and nuns have taken to working to eliminate the suffering of the poor.

While most such incidents are not publicised, as monks and nuns do not work for public recognition, I would like to share with you the work that is being performed by Venerable Cheng-Yen of Taiwan. This Buddhist nun has touched the hearts of millions in her determined efforts to help the poor. Through her efforts a massive volunteer force that is backed financially through businesses and individuals, now provides health care, hospitals, schools, homes, food and clothing for the poor. And the sick in Sri Lanka who have had the good fortune to experience the gentle ministering of the Venerable Vipassi will attest to the peace and caring that has changed the lives of millions of the poorest of the poor.

Despite the fact that it is over 2500 years since the passing away of the Buddha, His teachings are as relevant today as they were at the time He lived. We live in a materialistic, selfish world with crime, rape and war dominating the news on television and in newspapers. The family unit is disintegrating with over 50% of all marriages ending in divorce. We live in a world that at times feels that it is "each man for himself" and condones the concept of survival of the fittest. The world now has a population of over six billion people. Six billion people living in different environments with different cultures, upbringing and beliefs. Approximately 20% of this population practise the compassionate teachings of the Buddha. And by doing so they contribute to the peace and welfare of mankind. The Buddha's teachings were documented in 84,000 suttas (discourses). These are but a few examples of the Buddha's teachings and His great contribution to the welfare of mankind.



## CHAPTER 2

### What is the Buddhist concept of inner peace?

*“If one, longing for sensual pleasure,  
achieves it, yes, he's enraptured at heart.  
The mortal gets what he wants.  
But when for that person -- longing, desiring --  
the pleasures diminish,  
he's shattered, as if shot with an arrow.”*

*“Those of peaceful mind, discerning,  
mindful and given to meditation,  
clearly see things rightly  
and long not for sensual pleasures.”*

*Sutta Nipāta IV, 1 & Itivuttaka*

**Question** - We live in a fast-paced world where material wealth and possessions seem to be the driving force. And yet, despite the affluence of the Western world, inner peace seems to elude most people. What is the Buddhist concept of inner peace?

**Answer** - A few years ago I asked my students what they would ask for if I said that each could have one gift. My students came up with many different answers. Many of the younger ones wanted a pet or a toy. They wanted a dog, or a rabbit, or a horse, or a computer game. The older students asked for a new computer, or in some cases, a car. And of course, there were the ones who wanted the winning ticket at the lottery. The majority of the students selected material things for their gift.

I then asked them if they would still wish for the same item if I asked them to choose a gift that would bring them inner peace and lasting happiness. Young as they were, they instinctively agreed that the gift they had chosen would not bring them inner peace or lasting happiness. After some discussion, we came to the conclusion that the gifts we had chosen would not bring us inner

peace and lasting happiness because:

- *the happiness we would receive from fulfilling our wish would be short-term;*
- *chances are that once the excitement and novelty of the gift wore off, we would want something else;*
- *money does not necessarily result in happiness. In fact, it brings with it many responsibilities and sometimes, fear – fear which results in security systems or other restrictions.*

My students unanimously agreed that material possessions do not necessarily lead to inner peace and happiness. Two thousand five hundred years ago Prince Siddhattha Gotama, who was later known as the Buddha, came to this same conclusion. The Prince was brought up in extreme luxury and wealth. He had every conceivable material possession. This is how Prince Siddhattha describes His life:

*“I was delicate, excessively delicate. In my father’s dwelling, three lotus ponds were made for my enjoyment. Blue lotuses bloomed in one, red in another and white in the third. I used no sandalwood that was not produced in Kāsi. My turban, tunic, dress and cloak were all from Kāsi.*

*Night and day, a white parasol was held over me so that I might not be touched by heat, cold, dust, leaves or dew. There were three palaces built for me - one for the cold season, one for the hot season and one for the rainy season. During the four months of rain I lived in the palace for the rainy season without ever coming down from it, entertained all the while by female musicians.....”*

Prince Siddhattha, who had boundless compassion and a contemplative nature, realized that none of this would bring inner peace or lasting happiness. Because despite all of this material wealth we still experienced suffering. None of these material possessions brought lasting peace or happiness because all things had a lifespan that eventually came to an end.

Leaving the palace, His crown, wealth and beloved family, He sought a path that would result in inner peace and lasting happiness – a path that would lead to the total destruction of suffering.

Turning from the outer world to the world within with the use of insight meditation, the Buddha realized the Truth, or the way things really are. The Buddha realized that catering to the senses and fulfilling the wants and needs of the senses with material possessions did not bring peace and inner calm. Instead, it led to greater craving, greater attachment and anger, ill-will and hatred if one's happiness or desires were thwarted. And all of these material possessions eventually led to suffering because of the impermanence of all phenomena. As such, the happiness they brought was short-lived.

The Buddha realized that the path to inner peace was total selflessness. When one stopped feeding the constant desires and wants of the senses and started to live for the welfare of both oneself and others, one would have inner peace and happiness. One had to stop thinking of oneself as number one. He realized that the path to inner peace started with generosity, infinite compassion and loving kindness to all living beings, and mental development so that we would have the developed mind to see things as they are and to act out our convictions.

He also realized that inner peace and lasting happiness were things we could all achieve because one could always change oneself through mental development. **The Buddha was a human being. An exceptional human who, over countless years, perfected Himself to achieve inner peace. An exceptional human being who achieved inner peace without any divine help.** The Buddha assured us that by following His path we too could, without any divine help, develop our minds and achieve lasting peace. As inner peace and lasting happiness begin within the mind, the path that he realized and taught addressed the mind. It addressed both the conscious and the unconscious mind.

The Buddha's path to inner peace required the practice of generosity, morality (infinite compassion and loving kindness to all living beings) and meditation. As most persons are familiar with generosity and morality, I will concentrate on meditation.

Both generosity and morality address the conscious mind. By practising generosity and infinite compassion and loving kindness to others, one moves away from thoughts, speech and actions that are harmful to oneself and others, to the welfare of oneself and others. At times, however, our minds are undisciplined. They

perform as though they have a life of their own. And even when we want to act with generosity and compassion we find that our minds cling tightly and crave for material happiness for self. We cannot control our minds even though our better judgement says we should. We give in to temptation. And so we need to strengthen the mind. Just as we develop and strengthen our bodies through exercise, we develop and strengthen our minds through meditation.

The Buddha used meditation on loving kindness (mettā) to help perfect morality, awareness of breathing meditation (Ānāpāna Sati<sup>2</sup>) to develop concentration, and insight meditation (Vipassanā) to develop wisdom. Through meditation one sees things as they really are and one develops the mind so that one can stop living only for oneself. With insight meditation one can see that there is no permanent self, one can see that suffering exists in the world, and one can see that all things are impermanent. As such one can reduce and eventually stop the constant craving to satisfy one's foolish wants and greed. And with each step towards selflessness, one experiences inner peace and lasting happiness.

We live in a materialistic and selfish world where great emphasis is placed on material wealth. People tend to equate material wealth with success and happiness. Many people rush around making more and more money to satisfy their wants and greed. But despite our affluence as a country, we in North America have very high rates of mental stress, suicide, crime, rape and murder. Can we truly say that our affluence has brought us inner peace?

There are some, however, who have realized that the way to inner peace is not through material wealth. They have achieved inner peace and calm through the practice of the Buddha's Noble Path. The best testimony to the success of the Buddha's Path to inner peace is found in real life experiences. The following extracts are from the monks and nuns of the Amaravati Forest Monastery in England. Amarāvati is run by Western monks, nuns and devotees who are Buddhist not by birth, but by conviction.

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2. One of the forty types of Samatha meditation that the Buddha taught for mental development.

The following question was asked of Ajahn Sumedho, Chief monk of Amarāvati forest monastery in England at a meditation retreat.

*“How do you find a sense of calm  
in a world filled with anger,  
disappointment, and greed?”*

This was his answer:

*“These are but different states of mind.  
They arise... and they cease.  
When we meditate we understand  
And do not attach (to these emotions).  
Hence the heart is liberated.*

*A liberation that does not come from lack of feeling,  
But a greater inner release,  
Because we understand  
The way it is.*

*If we understand anger, disappointment and greed,  
We are not threatened (by it).  
We can then work with it  
For a wholesome outcome.”*

The following are experiences of Mali Bagoien, a Norwegian lady who has embraced the Buddha’s path to inner peace. Her experiences whilst meditating in the North Pole where nights are as bright as days in summertime and flowers blossom only for a few days.

### **Svalbard-Summer**

*“Up here on the roof of the Earth  
My heart is at one,  
Life shows its true nature:  
Changeable, impermanent, belonging to none.*

*Like the moss in its rose-coloured splendour  
And the Arctic poppy dressed in white,  
Better to blossom one single night  
Than never experience the light.*

*The wandering heart to the Pole having won,  
Takes a leap...  
And joins the sun.”*

The following are some of the experiences of Ajahn Amaro whilst meditating in vibrant and colourful Thailand.

### ***In Spite of All***

*“In spite of all the heated breath,  
The angry skies and stormy seas;  
In spite of passions ripe and hot  
That flicker through the mind  
And trot around each other  
Blind and fraught,  
(furious, signifying naught),  
In spite of all the agitations,  
The confrontations;  
In spite of all the heat that’s spent,  
I know in truth I am content.*

*A falling leaf spins through the air  
And through my open window where  
It lands upon my lap  
"O joy! A wish ! A wish.....a wish?"*

*Nothing to wish for,  
Not a thing.  
My head's a blank, an empty ring;  
Nothing stirring there, no waves,  
Like the clear and empty blue that paves  
A still and peaceful ocean sky,  
The silence between you and I.*

*Silence in the midst of change,  
A silence beautiful and strange,  
Silence in the forest deep  
Where chickens scratch and lizards creep,  
Silence deep - in spite of all.*

*Silent Rain*  
*Ajahn Amaro*  
(Roi-Et, North-East Thailand, 1979)

My final quotation are some words of wisdom from Ajahn Chah, the great teacher who taught Ajahn Sumedho in a forest monastery in Thailand.

***Aimless wanderer***

*“...Nowhere in the world is any real peace to be found.  
That is the nature of the world.  
Look within yourself  
And find it there instead... ”*

- *A Tree in the Forest*  
*Ajahn Chah*

Many well-meaning persons want to change the world so that we could have world peace. Soon they realize that they have taken on too much and so they decide to begin by changing their country. But even this is too great a challenge and so they decide to change their community. When they find that they cannot change their community they start on their family.

Over 2500 years ago the Buddha showed us a path to peace. But you did not start with the world, your country or your community. You started with yourself. The Buddha said that the only person you can change is yourself. And then, once you have changed, you influence others to change with love, compassion and through example. By practising the Buddha's path to inner peace you achieve inner calm and peace for yourself. Then, by example and compassion, you help to change your family, your community, your country and the world. This is the Buddha's concept of lasting inner peace.



## CHAPTER 3

### Why is Buddhism sometimes compared to science?

*“Mind precedes all things;  
mind is their chief,  
mind is their maker...”*

*Dhammapada 1*

**Question** - Buddhism is often referred to as a scientific religion. What attributes does Buddhism have that result in its comparison to science?

**Answer** - I will begin with a quotation from Ajahn Sumedho, the Chief Monk of the Amaravati Forest Monastery, in England. When questioned as to why he chose Buddhism as his religion and path to emancipation he said:

*“What impressed me about Buddhism was that it did not ask me merely to believe. It was a way (path) where one was free to doubt. It offered a practical way of finding out the Truth through one’s own experience rather than through accepting the teachings of other people.*

*I realized that was the way I had to do it because it is in my nature to doubt and question rather than to believe. Therefore religions that ask one to accept on faith were simply out. I could not even begin to get near them.”*

Ajahn Sumedho is referring to the Buddha’s scientific attitude towards His teachings. In His advice to the Kālāmas, the Buddha made it clear that we should only accept His teaching after question and study, and only if we feel that it is to the moral benefit of self and others to do so. The Buddha said:

*"Come, O Kālāmas, do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do*

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

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

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

*Anguttara Nikāya*

In the Gnānasāra-Samuccaya the Buddha said:

*"As the wise test gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing (on a piece of touchstone), so are you to accept my words after examining them and not out of regard for me."*

This scientific approach of studying, questioning, understanding, practising, experiencing and accepting has not been taught by any other religious teacher. The very essence of science is the fact that one should not accept anything without careful examination, study, questioning, testing and observation. Over 2500 years ago the Buddha, who had no qualms about anyone questioning the Dhamma - The Truth - used this method of teaching.

Gerald Du Pre, author of *Buddhism and Science*, *Buddhism and Psychotherapy*, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Science*, *Scientific Buddhism and Science and the Wheel of Life*, states, "It is this method, this down-to-earth attitude, this spirit of free inquiry, this combining of logical theory, acute observation and practical application, which has made Buddhism so hard to classify (as a

religion, philosophy, or science) in the past. I see no reason, and I have looked hard for one, why Buddhism would not be termed a science... I argue that Buddhism is a science because it combines observation, experiment and theory in a spirit of free inquiry.”

Science reveals the physical laws of cause and effect. But how many persons are aware that over 2500 years ago the Buddha proclaimed the law of cause and effect (kamma vipaka) and the doctrine of dependent origination which is a parallel that is applied to the mental and moral sphere as opposed to just the physical sphere. Dr. Paul Dahlke of Germany in his *Buddhist Essays* states, “ It is the knowledge of the law of cause and effect, action and reaction, that urges a man to refrain from evil and gather good. A believer in cause and effect knows only too well that it is his own actions that make his life miserable or otherwise.

Scientific research has shown that everything is made up of tiny particles called atoms. These are combined to form structures that give the illusion of permanence and solidity. But in truth they are in constant motion and in a state of constant flux. The human body, which appears to be solid and static, is in a constant state of flux with bio-chemical reactions and cells that constantly die and renew themselves.

A few years ago an American by the name of Donald Glaser received the Nobel Prize for Physics because he invented a machine to measure the number of times a sub-atomic particle changed in one second. He called his instrument the bubble chamber and found that in one second a sub-atomic particle arises and vanishes  $10^{22}$  times. It was already known to scientists that these particles which make up **any** substance arise and pass away with great rapidity. The invention of the bubble machine quantified their knowledge.

Over 2500 years ago the Buddha realized this Truth. He realized that at every moment the matter that comprised what we call self, changed. Through insight meditation and a concentrated mind, He penetrated deeply into His own nature and realized that the entire material structure is made up of sub-atomic particles (kalāpas)

which are continuously arising and vanishing. “In the blinking of an eye”, He said, “ these particles are arising and passing away many trillions of times.” Unbelievable as it seems, this body which appears to be solid and permanent is in actual fact composed of sub-atomic particles that are changing at every second. Not only did the Buddha declare that all conditioned phenomena were impermanent, but by analyzing this being we called self, He also realized that there was no permanent entity called self. All that existed was an ever-changing process. The Doctrine of Anatta analyzes the splitting of existence to its constituent parts. The doctrine of Dependent Origination synthesizes these components and shows that they are conditionally related. In his work, Gerald Du Pre has shown how the Buddhist philosophy of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and no permanent self or soul (anatta), blend with modern science with remarkable clarity.

Textbooks claim that scientific psychology was founded by Wilhelm Wundt in the latter half of the 17th century in Germany. And yet over 2500 years ago the Buddha experienced and taught the doctrine of no soul which is very similar to Wundt’s theory. Both the Buddha and Wundt discarded the soul and replaced it with matter and the experience of the mind (nāma, rupa and the skandas).

Scientists are still debating the origin of the Earth. They have, however, accepted that at one time the Earth was covered with water and that the first living being was an asexual, fluid, one-celled animal. They have also accepted evolution. Dr. Herbert Wendt states: “The ocean is the mother of life. In the sea’s primeval mud lived the first animals. Ninety percent of plants live there even today, and in water every form of life known today originated.”

The Buddha’s description of the Earth’s beginning goes further back than what scientists have discovered. But it corresponds to what scientists now accept. It is interesting to read the Buddha’s description of life on Earth, in the Agganna Sutta. Starting after the evolving period, He says that a time comes when the Earth is fully covered with water. Then, due to the heat of the sun, a cusp or thin

film forms on the surface of the water rather like the scum that is formed when rice is boiled. An asexual, fluid animal is evolved when the elements needed for life such as heat, moisture, air, etc., are present. The next form of life He talks about are fungi. Scientists now claim that, given proper temperature, water, carbon and nitrogen in some form, as was the case on primitive Earth, life is almost inevitable.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the Buddha has not specifically spoken of man evolving from apes it is interesting to read His description of early man at the beginning of the next cycle of human life. In the *Anāgata-Vamsa* He states that there will come a time when the ‘human’ lifespan will be about ten years. Females of five years will be of marriageable (procreating) age. Among such ‘humans’ the taste of butter, sugar and salt will disappear. Kudrusa grain will be the highest kind of food. Among such ‘men’ the ten moral courses of conduct will disappear, and the ten immoral codes of conduct will flourish. Just as today homage is paid to the wise, the pious and the noble, at this time homage will be paid to the ignoble. Among such ‘humans’ there will be no bar to intermarriage with mother, with mother’s sister, etc. ‘Mankind’ will fall into promiscuity like goats, sheep, fowl and swine. The Buddha then goes on to say that over a very, very long period of time, man will develop morally and intellectually and his lifespan will slowly increase.

Dr. Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe, a well-known interplanetary biologist and evolutionary scientist, has shown remarkably well how the revolutionary theories of Charles Darwin and others such as Gregor Mendel and Julian Huxley blend in with the Buddha’s teaching<sup>4</sup>.

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3. *Buddhism, Biology and Exobiology* by Dr. Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe.

4. *Natural Selection and Evolution* by Dr. Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe.

Astronomers such as Sir James Jean say that the universe is vast and probably equal to the number of grains of sand on all the seashores. Dr. Appleton, President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, claimed that evidence through a radio telescope (as opposed to a visual telescope) revealed that there is at least one more world system beyond our own. Three British mathematical astronomers, H Bondi, T. Gold and Fred Hoyle state: "The universe looks the same no matter how far we go forward or backward". They believe in a steady state of universe, with no beginning or end. Over 2500 years ago the Buddha, with His Buddha vision, talked of the vastness of the universe. Without the use of any telescope He talked of a very complicated universe and observed 10,000 world systems (comparable to modern-day galaxies) which were within His domain. The Buddha also said that there were many, many more world systems beyond the ones within His domain (pita-sakwalas).

The possibility of life outside the universe is now being discussed by scientists. Dr. Harlow Shapley of Harvard University and Dr. Edward Purcell believe that one hundred million planets in our Milky Way alone have intelligent life. Professor Gamow of the University of Colorado is of the same opinion. Dr. Stephen H. Doyle of Rand Corporation, USA, in his book *Habitable Planets of Man*, states that in our galaxy alone there are likely to be some 640,000,000 Earth-like, life-bearing planets and that, besides ours, there are many billions and billions of other galaxies. Dr. Fred Hoyle of the University of Cambridge concludes that there are various forms of life on other planets in the universe. The Buddha, however, was quite lucid in His description of other forms of life. Not only did the Buddha describe other forms of life but He communicated with them. He also explained in detail 31 planes of existence where different life-forms existed, and thousands of world systems.

Science is just beginning to accept the importance of the mind. The role that the mind plays in the causing and curing of disease is now recognized. In his research Dr. J.B. Rhine has shown that one person's thoughts could strike another person's thoughts. He has

also recorded instances where the mind has acquired knowledge without the use of the five senses and even reported future events accurately. The Buddha recognized the importance and supreme power of the mind. In the Dhammapada the Buddha said, “Mind is foremost, mind is supreme and everything is mind-made.” The Buddha developed His mind to have experiences other than those experienced by the five senses. He developed His mind to go beyond time and space. The Buddha could project His image, travel through air, project His thoughts and voice, and see and hear beyond the normal vision and hearing of man. He also taught us the Path to show others how to achieve the same.

The analysis of the mind found in the Abhidhamma over 2500 years ago is only now being recognized by doctors and scientists. Dr. Graham Howe, an eminent Harley Street psychologist, in his book *The Invisible Anatomy* states, “In the course of their work many psychologists have found, as the pioneer work of C.G. Jung has shown, that we are near to (the) Buddha. To read a little Buddhism is to realize that the Buddhists knew 2500 years ago far more about our modern problems of psychology than they have yet been given credit for. They studied these problems long ago and found the answers too. We are now rediscovering the Ancient Wisdom of the East.” Dr. Shanti Tayal, a practising psychotherapist trained in the USA, states that many early mental diseases can be controlled by recognizing the Four Noble Truths and gradually practising the Eight-fold Noble Path.

In general we limit our knowledge to that which we can experience with the six senses (the mind is the sixth sense). As we are limited by the capabilities of our sense organs we tend to perceive our limited experiences as absolute. Therefore with confidence we look into an empty room and say that there is nothing in the room though in fact the room is teeming with life forms that are so small that they cannot be seen by the naked eye. Similarly there are many sounds that we cannot hear. The universe as experienced by the wise is much larger, as they can, with their developed mind, tap into other sources of energy. Truth is absolute. However, what we perceive as Truth differs as it is limited by the capacity of our senses. The Buddha showed us a path to develop our sense organs so as to experience absolute Truth.

The Buddha’s teaching is a practical teaching that could be followed and experienced by others in this very same life. As such

we have the testimony of great disciples and contemporaries of the Buddha such as Sāriputta, Mahā Moggalāna, Mahā Kassapa, and Anuruddha, who, by using the teachings of the Buddha, developed their minds to achieve similar experiences. However, it is not only contemporaries of the Buddha who could recreate the Buddha's experience. By following the Buddha's Noble Path, one hundred, two hundred, and even five hundred years after His passing away, Arahants such as Sabbakāmi, Moggaliputta Tissa, Mahinda, Sanghamittā and Nāgasena, and great scholars such as Buddhaghosa experienced and confirmed His teachings. Throughout Buddhism's peaceful existence of 2500 years, we have the experiential testimony of great men and women as to the truth of the Buddha's teaching. Just as in science a test can be recreated and observed by another, the Buddha's observations of truth (teachings) can, if practised, be experienced by others.

Even though science has not as yet endorsed rebirth, which is a fundamental concept of Buddhism, rebirth is in keeping with the law of conservation of mass and energy. Science states that nothing is created or destroyed, and that there is only a transformation from one form to another. At death the body deteriorates and forms minerals, salts, fluids, gasses, etc. Should not this law then also apply to the mind?

Despite the fact that science has not as yet endorsed rebirth many scientists and doctors have accepted it as the only possible explanation for the many verifiable, documented incidence of persons who can remember their past lives through past-life regression. There are many doctors such as Brian L. Weiss MD (*Many Lives, Many Masters*) who have helped patients with mental disorders by the use of hypnosis. With the help of the doctor, patients have transgressed into past lives through hypnosis and found the explanation for their ailment. Dr. Weiss, documents in detail 15 past births of his patient, Catherine. Dr. Gina Cerminara, in her book *Many Mansions*, explores the past-life experiences of over one thousand persons given by Edgar Cacey, a Christian preacher, under self-hypnosis. Francis Story in his book *Rebirth as Doctrine and Experience* and Canadian-born Ian Stevenson MD in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* methodically researches, verifies, and documents cases of persons who can remember their past lives in South-East Asia and other parts of the world. Rebirth is no longer a doctrine endorsed only by the East. *Reincarnation in World Thought* edited by Head and Cranston, lists over 400 great men of the West who believed in rebirth:

scientists like Thomas Huxley, astronomers like Professor Gustaf Stromberg, philosophers like Pythagoras, Plotinus and Plato, poets like Shelley, Tennyson and Wordsworth, great writers like Tolstoy, Browning, Kipling and Longfellow, musicians like Bruno Walter, Sir Henry Wood and Yehudi Menuhin, statesmen like Benjamin Franklin and Lloyd George... The list is impressive.

2500 years ago the Buddha explained that phenomena such as thunder, lightning, volcanoes, earthquakes, rain, and tornados were acts of inorganic order that He called Utu Niyāma. They were not acts of God. He also explained the order of germs and seeds (comparable to genetics) where traits are handed down from parent to child, which He called Bija Niyāma. The Buddha also acknowledged Laws of norm or forces such as gravity which He called Dhamma Niyāma. And He achieved all of this wisdom without the help of the divine or any external instruments such as a telescope, microscope or test tubes.

Science is just beginning to discover truths that the Buddha realized over 2500 years ago. The Buddha's knowledge was infinite. His teachings, which were documented in 84,000 suttas (discourses), were but a fragment of His knowledge. With compassion the Buddha taught all that would be required to reach emancipation and sifted through and discarded the knowledge that would not lead to emancipation<sup>5</sup>. The Buddha said,

*"I have taught the Truth  
Without making any esoteric (privileged)  
And exoteric (secret) doctrine.  
For in respect of the Truth  
The Tathāgata has no such thing as a closed fist  
Of a teacher who keeps something back."*

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5. The Buddha once picked up a handful of leaves from a forest and asked His monks if there was more leaves in His hand or in the trees in the forest. The monks replied that there were more leaves in the trees in the forest. The Buddha then stated that what He had not taught was like the leaves in the forest and what He had taught was like the leaves in His hand. So as not to confuse and distract His disciples, the compassionate Buddha had taught only that which was required for emancipation. Despite this fact we have 84,000 discourses of the Buddha and His disciples in the Tripitaka. How vast then must have been His knowledge?

*Parinibbāna Sutta*

Some of what the Buddha taught has since been discovered by scientists. Scientists continue to conquer the world and acquire knowledge through outward study. The Buddha conquered the world and acquired supreme knowledge through inward study. The riddle of life is locked within each of us and is available to each of us. By following His scientific teaching we can each break through this delusion and unlock the wisdom that lies veiled from view. I will close with this testimony to the Buddha's Teaching from the eminent scientist Albert Einstein:

*"The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God, avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism."*

This is why Buddhism is compared to science.



## CHAPTER 4

### **How has Buddhism contributed to the position of women?**

*“Women, like men, are spiritually and intellectually capable of reaching the highest stage of spiritual development.”*

*Samyutta Nikāya*

**Question** - It is said that the Buddha made radical changes to the position of women in India. What was the Buddha’s contribution to women?

**Answer** - Before we examine what the Buddha did for women, it is important to understand the religious and social attitudes towards women both in the present day and age and in the past, at the time of the Buddha. At the dawn of the twenty-first century we see that women all over the world, in Africa, Asia, Europe and America, still face prejudice. At times religions have contributed towards some of these prejudices. Social and cultural attitudes have also played a large role in the struggle that women face.

We still have religions that claim that man was created in the image of God and that introduce men as the sons of God. However, a similar status for women, as the daughters of God, is not seen. Some religions that believe in a permanent soul hold the view that soul exists only in men. This belief has given credence to the theory that women cannot go to heaven through their own effort. Some religions do not allow women in their places of worship and some do not allow women to read their scriptures. Some religions only allow men in their clergy. Such views have made it possible for men to take the leading role while keeping women in the background, as less important members of society in religious, social and political issues.

Social and cultural beliefs have also led to prejudice against women. Some cultures believe that only a son or grandson can

perform the very important funeral rites which lead to the heavenly rebirth of fathers and grandfathers. Large dowries or marriage settlements are still required in some countries to give a daughter in marriage. While an unmarried man is considered a happy bachelor, an unmarried woman is looked down upon as an 'old maid'. Some cultures stripped all rights from a widow by expecting her to follow her husband onto the funeral pyre at his death. Women who did not bear a son were slighted, and it was quite acceptable for a man to take another wife if his first wife could not bear children. The fact that the gender of the baby is determined by the man held no significance in this unfair practice. Until recently, many cultures felt that women's place was in the home, looking after children and household tasks. Even when women began to enter the workforce and worked side by side with men they received lesser pay, creating a myth that their work was somehow of a lesser quality. In some countries women still do not have the right to vote.

Susan B. Anthony, an American woman, pioneered the drive for equality for women about 150 years ago, in 1848. Since then, the movement, now with wider objectives, has forged ahead under various women's organizations. These women rightfully believe that they have a role to play with men in contributing to the betterment of the world through a better society. The United Nations Charter went further to grant the principles of equality and freedom to all women. The Commission on the Status of Women, created by the United Nations, investigated issues relating to discrimination based on gender, and issues such as women's political rights, equal pay for equal work, education and economic opportunities for women.

Though much has been accomplished through these women's movements relative to their participation in the social, economic and political fields, the issue of real freedom and equality has not as yet been achieved universally. And so we find women prime ministers and presidents in some countries and other countries where women still cannot vote, countries that encourage women in traditionally male-dominated occupations such as engineering, and countries that still keep women out of the workforce, countries that look down upon widows and divorcees, and countries that think nothing of women having many consecutive husbands, countries that allow women to dress as they please in daring, revealing clothes, and countries that hide the beauty of their womenfolk under voluminous robes. In truth it must be said that at the dawn of

the twenty-first century, women are still struggling for fair and equitable opportunities.

To fully appreciate the courage and fortitude of the Buddha and the radical changes He wrought, one has to be aware of the position of women in India at the time of the Buddha. At that time the Brahmin law-giver was Manu, whose code of law was the most anti-feminist literature one could find. Manu deprived women of their religious rights and spiritual life<sup>6</sup>. Women were prohibited from reading the Vedas (religious scriptures). A woman could not attain heaven through her own merit. She could reach heaven only through explicit obedience to her husband. Manu elaborated the myth that all women were sinful and prone to evil. He said, "Neither shame nor decorum nor honesty nor timidity is the cause of a woman's chastity, it is but the want of a suitor alone. She should therefore be kept under constant vigilance; and the best way to do it is to keep her occupied in the endless task of motherhood and domestic duties so she has no time to make mischief."

In China, Confucius, a contemporary of the Buddha, spoke in a similar tone. He outlined in detail the duties of the wife to the husband, and the wife to the mother-in-law, but not vice-versa.

It is against this anti-women backdrop that the Buddha made His well-known statement to the distraught King Pasanadi when his wife Queen Mallikā gave birth to a daughter. He said, "A female offspring, O king, may prove even more noble than a male...."

The Buddha gave religious equality to women when He established the order of the nuns. He appointed two female chief disciples to help with His growing congregation of nuns, just as He had two male chief disciples to help with His monks. The Buddha acknowledged the spiritual potential of both men and women. He said that women, like men, were spiritually and intellectually capable of reaching the highest stage of spiritual development -

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6. Information taken from "The Position of Women in Buddhism", a research paper presented at the University of Western Australia by Dr. Dewaraja.

Arahanthship. Why then, you may ask, did the Gotama Buddha hesitate to form the female order, when the Buddhas of the past had established the Order of the Nuns? Not because women were intellectually incapable of reaching Arahanthship. It was to strengthen Mahā Pajāpati's resolve, because within the society that prevailed at that time the Buddha saw that ordination as a nun would require great hardship and enormous resolve, especially for women of royal birth. He also realized that society's treatment of women would make it difficult for Him to ensure the safety and respect of His nuns.

The Buddha foresaw that the span of the Buddha Dhamma on Earth would be reduced as a result of the establishment of the Order of Nuns. He also foresaw that the female order would not last as long as the male order. It is documented that the Order of the Nuns disappeared from Theravāda Buddhism approximately 500 years after the Buddha's Parinibbāna. The Order of the Nuns however, still operates under the Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism.

To minimize the effects of society's treatment of women, and to protect His nuns, the Buddha established eight additional Vinaya rules that women had to follow. Some of the rules were for their protection; others ensured that they would respect the monks who had to protect them. It was after the Buddha's second chief disciple, Uppalavannā, was raped in a hut in the forest where she was meditating that the Buddha had nunneries built within the city. It was clear that the nuns could not go into forests, caves and glens and meditate in solitude as did the monks. The physical and social differences that existed between men and women had to be acknowledged and accepted. The Buddha changed the code of discipline for nuns so that they would no longer meditate in forests and lonely glades on their own.

In the Sigālovāda Sutta the Buddha outlined the duties of a husband to his wife and the duties of a wife to her husband. If adhered to these would lead to a happy and prosperous marriage. He said, *"In five ways should a man administer to his wife. By respect, by courtesy, by faithfulness, by handing over authority and by providing her with ornaments. A wife in turn should love him,*

*perform her duties well, be hospitable to kin of both, be faithful and watch over his property by skill and industry when managing all business.*” It is clear that the Buddha felt that the happiness and prosperity of a marriage is the responsibility of both the man and the woman.

When Visākā, the Buddha's chief female benefactor, came to the monastery dressed in rich clothes and ornaments, the Buddha did not dissuade her. Neither did He prevent Visākā and her maidservants from tending to the needs of the sick monks. The Buddha gave women freedom to move and associate with men. There was never any segregation of His devotees based on gender.

Despite the Buddha's acknowledgement of the intellectual capabilities of women, there were many men who were not willing to change the views that had been ingrained in them for years. Just prior to the death of the Buddha's foster mother, Pajāpati, He asked her to perform some miracles to show the men among the people gathered, the error of their thinking. In the Apadāna the Buddha said, *“O Gotami, perform a miracle to dispel the wrong views of those foolish men who are in doubt with regard to the spiritual potentialities of women.”*

Perhaps the greatest honour the Buddha paid to women and motherhood was when He walked behind the body of Mahā Pajāpati Gotami, His foster mother, at her funeral. The Buddha never walked behind anybody. Yet to respect the mother who had fed and cared for Him, the Buddha walked behind the carriage that carried her body to its cremation.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the Buddha's teachings, His liberal views, and the freedom He gave to women, there were many men who opposed His views. After the Buddha's Parinibbāna, His personal attendant, Ānanda, was criticized for the role he played in establishing the female order. Some also admonished him for allowing women to pay homage to the Buddha's remains prior to the men. “The women”, they said, “had soiled the Buddha's body with their tears.” India was not ready for the compassionate and radical changes made by the Buddha.

The freedom the Buddha gave to women and the equality that He gave to all persons by condemning the degrading caste system ultimately contributed to the demise of Buddhism in India. The Mohammedans crushed Buddhism in India during the 6th and 7th century AD, giving the Brahmins the opportunity to overpower the weakened religion. The very powerful and wealthy Brahmins regained their power and India went back to an era similar to that which existed prior to the Buddha.

Even though I have not read any Buddhist literature which supports the notion that a person is born as a woman because of an unwholesome deed (akusala kamma) committed in a previous life, I have heard some Buddhists say this. In fact, in 1399 A.D. the Queen Mother of Thailand founded a monastery and commemorated the event with an inscription in which she requested "by the powers of my merit may I be reborn as a male." And yet those like Mahā Māyā, who aspired to be the mother of a Buddha, and Yasodharā, who aspired to be His helpmate, had performed enormous amounts of wholesome deeds over countless years to ensure that their aspirations be fulfilled. The Buddha Himself, when striving for perfection as the Bodhisatta, was in some births born as a woman.

The Buddha did, however, acknowledge that some forms of suffering or discomfort were unique to women. Discomfort and pain from menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth are unique to women. At the time of the Buddha, Indian women had to live with their in-laws and were quite subservient to their husbands and in-laws. This, the Buddha said, was suffering unique to women because of the accepted role of women in society in India at the time.

It is appropriate at this point to examine the effect Buddhism has had on the position of women in Buddhist countries. The freedom, equality and respect that the Buddha gave women had far-reaching results. Before the transforming effects of Western influence, writings from Europeans travelling in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Tibet, Burma and Thailand illustrate that women in these Buddhist

countries had more freedom, respect and equality than their counterparts in neighbouring countries.

Hugh Boyd, who went to the Kandian court of Ceylon in 1782, writes, "The Cingalese (Sinhalese) women exhibit a striking contrast to all Oriental Nations in some of the most prominent and distinctive features of their character. Instead of that lazy apathy, insipid modesty and sour austerity, which have characterised the sex throughout the Asiatic world in every period of history, in this island they possess that active sensibility, winning bashfulness and amicable ease, for which the women in modern Europe are peculiarly famed. The Cingalese women are not merely the slaves and mistresses, but in many respects the companions and friends of their husbands.... "

R. Grant Brown, who was the revenue officer for 28 years in Burma (1889 - 1917), remarked, "Every writer of Burma has commented on the remarkable degree of independence attained by the women. Their position is more surprising in view of the subjection and seclusion of wives and daughters in the neighbouring countries of India and China..."<sup>7</sup>

A British envoy, struck by the equal treatment accorded to royalty in Burma, wrote, " The queen sat with the king on the throne to receive the embassy. They are referred to as the two sovereign lords."

J.G.D. Campbell, Education Adviser to the Government of Siam (Thailand), wrote in 1902, "In Siam, at any rate, whatever be the causes, the position of women on the whole is a healthy one and contrasts favourably with that among other Oriental people."

Sir Charles Bell, British Political Representative to Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim in 1928, wrote, "When a traveller enters Tibet from the neighbouring nations of India and China, few things impress him more vigorously or more deeply than the position of the Tibetan women. Accustomed to mix with the other sex throughout their

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7. Even though India and China were once Buddhist countries, Hinduism is the predominant religion in India at present and communism effectively destroyed the influence of Buddhism in China. Hinduism and Confucianism both tend to place women in a subordinate position.

lives, they are at ease with men and can hold their own as well as any women in the world... And the solid fact remains that in Buddhist countries women hold a remarkably good position. Burma, Ceylon and Tibet exhibit the same picture."

Buddhism is a realistic religion. Both men and women are required for life. One cannot live without the other. In an era when women were mere chattels and slaves, the Buddha, with His infinite compassion, gave them their rightful place. Dr. Dewaraja concluded her research paper on *The Position of Women in Buddhism* by saying, "Buddhism saved the daughter from indignity, elevated the wife to a position approximating to equality, and retrieved the widow from abject misery."

Women bravely continue their struggle for equality and freedom. Real freedom, however, is not equal pay for equal work, it is not the right to vote, it is not the right to dress as one pleases, and it is not the opportunity to work side by side with men in the political, social and religious arena. Real freedom is freedom from the bondage of suffering. This freedom has been given to women by the Buddha. No amount of public debates, demonstrations or universal charters can bring about this freedom. This freedom can be achieved only through spiritual development. It can only be achieved by the practice of generosity, infinite compassion and loving kindness, and wisdom as taught by the Buddha. The Buddha, the Great Emancipator, with His boundless compassion, gave women real freedom. At a time when the mainstream religion did not allow women to read the scriptures, at a time when it was felt that women could only go to heaven through explicit obedience to their husband, He taught them the path to emancipation and helped countless women achieve the supreme bliss of Nibbāna. The gratitude felt by His female disciples who experienced the bliss of emancipation, is summarized by Mahā Pajāpathi, who was instrumental in the establishment of the female order:

*"Buddha, Hero, homage to you,  
O best of all beings,  
Who released me and many other beings from pain.*

*All pain is known: craving as the cause is dried up;  
The Noble Eightfold way has been developed;  
Cessation has been attained by me.*

*Formerly I was mother, son, father, brother and grandmother;  
Not having proper knowledge;  
I journeyed on (in samsāra) without expiation.*

*I have indeed seen the Blessed One;  
This is the last body.  
Journeying on from rebirth to rebirth has been eliminated;  
There is now no renewed existence (for me).*

*I see the disciples all together,  
Putting forth energy, resolute, always with strong effort;  
This is homage to the Buddha.”*

*Truly for the sake of many,  
Māyā bore Gotama;  
She thrust away the mass of pain,  
Of those struck by sickness and death.”*

*Therīgāthā 157-162*

Kema, the Buddha’s first female chief disciple, revered the Buddha in gratitude for directing people away from image worship and toward the practice of compassion and wisdom.

*“Fools who do not know reality  
In forest glades they seek retreat  
And worship in reverence, planets, stars, or fire  
To quench passion’s impurity.*

*The great Buddha, noblest of all men  
I who worship Him  
From sorrow of repeated birth am free  
The Noble Buddha Order, I protect devotedly.*

*Therīgāthā 139-144*

Bhaddā Kundalakesi, the debating nun, was famous for her knowledge of many religions and philosophies that existed at the time of the Buddha. Taking to the lonely life of an ascetic after a traumatic personal experience, she studied under many teachers.

Bhaddā soon mastered their knowledge and challenged religious leaders to debates, travelling from city to city. Bhaddā expressed her gratitude to the Buddha for helping her to move away from extreme forms of ascetic practice to the practice of infinite compassion and wisdom that led to her final deliverance. The Buddha appointed Bhaddā as the nun foremost in quick understanding of the Dhamma, just as He appointed Bāhiya foremost in quick understanding among the monks.<sup>8</sup>

*“Formerly I travelled in a single cloth,  
With plucked hair, covered with mud;  
Imagining flaws in the flawless,  
And seeing no flaws in what is flawed.”*

*“He then taught me the Dhamma,  
The aggregates, sense bases, and elements;  
The Leader told me about foulness,  
Impermanence, suffering and non self.*

*Having heard the Dhamma from Him,  
I purified the vision of the Dhamma;  
When I had understood true Dhamma,  
(I asked for) the going forth and ordination.*

*Right on the spot my mind was released,  
Totally freed by the end of clinging;  
The Victor then appointed me the chief,  
Of those with quick understanding.”*

*Therīgāthā 107 and Apadāna 38, 39 & 46*

While it is true that the Buddha’s attitude towards women had far-reaching and lasting effects for women in Buddhist countries, this is the Buddha’s unique, timeless, incomparable contribution to women.

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8. Read *Relatives and Disciples of the Buddha* by Radhika Abeysekera for more examples drawn from the life stories of nuns.



## CHAPTER 5

### Who is a Buddhist?

*“Those to whom the Dhamma is clear  
are not led into other doctrines;  
Perfectly enlightened with perfect knowledge,  
they walk evenly over the uneven.*

*Samyutta Nikāya I, 4*

**Question** - Persons born to Buddhist parents often think of themselves as Buddhists. What was the Buddha’s definition of a Buddhist?

**Answer** - Most of us call ourselves Buddhists because we are born to Buddhist parents and had an upbringing in a Buddhist household. Sometimes people think that taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha through (mechanical) recitation makes one a Buddhist. Some feel that casual observance of the precepts makes one a Buddhist. Some feel that reciting the Suttas in Pali makes one a Buddhist. And some think that the offering of flowers and lamps and praying to the gods make one a Buddhist.

What would be the Buddha’s definition of a Buddhist? At the time of the Buddha there were no Buddhists and no religion known as Buddhism. We had the Buddha, His teaching known as the Dhamma, and His ordained disciples known as the Sangha. We also had people who practised the Dhamma and many more who did not practise the Dhamma.

Even though the Buddha did not define the term Buddhist, it is easy to surmise from His teachings. The Buddha indirectly showed us His views on the birthright of children of Buddhist parents. In the Vasala Sutta He proclaimed *that it was not by birth that one was a Brahmin but by deeds that one became a Brahmin*. At the

time of the Buddha in India the Brahmins were the priests and very highly regarded and respected as the chosen people of the Creator God Brahma. They were the highest caste in India. The roots of the religion known as Hinduism lies in Brahmanism. By extending His views to the children of Buddhist parents as opposed to Brahmin parents, we have a fair assessment of the fact that the Buddha did not feel that birth to Buddhist parents in itself made one a Buddhist.

In the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta there are two indications of the Buddha's definition of a Buddhist. The first lies in the comments He made when He saw the beautiful Sal trees in the garden of the Mallas. The Buddha reached the Sal garden of the Malla's and saw that the twin Sal trees were in full bloom even though it was out of season. He then said:

*"It is not thus that the Tathāgata is respected,  
venerated, honoured and revered.  
Whenever a Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni, Upāsaka or Upāsikā  
lives in accordance with the Teachings,  
conducts himself dutifully and acts righteously,  
it is he who respects, reverences, venerates, honours and reveres  
the Tathāgata with the highest homage."*

The second was His praise of the conduct of the monk Dhammārāma. Just before the Buddha passed away many disciples came to pay their respects to Him. The monk Dhammārāma, however, did not come. Instead, he remained in his abode, deep in meditation. The Buddha approached Dhammārāma and asked the reason for his absence. Dhammārāma said, "Lord, I knew that Your Reverence would pass away shortly and I thought that the best way to honour the Teacher was by attaining Arahanthship<sup>9</sup> before the passing away of Your Reverence." The Buddha, pleased with his reply, said:

*"Excellent, excellent! He who loves me should act as this monk.  
He honours me best who practises my teaching best."*

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9. The term used for a person who has attained Nibbāna.

In the Dhammapada the Buddha made clear His views on the importance of the study and practice of the Dhamma. Ānanda, at the request of King Pasenadi Kosala, was teaching his consorts Queen Mallika and Queen Vāsabha Khattiyā. Queen Mallikā listened attentively to Ānanda, questioned him, and applied the teachings she learnt. Vāsabha Khattiyā was inattentive and did not benefit by the well-spoken words of Ānanda. Ānanda informed the Buddha of the difference in approach of the two royal ladies and how ineffective the Dhamma was on his kinswoman, Vāsabha Khattiyā. The Buddha confirmed Ānanda's observation by saying:

*“As a flower is lovely, beautiful, but scentless  
Even so fruitless is the well-spoken word of one  
to those who do not practise it.  
As a flower is lovely, beautiful and scent-laden  
Even so fruitful is the well-spoken word of one  
to those who practise it”.*

*Dhammapada 52 and 53*

Time and time again, the Buddha in His teachings made it clear that to Him practice of His teachings is what was important. The Buddha's Teaching is more of a philosophy than a religion. It is a way of life. Believing in the Buddha or the Dhamma would not in itself lead to emancipation. Neither would praying to the gods or the Buddha lead to emancipation. In fact, the Buddha discouraged prayer by saying that those who observed the precepts and performed righteous deeds would be protected by the gods without having to resort to prayer. He also said that praying to the gods for emancipation was like praying to the opposite bank of a river to come to you so that you did not have to cross its overflowing waters. Praying for emancipation, according to the Buddha, was a pointless task.

The Buddha was interested in the practice and experiencing of the Dhamma. It is clear that one had to first study the Dhamma so that one had the knowledge to practise. But knowledge in itself without practice was of little value. One had to practise the teachings for self-realization. And because we are at different levels in our spiritual development we require at times the calming effects of the rituals and ceremonies to create the environment for study and

practice. Rituals and ceremonies are of little value if one's mind is not concentrated and one's heart is filled with greed and hatred. But they could be of great value if they help to calm the mind to study, meditate, and practise the Dhamma. These cultural aspects are also important to children as they help to preserve their heritage, and provide stability and continuity. They should be performed mindfully with full understanding so that they form the foundation for meditation. They should not, however, be the full extent of one's practice.

As such we can surmise that the first step to being a Buddhist is knowledge of the Dhamma. But how much of the teachings does one have to know before one can say with confidence that one knows and has a good understanding of the Dhamma? We have 82,000 documented discourses (suttas) of the Buddha and 2,000 documented suttas of His disciples. What percentage of these suttas would you have to know and understand before you could state with confidence that you know the Dhamma?

Often I am invited to events conducted by other religions. I attend these functions mainly because I have found that each experience gives me an opportunity to learn, which, when applied, helps me to improve. I am going to share with you one lesson that I have learnt from my Christian friends. My Christian friends consistently attend church every Sunday. Young Roman Catholics attend church every Sunday for mass and also attend religion classes. I am told that they have to, in order to receive confirmation as Roman Catholics. Then, as youths and adults, they continue to go to church every Sunday to renew their faith and refresh their memory of the teachings they learnt as children.

The Buddha too encouraged His devotees to set aside one day each week for religious observance. He encouraged His lay devotees to practise His teachings on special religious holidays (uposatha) which were tied to the four phases of the moon. In fact, Anātha Pindika, the Buddha's chief patron, tricked his errant son Kāla by paying him a thousand gold coins to attend a religious day at the monastery. After coming once, Kāla decided to take a break from his business and join his family every week. It is very unfortunate that we Buddhists have given up this practice. Just imagine the knowledge and practice we would have had if we had attended temple for one hour every Sunday. How much more knowledge and practice we would have had then, than we have now. Forty weeks (even with latitude for vacation and sickness) over 30 years

would have given 1200 hours of the Dhamma. How much more of the Dhamma we would have been able to practise and how much more confidence we would have had in the Dhamma if we had attended the temple and listened to the Dhamma and/or meditated on (most) Sundays for the past thirty years?

We have many professionals in the audience. Where would we be today if we decided that the knowledge we learnt in college was sufficient to carry us through our whole career? How much money and time do we invest in continuous education and research to update and renew our knowledge? Knowledge of the Dhamma is no different from any other knowledge. You need to learn and practise continuously in order to improve continuously.

To arrive at the definition of who is a Buddhist I have used the seven-fold Āryan treasure that the Buddha gave His little son Rāhula when he asked his father for his inheritance. The Buddha did not give Rāhula His crown, kingdom or wealth. Instead He gave a more valuable treasure. He gave Rahula the seven-fold Āryan treasure of the Dhamma. In my opinion the presence or practice of these seven elements makes one a Buddhist. The extent of their presence will determine the caliber or spiritual effort of the person. The first two address knowledge of the Dhamma. The latter four address the practice and experience of the Dhamma. They are as follows:

1. Suta - Learning of the Dhamma. This is important, as without knowledge of the Dhamma one cannot practise the Dhamma. Knowledge of the Dhamma can be acquired through reading books on the Dhamma, listening to Dhamma talks, taking part in Dhamma discussion and by teaching the Dhamma. Sometimes people claim that they need not study the Dhamma because they know the Dhamma. Such people should reflect on how many of the 84,000 documented Suttas of the Buddha they know and understand that they can make such a claim. One must also realize that persons such as Tissa and Santati, who attained enlightenment after hearing just four lines of the Dhamma, had reached very high levels of spiritual development in past births. They were the exception, not the rule. Knowledge of the Dhamma is also important because without knowledge of the Dhamma one cannot have confidence in the Dhamma.

2. Saddha - Confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and confidence in yourself built through study, analysis, questioning, understanding and experience of the Dhamma. If one does not

have confidence in the Buddha Dhamma and in oneself, one will not be motivated to practise the Dhamma and one will be vulnerable to missionaries of other religions that evangelize. One will also often resort to practices that are not in accordance with the Buddha's teachings such as prayers and vows to the devas. When one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha one should do so with full confidence. Confidence that is built through study, questioning, analysis, practice and experience. It must be stressed, however, that full confidence will be gained only through practice and experience of Truth.

3. Cāga - Giving, or the proper practice of generosity. The Buddha gave some guidelines that would help us in the proper practice of generosity. Persons who wish to practice generosity should ensure that:

- They give that which is earned lawfully and righteously
- They give clean things
- They give what is choice (valuable)
- They give at the proper time
- They give what is suitable (for the person and occasion)
- They give with care and consideration of the other's feelings and needs
- They give frequently
- They calm their mind by giving
- After giving they become happy

As Buddhists we practise generosity to reduce craving and purify the mind. It is clear then that gifts given carelessly and gifts given for public honour and with expectation of return do not constitute the proper practice of generosity as per the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha also said that the mind of the giver is very important when practising generosity.

- Before the gift he is glad of heart
- In giving the heart is satisfied
- The heart is uplifted when he has given

Not only should one be happy during the act of giving but one should be happy during the planning of the act of generosity and after the act of generosity when reflecting on the act.

4 & 5. Hiri Otappa - Shame and fear or total reluctance and loathing to perform unwholesome deeds, and genuine, constructive regret if one does perform an unwholesome deed. It also includes the deep reflection that is required when we transgress and perform unwholesome deeds for it is through such reflection that we ensure that unwholesome deeds are not repeated. The shame of exposure and the fear of consequences are the two conditions that govern the behaviour of man. Once this fear is lost man can stoop to extreme evil. A Buddhist should abhor unwholesome deeds.

6. Sila - Morality or virtue is more than abstaining from unwholesome deeds. It is the active practice of wholesome deeds. Buddhists begin the practice of morality by observing the precepts mindfully. They then complete the practice through loving kindness (Mettā), compassion (Karunā), sympathetic joy (Muditā) and equanimity (Upekkhā). Mettā is loving kindness directed to all living beings and is independent of one's own happiness, while Karunā is compassion towards the suffering. Muditā is directed to the prosperous and happy by rejoicing in others' good fortune, while Upekkhā is the balanced mind and serenity that embraces the good and the bad, the loved and the unloved, the pleasant and the unpleasant. Equanimity teaches one to let go. Morality, as per the Buddha, is the active practice of infinite compassion and loving kindness so that over time one's thoughts, speech and actions are all directed towards the peace, welfare and harmony of all beings.

7. Panna - Wisdom or seeing things as they really are by development of the mind through Insight (Vipassanā) Meditation. In general, what we perceive as Truth is limited to the experience of our five senses. Vipassanā helps to develop the sixth sense, the mind, to experience the unseen and unheard. With Vipassanā one develops wisdom and penetrates the Truth so as to see things as they really are.

It is said that the predominant reason Christian missionaries can convert Buddhists to Christianity is because they do not know the Dhamma. The extent of their knowledge/practice is often limited to taking refuge in the triple gem, offering of flowers, lamps etc., transferring of merit/praying to the devas and recitation of Suttas in Pali. ....the second reason is poverty.

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to live in Canada. With hard work and effort, even new immigrants can, over time, lead a fairly comfortable life. The Dhamma, however, is not readily available in the West. Parents should realize the grave danger in

which they place their children when they neglect their spiritual development. When little Rahula asked for his inheritance the Buddha gave him the Dhamma. The Buddha placed the Dhamma above His kingdom, wealth and crown. Should we not be following the Buddha's example? Parents and elders should also ensure that they have experienced the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, for you cannot give to your child what you yourself do not have.

Now look at yourself and see if in truth you can call yourself a good Buddhist. And if, when you look at yourself, you feel that more effort is required, do not despair for you are not alone.

The Buddha made it very clear that the goal is within everyone's reach and that the goal can be attained in this present life without divine help or prayer. The Buddha attained Enlightenment on His own, and by following His teachings thousands of Arahants reached their own emancipation and testified to the Truth of His teaching. Due to their foresight and diligence in preservation and documentation of the teachings, the Dhamma is available to us. Each of you who wants to and is committed to being a good Buddhist can be a good Buddhist by continuous study and practice of the Dhamma. Reflect when in doubt that the alternative is infinite wandering in samsara (cycle of birth and death) which is fraught with dangers and suffering. Develop confidence in the Buddha Dhamma and confidence in yourself. I will close with these words of encouragement of the Buddha.

In the Digha Nikāya the Buddha said:

*“Do not depend on others for your salvation;  
Develop your self-confidence to gain it”.*

In the Mahāvagga the Buddha said:

*“It is through unshaken perseverance that  
I have reached the final goal and enlightenment;  
Through unceasing effort that  
I have reached the peace supreme.  
If you also will strive unceasingly,  
You too will in time attain the highest goal of bliss.”*



## CHAPTER 6

### **How was the Buddha Dhamma preserved and spread to other countries?**

*“.... But so long as there is respect and regard for the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the training, and for meditative concentration on the part of monks, nuns, and male and female devotees the Dhamma will remain free of obscuration and will not disappear.”*

*Samyutta Nikāya*

**Question** - There were no written records at the time of the Buddha. How was the Buddha Dhamma preserved and how was it spread to other countries?

**Answer -**

#### **Preservation of the Buddha Dhamma**

As it has now been more than 2500 years since the Parinibbāna of the Gotama Buddha, it is important to know the steps taken in the preservation of the original teaching of the Buddha. It is also important to know the tests given by the Buddha to help determine the authenticity of the material handed down as His teachings, as it is possible for the word of the Buddha to be changed over the years.

As the word of the Buddha was handed down by word of mouth, He ensured its preservation in the Holy Order through repetition and memorization. Many of the Buddha's discourses were given in a repetitious form so that it was easy to remember and reinforced the doctrine. Meditation led to enhanced memory power which made it easy for the monks to retain the suttas by memory. The Buddha's eighty great disciples on whom he conferred titles had

the ability to view their past births over a period of one hundred thousand world cycles. With minds that have reached such spiritual levels, retention was not a problem. The monks were also trained in memorizing the doctrine so that they in turn could hand it down to others. Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant, who had a remarkable memory and had the opportunity to hear all of His teachings, was appointed by the Buddha as the guardian of the Dhamma.

After the cremation and the distribution of the Buddha's relics, Mahā Kassapa, who was the third most pre-eminent monk in the Buddha's retinue, concentrated his efforts on the preservation of the Buddha Dhamma. He proposed holding a Sangha Council where the Dhamma and the rules for the Sangha – the Vinaya – would be reviewed. When he shared his views with the other members of the Noble Order, they agreed.

For the First Sangha Council, Kassapa selected 500 members from the Sangha, all Arahants except for Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant. Ānanda, who was known as the guardian of the Dhamma, was selected because of his retentive memory and detailed knowledge of the 84,000 suttas dispensed by the Buddha and His great disciples. Upali, the former barber of the Sākya Prince, who was an Arahant, led the monastic discipline (Vinaya) as he had been declared by the Buddha as the monk foremost in the monastic rules. All other monks had to leave Rājagaha for the seven-month duration of the recitation. All the teachings of the Buddha and the monastic discipline were recited methodically. The Dhamma was codified and organized into the five collections (Nikāyas) and the three Pitakas: Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. The first Sangha Council was held in the capital of Rājagaha, in the country of Magadha, in the Sattapanni Cave under the patronage of King Ajātasattu, three months after the passing away of the Buddha. A detailed account of this historic meeting can be found in the *Chullavagga* of the Vinaya Pitaka.

Ānanda, with the encouragement of Anuruddha, his step-brother, meditated and reached Arahantship at dawn on the day of the First Sangha Council. He then travelled through the air using astral travel to indicate his deliverance and took his place among the other members of the Council.

The First Sangha Council, known as the Pancasatikā because 500 Arahants took part in it, was extremely successful in the

preservation of 'The Word of the Buddha'. This method, the introduction of which resulted in Mahā Kassapa being called 'the Father of the Dhamma' was used in subsequent years as and when required. It also led to the use of the term 'Theravāda' or recitation of the elders (Arahanths) being used for the Word of the Buddha.

Since then there have been five more Sangha Councils under the Theravāda tradition and one Sangha Council under the Mahāyāna tradition. The Second Sangha Council was held 100 years after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, in the Valukarama at Vesali, under the patronage of King Kālāsoka. One of Ānanda's pupils, the Arahanth Sabbakāmi, who was 120 years old, presided over the Second Sangha Council, and 700 members of the Sangha, all of whom were Arahanths, took part. The Second Sangha Council was known as the Sattasatikā because 700 Arahanths participated in it. The Sattasatikā took eight months to complete.

The Third Sangha Council was held 235 years after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha in the 17th year of King Asoka's reign, under his patronage in the Asokārāma in Pataliputta. The Arahanth Moggaliputta Tissa presided over the Third Sangha Council and 1000 members of the Sangha, all of whom were Arahanths, took part. The Third Sangha Council took nine months to complete. It was after the third Sangha Council that the word of the Buddha was spread to countries outside India. Emperor Asoka, with the assistance of Arahanth Moggaliputta Tissa, was the first ambassador of the Buddha Dhamma.

The Fourth Sangha Council, which was in the Theravāda tradition, was held, and the Word of the Buddha was documented for the first time in Mātale, Sri Lanka at the Aluvihāra, under the patronage of King Vatta Gāmini Abhaya (Valagambāhu). This was the invaluable contribution of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhus to the world. Their foresight led to the preservation of the pristine Dhamma for future generations. King Vatta Gāmini Abhaya, who ascended the throne in 103 BC, lost it to a South Indian King almost immediately and went into hiding. He then gathered an army and recovered his throne in 89 BC, and reigned until 77 BC. During this period he built the Abhayagiri Stupa and the famous Rock Cave temple in Dambulla. Buddhism flourished during Vatta Gāmini Abhaya's reign as he was a strong devotee of the Buddha Dhamma. Five hundred members of the Sangha, all of whom were Arahanths, took part in the Fourth Sangha Council. The Great Arahanth and commentator, Buddhaghosa, who wrote the *Path of*

*Purification (Visuddhi Magga)*, states that the number of books written on Ola (palm) leaves was so great that when piled one on top of another they reached the height of six elephants.

Between the first century BC and the first century AD the term Mahāyāna (and Hinayāna) appeared in the Saddharma Pundarika Sutta (Sutta of the Lotus of the Good Law). Around the second century AD Mahāyāna became clearly defined as Nāgārjuna developed the Mahāyāna philosophy of Sunyata or voidness (comparable to Anatta in the Theravāda tradition) in a short text called the Mādhyamika- Karika. Around the fourth century Asanga and Vasubandhu wrote many volumes on Mahāyāna Buddhism. We must not confuse the term Hinayāna with Theravāda because the terms are not synonymous. Theravāda Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka and Myanmar in the 3rd century BC at the time of Emperor Asoka at a time when Mahāyāna Buddhism did not exist and has been preserved carefully. Hinayana sects appeared in India around the same time as Mahāyāna arose and had an existence independent of the Buddhism which Emperor Asoka disseminated to all quarters of the world. Today we have no Hinayāna sects anywhere in the world.

During this period the First Sangha Council in the Mahāyāna Tradition was held in Kashmir about five hundred years after the Parinibbāna of the Lord Buddha, under the patronage of King Kanishka (78 BC - 101 AC). Ven. Vasumitta presided. It was at about this time that the teachings of Christ are said to have been documented.

The Fifth Sangha Council in the Theravāda tradition was held in Mandalay in Myanmar (Burma), 2415 years after the passing away of the Lord Buddha, in November 1871, under the patronage of King Mindon. The scriptures written on palm leaves would eventually deteriorate. To ensure the preservation of the scriptures the Buddha Dhamma was inscribed on marble slabs.

Two thousand four hundred Bhikkhus led by Venerable Jāgarābhivamsa of the Dakkhinārāma Monastery, assisted by Venerable Narindābhidhaja and Venerable Sumangalasāmi, began by reciting the scriptures in the traditional manner. The joint Dhamma recitation lasted five months. Then, with the help of skilled craftsmen, it was inscribed in seven hundred and twenty-nine marble slabs. It took seven years, six months and fourteen

days to complete the work. The marble slabs were placed in Pitaka Pagodas in the grounds of King Mindon's Kuthodaw Pagoda at the foot of the Mandalay Hill. These marble slabs are now known as the world's largest book.

The Sixth Sangha Council, known as the Kaba Aye, which was of the Theravāda tradition, was held in Yangon (Rangoon), Myanmar, in 1954. It was sponsored by the Burmese Government led by the Honorable Prime Minister U Nu. He authorized the construction of the Mahā Pasana Guhā, 'the great cave', an artificial cave similar to the cave in which the First Sangha Council was recited. The Sixth Sangha Council was unique in that the Bhikkhus taking part in it came from eight different countries. Two thousand five hundred learned Theravāda monks from Myanmar, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam graced the momentous occasion. The late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw was appointed to question the Dhamma as required and the Venerable Bhadanta Vicittasārābhivamsa answered the questions eloquently. By this time the scriptures had been translated to the native language of all the participating countries except for India. The traditional recitation took two years. The commentaries and different scripts were also examined and reconciled where necessary. This version of the Tripitaka, which was sanctioned by the entire Theravāda Buddhist World, is now accepted as the pristine teachings of the Buddha Gotama.

The retentive powers of the minds of Arahants developed through years and years of meditation, the Buddha's style of teaching which was repetitive, and His instruction to memorize the Teaching so as to hand it down to others, resulted in a comprehensive text for future generations. The fact that only Arahants were admitted to the early Sangayanas ensured that it was only those that have experienced the Truth, those that have seen the supreme bliss of Nibbāna, who participated in this very important preservation. The freedom the Buddha gave to investigate, question and debate also helped as the teachings were analyzed whenever there was a conflict of opinion and corrected to ensure that it was the word of the Buddha that was preserved. Thus, the Arahant Mahā Kassapa, the third most pre-eminent monk of the Buddha, often referred to as the 'Father of the Dhamma', ensured the preservation of the Dhamma for future generations.

Despite the efforts of the Sangha to preserve the Dhamma, it is

possible for the original words of the Buddha to be changed through translation errors and poetic embellishment of authors. The Buddha, who recognized this possibility, left us a set of instructions to follow before we accepted His teachings as absolute. The Buddha's instruction, by which His words should be tested, is known as the Mahāpadesa and is as follows:

*A Bhikkhu may say thus - From the mouth of the Buddha Himself have I heard, have I received thus: [This is the Doctrine, this is the Discipline, this is the Teaching of the Master. His words should not be accepted or rejected. Without either accepting or rejecting such words, study thoroughly every word and syllable and then put them beside the Discourse (teachings) and compare with the Monastic Disciplinary Rules. If, when so compared, they do not harmonize with the discourses and do not agree to the Disciplinary Rules, then you may come to the conclusion: Certainly this is not the word of the Exalted One, this has been wrongly grasped by the Bhikkhu. Therefore, you should reject it. If, when compared and contrasted, they harmonize with the Discourses and the Disciplinary Rules, you may come to the conclusion: Certainly this is the word of the Exalted One, this has correctly been grasped by the Bhikkhu. Let this be regarded as the first reference.]*

*The Buddha then went on to dispense the second, third and fourth reference (or check) by substituting the words, "Heard from the mouth of the Buddha" with, "Heard from the mouth of the Sangha, heard from the mouth of the Thera, and heard from the mouth of Theri."*

Readers should also compare the doctrine of the disciples with those of the Buddha and ensure harmony before acceptance.

The Buddha also gave Mahā Pajāpathi an illuminating instruction on discerning the true Doctrine. Whenever you find yourself questioning the authenticity of a particular teaching, heed well the Buddha's advice to His foster mother. The Buddha said:

*"Qualities that lead to passion, not to dispassion; to being fettered, not to being unfettered; to accumulating, not to shedding; to self-aggrandizement, not to modesty; to discontent, not to contentment; to entanglement, not to seclusion; to laziness, not to aroused persistence; to being burdensome, not to being unburdensome': You may definitely hold, 'This is not the Dhamma, this is not the Vinaya, this is not the Teacher's instruction..'"*

*“Qualities that lead to dispassion, not to passion; to being unfettered, not to being fettered; to shedding, not to accumulating; to modesty, not to self-aggrandizement; to contentment, not to discontent; to seclusion, not to entanglement; to aroused persistence, not to laziness; to being unburdensome, not to being burdensome”: You may definitely hold, ‘This is the Dhamma, this is the Vinaya, this is the Teacher’s instruction..”*

*Anguttara Nikāya VIII.53*

### **Spread of the Buddha Dhamma**

The Dhamma Chakka, or the wheel of Truth, was first dispensed by the Buddha in the deer park at Isipatana to His five friends – Kondañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma and Assaji. The text says that many celestial beings descended to Earth to listen to the Truth. The Dhamma Chakka contained the essence of the Buddha’s teaching known as the Four Noble Truths. After listening to the discourse, Kondañña attained the first stage of sainthood - Sottāpanna. After listening to a discourse on the doctrine of no permanent self, the five monks attained enlightenment.

The Buddha’s ministry which started with five disciples soon increased to sixty. A wealthy merchant named Yasa and his fifty-four friends heard the Dhamma, attained enlightenment and joined the Noble Order. The Buddha addressed His first sixty enlightened monks and instructed them to teach the doctrine as follows:

*“Freed am I, O Bhikkhus, from all bonds, whether divine or human.*

*You too, O Bhikkhus, are freed from all bonds, whether divine or human. Go Forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of gods and men. Let not two go by one way: Preach, O Bhikkhus, The Dhamma excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the Holy Life, altogether perfect and pure.”*

The Buddha, however, made it clear that the acceptance of His teachings was solely up to the receiver. The Buddha said:

*“The doors to the deathless are opened!  
Let those who will hear leave wrong beliefs,  
Now shall I turn the wheel of the great Law (Dhamma),*

*For this I go to the Kāsian City,  
There shall I beat the drum of deathlessness,  
In this world where people are groping  
in the dark (of ignorance). ”*

*Majjhima Nikāya*

Before long, thousands of male and female disciples joined the Buddha’s Noble Order. The Buddha’s chief disciples helped the Buddha with His growing congregation of monks, nuns and lay disciples. The Buddha conferred titles on eighty of His pre-eminent disciples.

There is no coercion or enforcement used in the propagation of the Dhamma. Instead, the Buddha encouraged investigation and examination. The Buddha’s message of loving kindness, compassion and wisdom is now one of the major world religions. In keeping with the Buddha’s boundless compassion His followers have ensured that there has not been any force, bloodshed, or coercion in its peaceful expansion over 2500 years.

The historical records of the Third Sangha Council state that by the third century BC, Buddhism had spread throughout North India. However, it was only after the Third Sangha Council that the Buddha’s message of peace spread outside the Indian Continent. Under the patronage of the Emperor Asoka (Beloved of the Gods) and the guidance of the Arahant Moggaliputta Tissa Thera, Buddhism spread to nine different countries.

The texts document that Venerable Majjhantika Thera headed the missionaries who were sent to Kashmir and Gandhara and that five missionaries led by Venerable Sona Thera and Venerable Uttara Thera were sent to Swarna Bhumi (Myanmar-Burma). Venerable Mahadeva was sent to Mahinsakamandala (Mysore) and Venerable Rakkhita Thera was sent to Vanavāsi (Northern Kanara in South India). Venerable Yonaka Dhammarakkhita Thera was sent to Upper Aparantaka (northern Gujarat, Kathiawara, Kutch and Sindh) and Venerable Maharakkhita Thera went to Yonaka-loka (the land of the Lonians, Bactrians and the Greeks). Venerable Majjhima Thera went to the Himavant (The land adjoining the Himālayas), while Emperor Asoka sent his own son, Venerable Mahinda Thera, with Venerable Itthiya Thera, Venerable Samabala Thera, Venerable Uttiya Thera and Venerable Bhaddasala Thera to Tambapani (Sri Lanka). Later Venerable Sanghamittā Theri,

daughter of Emperor Asoka, brought the south branch of the Bodhi tree and the female order to Sri Lanka.

The thirteenth Asokan rock edict references Dhamma missions to the West. Emperor Asoka's message of peace was sent to the kingdom of *Antiyoka*-Antiochus II, the king of Syria (261-246 BC), *Tulamaya*-Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285-247 BC), *Antekina*-Antigonos Gonatos of Mecedonia (276-239 BC), *Alikasudale*-Alexander of Epirus (272-255 BC) and *Maga*-Magas of Cyrene in North Africa (300-250 BC). The thirteenth rock edict says, "...Here in the king's (Asoka's) domain among the Greeks the *Kambojas*, the *Nabhakas*, the *Nabhapankits*, the *Bhojas*, the *Pitinikas*, the *Andhras* and the *Palidas*, everywhere people are following *Beloved of the Gods'* instructions in Dhamma. Even where *Beloved of the Gods'* envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of the Dhamma and the ordinances and instructions in Dhamma given by *Beloved of the Gods*, are following it and will continue to do so. This conquest has been won everywhere and it gives great joy – the joy which only conquest by Dhamma can give." Emperor Asoka also paved the way for Buddhist missions to Central Asia, China, Japan, Tibet, Thailand and Cambodia.

Asokan missions to Egypt are said to have resulted in the *Therapeutaes* (*Theraputta*) a religious order of monks and nuns that followed the Buddha's teachings. Under the Theravāda Tradition, the Dhamma students of the great elders are known as Dhamma sons or *Theraputta*. The Dhamma sons of the Theravāda elders were sent to Egypt as they were stronger and younger and could withstand the long journey. These monks and nuns, who were celibate, led the homeless life in the forest monastery tradition.

Emperor Asoka's Dhamma missions are history-making because of his peaceful approach and tolerance of other faiths. In keeping with the teachings of the Buddha, in the twelfth rock edict the task of the missionaries is defined thus: "*Beloved of the Gods*, honours both ascetics and the householders of all religions, and he honours them with gifts and honours of various kinds. But *Beloved of the Gods*, does not value gifts as much as he values this – that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religion of others without good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way.

*But it is better to honour other religions for this reason: by so doing, one's own religion benefits, and so do other religions, while doing otherwise harms one's own religion and the religion of others. Who ever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought 'Let me glorify my own religion' only harms his own religion. Therefore contact (between religions) is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others. Beloved of the Gods desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions."* Rock edicts found in the Kalinga kingdom state "All human beings are my children. What I wish for my children: that they may share in well-being and good fortune both in this life and in lives to come." He extolled the gentleness of the Dhamma, affirmed the protection of all beings and advocated the furtherance of well-being and virtue.

King Menandros (Menandros-Milinda), an Indo-Greek King who reigned over North-Western India and Afganistan in the 1st century BC, also helped in the spread of Buddhism. The Milinda Panha, which contains the well-known dialogue between King Milinda and Arahanth Nāgasena on the doctrine of no permanent self, documents the king's intellect and acute wisdom. During his reign, ties with Greece were strengthened and Buddhism was again taken to Greece.

By the first century AD, the centre of Buddhist activity had shifted to Western India where the First Mahāyāna Sangha Council was held under the patronage of King Kanishka (78-101 AD). The king brought many Buddhist scholars to Kashmir, where the Sangha Council was held. His empire, which extended from Madhya-Desa in India to Central Asia, combined the rich Indian and Greek culture resulting in the Ghandāra school of Buddhist art and inspired the Buddhist architecture found in Khotan and Kucha in Central Asia. According to the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hsien, Sun-yun and Yuan Chwang, there were over 4000 Buddhist establishments, including monasteries and temples, in Khotan until about the 8th century AD. From Khotān, Buddhism spread to other states in the South such as Niya, Cherchan, Laulan and Kashgar.

In Chinese Turkestan the most powerful of the kingdoms was Kucha, which received Buddhism in the 1st century AD. According to the Chinese tradition it is from Kucha that Buddhism spread to the rest of China. From China, Buddhism spread to Japan through Korea, and from Japan to the Americas. From Central Asia

Buddhism also spread to Tibet and Northern Burma. Archaeological findings in Guatemala indicate that Buddhist missionary monks may have reached the Americas more than one thousand years before Columbus.

There also existed many centres for Buddhist learning, some of which had the status of universities. Besides the Taxila University at the time of the Buddha there were the Nālanda University (5th century), Valabhi (6th century), Vikramasilā (7th century), Jagaddalā (11th century), the Odantipura in North India and Kanchipura or Conjeevaram (6th century) in South India. Until the 10th century there was the Mahā Vihāra and the Abhayagiri in Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya in the Malay Archipelago. Buddhist scholars from these Buddhist centres took the Buddha's message of peace and wisdom to many countries.

The Buddha's teaching is for all of mankind who experience suffering. In His teachings there is no chosen race, caste or creed. All of mankind could access His teaching and benefit by it if they chose to practise it. The heavens, according to the Buddha, are for the righteous. They are not restricted to the followers of the Buddha. As such the spread of Buddhism incorporated the rich culture and heritage of each of the countries to which it was introduced, and spread with no coercion or bloodshed.

The expansion policies of the Mohammedan rulers of the 6th and 7th century destroyed Buddhism in Central Asia, India and the Malayan Archipelago. Buddhism, with its infinite compassion and non-violent teachings, could not survive the onslaught of force. By the beginning of the 19th century Buddhism survived only in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in South Asia, and in Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan in the North and far East of Asia. In the latter part of the 19th century, colonization of Sri Lanka by the Portuguese and later by the British all but led to the demise of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Force and coercion were used to convert the masses to Christianity. Good schools and jobs were available only on conversion. Titles were taken away from the nobility who refused to convert. Buddhist scholars and monks such as Anagārika Dharmapala, Henry Steele Olcotte, Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda and Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala helped to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

## **Buddhism in the West**

The revival of Buddhism in the West came with the renaissance of Buddhist Studies in the East and West. Many international scholars did intensive research in Buddhist studies resulting in the spread of Buddhism to Europe and America. Some scholars who are worthy of note are Professor Vincent Fallsball of Copenhagen, Herman Oldenberg, Max Muller, Paul Dahlike and Winternitz of Germany, Sylvan Levi and Poussin of France, H.C. Warren and E. W. Burlingams of the USA, and Professor Stcherbatsky of Russia. Sir Edwin Arnold's well known book *Light of Asia* also helped to focus the attention of the West on the Buddha.

The Buddha's compassion and tolerance led to a civilizing influence on each of the countries to which it spread, while it preserved each country's unique culture and heritage. Wherever Buddhism took root it gave birth to a rich culture distinctive to its people. To the uninitiated there seem to be vast differences in the way Buddhism is practised in different countries. However, at the core of each tradition lies the boundless compassion of the Buddha, the Four Noble Truths and the Doctrine of Dependent Origination.

Buddhism is now a world religion that appeals both to scholars and the masses in the East and the West. Academics such as Howard Cutler MD, Dr. Roy Amore, Jeffrey M. Schwartz MD, film stars and musicians such as Richard Gere, Tina Turner, Goldie Hawn, William Dafoe and Philip Glass, and ordinary people such as you and I are actively seeking out the teachings of the Buddha. Tickets to attend talks given by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, in North America are booked and sold out well in advance of his arrival. Academics have held conferences on Buddhism on three continents: *Buddhism in America*, held at Harvard University in May, 1997, *Buddhism in Australia*, held in September, 1997, and *Buddhism and Africa*, held at the University of South Africa in June of 1998. Buddhist-Christian studies are actively pursued as Buddhism comes to the West. Organizations such as the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies at the University of Hawaii and the Pali Text Society of Oxford, England, help to further academic studies.

Buddhism is no longer a religion of the East. While Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand remain as the Theravāda strongholds, Theravāda Buddhist centres and forest monasteries for Western

monks and nuns have taken root in the Buddhist borderlands and all over the world. Pioneering Bhikku (Sangha) work is undertaken and monasteries have been built in Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the USA and Canada. In the twenty-first century, Dhammaduta (missionary) monks and nuns are just as likely to be from the West as they are from the East.

The following is a chronicle of some of the significant Theravāda Dhammaduta work performed in the Buddhist borderlands in the last century (Dhammaduta web site):

- 1893** Anagārika Dhammapala of Sri Lanka addresses the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.
- 1899** The first Western Theravāda monk, Gordon Douglas, is ordained in Myanmar.
- 1900** Ajahn Mun and Ajahn Sao revive the forest meditation tradition in Thailand.
- 1908** Ven. Ānanda Metteya (Allan Bennet) leads Buddhist missions to the UK.
- 1926** Anagārika Dhammapala of Sri Lanka establishes the London Buddhist Vihāra. Judge Christmas Humphrey starts the London Buddhist Society.
- 1940** The first Vietnamese Theravāda temple, Buu Quang Temple (Ratana Ramsyarama), is established in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). The abbot, Ven. Bhikkhu Ho Tong (Vansarakkhita), had been ordained in Cambodia by Ven. Bhikkhu Chuon Nath, the Cambodian Sangharāja. The Nepalese Ven. Amritānanda is ordained as a Bhikkhu in Colombo.
- 1943** The first Vihāra in modern Nepalese history is established on Swayambhu Hill by Ven. Dhammāloka Thera.
- 1947** Mahasi Sayadaw becomes head teacher at a government-sponsored meditation centre in Yangon, Myanmar.

- 1951** Sister Dhammadinna, an American nun ordained in Sri Lanka, comes to Australia and conducts the first Vesak ceremony in that country. Ven. K. Sri Dhammānanda arrives in Malaysia from Sri Lanka.
- 1954** The Myanmar government sponsors the Sixth Sangha Council in Yangon. The first Indonesian Bhikkhu in 500 years is ordained in Myanmar as Ven. Jinarakkhita.
- 1956** William Purfurst of England is ordained as Ven. Kapila-Vuddho in Thailand.
- 1957** A mission from Myanmar arrives in Vihāra in Moji, Japan. The German Dharmaduta Society (based in Sri Lanka) founded by Asoka Weeraratna in 1952, sponsored the first Theravāda Buddhist Mission to Germany. Three Buddhist monks, Ven. Soma, Ven. Kheminda and Ven. Vinitha took up residence in 'Das Buddhistische Haus' based in Berlin -Frohnau. 'Das Buddhistische Haus', located on a 7-acre parcel of land, was built in 1924 by the well-known German Buddhist, Dr. Paul Dahlke. It is reputed to be the oldest Buddhist Temple in Europe.
- 1958** The German Ven. Nyanaponika Thera establishes the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka to publish English-language books on Theravāda Buddhism. Two Germans are ordained at the Royal Thai Embassy in London, becoming the first to take full Theravāda ordination in the West.
- 1959** The first Indonesians, Ven. Jinaputta and Ven. Jinappiya are ordained on Indonesian soil.
- 1964** The Washington (D.C.) Buddhist Vihāra is founded. The first Theravāda monastic community in the USA founded by Ven. Madihe Pannasiha Mahā Nāyaka Thera.
- 1966** Thais establish the Buddhapadipa temple in the UK.
- 1970** Ven. Taungpulu Sayadaw and Dr. Rina Sircar, from Myanmar, establish the Taungpulu Kaba-Aye Monastery in Northern California, USA.
- 1973** Sri Lankans establish Australia's first Theravāda Vihāra in New South Wales.

- 1974** Ven. Dr. D. Piyananda establishes the Los Angeles Buddhist Vihāra.
- 1975** Ajahn Chah establishes the Wat Pah Nanachat, a forest monastery in Thailand for training Western monks. The Wat Buddharangsee is established in Sydney, Australia, by Ven. Bhikkhu Khantipālo (English) and 3 Thai monks.
- 1976** The Sangha Theravāda of Indonesia is constituted.
- 1977** Ajahn Chah travels to England with the American Ajahn Sumedho and the British Ajahn Khemadhammo to lead a small community of monks at the Hamsptead Vihāra.
- 1978** Sri Lankans establish the Toronto Maha Vihāra in Canada.
- 1979** The Wat Pah Cittaviveka (Chithurst Forest Monastery) is established by Ajahn Sumedho in Sussex, England.
- 1981** The Ratanagiri is established in Northern England by Ajahn Sumedho. Sri Lankans establish the New York Buddhist Vihāra.
- 1982** The first Theravāda forest monastery in the USA (Bhavana Society) is established in West Virginia by Ven. H. Gunaratana. Ajahn Jagaro arrives in Perth to establish the Bodhinyana Monastery.
- 1983** The Devon Vihāra is established in S.W. England by Ajahn Sumedho.
- 1984** The Amaravati Buddhist Monastery is established in England by Ajahn Sumedho. The Bodhinyana Monastery is established in Western Australia by Ven. Jagaro and Brahmavamso, disciples of Ajahn Chah.
- 1985** Ajahn Khemadhammo establishes the Forest Hermitage at Warwick, in the United Kingdom. Ajahn Viradhammo arrives in New Zealand from the UK.
- 1988** The Canadian Ven. Tiradhammo establishes the Dhammapala Buddhistisches Kloster in Switzerland.

- 1990**    The Italian Ven. Thanavaro establishes the Santacittarama in Italy.
- 1992**    Sri Lankans establish the West End Buddhist Vihāra in Mississauga, Canada.
- 1993**    The American Ajahn Thanissaro establishes Metta Forest Monastery in Southern California.
- 1996**    The Abhayagiri Forest Monastery is established in California by the British Ajahn Amaro.
- 1999**    The Dhammasara Nuns' Monastery, the largest Theravada nuns' monastery outside Asia, is established near Perth, with the Australian abbess Ajahn Vayama.
- 2000**    A Peace Pagoda with the Buddha's relics is built in Manitoba, Canada, under the guidance of Sayadaw U. Thila Wunta of Myanmar, sponsored by the Dhamma Centre of Winnipeg.

Buddhism with its boundless compassion has encircled the world with its peaceful message of tolerance and harmony. The spread of Buddhism in the West is slow as there is no force or coercion used in its spread. Despite this fact, Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in North America. The above list contains some of the leading Theravāda Sangha missionary works. To this one could add the Mahāyāna establishments. Followers of the Buddha's teachings continue to ensure that in keeping with the teachings, no force, coercion or bloodshed is used in the spread of the Buddha Dhamma. Monks, nuns, and male and female devotees ensure the preservation of the Buddha Dhamma through teaching and meditative contemplation.



## CHAPTER 7

### **What is the role of celestial beings (devas and Brahmas) in Buddhism?**

*Anāthapindika, there are five desirable, pleasant and agreeable things which are rare in this world. They are long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in a heaven. But of these five things, householder I do not teach that they are to be obtained by prayer or by vows. If one could obtain these by prayers and vows then who would not do so?*

*Anguttara Nikāya*

**Question** - Many Buddhists in Sri Lanka pray to celestial beings and take vows. Is this on the instruction of the Buddha or is this a result of the influence of other religions on Buddhism?

**Answer** - Devas and Brahmas (angels, gods, and other celestial beings) have always fascinated mankind. Visions of eternal happiness with beautiful beings that have everything they want is the general perception one has of the divine. According to the teachings of the Buddha there is some truth to these perceptions. The celestial beings are another form of beings that live on different planes or realms. They enjoy pleasures of the senses and mind and have many pleasures with little suffering. However, according to the Buddha, they are not perfect beings. Like humans they still have impurities (kilesa) such as greed, hatred and delusion in their minds<sup>10</sup>. And they too, like humans, are transient.

Let us begin by going back in history to examine the different civilizations and their concepts of the divine. With the evolution of man came knowledge – knowledge which was gained very slowly through experience and experimentation. But before mankind

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10. Dhajagga Sutta.

gained this knowledge there were many unknowns – many natural phenomena which were frightening, life-threatening, and life-sustaining.

There was the sun which gave life with its energy. It is the sun that brought warmth, light, and food through the growth of crops. The sun sustained and nourished life. Before long man worshipped the life-giving sun as a divine being. In ancient Egypt they called the sun-god Ra. The Incas in South America called him Pachacamac.

But it was not only the sun that sustained life. As important, and if not more so, was rain. And at times it did not rain. There was drought, and with no rain, no crops. And man, who had no knowledge of the formation of rain but required it for the sustenance of life, created the rain-god. The people prayed to the divine for rain in times of drought, and pleaded and bargained with the god through sacrifices and vows in an attempt to stop the unleashing of its powers in times of flood. Before long in many places around the world the unexplained was explained through the creation of gods. And so we had the god of thunder, the god of lightning and in places like Hawaii which had many volcanoes, the god/goddess of volcanoes. Not knowing the true cause of these natural phenomena the people created gods to explain the unexplainable. They prayed to the gods when they were in despair and grief and accepted their erratic behaviour, without question, when their prayers were answered sporadically without rhyme or reason.

With the advances made by science we now have a scientific explanation for such natural phenomena. The sun, the rain, the thunder and lightning, the earthquakes and volcanoes were not unpredictable angry gods that needed to be appeased with offerings, constant prayer and devotional songs. They resulted from natural phenomena that existed in the universe. The ice storms and floods, earthquakes and volcanoes that continuously shook the Earth were but natural phenomena resulting from natural causes.

They were not the results of the whims of an inconsiderate, unpredictable, cruel god <sup>11</sup>.

The myths, however, continued. Before long man began to contemplate his origin. Unaware of the theory of evolution man had but one choice. He created an omnipotent/compassionate Creator God – a God who he claimed created the universe, the world and all living beings including man. In India, at the time of the Buddha, this God was known as Mahā Brahma (The Great God).

*All over the world, men explained the unknown with the divine and created gods to help them for they lacked confidence and knowledge to help themselves. Even though many religions claim that god created man, when one examines history and religions objectively, one sees that often it was man that created god.* And so we had a multitude of gods with immense powers. Gods who were jealous and angry, cruel and compassionate, helpful and inconsiderate, for their behaviour and benevolence were unpredictable and without logic.

### **The Buddhist view of celestial beings**

The Buddha's explanation of celestial beings was not based on the unknown. It was not something He created to explain the unknown. It was based on the known. It was an explanation of His experience gained through the development of His mind through insight. The Buddha's knowledge was gained by developing awareness in His mind to include the unknown, unseen and unheard. The Buddha was not limited to the faculties of the senses to experience the unknown. He had superior powers which He developed over countless eons of time to 'see' the Truth, to 'see' things as they really are. The Buddha's teaching of the divine was His actual experience of the divine. And His experiences are not unique to just Himself. They are available to all that practise the

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11. The Buddha acknowledged natural phenomena such as rain, thunder and lightning and called them Utu Niyāma or order of inorganic matter that ultimately resulted from the effects of heat. This the Buddha insisted was a natural law that existed in the universe akin to the law of genes, Bija Niyāma. The Buddha did not give any divine sanction to these natural laws.

Noble Path. In fact, many documented experiences of the Buddha's disciples substantiate His teachings.

The Buddha acknowledged the existence of divine beings whom He addressed as devas (beings with sense pleasures) and Brahmas (beings with pleasures of the mind). The Buddha also encouraged His devotees gradually in the Noble Path by saying that performance of wholesome deeds led to rebirth as a deva, while performance of wholesome deeds and mental culture (Jhāna) led to rebirth as a Brahma. He also explained in detail how birth as a divine being could be obtained and the lifestyle and pleasures that existed in the heavenly realms.

Birth in the heavens, He said, was not directed by an omnipotent, compassionate/non compassionate God (Brahma)<sup>12</sup>. It was not faith, prayers, sacrifices or praise of the Divine that resulted in birth in the heavens. For surely if there were a compassionate and omnipotent God, then would He not, with love and compassion, take all living beings to this place of immense luxury and happiness? The Buddha insisted that birth in the heavens resulted from one's very own wholesome actions.

Neither was life in the heavens eternal. When the effects of the good deeds that propelled one into the heavenly realms expired, birth in another plane in keeping with one's wholesome and unwholesome actions would occur<sup>13</sup>. The extremely long lifespans in the heavens, and the absence of aging and sickness which are the natural signs of death, result in an illusion of permanence. But if one had the vision that exceeded the lifespan of the heavens one would see, as the Buddha and His Disciples who were Arahants did, that in keeping with the Law of Impermanence, all conditioned phenomena, including birth in the heavenly realms, are impermanent.

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12. Read the section on reincarnation in *Bereavement* by Ursula Markove. Through past life regression she describes a nun who was reborn in the human realm despite her faith in her religion.

13. Read *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Brian L. Weiss, M.D. Using past life regression Dr. Weiss takes a patient through many births in the human and celestial realms and talks of the seven planes of existence with sense pleasures.

The Buddha then went on to explain the happiness and bliss found in the heavenly realms to encourage His devotees to partake in wholesome actions and refrain from unwholesome actions. The Buddha explained that the devas have instantaneous birth (opapathika), unlike humans who are born from a womb. The devas appear in the heavenly realms and when they appear they are of the age of a youth or maiden in full bloom. Devas do not age and decay as we do. They remain through their entire life as youths or maidens. Maidens are said to be very beautiful and youths very handsome. Death occurs with tiredness, excessive perspiration and a dulling of the complexion as pre-warning, but in most instances these symptoms are not recognized by the devas as signs of imminent death.

Clothing in the heavens is very fine and sheer. Food is more refined than ours. Their constitution, habitat and food are better than those of humans but this does not mean that the devas transcend humans in wisdom. The devas, just like the humans, have jealousies, ill-will, fear, greed, craving and attachments, because they have not eradicated any of the 1500 impurities (kilesa) that lie dormant within. They are similar to us as they have not attained the four stages of sainthood. It is by attaining the four stages of Sotapanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi and Arahantship that these impurities are eradicated.

In the Dhajagga Sutta, the Buddha explains that at times of fear and distress one should not reflect on or call on the king of the heavens - Sakka-or his generals for assistance. Instead, one should reflect and derive strength from the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha because fearlessness can be given only by the fearless. The devas cannot give fearlessness for they themselves harbour fear.

The Buddha spoke of seven happy planes with sense pleasures. They are the human realm and the six celestial realms. I have at this point included a brief description of the six celestial realms and the beings who live in these realms, the devas, as found in the ancient texts.

1. Cātummahārājika - The lowest of the heavenly realms where the guardian deities of the four quarters of the Earth reside with their followers. The lifespan in this realm is 9,000,000 human years.

2. Tāvātimsa - Means thirty-three. This is the realm of the thirty-three devas where the deva king is Sakka. The origin of the name is attributed to a story where thirty-three selfless volunteers led by Magha (Sakka) were reborn in this realm due to the meritorious deeds they performed. It is in this realm that the Buddha preached the Abhidhamma. The lifespan in this realm is 36,000,000 human years – four times the lifespan of Cātummahārājika. These two heavens surround the Earth. They are the only happy planes in the vicinity of Earth.
3. Yāma - Means that which destroys pain. This is the realm of the Yama Devas. The lifespan in this realm is four times the lifespan of Tāvātimsa.
4. Tusita - Means happy dwellers. This is the realm of delight. Bodhisattas who have completed the ten perfections reside here until the appropriate moment for birth in the human realm. It is said that the Metteyya Buddha is at present in this realm. The Bodhisatta's mother was born in this realm as a deva by the name of Matu Deva Putta. From there she went to the Tāvātimsa heaven to listen to the Abhidhamma.
5. Nimmānarati - The realm of the devas that delight in the created mansions.
6. Paranimmitavasavatti - The realm of the devas that make others' creations serve their own ends.

Superior to these sensuous planes are the Brahma realms of form (Rupaloka) and the Brahma realms with no form (Arupaloka). There is no sex distinction in the Brahma realms and no pleasures of the senses. Instead, the beings in these realms delight in jhānic bliss achieved through development of the mind. The Rupaloka consists of sixteen realms and the Arupaloka consists of four realms. Asita, who foretold that Prince Siddhartha would be a Buddha, and the Bodhisatta's first two teachers, Alāra Kālāma and Uddakārāma Putta, were reborn in the Brahma realms.

### **The Buddhist view of prayers**

The Buddha was very clear about the powers of the celestial beings. As Buddhists, our goal is the attainment of Nibbāna, and in this goal the devas and Brahmas have no place or role to play. The Buddha did not believe in salvation through celestial beings.

Neither did He claim to be a saviour. The Buddha was a great teacher of men and celestial beings. In fact, it was at the invitation of Brahma Sahampati that the Buddha taught the Dhamma. Many suttas begin with an invitation to celestial beings, for the devas and Brahmas rejoice in hearing the Dhamma. However, the Buddha made it clear that all beings have to study and practise His teaching to reach salvation. In Buddhism you are your own saviour. Neither the Buddha nor any celestial being can do this for you.

The Buddha was also very clear in His opinion of prayers for salvation. When Vāsettha questioned Him on praying for salvation, this is what the Buddha said:

*“Vāsettha, it is just as if this river Aciravati were brimful of water and a man should come along wishing to cross over, to get to the other side, to get across, and standing on this bank, were to call out: “Come here, other bank, come here!” What do you think, Vasettha? Would the other bank of the River Aciravati come over to this side on account of that man’s calling, begging, requesting or wheedling?”*

“No, Reverend Gotama.”

*“Similarly, no amount of prayers will free one from samsāra.”*

Neither did the Buddha believe that rebirth in the heavens and Brahma realms was due to the grace of celestial beings. The Buddha could see that birth in the celestial realms and hells was not directed by a divine hand. In reaching enlightenment the Buddha saw the law of cause and effect in operation. **Just as birth in the celestial realms and hells was dependent upon one’s good and bad actions, He saw that salvation was possible only through one’s own striving.**

In the Anguttara Nikāya, the Buddha explained the futility of praying to the devas and Brahmas for long life, happiness, prosperity, beauty and rebirth in the heavens. He declared to His chief male benefactor, Anāthapindika, that there were five desirable, pleasant and agreeable things which are rare in this world. They are long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in a heaven. He then said “But of these five things, householder, I do not teach that they are to be obtained by prayer or by vows. If one could obtain these by prayers and vows then who would not do so?”

“For a noble householder who wishes to have long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in a heavenly realm it is not befitting that he should pray for long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in the heavens or take delight in doing so. He should rather follow a path of life that is conducive to long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in the heavens.”

The Buddha then instructed Anāthapindika on how one obtains long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in the heavenly realms. He said one obtains these not by prayer but by perfection of confidence (in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha), perfection of generosity, perfection of virtue and perfection of wisdom.

And so we have in simple language a fundamental concept of the Buddha’s teaching. The Buddha did not encourage His devotees to pray and take vows. Instead, He encouraged His devotees to lead moral, virtuous and generous lives in wisdom. The householder would then receive long life, beauty, happiness, fame and rebirth in the heavens, and would do so without having to resort to prayers and vows.

By the effects of the wholesome deeds the householder has diluted the effect of past unwholesome deeds and paved the way for help at the time of distress. It may be a celestial being who would help, it may be a person, or even an animal. But by one’s wholesome actions one made it possible for others to assist one in one’s time of need. The Buddha declared that the divine beings were compassionate beings who would help those that led a virtuous and moral life. One did not have to pray, beg for mercy or take vows. The celestial beings help the virtuous just as human beings like to help the virtuous. After all, we do not pray and beg for mercy from our friends when we are in need. Why would we assume that this compassion that lies within us is not in the celestial beings?

Buddhists should also not pray to the devas and Brahmas for wealth and property. Constant asking for material things for self and for those that we call mine, an extension of ourselves, increases one’s craving and attachment. This would then lengthen one’s time in samsāra. This is a contradiction to the goal of Buddhists which is to reduce one’s time in samsāra. The true followers of the Buddha’s teaching do not pray to the celestial beings. Instead, they have confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and in themselves to help them at times of distress.

## **Can we help the celestial beings?**

According to the Buddha, the extreme happiness and abundance of material things in the heavens make it difficult for the devas to perform wholesome deeds and acquire merit. This is why a Buddha is always born as a human being and the reason that the ten perfections<sup>14</sup> are completed in the human world. In this world we have both happiness and sorrow, and the opportunities to help others and show compassion are many. The devas and Brahmas do not have such opportunity to help each other. As such, when the effects of the good deeds that propelled them into these realms are exhausted, they will die from that birth and take birth in another realm appropriate to their kamma.

The devas, unable to perform meritorious deeds to each other, came to the Buddha, and on the instruction of the Buddha, thus arose the practice of humans performing wholesome deeds and sharing the merit with the divine. In this way, Buddhists give to the celestial beings instead of asking from them, as in most other religions.

The Buddha has not requested or encouraged us to ask the devas or Brahmas for anything in return for this transfer of merit. Just as Buddhists are expected to practise generosity with no expectation of return, they are encouraged to share the effects of wholesome deeds with the celestial beings with no expectation of return. According to the Buddha's teaching, the devas and Brahmas who have divine powers of various levels will protect and help those that are in need. After all, why would they not? Why would they not when you and I would help those in distress without prayer or gifts. Surely it is only right that we assume that this compassion which exists in us extends to the celestial beings who, like us, are compassionate beings.

Buddhists practise meditation on loving kindness towards those in distress. Buddhists chant paritta and direct it to those in distress. Buddhists perform wholesome deeds and direct the effect of such deeds towards those in distress. In this way, with our own strength and purity, with confidence we help the sick and suffering by giving without helping the sick and suffering by asking (the gods).

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14. Generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truth, determination, loving kindness and equanimity.

And, according to the Buddha, celestial beings who are compassionate, as we are will use their powers to help those in distress.

### **The Buddhist view of creation by an omnipotent God**

If the universe was created by an omnipotent Creator God, then it is logical that the said God should take full responsibility for His creation. If a scientist creates an advanced robot with super intelligence that benefits mankind, he gets credit and accolades for his creation. But if his robot malfunctions and starts maiming and killing indiscriminately, the scientist is held responsible for its actions. Similarly, a manufacturer of any item is fully responsible for its defects and the result and suffering that may be caused by its defects, just as he enjoys the profits and accolades of his success.

As such it is logical that whichever God created the universe should be held fully responsible for His creation. The earthquakes, volcanoes, floods and famine that take countless lives and cause untold suffering are the results of the flaws in the creation of the world. And just as we can credit the Creator God for the gentle rain and sun that result in a good harvest we can credit the Creator God for the untold misery. Similarly, the blind and the handicapped, the sick and the lame can credit God for their suffering and misery just as they credit God for their talents and good health. We could even go as far as to place all evil and good on God's shoulders. After all, if God created man He should be responsible for man's actions. Even if He decided to give free will to man it was His sole decision and as such He should take responsibility for any lack of wisdom (delusion) in such a decision. As an all-knowing God we can assume that He was aware that some of His creations would cause more suffering and misery than joy and happiness.

The question then arises as to whether God is compassionate or omnipotent? All the misery and suffering in the world indicate that He cannot be both. Most people would like to assume that God is better than we are and that our goal is to be as God-like as possible, and as such use Him as a role model. And yet, if we were omnipotent would we cause such misery? We now live in a society where we are taught to help our children grow with love and understanding as opposed to spanking and hitting them. How does one relate to a God who kills and maims to teach us to grow?

In the Bhuridatta Jātaka the Buddha challenges the Brahmanic beliefs in an omnipotent Creator God by saying:

*“He who has eyes can see the sickening sight,  
Why does not Brahma (God) set his creatures right?  
If his wide power no limits can restrain,  
Why is his hand so rarely spread to bless?  
Why are his creatures condemned to pain?  
Why does he not to all give happiness?  
Why do fraud, lies and ignorance prevail?  
Why triumphs falsehood, truth and justice fail?  
I count you Brahma, one the unjust among,  
Who made a world in which to shelter wrong.”*

In the Mahābodhi Jātaka the Buddha refutes the theory that good things and blessings are engineered by or are the work of an omnipotent God by saying:

*“If there exists some God all powerful to fulfil  
In every creature bliss or woe, and action good or ill  
That Lord is stained with sin, man does but work his will.”*

The Buddha did not advocate the concept of creation by an omnipotent being. According to the Buddha, the law of cause and effect (kamma) operated on all living beings. All beings, including celestial beings, were responsible and accountable for their actions as the law of cause and effect was a natural, universal law. Nor did He believe that there was an omnipotent being who was eternal. Wholesome deeds result in rebirth in celestial realms, but in keeping with the law of impermanence even the extremely long lifespans in the celestial realms come to an end.

In most religions men venerate and pay reverence to celestial beings. In Buddhism the celestial beings venerate and reverence the Buddha and His disciples (*Sakka Samyutta*). Celestial beings who understand that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent come to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for they know that the abundance of celestial wealth and happiness they have is transient. Throughout the Buddhist texts one finds instances where both devas and Brahmas study and practise the Buddha Dhamma, for it is only through the practice of the Buddha Dhamma that one attains Nibbāna.

It is clear that according to the Buddha, celestial beings do not play a very significant role in our lives. The Buddha has encouraged all beings to use every possible opportunity to perform wholesome deeds so as to work towards salvation. We perform wholesome deeds and share the joy of our deeds with the divine. Celestial beings, who have powers of varying levels enjoy helping the virtuous just as we do (*Rasavāhini*). Why then do some Buddhists in Sri Lanka pray to celestial beings at times of distress? Mostly because of the influence of other religions on Buddhism. It is also due to their lack of confidence (Saddha) in the Buddha Dhamma and in themselves. Often people find it easier to run to someone else and ask for help when in trouble than to use their own strength, energy and resources to help themselves.

Buddhism is a very tolerant religion that encourages investigation and free thinking and respects the faiths and beliefs of others. Interfaith marriages many, many years ago at the time of our kings and Indian princesses who followed the Hindu religion, resulted in the building of shrines to Hindu Gods in the temple premises. Buddhist kings upheld the Buddha's infinite compassion and tolerance by not forcing these princesses to adopt Buddhism and by giving them freedom to practise their faith. And so we find that the roots of the influence of Hinduism on Buddhism in Sri Lanka go a long way back. Living in a multi-faith environment has resulted in some Buddhists being heavily influenced by Hinduism and in some instances possibly by Christianity and Islam. Daily prayer for salvation, strength and assistance is an integral part of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. It is only natural that over the years there would be some influence from religions that co-existed in harmony.



## CHAPTER 8

### **What do Buddhists do in times of distress and suffering?**

*Do not depend on others for your salvation  
Develop your self-confidence to gain it*

*Digha Nikāya II, 100*

**Question** - Praying for material possessions increases craving. But often Buddhists pray, not for material wealth, but at times of distress and sickness. The Buddha did not instruct His devotees to pray to celestial beings (gods, angels, brahmas, devas and other divine beings) at times of distress and sickness. Did the Buddha teach an alternative for Buddhists to follow in times of pain and distress?

**Answer** - The long-term strategy that the Buddha gave His devotees to avoid sickness and distress is to refrain from unwholesome deeds and to perform wholesome deeds. Such a lifestyle, the Buddha, said would lead to a long, healthy and happy life in both this birth and the next. But what does one do when faced with grave family sickness or physical and mental suffering in one's daily life resulting from past unwholesome actions?

Often Sri Lankan Buddhists resort to prayers when faced with illness or distress. Nothing is more distressing than the sickness or suffering of a loved one. We want to ensure that everything possible is being done to ease the suffering and discomfort of our loved one. If the illness is critical we resort to prayers for a speedy recovery and longevity. Most Buddhists are rational and realize that prayers alone will not cure the loved one. They take them to the best doctors and use both Western and Eastern medicine in hope of relief. But in this unfortunate situation when one feels that things are beyond one's control, in desperation one often resorts to every available option. This often includes prayers and vows taken to celestial beings.

These are some of the reasons that Buddhists resort to prayers at time of distress:

1. Because they have heard of, or experienced, an incident when someone who was seriously ill recovered with no known explanation for the recovery. There is no proof that the recovery was due to prayer, but as there is no scientific explanation for the recovery, it is assumed to be the result of prayers. Often these very same people have experienced instances when prayers have not worked. However, these incidents are set aside. Nobody questions as to why God needed to be prayed to in order to be compassionate.
2. Because people feel that the gods have supernatural powers which include the ability to heal. Most people realize that there are many instances when the gods have not been able to help, but since they believe that the gods do have healing powers it is prudent to ask for their assistance, for every effort and every avenue must be explored to ensure that there are no regrets later.
3. Because at a time when they are in uncontrollable grief they feel that they are not alone. A benevolent God or gods are assisting them and helping them in their time of need. This gives them comfort and eases their mind for the burden is no longer just on their shoulders and they are doing something to help the loved one. They are praying for his comfort and safety with compassion.

### **Why Buddhists need not pray**

Despite the fact that the Buddha has not encouraged prayer, I do not admonish anyone who finds comfort in prayers at times of acute distress. A mother who is tending a critically sick child will grasp at every hope and should be viewed with deep compassion and love. The Buddha Dhamma brings joy, hope, love and happiness to people. One must be sensitive to the needs and circumstances of each situation. As Buddhists we must use boundless compassion. This is not the time to question or refute others' beliefs.

We can assume that the celestial beings are compassionate beings who will help those in distress if they can. After all it is the righteous, the compassionate, the tolerant and generous who are reborn as celestial beings. In fact, the Buddha encouraged the laity to perform wholesome deeds and avoid unwholesome deeds by

enumerating heavenly pleasures. The wholesome characteristics that led to rebirth as celestial beings are sustained, resulting in compassionate beings that feel joy in helping those in distress.

Even though I do not admonish anyone for praying at times of acute distress I do encourage them in the practice of wholesome deeds, meditation on compassion and the use of the power of truth (paritta). I also discourage them in the taking of vows, which in my opinion amounts to bargaining with the god(s). Instead, I encourage them to perform wholesome deeds and share the merit and joy of their actions with the god(s). Whether one's loved ones recovered or not one can assume that the compassionate god(s), to the best of their abilities, assisted in their care and comfort. We must remember that according to the Buddha's teaching only you can change your kamma. Compassionate god(s) cannot do that for you. As such, vows taken which are dependent only on success seem to be, in my opinion, irreverence.

Some religions portray their gods as being jealous and cruel. These scriptures document god(s) who have maimed and killed. Explicit obedience is required and every imaginable harm from blindness to floods have been inflicted by God on His people. Some holy books stating that their God is jealous of other religions and other gods have gone so far as to instruct his followers to kill their own children if they accept any other faith. Some holy books claim that killing in the name of God is wholesome. Animal and human sacrifices are also often required to appease these gods. It is understandable that such religions should incorporate constant prayer, vows and begging for mercy in their daily worship.

Despite the fact that most religions claim that their gods are compassionate, animal sacrifice was a common practice in almost every culture in all quarters of the world. The compassionate Buddha refuted the cruel practice of animal sacrifice to appease the gods by offering Himself in place of 500 innocent goats. The Buddha said, "If gods can be appeased by animal sacrifices, then how much happier they would be with a human sacrifice." The Buddha then taught the king compassion by saying:

*"All tremble at the rod,  
life is dear to all.*

*Feeling for others as for yourself,  
neither slay nor cause others to slay.”*

*Dhammapada 130*

Have you ever prayed or begged for mercy from a compassionate friend? Why then would you assume that it is required of a compassionate god? Praying and begging for mercy from the merciless is understandable. I can see a person begging for mercy from a murderer or rapist. But why does one constantly have to pray and beg for mercy from compassionate beings? The Buddha has advised us to perform wholesome deeds and share the joy of our deeds with the gods. According to the Buddha, the compassionate gods will protect the harmless and needy without constant prayers and begging, just as we would.

If daily prayers are a part of your worship, reflect on your practice. The Buddha has encouraged us to question our actions. Why are you praying and begging for mercy? Are not the gods to whom you are praying compassionate? We have so little time in our busy lives. Should we not be spending this time in meditation, which leads to Nibbāna instead?

Buddhists should be aware how rare is birth as a human being by reflecting on the parable of the blind turtle. The Buddha explained how difficult it is to obtain birth as a human once you are born in an unhappy plane. He said, “If a ring were tossed about on the surface of a stormy sea, and if in that sea there lived a one-eyed turtle which came up to the surface once every hundred years, the likelihood of the turtle surfacing such that the ring would slip around its neck is greater than that of achieving birth as a human.” We are fortunate. Resulting from past wholesome deeds we have birth in the human realm. The teachings of the Buddha, the Dhamma, are at present available in the world. Both these conditions are required to attain enlightenment. Should we not then be using this opportunity to work towards attaining Nibbāna?

**The Buddha’s alternative to prayers**

As Buddhists we understand the operation of the law of kamma. As such we know that the present distress and suffering is a result

of past intentional, unwholesome actions<sup>15</sup>. These actions may not be viewed for they could have taken place in a previous birth, but we are aware that the results of kamma take effect at the opportune time. We also know that the unwholesome effects of our past actions can be reduced by wholesome actions. As such great effort should be taken to perform wholesome actions at times of distress and suffering. Providing meals for the poor, medicine and comfort to the sick, gifts and clothes to the needy, and care and compassion to the elderly are some of the wholesome deeds that are undertaken. Many Buddhists release a cow or calf that is to be slaughtered by buying the animal from a butcher and ensuring its safety through release to a farm or field (estate).

Buddhists also provide meals and requisites for the Sangha, who have with compassion given up all material possessions and devoted their life for their own spiritual welfare and that of the laity. They also purify their minds by reflecting on the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and honour the compassionate Buddha by lighting lamps or venerating the Bodhi tree under which He attained enlightenment.

By performing these wholesome deeds one dilutes the effects of the unwholesome deeds and paves the way for recovery. At such time it may be a doctor, a god or even an acquaintance who assists the suffering. The effects of help by the celestial beings cannot be easily viewed but often recovery or relief is assumed to be a result of divine assistance. If relief is not obtained and the patient passes away or the unfortunate situation continues it is assumed that it was the result of unavoidable, unwholesome kamma. Buddhists should reflect that with wholesome deeds one increases the chances of recovery of the distressed, for benevolent gods cannot change one's kamma. Only you can do that.

Meditation on compassion helps both the person practising the meditation and the person towards whom it is directed. The practice of meditation at times of distress is easier for those who are already accustomed to daily meditation. However, distress and acute suffering is conducive to the initiation of meditation on

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15. Dr. Paul Dahlke of Germany in his *Buddhist Essays* states, “ It is the knowledge of the law of cause and effect, action and reaction, that urges a man to refrain from evil and gather good.

compassion. Starting with compassion to a loved one as opposed to an unknown person also makes it easier for the beginner.

In generating compassion begin by recognizing that you do not want suffering and that you are deserving of happiness. Then recognize that, just like you, all other living beings do not want to suffer and are deserving of happiness.

Begin by visualising the person who is experiencing great suffering. For the first few minutes of meditation reflect on his or her suffering in an objective, analytical way. Reflect on his present situation and how he was before this occurrence. Reflect on all the missed opportunities resulting from this sickness and how much he enjoyed freedom from suffering.

Now relate that suffering to yourself by reflecting that this individual has the same capacity to experience pain, joy, happiness and suffering as you do. Reflect that he too feels and experiences sensations, just as you do. And that, just like you, he too wants happiness.

Then allow yourself to respond to his suffering naturally, with compassion. Try to experience a feeling of wanting to help the loved one, a strong feeling of wanting to relieve his suffering. Think how much you want this person to be free from suffering. And then resolve that you will help this person to be free from suffering.

Finally, concentrate your mind on your resolution and simply generate thoughts of compassion and loving kindness. Direct your love, compassion and warmth towards him. Let the goodness that lies within you surface. Let it encompass your loved one. Encircle him with love and compassion and sustain this thought for the duration of the period of meditation.

Conclude your meditation by radiating compassion and loving kindness to all living beings by aspiring thus:

*In gladness and in safety,  
May all beings be at ease.  
Whatever living beings there may be;  
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,  
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,  
The seen and the unseen,*

*Those living near and far away,  
Those born and to be born  
May all beings be at ease!*

*Let none deceive another,  
Or despise a being in any state,  
Let none through anger or ill-will  
Wish harm upon another,  
Even as a mother protects with her life  
Her child, her only child,  
So with boundless heart  
Should one cherish all living beings;  
Radiating loving kindness over the world:  
Spreading upwards to the skies  
And downwards to the depths;  
Outwards and unbounded,  
Freed from hatred and ill-will.  
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down  
Free from drowsiness,  
One should sustain this recollection.*

*(Adapted from the Metta Sutta)*

In practising meditation on compassion one will find peace and calm and also relief for the loved one. Those who are distressed by the feeling of helplessness in an intense, uncontrollable situation will find great comfort in knowing that they are doing something to help. It is, however, easier to fall back on the gods and to ask them for help than to use your own inner strength, benevolence, and compassion to help others. One must as such have confidence in the benefits of meditation on compassion and the genuine desire to help the loved one by giving, rather than to help by asking (gods).

In addition to performing wholesome deeds and meditation on loving kindness the Buddha taught His followers to use the power of Truth for strength, comfort and relief at times of distress and sickness. At the time of the Buddha there was great discomfort and suffering in Vesāli resulting from drought and the plague. The Buddha dispensed the Ratana Sutta (discourse on the three jewels - Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) to bring relief to the people of Vesāli. This Sutta conveys the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and concludes by conferring blessings based on the Truth of these statements. Sakka, the king of the heavens, was so inspired

by the discourse on the three jewels that he expressed his joy in the last three verses by venerating the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha as follows:

*“We beings assembled  
On earth and in the air  
Salute the Accomplished Buddha/Dhamma/Sangha(Arahanths)  
Honoured by the divine and humans.  
By this truth  
May there be happiness  
To all beings.”*

The Buddha dispensed many suttas that can be used for protection and blessing on various occasions. The power of the Ratana Sutta exceeds all others and as such is used for any type of suffering or distress. Specific suttas could also be used to suit the distress. The Buddha dispensed the Girimānanda Sutta when the monk Girimānanda was very sick. This sutta, which analyzes the body to its constituent parts, enumerates the realities of the body. As the sutta eased the suffering of the monk Girimānanda it is used with confidence at times of sickness.

The Dhajagga Sutta (Crest of the Banner) is used for fear. Grave sickness is often accompanied by fear for the safety of the loved one. As such it is also used at times of grave sickness. Many, many years ago there was a disagreement between the devas and the asuras which resulted in a battle. Sakka, the king of the heavens, then dispensed the Dhajagga Sutta to calm the minds and relieve the fears of his army. Sakka instructed his army to look for the crest of his banner in the distance when they experienced hair-raising fear that resulted in trembling and perspiration. He said that doing so and reflecting on his strength would soothe their fears and give them confidence. He then went on to add that if his crest was not visible to look for the crest of the banner of each of his four chief generals, and in so doing to derive strength and confidence from each of his generals. The Buddha repeated the Dajagga Sutta and added to it by reminding the men and celestial beings gathered that one could not gather fearlessness from those that harbour fear. After gently pointing out that Sakka and his generals all harboured fear He enumerated the virtues of the Triple Gem and instructed those gathered to reflect instead on the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha (Arahanths). Fearlessness, He said, could only be given by the fearless.

The Angulimāla Sutta, which was taught by the Buddha to Angulimāla to help a mother who was in labour, also called upon the power of Truth. In this sutta, Angulimāla, who was formerly a serial killer, uses the truth of the statement that he had not in thought, speech or action committed any harm to any living being after his initiation to the Noble Order. The truth of this statement by Angulimāla eased the pain and discomfort of the woman in labour and she delivered a healthy son. Since then Buddhist women use the sutta when in labour.

The Jayamangala Gāthā enumerates the great feats of compassion performed by the Buddha and concludes by conferring joyous victory. The Buddha called His teachings the Dhamma, which means the Truth. There is, according to the Buddha, great power in Truth. Followers of Truth can use this power of Truth for relief, in times of distress and suffering.

The suttas of the Buddha can be used for protection, comfort and relief at times of distress. As with meditation, for best results one must have confidence in the Buddha Dhamma and understanding of the suttas and the circumstances under which the Buddha dispensed them. The term paritta, or protection, is often used for the Buddha's suttas, as the chanting of these suttas of Truth is said to create positive thoughts and vibrations which bring about calm and peace of mind to the distressed.

Mind is supreme in the teachings of the Buddha. It is a well-proven fact that a positive attitude can help at times of sickness and distress. The root cause for many a physical illness lies in the mind. The power of Truth helps the followers of Truth is the premise that upholds the chanting of Paritta. Just as virtue protects the virtuous, when a person with complete confidence in the Truth of the Buddha's Word which arose from full enlightenment recites Paritta, he will be protected and receive blessings. He will also calm his mind and experience inner strength, peace and confidence.

A very interesting experience of the effects of Paritta is described by Ven. Rastrapal Mahathera in the book *Five Visions of a Dying Man*. In the Abhidhamma, the Buddha explains the importance of the javana thought-process of a dying man in determining the place

of rebirth<sup>16</sup>. The images that enter the mind at the time of death during the javana thought-process condition the mind and the succeeding birth. These images, which are known as kamma, kamma nimitta or gati nimitta, are recollections of an action, a symbol of an action or place of rebirth resulting from an action. Ven. Rastrapal had observed the visions of a dying man by conversing with him and questioning him on the images he saw at the time of death. He found that with the recitation of Paritta, the images turned to symbols of heavenly birth, while at moments of rest when the man's thoughts turned to more mundane matters and attachments, the images were indicative of rebirth in the human realm. In this book Ven. Rastrapal, through experience of conversation with a dying man, confirmed the Buddha's teaching that Paritta and wholesome thoughts have positive effects and lead to rebirth in happy planes.

In most religions people venerate the celestial beings. In Buddhism the devas and Brahmas (celestial beings) venerate the Buddha and His Arahants. From the time of Prince Siddhattha's birth to His passing away, there are many instances of celestial beings venerating the Buddha and asking for blessings. The sutta on blessings (Mahā Mangala Sutta) was dispensed by the Buddha at the invitation of a deva. Maha Brahma, Sakka and Anuruddha spoke at the Buddha's Parinibbāna. Mahā Brahma (Creator God of the Brahmins) was the first to console the grieving Brahmas with a talk on impermanence. This was followed by Sakka, king of the heavens, who consoled the grieving devas. It was only after the celestial beings had venerated and paid respect to the remains of the Buddha that Anuruddha addressed the grieving masses with a talk on impermanence. One must also remember that it was at the invitation of Brahma Sahampathi that the Buddha decided to teach His new-found knowledge for the benefit of humankind and celestial beings.

It is appropriate that as Buddhists we reflect on the fact that even celestial beings came to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for veneration and blessings. Is it not then ironic that we should go to the celestial beings when the celestial beings came to the Buddha? The Buddha has left His Dhamma as the teacher. The Dhamma is

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16. Read Chapter 8 of *Questions and Answers in Buddhism - Volume I*, by Radhika Abeysekera for a comprehensive answer on what determines the place of rebirth .

available for the benefit of all beings. Many suttas begin with an invitation to the celestial beings to listen to the Dhamma. At the request of the devas and Brahmas the Buddha began His suttas in this manner for the celestial beings rejoiced in the Dhamma. Does it not make more sense that we should, like the celestial beings, go to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for blessings?

According to the Buddha, the majority of the devas and Brahmas are compassionate beings who find joy in helping and blessing the virtuous. They are, however, worldlings, in that they have not eradicated their impurities. When the results of the wholesome deeds that propelled them into the celestial realms are extinguished, they will fall back to the human realm in keeping with their kamma.

As Buddhists we should build confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha so that we can overcome distress and strengthen our minds through wholesome deeds, meditation on compassion and the power of Truth (Paritta). While we should not add to the grief of a person who is praying to the gods in acute grief and suffering, we should, with compassion, gently encourage them in the performance of wholesome deeds and the sharing of the joy of their action with the devas and Brahmas, by reminding them that even the celestial beings went to the Buddha for blessings. And if we find that the influence of other religions and past habit is too strong to break, we should remind them with compassion that the Metteya Bodhisatta has completed the ten virtues and awaits the appropriate time for His final birth. He awaits His appropriate time in the Tusita Heaven. If one requires prayers, at least go to One who is closest to perfection.



## CHAPTER 9

### **What are the ten wholesome deeds that, if accompanied by intention, lead to wholesome results?**

*“Think not lightly of good, saying, ‘It will not come to me.’  
Drop by drop is the water pot filled.  
Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little,  
Fills himself with good.”*

*Dhammapada 122*

**Question** - The Buddha did not encourage His devotees to pray or take vows. Instead, He asked them to perform wholesome deeds to ensure a long, healthy life, happiness, prosperity, beauty and rebirth in the heavens. What are the wholesome deeds that the Buddha advocated?

**Answer** - When explaining the law of kamma the Buddha said, “Intention, O Bhikkus, is kamma” (Chetanāham bhikkhave kamman vadāmi). Once one has willed, one acts by thought, word or deed. He then went on to explain that moral and immoral actions that are accompanied by intention, constitute kamma. These wholesome and unwholesome deeds, when accompanied by intention, will result in wholesome and unwholesome reactions (vipaka).

The wholesome deeds that the Buddha declared would lead to wholesome reactions are:

Dāna - Generosity  
Sila - Morality or virtue  
Bhāvanā - Meditation or mental culture  
Apacāyana - Reverence  
Veyyāvacca - Service  
Pattidāna - Transference of merit  
Pattānumodanā - Rejoicing in others’ merit

Dhamma Savana - Listening to the doctrine  
Dhamma Desanā - Teaching the doctrine  
Ditthajjukamma- Straightening one's views

As the Buddha said that intention, or volition, is kamma, and that once one wills one acts by thought, speech or action, we will look at the ten wholesome deeds from the point of view of volition. There are three periods during which this volition or intention arises:

1. Before the wholesome act
2. During the wholesome act and
3. After the completion of the wholesome act.

To acquire the full benefit of the wholesome deed one should sustain the wholesome intention throughout all three periods.

If generosity is used as an example, we should consider the intention before giving, intention during the process of giving and intention after the gift changes hands, when reflecting on the giving. Intention before the act of generosity arises when preparing for the giving. Intention during the act occurs at the actual time of giving and intention after the act occurs whenever the act of generosity is contemplated.

Intention is also categorized three-fold depending on the intensity. Intention could be weak, moderate or intense. Intention is weak at the time of preparation when the wish to act (chanda), energy (viriya), thought (citta) and investigation (vimamsa) are weak. Intention can also be weak, moderate or intense at the time of giving. Intention becomes weak when gifts are given with impure thoughts or with thoughts of material gain for self in this world or even in the heavenly or Brahma realms. They are intense when given with the intention of purifying the mind to attain the four stages of sainthood for the benefit of others. To practise in this manner is also to work towards the fulfilment of the first perfection of virtue, Dana. The strength of intention also affects one's emotions when one reflects on the gift. When one's intention is strong, joy arises each time one reflects on the act of giving.

These grades or intensities of intention are applicable to all wholesome and unwholesome actions including the other wholesome acts such as morality, mental culture, reverence,

listening to the Dhamma, etc., discussed in this lesson. They are important as they determine as to when the effect or Vipaka takes place.

Dāna - Generosity is the act of charity and is practised in two ways. One is the generosity practised toward the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha or generosity practised toward those worthy of honour, and the other is generosity practised to those in need, which is Dāna practised out of compassion. Generosity must be accompanied by intention to constitute as wholesome kamma. According to the teachings of the Buddha, the wholesome benefits of generosity are wealth and prosperity.

Sila - Virtue is the moral volition of refraining from unwholesome actions done through mind, body and speech and the active practice of compassion, loving kindness, sympathetic joy and equanimity by thought, word and deed. It includes right speech, right conduct and right livelihood. As such it must be stressed that sila is not just refraining from false speech, harsh speech, slander and gossip. It is the speaking of truth and words that bring hope, joy and confidence to others. Sila is not just refraining from harming or killing living beings, it also includes helping the sick, suffering and needy with compassion. Virtue or morality is of four kinds – the virtue of a Bhikkhu, the virtue of a Bhikkhuni, the virtue of a novice and the virtue of the laity.

The virtue of the laity is in observance of the three refuges<sup>17</sup> and in the mindful daily observance of the five precepts<sup>18</sup> and the eight precepts on Uposatha days or other convenient days. If a person takes the five precepts and breaks even one, then the person is

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17. Devotees of the Buddha take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This does not mean that they are saved or emancipated through the efforts of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. It means that with confidence they adopt the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha as their path or guide to salvation. It is not just the recitation that counts but the active adoption of the path with confidence.

18. After study and understanding I undertake the precepts of refraining from destroying life, stealing, sexual misconduct, inappropriate (false) speech and consumption of alcohol and mind-altering drugs.

defiled or dussila. Those who refrain from unwholesome deeds but do not take the precepts are known as sampattavirati. The wholesome effects of deeds performed by such persons are not the same as those of one who has taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha and then observes the precepts. This is because the intention when one observes the three refuges is the practice of morality with a view to Nibbāna.

Observance of the precepts is voluntary and not a commandment. Despite this fact one should not observe the precepts carelessly. If one is determined to take alcohol at every party and social occasion then it does not make sense to observe the precept of refraining from intoxicating drinks and drugs. In doing so one simultaneously breaks the precept of refraining from untruthful speech. Instead, one should reflect on why one needs to take alcohol at social gatherings. Is it lack of confidence in self, lack of confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, lack of self-control or an addiction? Remember that it is difficult to expect children to hold up to peer pressure if we as adults cannot do so by setting a good example. Ensure that the precepts are taken mindfully and that every effort is made to observe them. Enhance the practice of morality with meditation on compassion and loving kindness. The wholesome effects of the practice of morality are long, healthy life, beauty and birth in higher states.

Bhāvanā - Meditation or mental culture is the moral volition that arises when a person is practising any one of the forty objects of mental concentration known as Samatha with a view of purifying the mind. It is also the practice of insight (Vipassanā) with the view of seeing things as they really are. Vipassana meditation is performed to penetrate the truth of suffering, impermanence, and no self with a view to Nibbāna.

The volition that arises in the thought-process of learning the doctrine or any other art or science may be included under the heading of mental culture. The wholesome effects of meditation are the development of wisdom, birth in the higher deva and Brahma realms, and ultimately, emancipation.

Apacāyana - Reverence is the moral volition of paying respect and reverence to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha and also includes reverence paid to one's parents, elders, teachers and others who lead a virtuous life without impure thoughts of personal gain. It is demonstrated by rising from one's seat, by saluting them,

ministering to their needs, etc. The wholesome effects of reverence is birth in noble families.

Veyyāvacca - Service is the moral volition of rendering a service to the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, parents, elders, teachers as well as the needy, the sick, the old, the poor and the feeble. Sewing the robes of a Bhikkhu and rendering assistance to the moral deeds of others are included in this category. The wholesome effect of service is having a large following or many friends and acquaintances who respect you. It also leads to the development of leadership qualities.

Pattidāna - Transference of merit is the moral volition of requesting others to participate in one's wholesome deeds and by doing so providing the opportunity for others to share in the joy of giving. The wholesome effect of transferring merit is having the opportunity to give in abundance in future births. As such one will be born with wealth and prosperity.

Pattānumodanā - Rejoicing in others' merit is partaking in the merit offered by others and rejoicing in their wholesome deeds. This includes giving to an individual and giving in general. Both transfer of merit and rejoicing in others' merit are often referred to as types of generosity. The wholesome effects of rejoicing in others' merit without jealousy is birth in noble states and the opportunity to share in others' fortunes and abundance.

Dhamma Savanā - This includes listening to the doctrine attentively with purity of mind and the intention of practising the Dhamma with a view to Nibbāna. It is also the learning of the Dhamma with the view of teaching others. The purpose of listening then should be clearly not just for the sake of knowledge but for the purpose of self-purification with the intention of reaching the four stages of sainthood. Listening to the arts and sciences too can be included to some extent in this category.

Dhamma Desana - Teaching the Doctrine is the practice of teaching the Dhamma to others out of compassion. It is the teaching with a pure mind without any impure motive of gain, honour, fame or glory.

Teaching of the arts and sciences with the view to enrich the knowledge of others is also included in this category. The wholesome effects of listening to and teaching the Dhamma is knowledge and wisdom.

Ditthajjukamma - Straightening one's views is the forming of correct views. It is the moral volition of establishing right understanding - of establishing the Four Noble Truths. It also includes freedom from false views such as man being created by God, salvation through prayers, not believing in the law of cause and effect, believing that fortune depends on objects seen, etc. The wholesome effects of straightening one's views is confidence in the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and self. It also leads to wisdom and full awakening.

These are the wholesome deeds that the Buddha advised His followers to adopt. The diligent practice of these ten deeds would ensure long, healthy life, happiness, prosperity, beauty and rebirth in the heavens.



## CHAPTER 10

### **What are the precepts that Buddhists observe daily and what is the purpose of such observance?**

*“Abandon wrong. It can be done.  
If it were impossible to do  
I would not urge you to do so.  
But since it can be done  
I say to you abandon wrong...”*

*“Of all the fragrances --  
sandal, tagara, blue lotus and jasmine --  
the fragrance of virtue is the sweetest.”*

*Anguttara Nikāya & Dhammapada 55*

**Question** - What are the precepts (modes of discipline) that Buddhists observe daily and what is the purpose of such observance? Are there any steps that can be taken to ensure that the precepts are not broken?

**Answer** - Buddhists observe either the five precepts (panca sila) or the eight precepts, the eighth of which is right livelihood (ajiva atthamaka sila), daily. Both of these are permanent observations (nicca sila) and are renewed daily so as to ensure successful observation. The precepts are modes of discipline that the Buddha asked us to examine with wisdom before acceptance. As such they are not commandments. Despite this fact they should not be undertaken lightly. If one chooses to follow the Buddha's moral code by observing the precepts, then one should, with care, make every effort to ensure that one observes them mindfully.

The observance of the precepts are the first step in the practice of morality or sila. Morality, according to the Buddha's teachings, is infinite compassion and loving kindness towards all living beings.

One begins the practice of morality by refraining from intentionally harming another either physically, verbally or mentally. Then one moves on to helping and assisting them with compassion and loving kindness so that one brings peace, joy, hope, comfort, confidence and harmony to all living beings.

The benefits of observing the precepts are two-fold. The Buddha has explained in detail the working of the law of kamma. Intentional unwholesome deeds result in unwholesome effects at the opportune time. A person who harms others will reap the effects of these unwholesome deeds. Similarly a person who refrains from harming living beings and instead works for their comfort, peace and harmony will reap the wholesome effects of such deeds. Most Buddhists are aware of the operation of the law of kamma and aware of the benefit of observing the precepts.

The deeper and less understood benefit of observing the precepts is the destruction of craving that leads to aversion, ill-will and hatred. The cause of suffering is craving and craving leads to both grasping/greed (lobha) and aversion/hatred (dosa). When unpleasant sensations arise one instinctively tries to set them aside. If the unpleasant sensation continues one feels aversion, ill-will and possibly hatred. One also feels aversion, ill-will and hatred when one's happiness is thwarted. The practice of the precepts leads to the practice of morality which helps to destroy aversion, ill-will and hatred. As such the practice of the precepts is the first step in combatting aversion/ill-will/hatred (dosa) which is one of the three defilements that have to be destroyed to attain Nibbāna. **As such the mindful observance of the precepts is an essential step in one's progress to Nibbāna.**

Most people lead a relatively moral life. Murder, burglary, adultery and rape, though seen often on television and in the newspapers, are not common in our immediate circle. We should not, however, be complacent or fooled into thinking that we are keeping the precepts just because we do not commit these grave, unwholesome deeds. We should remember that in aspiring for Nibbāna we are aspiring for perfection. As such our goal is not to be satisfied with the off-hand practice of morality, but to strive for perfection in morality. Therefore this lesson concentrates on perfection of morality or fine-tuning our behaviour to keep the precepts to perfection. We have to remember that our goal, Nibbāna, requires intense training of the mind. It is relatively easy to train and control the body. It is so much more difficult to train and control

the mind. Just as it is most difficult to raise your school marks from ninety-five to ninety-nine percent, it is most difficult to move the practice of the precepts from ninety-five to ninety-nine percent. But it can be done. The Buddha assured us that it can be done. This lesson will help you in the perfection of the precepts.

The precepts that Buddhists follow daily are documented below in the abbreviated and expanded form. One must remember that refraining from unwholesome deeds is just the beginning of the practice of virtue. One must also actively work towards performing wholesome deeds. A young man approached the Buddha and enumerated his high level of spirituality by informing the Buddha that he had observed the precepts to perfection. The Buddha then gently informed the young man that if refraining from unwholesome deeds in itself led to the highest level of spiritual development, then surely the most spiritual persons would be infants who were lying on their backs. The Buddha then encouraged the young man in wholesome deeds and mental culture. While this lesson concentrates on observing the precepts to perfection one must be aware that this is just the beginning of the practice of virtue.

**1. (Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life) I undertake the precept of refraining from destroying life.**

*Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life,  
I vow to cultivate compassion and  
learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals,  
plants, and minerals (environment).  
I am determined not to kill,  
and not to condone any act of killing in the world,  
in my thinking and in my way of life.*

Few people are consumed by anger and hatred to kill living beings indiscriminately. Those who do are usually confined to the mental hospitals or prisons. However, when one observes this precept one undertakes to refrain from killing all living beings. This includes animals and even insects. Many persons do not hesitate to kill a mosquito or a fly that is bothering them and there are some who enjoy killing animals and view it as a sport.

In the Dhammapada the Buddha said:

*“All tremble at the rod;*

*All fear death.  
Feeling for others as for your self  
Neither slay nor cause others to slay."*

All beings enjoy life. Observe the love a mother elephant feels for her calf and the way the herd of elephants protect their young by encircling them. Observe the loyalty of a swan to its life-long mate. Observe the tenderness of the doe as she nuzzles her suckling fawn. Animals may not be able to express their feelings with words, but similarly to humans, animals feel love and compassion, fear and pain. Even mosquitos and flies have nervous systems and feel fear and pain. Even pests (which is how most people refer to mosquitos and bugs) have a right to live for nature balances all forms of life in the universe. All living beings enjoy life and have a right to happiness. The will to live is an instinct that is inborn in all beings. Feeling for others as for ourselves the Buddha asked us to refrain from destroying all forms of life.

Why then do we destroy life? There are many reasons but if we analyze them we will find that the root cause is our own pleasure and happiness. Some may kill for their livelihood so that their loved ones can have a comfortable life. Some may kill for sport to ensure their pleasure in hunting or the satisfaction of their taste buds. Killing may also occur through aversion to set aside an unpleasant occurrence such as a buzzing mosquito or a bothersome fly. And it may be through uncontrolled anger at those who are a hindrance to one's happiness. Whilst practising Buddhists generally try to refrain from any type of killing, from time to time these unfortunate deaths occur due to ignorance, because people have let their aversion grow unchecked to extreme anger and hatred.

The Buddha has advised Buddhists to refrain from employment that involves the killing of animals. If your livelihood involves the killing of animals every effort should be made to change your livelihood. Sports such as hunting and fishing are also not seen as enjoyment by practising Buddhists. Whilst there may be some Buddhists who may kill a man (or an animal) in anger it is outside the scope of this lesson as I am addressing this to those who are knowledgeable of the Dhamma and actively practising the Dhamma. In this lesson we will concentrate mindfully on the minor irritations that could lead to killing. Those who have moved away from the killing (or harming) of humans and animals need to concentrate on the mosquitos and bugs that they may kill through

aversion and irritation. Those who observe this precept should be vigilant so as not kill any living being intentionally.

Reflect on your past year's experience. Have you at any time in the last year taken a life? If so what can be done to prevent its happening again? Remember that we are striving for perfection. Even the little bugs have a right to live. Use mosquito repellent or brush them away gently. Dress appropriately when going outside to minimize the unwanted bites. Do not let the minor irritation of a mosquito bite or a buzzing fly lead to irritation and anger. Observe yourself and observe the bugs. Learn about insects, their life and their unique beauty. Practise meditation on loving kindness to all living beings. If you find that your friends at school take pleasure in killing animals and innocent insects teach them to be tolerant or change your friends. Practise loving kindness and compassion to all living beings until the taking of a life becomes completely loathsome. Refrain from any action that will in any way cause physical pain to another. Reflect deeply whenever you transgress. Keep in mind that the goal of Nibbāna requires perfection. Renew your precepts mindfully, then practise the precept to perfection.

Five factors must be present for the first precept to be broken.

1. It must be a living being.
2. One must be aware that it is a living being.
3. There must be the intention to kill.
4. One must make the effort to kill (plan/act).
5. The living being must die.

When all five factors are present a person has effectively broken the precept and performed an unwholesome deed, the effects of which are short life and sickness when born in the human realm. Such unwholesome deeds are known as kamma patha, or full circle kamma. As all five factors are present such a deed could influence one's next birth (janaka kamma). One must also remember the importance of intention or the will to kill. Without intention it would not constitute as kamma because kamma is intention. If one plans to kill and the plan is foiled or one succeeds in injuring the living being though not fatally, one still reaps the effects of the unwholesome deed. It would not, however, be a Kamma patha. The result of such an action would be felt as supportive or counter-active kamma.

I am sometimes questioned on the effects of extreme and rare occurrences. Is it an unwholesome deed to kill a dog that is attacking someone or to abort a baby to save the life of the mother? In such instances one should examine the intention of the person who is taking the life. Is the intention to save a life or to take a life? People also ask about farmers' spraying of fields with chemicals to ensure a healthy crop and scientists that may have to experiment with living creatures to research cures for disease. More recently I was questioned on the killing that one has to perform if one joins the Sri Lankan army. Examine the intention in each of these instances and the intensity of the intention. Also examine the aversion to the living being and the pleasure/distaste in the act of killing. Is this something that is being done to satisfy one's own pleasure or happiness? Is it something that one does with distaste but through necessity to defend one's country or as part of one's job? Is there ill-will, anger, or hatred in the act of killing? Reflecting on such questions will usually lead one to the right answer so that one can make a decision with wisdom. In general one should abhor taking the life of another.

**2. (Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation and stealing)  
I undertake the precept of refraining from taking that to which  
I am not entitled.**

*Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation,  
social injustice, stealing and oppression,  
I vow to cultivate loving kindness and  
learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals,  
plants and minerals (environment).  
I vow to practise generosity by sharing my time,  
energy and material resources with those who are in real need.  
I am determined not to steal and  
not to possess anything that should belong to others,  
and I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering  
or the suffering of other species on Earth.*

Sometimes people assume that this precept includes only stealing from people. However, it is more than breaking into a home and stealing. It includes careless borrowing that one does with no intention of returning, embezzlement and fraud, tax evasion and fraudulent business dealings. It includes exploitation of living beings directly and indirectly in all circumstances.

Those who have developed their mind to refrain from the obvious unwholesome acts such as stealing and embezzlement should look for the subtle implications of the observation. One must not take a pen or even paper from one's office for private use. As one wishes others to respect belongings that we consider our own, one should respect the belongings of others. And this includes inanimate companies and the government.

Reflect on your past year's experience. Have you at any time in the last year taken something that you were not entitled to take? If so, what can be done to prevent its happening again? Remember that we are striving for perfection. Overcharging a person is stealing. Passing off your thirteen-year-old child as twelve to get a discount ticket is stealing. Charging personal expenses to your business is stealing. Manipulating personal trips to make them appear to be business trips is stealing. Accepting bribes is stealing. Even the pens and pencils we may take home carelessly, and the personal photocopying that we may do at work is stealing. Is it really worth it? Why are we doing it? Are we really saving money by doing it? Is it for convenience? If it is for convenience as opposed to saving money, then is there some way to pay back your employer or is it possible to forego another paid benefit to even the score? Could you work late without pay or forego a benefit such as car allowance for the convenience? Do not let temptation overpower you. Practise meditation to strengthen your mind. Reflect on how you would feel if someone else was taking from you. Remember that one must perfect the practice of the precepts to attain Nibbāna. Practise the precept to perfection.

Five factors must be present for this precept to be broken.

1. It must be owned by another.
2. One must be aware that it is owned by another.
3. There must be the intention to steal.
4. One must make the effort to steal (plan/act).
5. One must obtain the item.

When all five factors are present one has effectively broken the precept and performed an unwholesome deed, the effects of which are loss of wealth or poverty when born in the human realm. Without intention the action would not constitute an unwholesome deed as kamma is intention. However, if one plans to steal, attempts to steal and the plan is foiled, one still reaps the effects of the unwholesome deed. It will not, however, influence one's place of rebirth as it is not a kamma patha or full-circle kamma.

**3. (Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct) I undertake the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct.**

*Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct,  
I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect  
the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and  
society.*

*I am determined not to engage in sexual relations  
without love and a long-term commitment.*

*To preserve the happiness of myself and others,  
I am determined to respect my commitments and  
the commitments of others.*

*I will do everything in my power to protect children  
from sexual abuse and  
to prevent couples and families from being broken  
by sexual misconduct.*

This precept is often interpreted as refraining from adultery and rape, both very painful and damaging acts to all concerned. However, it encompasses more than just adultery and rape. It includes misconduct with a person under the protection of a parent or guardian, misconduct with religious celibates such as nuns and monks, and misconduct with one who is spoken for or committed to another. If one remembers that the practice of morality is the practice of infinite compassion and loving kindness to all living beings, one will have a better understanding of the proper practice of this precept. Remember that one has to consider not just the feelings and needs of the parties to the act, but also the feelings of the family and loved ones. When in doubt use the universal test. Is this something of which you can be proud? Is this something of which your parents and loved ones will be proud? Is this something that the wise will condone? Western society has accepted a lowering of moral standards on sexuality. Peer pressure is difficult to withstand. Have confidence in yourself, set the highest standards and abide by your convictions. You will feel better about yourself and your parents, and true friends will respect you for your maturity.

Reflect on your past year's experience. Have you at any time in the last year indulged in sexual misconduct? If so what can be done to prevent it happening again? Reflect on the pain and harm you may cause loved ones if they are aware of your conduct. Reflect on the embarrassment you may cause and the damage you may cause if

innocent children are involved. Lustful thoughts can lead to lustful actions. One of the ten unwholesome deeds is craving for another's belongings. Lustful thoughts that do not lead to action also constitute unwholesome kamma according to the Buddha. Knowing that lustful thoughts could lead to lustful deeds, entertain wholesome thoughts. Set aside unwholesome thoughts. Remember that we are striving for perfection. Strengthen your mind through meditation. When unwholesome thoughts enter your mind, set them aside and replace them with wholesome thoughts. Young persons are wise to refrain from actions that will cause bondage and from commitments that will have long-term negative impacts on their future. Renew your precepts and practise the precept to perfection.

Four factors must be present for this precept to be broken.

1. The person must be under the protection of a parent or guardian, married or committed to another, or a religious celibate.
2. There must be an intention to indulge in misconduct.
3. One must make the effort to indulge in misconduct (plan/act).
4. The act must be completed.

It must also be stressed that any sexual act with any person performed by force is also included as misconduct in this precept, as it disrupts their peace and harmony. When all five factors are present a person has effectively broken the precept and performed an unwholesome deed, the effects of which are inability to have meaningful long-term relationships and the resulting loneliness and sexual disfunction when born in the human realm.

**4. (Aware of the suffering caused by inappropriate and false speech) I undertake the precept of refraining from inappropriate and false speech.**

*Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech  
and the inability to listen to others,  
I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening  
in order to bring joy and happiness to others and  
relieve others from their suffering.  
Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering  
I vow to learn to speak truthfully,  
with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope.  
I am determined not to spread news  
that I do not know to be certain and*

*not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure.  
I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or  
discord,  
or that can cause the family or the community to break.  
I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts,  
however small.*<sup>19</sup>

When observing the five precepts this precept is often abbreviated to untruthful or false speech. However, if you are observing the eight precepts known as the Ajiva atthamaka sila, this precept is expanded to include also harsh speech, gossip and slander. For the purpose of this lesson we will be including all forms of inappropriate speech. As our goal is infinite compassion and loving kindness to all living beings, we must begin by ensuring that speech is in no way harmful to others. Then we concentrate on speech that results in hope, joy, confidence, peace and harmony.

The Buddha stated that speaking the Truth was the most important one of all the precepts. A seeker of Truth should at all cost refrain from untruthfulness. Also one who is not afraid of lying is more likely to break the other precepts and then cover up their misbehaviour with lies. As such, a person who lies is more likely to break the other precepts. This is also the most difficult precept to perfect because, in general, it is easier to control one's action than to control one's speech. Each of the four factors of inappropriate speech will be examined separately.

Why does one lie? Usually through fear or insecurity. One has done something that is not acceptable or one has not done something that should have been done. Now to cover up our error or omission we lie. We do not have the courage to own up to our mistake so we make another mistake to cover it up. Lying leads to more lying. To ensure that one is not caught at lying one often has to tell more lies. Before you know it the one small lie has ballooned into a string of lies. Now one has to watch what one says as it is easy to trip up on one's false stories and be caught. One lives in fear and mental agony of being caught. How much easier to own up to the mistake and make the effort to ensure it does not happen again.

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19. Four of the precepts, the telling of untruths, backbiting and slander, harsh, rude or abusive language and idle gossip have been amalgamated into one.

People also lie out of insecurity. Children and even adults may brag to fit in and be accepted. Have confidence in yourself and be honest and humble. These qualities are much more valuable than the house you own or the car you drive. Even though material things may seem more important to some of your friends and peer pressure directs you to follow their example, if you analyze intelligently you will realize that the friend you value is not the friend who brags the most but the friend who is most compassionate and kind. Bragging about what you have and making up what you don't have are signs of insecurity. Have confidence in your goodness.

Reflect on your past year's experience. If you are constantly speaking untruths examine yourself carefully. Why is this happening? When is it happening? Then take steps to avoid this situation. Knowing your weakness, devise coping strategies to help. Give yourself some time before you answer. Reflect before speaking. Think of the consequences of lying and being caught. Remember the importance of speaking the Truth to seekers of Truth - those that have as their goal Nibbāna. Renew the precept, strengthen your mind, and speak the truth.

Four factors are necessary to break the precept of false speech.

1. The speech must be false.
2. There must be the intention to speak falsely.
3. One must make the effort to do so: the spoken word.
4. One must complete the deception. In the case of false speech One must trick the other into believing.

The effects of untruth when born among humans are being subject to abusive speech, untrustworthiness, and bad breath.

Gossiping and slander are a total waste of time, and like all the other unwholesome deeds, cause more damage to yourself than to others. If you find that you are constantly talking about others in their absence and that often what you say is not beneficial and not complimentary, examine yourself. Why are you doing it? With whom are you doing it? Are you more likely to gossip with certain friends than with others? Maybe you have too much free time. If so, engage in a productive hobby. Rather than perform an unwholesome deed which will have unwholesome results, spend this time in a manner that will be beneficial to others. Volunteer

your time to help a person in need. If certain friends tend to lead you to gossiping and slander, limit your conversations with them. If the conversation is leading towards gossip and slander, change the subject. Make an excuse to stop the conversation. Try and direct your conversation to productive information that will be useful to you or your friend and try to avoid talking about anyone else in their absence. If you don't have anything worthwhile to say, be silent. Our goal is to speak words that will instil hope, joy, confidence and peace. Reflect on your conversations and see if you achieved your goal.

Four conditions are necessary to break the precept of slander.

1. There must be persons who are intended to be divided or separated.
2. There must be the intention to separate or cause ill-feeling between the persons.
3. One must make the effort which results in the spoken words.
4. The communication that results in division or discord.

The result of slander is the inability to keep friends and the dissolution of friendships with no verifiable cause.

Two conditions are necessary to break the precept of frivolous talk.

1. One must have the inclination towards frivolous talk.
2. The narrative or words must be spoken.

The consequences of frivolous talk are defective bodily organs and speech that others cannot understand.

The most difficult observation, in my opinion, is refraining from harsh speech. It happens so quickly that often one has said something even before one had time to think. At times what you say in anger is not even true. More often than not one regrets these harsh words later. To refrain from harsh words one has to learn to manage anger. As this is a common frailty and difficult to achieve I have taken a separate lesson on this topic<sup>20</sup>. In general, self-observation and reflection before you speak will help to eliminate embarrassment and regret. Remember that great leaders are honoured for their calm, rational behaviour. Does anyone respect a

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20. See Chapter 12

leader who gets angry in public and uses harsh words? Learn to manage your anger from a young age. It is cool to be cool.

One will also notice that often it is the ones you love who have to face the brunt of one's anger. Persons who do not get angry with acquaintances and colleagues get very angry and abusive with their family and loved ones. It is almost as if they think that the family will love them and excuse their behaviour no matter what. Behaviour and language they would not dream of using on colleagues and peers is used on the ones they should be treating with the most love and care. This causes untold damage because children do not necessarily love parents just because they are their parent, just as spouses will not just automatically continue to love an abusive partner. However, the cause of anger is deep craving and attachment. And as such it is natural that one is most angry with the persons one is most attached to or with persons who are threatening or endangering the ones you love. The same incident that caused intense anger when involving your child may result in just a shrug of the shoulder when involving the neighbour's son. As such anger management is extremely important. This is what the Buddha has said about harsh speech:

*“The fool thinks he has won a battle  
when he bullies with harsh speech,  
but knowing how to be forbearing  
alone makes one victorious.”*

*Samyutta Nikāya I, 163*

Three conditions are necessary to break the precept of harsh speech.

1. There must be a person to be abused.
2. One must have the angry thought.
3. The abusive words must be spoken

The consequences of harsh speech are a harsh, shrill, unpleasant voice and not being liked by others even though one has not done anything to arouse their dislike.

**5. (Aware of the suffering caused by drugs and intoxicants) I undertake the precept of refraining from drugs, intoxicants and other substances that are harmful to my consciousness.**

*Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption,  
 I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental,  
 for myself, my family, my society,  
 by practising mindful eating, drinking and consumption.  
 I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace,  
 well-being and joy in my body, in my consciousness and  
 in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society.  
 I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant,  
 or to ingest food or other items that contain toxins,  
 such as certain T.V. programs, magazines, books,  
 films and conversations.  
 I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness  
 with these poisons  
 is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society and  
 future generations.  
 I will work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion  
 in myself and in society by practising  
 a proper diet (mindful consumption) for myself and for society.  
 I understand that a proper diet is crucial for  
 self-transformation and the transformation of society.*

I am told that the fifth precept is fast becoming an obsolete precept among Buddhists. People observe the fifth precept but know even at the time they are observing it that they will consume alcohol at the very next opportunity. This precept does not say I will refrain from excessive use of intoxicants and drugs. It says, I will refrain from the use of intoxicants and drugs. Whilst Buddhists with effort try to observe the other precepts, the fifth precept seems to be fast becoming a token precept. And yet, due to the very harmful effects of alcohol and drugs, this may be the most important precept to observe for the preservation of our values in our younger generation.

Drugs and alcohol are harmful to one's mind. Controlling one's mind is difficult at the best of times but is impossible to achieve when you are under the influence of intoxicants. Drugs and alcohol cause a false sense of well-being. The person is no better off than before, in fact he has given his mind away to a drug so he is in a worse position, but he feels better. Drugs and alcohol lead you to delusion. They lead you to a false sense of well-being. As Buddhists we are seekers of wisdom. Our goal is to destroy delusion and see things as they are. Why then would we poison our consciousness with a substance that causes delusion? In taking mind-altering drugs one moves away from the Buddhist goal of Nibbāna and moves towards delusion.

Drugs and alcohol also cause heedlessness. One needs a clear, strong mind to observe the precepts. With a weakened mind one is more likely to break the precepts. Shame and fear of wrongdoing are natural defences against unwholesome deeds. Under the influence of alcohol and drugs one loses one's natural sense of shame and fear. As such one is much more likely to commit an unwholesome deed under the influence of mind-altering drugs. Statistics show that the majority of crime, rape and murder is committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The long-term effects of drugs are devastating. Despite the fact that selling or consuming drugs is illegal, they are readily available in the market for our children to experiment with.

We live in a society where alcohol is accepted as an adult beverage. After eighteen, the legal age for drinking, it becomes a must. Children often cannot wait until they are eighteen to sample the wonder drug that gives them this wonderful sense of well-being and initiation to adulthood. Social drinking is thought to be an elite practice.

Children growing up in Western countries face enormous peer pressure, as drinking is a very acceptable part of the Western culture. And yet the Buddha advised us against taking any alcohol. As practising Buddhists, we should make every effort to keep this precept so that we can set an example to our children. If as adults we do not have confidence in ourselves to say no to drinking because of peer pressure, then how can we expect our teenage children who are struggling to be accepted in a foreign country to withstand peer pressure? The educated should lead the rest of society through example. They should examine and analyze the reasons behind this precept and then have the courage to act out their conviction so that they can lead the younger generation.

The influence of Western culture in Eastern countries has opened the doors to drinking and drugs in the East. Whilst once it was thought that only the lower class and those with problems drank to drown their sorrows, now it is thought that one has to drink to belong to the upper class. I remember as a young child being told by my father that those from noble families did not take alcohol. Abstaining from drinking was a noble thing to do. I still believe that it is a noble thing to do, for it requires immense confidence and inner strength to swim against the current and act out your conviction. Unfortunately, drinking is now considered to be the

cool thing to do. To belong to the jet set one has to drink. Increasing delusion is a cool thing to do!

I would suggest that all practising Buddhists who consume alcohol examine themselves to find the cause of their dependence. Once one knows the cause, then it is easier to work at the solution. Is it lack of confidence in the Buddha Dhamma or lack of confidence in yourself? Is it an addiction, or the lack of inner strength to say no? Are you trying to drown your sorrows in drink or do you feel that social drinking is acceptable?

If it is an addiction, understand that it requires treatment and counselling for the whole family, for it is a grave sickness that in general cannot be overcome on your own. Understand that problems and sorrows will not go away when you drink. In fact, they will escalate. The temporary forgetfulness and relief is but delusion. Reflect on the cost of this habit to your family and your resources. Have the courage to see it for what it is. Most people will not hesitate to go to a doctor if they have a physical sickness. Alcoholism is a sickness. Do not hesitate to seek help if you cannot resolve it on your own because the problem will not go away by itself. It will just escalate until, like a cancerous growth, it affects your whole family. Treat it with the same compassion and understanding you would apply for any other grave sickness.

Women are often referred to as the weaker sex, and yet in Eastern countries it is mostly the men who need the mind-altering effects of alcohol to cope with their daily life. Is it possible then that men, not women are the weaker sex when it comes to strength of mind? Or is it possible that women turn to the Dhamma to cope with stress and sorrow while men turn to alcohol and drugs? Is this why we see more women than men at temple?

For the betterment of our younger generation I challenge every Buddhist adult who consumes alcohol to examine themselves mindfully to find the cause of this degeneration. And if one cannot give up consumption, refrain from observing a precept which then becomes meaningless. The moment one observes the fifth precept with no intention of keeping it, one has broken the fourth precept, for one has lived a lie. This is a poor example to set for our children. The precepts are not commandments. They are taken after careful examination and analysis, on one's own free will. They should be observed only when one feels that it is for the betterment of oneself and others to do so. Observing the precept

casually sends false messages to children and undermines the importance and sacredness of these precepts. Those that do not have the strength to give up drinking should abstain from taking the fifth precept until such time as they have the inner strength and confidence in themselves to work towards giving up alcohol.

Alcohol and casual sex are now a part of Western society. There are many things that we can learn from the West but is this one of them? If we want to preserve our culture and values we must set an example for our children. I urge all practising Buddhists to take the challenge to give up drinking for the sake of our children.

Four conditions are necessary to break the precept of not consuming mind-altering substances.

1. One must be aware that it is a mind-altering substance.
2. One must have the intention to consume it.
3. One must make the effort to consume it.
4. The consumption must take place.

The consequence of unmindful consumption when born in the human realm is lack of wisdom. It also leads to loss of resources and property, and to quarrels, embarrassment and blame. In addition, if one breaks one of the other precepts under the influence of mind-altering substances, one also reaps those unwholesome effects.

The precepts are the laity's first step to moral development. They are an essential step in one's progress to Nibbāna<sup>21</sup>. As such, all those who aspire to Nibbāna should observe the precepts with effort and mindfulness.

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21. When observing the Ajiva atthamaka sila, Buddhists expand on the precept for inappropriate speech and add as the eighth precept that of refraining from unmindful livelihood.



## CHAPTER 11

### **What are the four sublime states (Brahmavihāra) and why did the Buddha say that Brahma is in your home?**

*“With goodwill for the entire cosmos,  
cultivate a boundless heart:  
Above, below and all around,  
unobstructed, without hostility or hate.*

*Sutta Nipāta I, 8*

**Question** - What are the four sublime states (Brahmavihāra) that the Buddha advised His followers to practise and why did the Buddha say that Brahma is in your home?

**Answer** -The four sublime (exalted) states that the Buddha asked His followers to practise are:

- Loving kindness (mettā)
- Compassion (karunā)
- Sympathetic joy (muditā)
- Equanimity (upekkhā)

The mainstream religion at the time of the Buddha was Brahmanism. Most Brahmins believed in a Creator God whom they called Mahā Brahma (The great God). They also believed that the sublime states were present in their Creator God. Because these characteristics were said to be present in Mahā Brahma, they were known as the Brahmavihāra (resident in God). Despite this belief they also portrayed their God as being vengeful and cruel. Brahmins prayed for salvation and had frequent animal sacrifices to appease their angry God. They believed that salvation or unification with the Great God was possible only through constant prayer, vows, sacrifices and begging for mercy. In the Tevijjaka Sutta of the Digha Nikāya the Buddha advised the Brahmins that

the Brahmin goal of unification with Mahā Brahma was not going to be achieved through prayers and vows. Instead, He advised them to practise the sublime states to perfection.

The Buddha encouraged His followers in the practice of the sublime states for the perfection of morality (sila). Morality which is infinite compassion and loving kindness to all living beings, includes the practice of the Buddhist code of discipline (precepts), the sublime states, and meditation on loving kindness. The Buddha also said that practice of the sublime states to perfection led to rebirth in the Brahma realms<sup>22</sup>. The Buddha, however, made it clear that even the extremely long lifespans in the Brahma realms were transient and came to an end. As Buddhists our goal should be the deathless state of Nibbāna.

### **Mettā**

The first of the sublime states, mettā or loving kindness, is often misunderstood. To give the reader a clear understanding of the meaning of the word mettā as per the Buddha, I have compared mettā or loving kindness with like, love and lust. Often we interchange these words and use them loosely, which may result in confusion.

At times people comment on their favourite food by saying “I love chocolate” or “I love pizza.” Here what they are generally referring to is a strong fondness for the taste of chocolate or pizza resulting from the pleasant sensation that arises through taste. In such an instance I would use the term ‘like’, or ‘like a lot’ so as to

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22. Sāriputta’s instruction on the Brahmavihāra to the Brahmin Dhanajāni on his deathbed led to Dhanajāni’s rebirth in the Brahma realms. Sāriputta was unaware that Dhanajāni was spiritually capable of full enlightenment. Unable to view the spiritual potential of each person the compassionate Sāriputta helped Dhanajāni, who was a Brahmin, reach his goal, unification with the Great God. The Buddha admonished Sāriputta on this omission. It was the only incident in which the Buddha admonished Sāriputta for He had great confidence and respect for His Chief Disciple. As only the Buddha had the ability to discern one’s spiritual potential the Sangha used this incident to ensure that they instructed the laity gradually on the full path to enlightenment.

separate it from love, which I will use in a different context. If an external stimulus causes a pleasant sensation we use the word like and if it causes a unpleasant sensation we use the word dislike. As such we ‘like’ pizza and ‘dislike’ anchovies.

Just as we like and dislike inanimate objects, we can like and dislike people. People who bring happiness to us we like and those who bring unhappiness and hinder our happiness we do not like.

The term ‘love’, though often used in western books on Buddhism to mean mettā or loving kindness, will not be used in this context in this lesson, as love is tinged with attachment. Though at times love is selfless, in general it is a selfish love. When you love someone you generally expect the other person to love you back. The relationship between love and hate is a fine line and unfaithfulness or any other major disagreement can turn this type of love to hate. Often this type of love and lust - strong physical attraction - are confused, resulting in the dissolution of marriages and relationships. This type of love usually comes with a vested interest, an interest in ‘my happiness’ which, if ‘my happiness’ is not met could lead to the cessation of love. In general, like, love and lust are dependent or conditioned on one’s happiness. Or, if we analyze it, they are a result of repeated pleasant sensations that ultimately lead to strong attachment.

Mettā or loving kindness is a selfless, unconditional love. In everyday life it is closest to the love a mother has for her infant child. It is unconditional, in that it is a love that is given with no expectation of return. Often the love that is felt for a newborn is unconditional. Despite the actions of the baby the love remains. And whilst there are many instances when the love between a man and a women is selfless and unconditional, with divorce rates of over 50% it is fast becoming a rare occurrence. As such, for the purposes of this lesson, the unconditional love a mother feels for her baby will be used as the closest to what the Buddha termed as mettā or loving kindness. The difference between a mother’s love and loving kindness is that loving kindness extends to all living beings. It is an unconditional love which is felt from deep within, not just to those who are dear to you but to all living beings. It is a love that is independent of one’s own happiness. In the mettā sutta the Buddha encourages the practice of loving kindness as follows:

*“As a mother protects her only child,  
Even at the risk of her own life,*

*Let one cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness,  
Towards all human beings."*

As such you can practise loving kindness to a person you dislike, a person you don't know, and even a person you cannot see. You do not have to like a person to practise loving kindness, though in general you have to like a person in order to love them. The loving kindness that the Buddha asked us to practise can be summed up as a concern and deep love for the peace, harmony, goodwill and welfare of all living beings. It is a totally selfless love with no expectation of return. It is not dependent or conditioned on happiness that the individual directs towards self and as such is not comparable to like, love and lust, all of which are conditioned on the satisfaction of one's own happiness.

It is with loving kindness that the Buddha approached Angulimāla, the serial killer and taught him the Dhamma. It is with loving kindness that He ordained him as a Noble Disciple. It is also with loving kindness that the Buddha calmed the enraged elephant, Nalagiri.

The practice of loving kindness leads to the perfection of morality and birth in the higher planes of existence. It also leads to good health and long life.

### **Karunā**

Karunā or compassion is directed towards the sick, lonely, destitute and suffering. Karunā is compassion that one feels when one sees or hears of a person in pain. It is the strong feeling and the resulting action to mitigate or reduce this suffering through caring and comfort. It is what results in volunteers working selflessly at hospitals, orphanages or with the elderly. As with mettā there is no expectation of return, neither does it result from grasping to hold on to a pleasant sensation. It is not dependent or conditioned on one's happiness. It is also directed to all who are suffering, not just to one's friends or relatives. It is with compassion that, as a child Prince Siddhattha removed the arrow from the swan's breast. It is with compassion that He placed soothing herbs on the wound and nursed it back to health. It is also with compassion that Ascetic Gotama carried the limping goat and followed the Brahmin who was taking 500 animals for sacrifice. It is with compassion that Ascetic Gotama spoke on behalf of the animals to King Bimbisāra and had them released from death.

The practice of compassion leads to the perfection of morality and birth in the higher planes of existence. It also leads to good health and long life. Often the practice of meditation on loving kindness encompasses both loving kindness and compassion, and as such the two are inseparable.

### **Muditā**

Muditā or sympathetic joy is the happiness one feels in the success and happiness of others. Jealousy, like anger, is a natural feeling. We have all felt jealous at some point in our lives. Young children feel jealous when a younger sibling is born to the family, and even in countries that accept polygamy, jealousies exist between co-wives. It is difficult not to feel envy when we hear of the good fortune of others and difficult not to feel envy when another child excels or surpasses one's own child.

Muditā is not just the absence of envy, it is the active rejoicing in the happiness and good fortune of others. When Queen Mallikā found out that King Pasenadi Kosala was taking a second wife, with sympathetic joy she accepted her and treated her as a younger sister. She rejoiced in the good fortune of her husband's co-wife.

The practice of Mudita is not easy. Even the Bodhisatta who was but a worldling during the kāyā-panidāna-kāla (period in which He completed the ten virtues) felt intense jealousy. Seven of the twelve unwholesome deeds (aparāpariya vedeniya kamma) which had recurring effects committed by our Bodhisatta were caused by jealousy<sup>23</sup>. As such one should not condemn oneself for feeling envy or jealousy. Neither should one be complacent about it thinking if the Bodhisatta felt envy then how can one avoid such feelings? Instead one should with right effort set aside these unwholesome thoughts and replace them with wholesome thoughts which are more beneficial to self. The Buddha declared that envy and jealousy, like all unwholesome deeds, damage self far more than they damage the person towards whom the envy is directed. The effects of envy and jealousy are birth in lower families, embarrassment and ridicule.

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23. Read Chapter 13 for a comprehensive account of the twelve serious unwholesome deeds that the Buddha performed during the period of action.

The practice of sympathetic joy leads to the perfection of morality and birth in the higher planes of existence, and birth into noble families with power and influence when born in the human world.

### **Upekkhā**

Upekkhā or equanimity is the balanced mind that makes it possible for one to let go. One observes the sensations of happiness and unhappiness that one feels and the clinging and aversion that arise, and then with wisdom, realizing that this too is impermanent, lets go so that the clinging does not lead to strong greed and attachment and the aversion does not lead to ill-will, anger and hatred. It is through the practice of mindfulness, insight meditation and deep reflection that one develops equanimity.

The Bodhisatta in the Lomahamsa Jātaka completed the perfection of equanimity when, with a balanced mind, He reflected on the praise and ridicule to which He was exposed as a Nigānthanātha Ascetic. With wisdom He reflected on the impermanence of all conditioned phenomena and let go. As such neither the pleasant sensations that arose when He was praised nor the unpleasant sensations that arose when he was ridiculed turned to craving.

The practice of equanimity helps in the practice of morality and if practised with insight ultimately leads to the attainment of the unconditioned - Nibbāna.

### **Brahma is in your Home**

*“Though being well-to-do,  
not to support father and mother  
who are old and past their youth --  
this is a cause of one's downfall.  
Sutta Nipāta I, 6*

The Buddha stated that Brahma is in your home because the characteristics said to be found in Mahā Brahma, ( Creator God of the Brahmins): mettā, karunā, muditā and upekkhā are also found in your parents.

A mother begins the practice of loving kindness to her child even before her baby is born. From the time she finds out that she is carrying a baby she takes care of herself. Mothers who smoke or drink give up these bad habits with loving kindness for their

unborn child. Mothers also start to eat healthy meals and drink milk to ensure a healthy baby. With loving kindness mothers take care of themselves to ensure that no accident will damage the baby. Physical exercise is reduced to appropriate levels and dangerous sports are avoided.

When the baby is born, both parents are overwhelmed with loving kindness and the need to protect the innocent infant. They stay up late to feed the baby and ensure that the baby is clean and comfortable. Parents start sacrificing for the baby, ensuring that they give the best they can afford for the infant. And when the child grows they continue to sacrifice for the baby to ensure a healthy child and a good education. In the Eastern culture most parents equate happiness to the welfare and success of their children. And as such they often go without, to ensure the happiness of their children. This deep love that parents have for their children is mettā.

Parents also practise compassion towards their children from infancy. With compassion, they comfort the baby who is sick with colic, soothe the baby who is cranky due to teething, and rock the baby who cannot sleep. They stay up all night with a sick child and comfort the child that is in pain. Parents would gladly shoulder the pain of their sick children if such a thing were possible because they do not want their child to feel any pain or to suffer. As they grow older they continue to practise this compassion, ensuring the safety of the child by avoiding situations that could lead to suffering. With the advance of medicine mothers practise compassion to their unborn child by consenting to operation on the embryo to help sick babies whom they love even before they are born. This intense compassion for their child who is in pain or feels grief is karunā.

Jealousy is a natural emotion. All of us have at some point in life felt jealous of someone who did better than we did. Even though they may not act on it, parents often feel a twinge of jealousy when they hear of other people's children doing well in life. Despite this natural emotion parents rejoice in the success of their children. They encourage their children to study and do well in life by saying, "You have to do better in life than we did." They rejoice at the high marks their children get in school and proudly display their children's artwork in their office. They video every concert their children take part in and cheer them on in every sport. This intense happiness in the success and prosperity of their children is muditā.

Parents practise equanimity towards their children when they let go as their children grow older. In the Eastern culture family is very important and parents continue supporting and caring for adult children even after they are married. And yet parents let go and allow children to move away to different countries and cities when they feel that it is in the best interest of their children. Children often move away from parents for their education or when they marry. The sorrow the parents feel at the parting is often not shown. With equanimity and a balanced mind they let go by reflecting on the happiness and welfare of their child. When parents who love their children act with a balanced mind in the best interest of the children, they practise upekkhā.

For this reason the Buddha said that Brahma is in your home. The parents who have the same qualities as Brahma - loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity - are in your home. The Buddha felt that the obligation we have to our parents for bringing us up in the Dhamma and taking care of us with love and compassion when we were too young to take care of ourselves could not be balanced even if we shouldered their responsibility for a hundred years. Saying this, the Buddha instructed us to care for and look after our parents as follows:

*“Parents are as Brahma (to their children)  
Worthy of gifts are they  
Compassionate unto their children.  
Thus the wise should worship and pay them honours due.  
Serve them with food, drink, clothing and shelter  
Anoint their bodies, bathe and wash their feet.  
For service such as this,  
To parents, given in this life  
Sages praise (such a person).  
And he, hereafter, has reward of joy in heaven.”*

And thus the Buddha, who has not asked for reverence even for Himself<sup>24</sup>, who has not encouraged prayer or reverence to any god, advised us instead to reverence our parents as others reverence God.

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24. In the Parinibbāna Sutta the Buddha made it clear that one revered Him not by offering flowers, and not even by paying respect to Him by visiting Him prior to His passing away, but by practise of His teaching.



## CHAPTER 12

### **What is the cause of anger and how can one manage anger so as not to harm others and oneself?**

*“Knowing that the other person is angry,  
one who remains mindful and calm  
acts for his own best interest  
and for the other's interest, too.*

*Samyutta Nikāya I, 162*

**Question** - What is the cause of anger? What can we do to ensure that we manage our anger so that we do not hurt ourselves or others whilst working towards the total elimination of anger?

**Answer** - The cause of anger is craving or grasping and our belief in a self. On the surface this may not be very apparent. Most Buddhists are aware that intense craving leads to attachment and greed. However, intense craving also leads to ill-will, anger and hatred.

Just as strong attachment and greed arises because we seek our own happiness, ill-will and anger arise because we seek our own happiness. Just as we crave to hold on to happy sensations that form strong bonds which lead to greed, we crave to set aside unhappy situations or unpleasant sensations. And when we cannot set them aside or avoid them, we feel ill-will, anger and hatred. We also feel ill-will and anger when our happiness is taken away or thwarted. The stronger the craving, the greater will be the suffering resulting from ill-will and anger.

Anger is a normal emotion that all human beings feel, like sorrow and happiness. The emotion of anger is felt from the time one is born. How many of you have seen a little baby turn red and cry with his little face twisted with anger? How many have witnessed

a two-year-old throw a temper tantrum? They are too young to have learned this behaviour from others. And yet it is obvious that they are experiencing intense anger. It is also obvious that they have not learned to manage their anger. Because of their young age they are often excused the temper tantrum.

Unfortunately, many adults too have never learned to manage their anger. And so, just like the two-year-old, when they are angry they throw a tantrum. Maybe not in quite the same way as the two-year-old, but in a manner that is not acceptable for an adult – in a manner that is harmful to self and to others.

Reminding us that anger harms us more than it does those on whom anger is directed, the Buddha advises against anger as follows:

*“The person possessed of anger; discoloured,  
Does not have sound sleep.  
Even when experiencing the beneficial  
He mistakes it as mischief.*

*Then he harms another  
By thought, speech and deed  
As result, he will suffer.  
Loss of property (fines or punishment).  
Crazed by wrath he behaves thus  
That invites ill-repute.  
His relatives, friends and acquaintance  
Shun him, for his temper – hot.*

*Anger fathers misfortune  
Anger maddens one’s mind  
It is a danger that rises from within  
But man realizes it not.*

*The angered knows not what is right  
Nor does he see what really is  
Surrounded by darkness he dwells  
Who now does anger defeat?*

*Captivated and maddened by anger  
He does what is unwholesome with ease  
But in time when anger is spent*

*Regrets he, as one burnt by flames. ”*

*Anguttara Nikāya*

As the cause of anger is craving, one often finds that intense anger is felt towards those we love the most. As such it is most important that we learn how to manage our anger so as not to hurt the people we love. One should not assume that those we love will accept and excuse our inappropriate behaviour. Even if they do not tell us how they feel, one can be sure that over time they will not love or respect us for such behaviour.

What we are going to learn today are some techniques to help us manage this anger, and over time, some techniques which will help us to reduce and possibly eliminate anger. We will illustrate these concepts with two stories that occurred at the time of the Buddha.

The first story is an incident that occurred with Visākhā, the Buddha’s chief female benefactor. One day she had come to the Buddha for solace as she was angered at some unfair taxes that had been levied on a gift she had mailed. Visākhā had mailed a parcel to some relatives and the border guards had charged an unreasonably high levy on the goods. Visākhā had complained to the king, but due to pressures of state affairs, he had ignored her complaint. Annoyed and angry, Visākhā visited the Buddha for solace. The Buddha calmed her mind by saying:

*“Painful is all subjection.  
Blissful is complete control.  
People are troubled by common concerns,  
Hard to escape are the bonds (of craving). ”*

These words of wisdom from the Buddha helped Visākhā put this minor irritation in perspective. The Buddha’s advice is as valid today as it was 2500 years ago. So strong are the bonds of craving and attachment that often we are angered and affected by small issues, many of which are outside our control and trivial when compared to other issues of greater consequence that afflict mankind.

Visākhā, as she was only a Sotāpanna, felt anger. She managed her anger by not lashing out and hurting anyone. She then went to the Buddha for support. Listening to the Buddha, she realized very

quickly that this was something outside her control and something that was not of great consequence. This helped to calm her mind.

The second story is about Sariputta, the Buddha's chief male disciple. A group of men were praising the noble qualities of the elder when a young Brahmin challenged them, saying the reason Sariputta had never shown anger was because he had never been provoked. To prove that Sariputta, like others, would resort to anger, he walked up behind the elder and dealt him a resounding blow. Sariputta said, "What was that?" and then, without even turning around to find who had hit him, continued walking. The Brahmin was overcome with guilt and shame at his conduct. Falling on his knees, he begged pardon and told Sariputta how he had hit him to provoke anger. Sariputta then forgave the Brahmin. The Brahmin, not satisfied with a verbal pardon, asked Sariputta to come to his home for the noonday meal to show that he bore no malice towards him. Sariputta accepted the invitation.

After the meal, as Sariputta was leaving, he saw that a mob of angry supporters had gathered with sticks and stones to punish the Brahmin. They had witnessed the Brahmin's treatment of the elder whom they loved and respected. Sariputta asked them what the commotion was about. When informed he asked, "Whom did the Brahmin strike, you or me?" On being told that it was the Elder whom the Brahmin had struck, he dispersed the angry crowd by saying, "I have pardoned him. What cause is there for anger when I, whom he struck, feels none."

Sariputta, being an Arahant, had eradicated all craving and as such felt no anger. The only way we cannot feel anger is by destroying craving. As such it is only an Arahant who will be completely free of anger. Since none of us are Arahants we should not put ourselves down or feel guilty when we feel anger. We should, however, ensure that we manage it so that we do not hurt others.

And so we have our long-term goal and our short-term goal – the long-term goal of eliminating anger and the short-term goal of managing anger. Our long-term goal will be reached only through the practice of morality - infinite compassion to all living beings and meditation. Meditation on loving kindness, awareness of breathing (Anapansati) and insight (Vipassana). Over time, all of these will help reduce and finally eliminate anger. As we are aware of the purpose of meditation in relation to the Buddhist goal of

Nibbāna, we will concentrate on the short-term goal of anger management whilst keeping in mind the importance of eradicating the craving which leads to anger, which is the Buddhist goal.

It must be stressed, however, that meditation also helps in the short-term goal of anger management, as meditation teaches you:

- compassion and loving kindness,
- to be more aware of your feeling,
- to reflect before you speak or act.

The Buddha encourages anger management as follows:

*“He abused me, he ill-treated me  
He defeated me, he robbed me.  
Releasing such thoughts  
Banishes hatred for all times.”*

*Dhammapada 4*

*“Repay not the angry with anger  
And you will win the battle hard to win.  
He who acknowledges the other’s anger  
While maintaining peace mindfully,  
Has worked for the well-being of both  
Himself and the other.”*

*Samyutta Nikāya*

*“Everybody loves himself  
Life is dear to all  
Feeling for others as for yourself  
One should refrain from harming others.”*

*Udāna*

*“By not retaliating in anger  
At one who gets angry  
One wins the battle  
That is hard to win.”*

*Samyutta Nikāya*

As meditation helps anger management, we will relate back to meditation periodically throughout this lesson.

When we are in a situation which causes us unhappiness or distress we go through many different emotions. Especially if the incident is one that is outside our control and is of significant importance. According to Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, when faced with grave personal loss we go through five stages: denial, anger, depression, bargaining and finally acceptance.

- Denial because at first you don't want to believe that this is true,
- Anger because you feel hurt that this should happen to you,
- Depression when you feel that nothing can be done about it,
- Bargaining when you start to look for alternatives or opportunities to minimise or overcome the hurt and, finally,
- Acceptance when you start to heal.

At times one may go through these stages very quickly. At times it may take months. At times one may go to acceptance and then relapse back to denial. These emotions are often felt when there is major personal loss. It could be an unexpected death, a job loss or a sudden diagnosis of a terminal illness. Academics say that it is normal for everybody to go through these stages. These feelings are not just unique to you. However, the anger felt at such times needs to be managed because if one cannot get past this stage in a reasonable time it could lead to hatred, long-term depression and emotional problems. If we can understand that everybody goes through these stages and that this situation is outside our control, we may, on our own, be able to manage it with time through acceptance and support from good friends. Some, however, may need professional help.

The majority of us, however, get angry because of day-to-day events and day-to-day stresses. What can we do to manage anger in these situations that occur daily? Anger manifests itself in two ways. Sometimes anger arises spontaneously, flares up, and then is spent. Sometimes anger flares up, then one holds the anger for days, weeks and maybe even for months. This is very dangerous as anger that is not managed can build to hatred. Both manifestations, which sometimes overlap, cause suffering to self and others. How do we manage this anger that we all feel so no one gets hurt? How do we ensure that anger does not escalate to hatred?

First we try to identify where anger starts, and secondly we identify where we hold anger. This may not be easy to do and at times you may need help from a loved one. What is your first sign of anger? Is it the clenching of your palms, the grinding of your teeth or is it your flushed face? Secondly, where do you hold the anger? Whilst there are some who blow over with anger, some retain it for days. Do you retain anger in the head with migraine headaches and thoughts that go on and on, in the chest with this consuming, burning heat, or in the stomach where it manifests as ulcers?

We begin by observing how we first express anger. Is it by yelling out hurtful words, throwing things, hitting, crying or running away? Or do we suppress our anger and hold on to it? Examine yourself and try to observe and know yourself.

In other words, with mindfulness we try to be aware of all our feelings and sensations at times of anger. Once you have identified the first external symptom of anger and consciously try to feel these sensations you will be able to identify when anger arises. Over time you will know and recognize the first signs of anger and suppressed anger. Mindfulness and insight meditation will help you very quickly to identify the first signs of anger. Being able to identify the first signs of anger, you can now start strategies to cope with or manage anger.

Anger that is held is more damaging in the long run as it can build to hatred. Unchecked, it can lead to unwholesome thoughts, speech and action, with grave consequences. As such, we will begin with some strategies for anger that has been held onto. The following have helped others:

- Calm discussion with person (sometimes this may be through letters)
- Exercise
- Self care (do something special for yourself)
- Deep breathing
- Reading a book
- Listening to soft music
- Talking to a friend (support)
- Reading or listening to the Dhamma
- Daily meditation on compassion, mindfulness and insight

Add to this list by reflecting on what works for you. Incidentally, these strategies also help to reduce spontaneous anger by reducing stress and promoting general well-being so that trivial things don't result in anger.

Some strategies for dealing with spontaneous anger are:

- Taking time out (walk out of the situation)
- Practising deep listening
- Reflecting before you speak
- Developing compassion and kindness to others' needs, frailties and differences .
- Looking at the other point of view
- Slowing down (cutting down on stressful commitments)
- Daily meditation on compassion, mindfulness and insight

Add to this list by reflecting on what works for you. The majority of us express anger in words, and so we will concentrate on words that will heal and reduce conflict as opposed to words that will hurt and escalate conflict. The Buddha has advised us to speak words that instil confidence and cause happiness, hope and joy. If we are mindful of our precepts we can, over time, move towards refraining from words that hurt, cause disharmony and suffering. With effort we can move towards words that bring hope, joy, peace and harmony.

Some words and action you should avoid using when you are angry are:

- Words of accusation
- Old history
- Personal traits
- Comparisons
- Pointing fingers

Hurtful words such as:

- You are stupid
- You are dumb
- You are selfish
- You are vicious
- You are cruel

and definitive words such as:

- You always...
- You never...

Instead, learn to express anger by sharing how you feel and how the other person's actions or words affect you. The following expressions will help to defuse anger without escalating it. "I feel (insert specific feeling) when you (insert specific act). Instead I would like/prefer (insert specific preference)."

For example, the statements: "I feel hurt when you accuse me of lying. I would prefer that you hear my side of the story before you pass judgement", defuses anger. Compare this with "You always call me a liar. You never believe what I say. I might as well lie to you. What is the use of telling the truth when you will never believe me anyway?" The first approach defuses anger and helps the situation, whereas the second escalates anger.

Reflect on the advice the Buddha gave Visākā. The following reflection when meditating on loving kindness may also be helpful.

*"May I develop the equanimity  
to accept things I cannot change,  
The courage to change things I can  
and the wisdom to know the difference."*

It is normal to feel annoyed when something unpleasant occurs. First, reflect on the issue and the magnitude of the action that has offended you. Is it really that important? If not, let it go. Do not let it escalate to anger, especially if the offender is a loved one. Instead, reflect on the positive things that the person has done for you. Also reflect as to whether this action is within your control. What is the use of getting angry and annoyed if you have lost your job and if there is nothing you can do to get your job back? Instead, spend your energy on changing or coping with the situation. Negotiate a severance package, ask for retraining, or look for other opportunities.

Remember that anger is your worst enemy. Anger harms you more than it does the person towards whom the anger is directed. The law of kamma operates despite the ignorance of man. Intentional actions by thought, word and deed will follow you and fruit at the opportune time. If you are a person who acts on anger through hitting and becoming abusive you need professional help. Spousal

and child abuse is against the law. One must recognize that abuse can be both physical and through continuous harsh and threatening speech. Both leave scars. Often it is the mental scars that are harder to heal. They leave long-term emotional problems. Does your family love and respect you or are they afraid of you? One needs to earn love and respect. It cannot be got through fear. In fact, according to the Buddha's teachings, continuous harsh words will result in aversion and ill-will in the mind of the recipient. Unchecked, aversion and ill-will in the mind of the recipient will lead to anger and hatred. And while you can change yourself and manage your own anger, you have no control over the minds of others:

The Buddha's advice for anger management is boundless compassion and loving kindness through mental development. The Buddha said:

*"Anger is never appeased by anger;  
Anger is appeased by loving kindness.  
This is an eternal truth."*

*Dhammapada 5*

The Buddha encouraged others to destroy anger and hatred through loving kindness by describing the bliss of those who have conquered anger. He said:

*"Truly we dwell in happiness,  
as we do not hate, while others hate.  
Amidst those who are filled with hatred  
we live appeased,  
free of hatred."*

*Dhammapada 197*

Statistics show that often persons are angry and abusive with their loved ones. The very same act performed by an acquaintance does not lead to anger. Most people with effort manage their anger in the workplace in order to appear professional, but vent at their loved ones. And yet it is those we love that we should treat with most tenderness. The damage done by anger cannot be measured. Reflecting on the following story may help to motivate anger management.

There was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he should hammer a nail into the back fence. The first day the boy drove 37 nails into the fence. Then it gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to manage his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to manage his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same."

When we say things in anger, we leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there. A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one. In fact it can be worse, for mental abuse takes longer to heal. Family and friends are like very rare jewels. They make us smile and encourage us to succeed. They lend an ear, they share a word of praise, and they always want to open their hearts to us to help us when we are hurt. Don't scar your family and friends. Learn to manage your anger.



## CHAPTER 13

**What are the twelve unwholesome deeds  
that our Bodhisatta performed,  
the effects of which were experienced  
even as the Buddha?**

*“It is through unshaken perseverance that,  
I have reached the final goal and enlightenment.  
Through unceasing effort that  
I have reached the peace supreme.  
If you also will strive unceasingly  
You too will in time attain the highest goal of bliss.”*

*Mahāvagga*

**Question** - There were many unwholesome deeds performed by our Bodhisatta during the period of action, but results of twelve of them were felt even as the Buddha. What were these twelve unwholesome deeds and how were they different from the others?

**Answer** - The Bodhisatta committed many unwholesome deeds during the period of action (kāyā-panidāna kāla<sup>25</sup>) because even though He was a Bodhisatta who was completing the ten virtues He was still a worldling (puthujhana). He had not as yet attained even the first stage of sainthood, Sotāpanna, and as such had dormant in Him all the defilements (kilesa) of living beings. The intention of some of these wrongdoings, however, was not as strong and as such the effects of these deeds were felt by the Bodhisatta in the same or in succeeding births. The intention of

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25. This is the period between the time at which our Bodhisatta received the definite proclamation from the Dipankara Buddha and the era of the preceding Buddha, the Buddha Kassapa. Our Bodhisatta completed the ten virtues during this period. The duration of this period was one hundred thousand world cycles interspersed with three infinite periods.

twelve unwholesome deeds was sufficiently strong to result in their effect being felt even as the Buddha.

The twelve unwholesome deeds and the residual effects of these actions which were felt even as the Buddha are as follows:

1. During the reign of the Kassapa Buddha, the Buddha preceding our Gotama Buddha, the Bodhisatta was born to the Sākya caste. The Sākyaans were very arrogant and thought of themselves as being above others. The Bodhisatta, who was still striving for Buddhahood, was jealous of the Kassapa Buddha. He insulted the Kassapa Buddha by saying, “How can this shaven-headed Brahmin become a Buddha?”

The unwholesome effects of this act felt during the reign of the Buddha was that it took our Buddha, Ascetic Gotama, six long years, including a period of extreme self-mortification, to attain enlightenment. It is said that the next Buddha, the Metteya Buddha, will attain enlightenment in 6 days.

2. In a preceding birth our Bodhisatta, who was at that time born as a person of low caste named Munai, saw a Pacceka Buddha named Surabi. Again there arose in Him intense jealousy that the goal He was striving for was attained by another. The Bodhisatta insulted Him by saying that He was a very low and immoral man.

The unwholesome effects of this deed which were felt even as the Buddha was the unjustified accusation of Cincamānavikā. Cincā, on the instruction of Queen Māgandiyā, pretended that the Buddha had fathered her child. Tying sticks and pillows to her belly, she pretended that she was pregnant. Then, walking up to the monastery, she accused the Buddha and claimed that He was the father of her child. This accusation caused embarrassment to the Buddha as some of the people present believed her. However, the purity of the Buddha was beyond reproach. The ropes holding her pillow broke loose and her false belly came tumbling down to the ground. Even though the people realized that Cincā had accused the Buddha wrongfully, He had to go through this embarrassing incident as a result of the residual effect of this unwholesome deed.

3. In another birth our Bodhisatta was born as a man by the name of Mulari. Unable to control His jealousy on seeing a Pacceka Buddha, He insulted Him as before by saying he was a low, immoral, habitual waster.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was the female ascetic Sundari accusing Him of inappropriate behaviour. Ascetics of other sects were annoyed by the Buddha's popularity. They were losing their disciples, as many who were inspired by the Buddha and His disciples were accepting the Buddha's teachings. They decided to discredit the Buddha so that they could reclaim their followers. They asked one of their female disciples, Sundari, to accuse the Buddha of misconduct. Though this incident caused embarrassment to the Buddha it was later proven that she had lied. The ascetics, afraid that she would disclose their involvement in the incident, murdered her and arranged for the body to be buried in the monastery in which the Buddha was residing, so as to implicate the Buddha in the murder.

4. In a previous birth the Bodhisatta, who was born into the Brahmin caste, lived in the Himalayan mountains teaching five hundred disciples the Vedas (scriptures). One day an ascetic who possessed powerful psychic powers known as *atthasampati jhānalabbhi* came to the mountain using astral travel. Our Bodhisatta, who was jealous of the ascetic, insulted him by saying that he was no more than an ordinary sensationalist who was showing off. His pupils too joined him in jeering the ascetic.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was that He was accused of killing the female ascetic Sunadari. Even though on investigation the Buddha was absolved of any association with the murder this led to embarrassment.

5. In one birth our Bodhisatta killed His younger brother by hurling him down a precipice and also rolled a huge rock onto him to ensure his death in order to inherit the family wealth.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was Devadatta rolling a huge stone with the intention of killing him at Gijjhakuta.

6. In another birth our Bodhisatta was playing on the streets when He was young when He saw a Pacceka Buddha on His alms round. Our Bodhisatta insulted Him and hit Him with a stone saying, "Where is this shaven-headed ascetic going?" The stone hit the Pacceka Buddha's leg and caused it to bleed.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was the blood gathering in one place and clotting when a

sliver of rock pierced His foot when Devadatta rolled the rock. This resulted in a painful infection and boil.

7. In one birth our Bodhisatta, who was an elephant keeper (mahout), saw a Pacceka Buddha on the road and insulted Him through jealousy by saying, “Where is this shaven-headed ascetic going?” He also frightened the Pacceka Buddha by making His elephant charge Him.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was the elephant Nalāgiri charging him. Devadatta, who was determined to kill the Buddha with the help of King Ajātasattu, fed the king elephant Nalagiri alcohol and set him loose on the path the Buddha and His retinue were taking. The Buddha calmed the enraged elephant through His compassion and loving kindness.

8. In one birth our Bodhisatta, who was born to a fisherman’s family, was watching the fishing. Seeing the fish that were caught gasping for breath and struggling to live caused our Bodhisatta pleasure.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was that He often suffered from headaches.

9. In one birth our Bodhisatta, who was born as the king of a remote country, saw some people on the road on which He happened to be walking, and, without cause or reason, attacked them with his sword, thereby injuring some and killing others.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was that Jivaka, His physician, had to cut open the infected boil that occurred on His foot to drain the pus and blood.

10. In one birth our Bodhisatta, who was born to a poor family, seeing the pupil monk of the Buddha Phussa, the seventh Buddha preceding our Buddha, insulted him. The pupil monk was eating very good quality, fragrant food. Unable to control His envy our Bodhisatta said, “Don’t eat such good food – eat inferior rice.”

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was that the Brahmin Veranja of the Veranja village invited the Buddha to spend the rainy season and forgot about his invitation. With no food, the Buddha and his 500 disciples who

had accepted the invitation had to sustain themselves with coarse food that had been bought for horses during the entire three months of the rainy season.

11. In one birth our Bodhisatta, who was born into a wealthy family as a very strong man, wrestled with a well-known wrestler and put him down. He then intentionally broke his spine.

The unwholesome effect of this deed which was felt even as the Buddha was that from time to time He had back pain.

12. In one birth the Bodhisatta was a famous physician. He treated a wealthy Count for a serious illness. But when the Count refused to pay him He gave him another medication which resulted in vomiting and diarrhea.

The unwholesome effects of this deed which were felt even as the Buddha were the stomach pains and dysentery that the Buddha had just before He passed away.

We can draw some very important lessons from these incidents. The state of a worldling is fraught with danger, for within us lie many dormant defilements. At any moment they could surface resulting in unwholesome deeds which would result in unwholesome reactions at the opportune time. Even a lofty-minded Bodhisatta is not free from anger or jealousy. At the time of the Dipankara Buddha, our Bodhisatta had the spiritual development to attain Arahantship. He suppressed this attainment with determination and continued in samsara to complete the virtues (perfections) so that He could be a Supreme Buddha and show the path of salvation to others. At this time the Bodhisatta was aware that during this period of action He would commit unwholesome deeds which would result in unwholesome effects. But facing the dangers with compassion He remained in samsara for the welfare of others.

The Bodhisatta was determined to become a Supreme Buddha. This is a very difficult task which requires enormous effort and determination over countless years. Seven out of the twelve unwholesome deeds resulted from jealousy because others had attained that for which He was striving. How difficult it is to control jealousy when one has tried so very hard only to see that others have succeeded whilst one still requires more effort. How difficult to stay on the course to Buddhahood with determination.

Learning from these incidents we must strive with diligence, for the state of a worldling is dangerous. We should be mindful of all our actions and constantly vigilant for it is easy to be tempted to do wrong. And yet the Buddha assured us that we could refrain from evil deeds and perform wholesome deeds which are beneficial to self. He himself had done so and He encouraged us by saying that we too, if we practise with effort, could reach the deathless - the supreme bliss of Nibbāna.

We should also with compassion not condemn other who have erred. Every living being who has not attained Arahantship makes mistakes. There is none among us who has not wronged through ignorance. In the same manner there is none among us who cannot change and become a better person. We should, with compassion, teach those that have erred the Truth and the effects of their unwholesome deeds, and encourage them in spiritual development. We should help to enlighten others, even those of different faiths, for they can have spiritual growth whilst practising their own religious traditions.

When learning about the effects of the twelve unwholesome deeds a reader may feel that everything that happens to a person is due to kamma<sup>26</sup>. Headache, backache, diarrhea, a small mishap, etc., This is not the case. According to the teachings of the Buddha everything that happens to an individual is not due to kamma. It is, however, due to the operation of cause and effect. Similar effects as the Buddha experienced can be experienced by a person due to a combination of several causes. The Buddha spoke of five laws that operate in this world. Kamma is one of them.

The others are:

- Utu Niyāma (inorganic order)
- Bija Niyāma (order of germs and seeds)
- Citta Niyāma (order of the development of the mind such as astral travel and the divine eye)
- Dhamma Niyāma (order of norm such as gravity and the laws of physics)

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26. The students should have a good understanding of kamma before they master this lesson. Read chapter 10 in *Questions and Answers in Buddhism – Volume I* for a comprehensive account of the workings of kamma and the other laws in operation.

Utu Niyama is inorganic order, the root cause of which is heat energy. Earthquakes, thunder, lightning, volcanoes, rain, and drought fall into this category. The root cause is the heat energy. This could be resulting from heat energy of the sun, heat energy trapped in the bowels of the Earth or even heat energy caused by man such as a fire. Utu Niyama, just as Bija Niyama, order of germs and seeds (genetics), also contributes to similar effects such as headache, backache, etc. If one puts one's hand into a blazing fire, one will get burned. This is because, for whatever reason, one put one's hand into the fire. One cannot then walk into traffic and say that it is one's past kamma when a car runs you over. These too have a cause. The cause may be foolishness, arrogance or the intention to kill oneself. It could also be a result of one's past kamma.

The Buddha also talked of instances when natural laws took effect because you happened to be there. Attha loka dhamma - gain and loss, praise and blame, shame and fame, happiness and misery, can happen due to kamma or due to a combination of other causes.

There were other unpleasant effects that the Buddha experienced which He said were not due to past kamma. The Mara-induced abuse of the Brahmin Akkosa Bharavaja, which the Buddha instructed him to take back like a banquet that was not accepted by his guests, was not due to kamma vipaka. And the time when Mara is said to have prevented a village from giving alms to the Buddha, was also not cited by the Buddha as the result of past unwholesome actions. The Buddha classified this as Dhamma Niyama. Operation of the law of Kamma and the other laws in operation in the world are complex and intertwined. It is only a Buddha who sees clearly the full operation of the law of kamma. Many of His disciples such as Mahā Moggallāna, Uppalavannā and Isidāsi could see the operation of the law of kamma to lesser degrees but no one had the infinite powers of the Buddha.

One must also not feel that every unwholesome action performed will have recurring effect until one's Arahantship. The Buddha categorized kamma into four categories depending on when the effects were felt. They are as follows:

1. Dīṭṭhadhammavedaniya kamma - kamma that takes effect in the same birth. Mallika, the flower girl, who became the Queen of Kosala because of her heartfelt gift of food to the Buddha, would be an example of this type of kamma.

2. Upapajjavedaniya kamma - kamma that takes effect in the next birth. Mallika obtaining rebirth in an unhappy plane for a short time resulting from sexual misconduct would be an example of this type of kamma.

3 Aparāpariyavedaniya kamma - kamma that takes effect in any of the succeeding births up to and possibly including the birth when a person attains Arahantship. The unwholesome deeds the effects of which were felt as the Buddha fall into this category.

4. Ahosi kamma. Due to the nature of the kamma or the lack of opportunity, the effects of kamma do not take place.

The Buddha analyzed the thought-process to determine when results of an action would take place. The thought-process when kamma takes effect is known as the javana thought-process and consists of seven consecutive thought-moments (five at the time of death).

The effects of the first thought-moment, the weakest, will be felt in the same birth and if it does not take effect in this same birth will become ineffective. The next weakest is the seventh thought-moment, the effect of which is felt in the succeeding birth. As before, if the kamma does not take effect in the succeeding birth it becomes ineffective. The strongest thought-moments are felt between the second and the sixth thought-moments. The wholesome and unwholesome effects of these intentions could be felt in any or all of the succeeding births.

The law of kamma is a natural law that operates without a law-giver just like the law of gravity and the laws of physics. Rain, thunder, earthquakes and volcanoes happen due to natural inorganic reasons. It is not someone but rather something that makes these natural phenomena happen. And when they happen they affect all beings. The law of kamma is similar. As such it applies to every living being including the Buddha, the devas and Brahmas. During the period of action our Bodhisatta committed twelve unwholesome deeds with strong intention. Kamma that the Buddha termed as Aparāpariyavedaniya kamma or kamma that takes effect in any or possibly even in all of the succeeding births. As such the residual effects of these strong intentional actions were felt even as the Buddha



## CHAPTER 14

### **What has the Buddha said about marriage between a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist?**

*“Victory breeds hatred,  
The defeated live in pain;  
Happily the peaceful live,  
Giving up victory and defeat.”*

*Dhammapada 121*

**Question** - Living in non-Buddhist countries, the opportunity of selecting persons of the same faith as partners is rare. What has the Buddha said regarding inter-faith marriages?

**Answer** - The question that was asked pertained to the marriage between a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist. However, I will use this opportunity to discuss inter-marriages of different religions, nationalities and castes.

Most of what I teach you are direct quotations from the Buddha's teachings. However, in this instance we will have to use His teachings and try to answer this question because the Buddha did not directly address inter-marriage between religions or nationalities. Before the Buddha there was no Buddhism in India. Obviously there was no question of people marrying Buddhists as there were no Buddhists. The people took refuge in the Buddha after listening to His Dhamma. There would have been very few born as Buddhists and so this question never arose and was never asked of the Buddha. Similarly, because travel between nations was difficult, there could not have been many instances of inter-marriage between different nationalities.

However, the caste system was very, very strong and inter-marriage between persons of different castes was not accepted. In fact, at the time of the Buddha, even association between the high

and the low castes was not accepted. And at least among royalty, inter-marriage was not encouraged. For example, Sakyan princes were only allowed to marry Koliyan princesses and vice versa.

As I said before, the Buddha has not made any direct reference to inter-marriage. He has, however, made His views clear through His teachings on the caste system. In the Vasala Sutta the Buddha said:

*"By birth is not one an outcast  
By birth is not one a Brahmin.  
By deeds is one an outcast.  
By deeds is one a Brahmin."*

The Buddha also advised us never to condemn or insult the religion of another. Denouncing the unfair criticism of others' faiths the Buddha said, "It is as a man who looks up and spits at heaven. The spittle does not soil the heaven, but comes back and soils his own person." On another occasion the Buddha said, "If you find truth in any religion, accept that truth."

It is obvious from these and other examples of His compassionate teachings that the Buddha was more concerned with the character of the person and his deeds or actions than on his birthright.

The Buddha renounced His kingdom, wealth and beloved family to seek the path for the total destruction of suffering for gods and men. The goal of His teachings is the cessation of suffering, or Nibbāna. What you may not know is that He was also concerned about your immediate happiness. Your happiness in this life and the next life and all the future births you will have before you attain Nibbāna. Practising His teachings ensures happiness in this life and the next.

The Sigālovāda Sutta deals specifically with happiness in your marriage. The Mangala Sutta addresses wholesome deeds that will uplift you and ensure your progress and prosperity. It deals with deeds that will make you more noble. The Parābhava Sutta shows you actions that will lead to your downfall, actions that you should avoid, as these deeds will bring you unhappiness in this life and the next. The Buddha realized that there were many of us who were as yet not spiritually ready to attain the ultimate goal of Nibbāna in the present birth. He therefore had a graduated method of teaching known as Ānupubbikathā. He encouraged us along the path through the practice of generosity, compassion, tolerance,

universal responsibility and wisdom. By using this graduated method of teaching He ensured our happiness while we traversed the path to Nibbāna, which of course is our goal.

The Buddha gave up His kingdom, crown, wealth and beloved family for the happiness of living beings. As such our happiness was the Buddha's goal. We will try to answer this question, keeping in mind that the Buddha would have with wisdom steered us towards family unity, happiness and spiritual growth. In this world the persons who love us the most are our parents. I know that I can speak on behalf of all the parents who are with me today when I say that for us the greatest happiness is the happiness and prosperity of our children. In Eastern cultures the family is very important, and as such the happiness of the couple cannot be isolated from the rest of the family. It is interdependent on the happiness of the family.

Just as when selecting a friend we select a person who has similar ideas, interests, values and background, when we select a partner we ensure that we are compatible. But unlike when we are choosing a friend, when we are selecting a partner, we are sometimes blinded by love and infatuation. As such it is difficult for us to be objective in our thinking.

Marriage is a long-term commitment. As such you should make every effort to ensure the success of your marriage. The initial romance and excitement fades away with the realities and stress of day-to-day living. It is easier for you to get along with the person if you have similar ideas, values and a similar way of life. If there are vast differences in values, customs and culture resulting from different faiths, nationalities and social standing, then one needs to be more tolerant and giving. One must be prepared to sacrifice for one knows that there will come a time when these differences will be difficult to reconcile.

If you make a mistake in your choice of a friend you can drop the friend. It is not that easy to break up a marriage as it results in enormous suffering and instability, especially for children. For this reason parents encourage their adult children, whom they love, to marry persons of similar religion, culture and background. If you have a similar background, upbringing, values and way of life, then it will be more likely that the marriage will be successful. This does not, however, preclude the character and interest of the person. Your parents might object to your marrying a person of a

different religion or culture if they felt strongly about the importance of such differences to compatibility. They would, however, definitely object to your marrying a person with questionable character even if his religion and culture were compatible. They would object because they would feel that such a marriage would not be conducive to your future happiness. Reflect when in doubt that indifferent parents would not care as to whom you married. Objections generally mean that they love you and are concerned for your future happiness.

It is in the best interest of all to discuss the objection with your parents rationally because all they want is your future happiness. As Buddhists we respect our parents and their wisdom. We know that we cannot build our happiness on their sorrow. Our parents cared for us and brought us up with unconditional love. Many have sacrificed their happiness to ensure that we have a good education and a comfortable life. In truth they only want our happiness. They also have the wisdom of age and experience in their favour. In this instance we have to understand that they are objective and have only our welfare and interest at heart. As such we should calmly discuss the reasons for their objections.

We must understand that just as our five fingers are each different from each other, each one of us is different. What is right for one person and one family may not be right for the happiness of another person and another family. I know of many marriages between persons of different religions and cultures that are happy and many that have failed. I know of marriages where both parties are of the same religion and culture that are successful and some that have failed. One has to work at one's marriage for it to succeed. One has to work harder and be more tolerant and giving if one is starting out with huge religious and cultural differences.

In many instances problems arise in inter-faith marriages when one person wants the other to convert to their faith or restricts the other person in the practice of their faith. Some religions will not perform the marriage unless the parties agree to conversion and even conversion of the children born of the marriage. Reflect carefully as to whether such intolerance in a religion and a partner who is accepting of such intolerance is acceptable to you. Discuss such issues and your feelings and make sure that all concerns have been addressed before you make a decision. Make sure that you sort out the impact an inter-faith marriage will have on your children prior to commitment.

The Buddha's tolerance and compassion regarding conversion of others is captured beautifully by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He advises teachers of Buddhism as follows:

*“Remember our purpose here is not to make more Buddhists, it is to make more enlightened beings. When you teach Buddhism don't encourage people to become Buddhists, just encourage them to cultivate the qualities of love, compassion, universal responsibility and wisdom within themselves. If some special people with strong karmic connections want to formally become Buddhists then that is acceptable, but in general the emphasis should be on a commitment to inner spirituality, not to any specific religious traditions.”*

The appearance of a Buddha is an extremely rare happening<sup>27</sup>. The hearing of the sublime Truth, His Teachings is even more rare. As Buddhists we believe that enormous effort over a countless period of time has resulted in birth to Buddhist parents. And many, many wholesome deeds have resulted in the opportunity to hear the Dhamma. One's journey in samsara is infinite. As such Buddhist parents have an obligation to ensure that they have provided their children with the knowledge and opportunity to practise the Dhamma so that they can continue their spiritual development towards Nibbāna. As parents we must remember that when Prince Rahula asked his father, the Buddha, for his inheritance, that the Buddha gave him the Dhamma. Reflecting on the fact that the Buddha valued the Dhamma above His kingdom and wealth, parents should ensure that they provide their children with more than just an education, food, and shelter. Parents, with love and compassion, should ensure their children's knowledge of the Dhamma, for the benefits of the Dhamma transcend this lifetime.

Children in turn, reflecting on how fortunate they are to have the opportunity to develop further by hearing the Dhamma, should consider the very grave danger in which they place themselves by changing their religion. Remember that it is a special person with strong karmic connection that has the opportunity to hear the Dhamma. It is your past wholesome deeds and effort that made

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27. Read *Practising the Dhamma with a View to Nibbāna* by Radhika Abeysekera, for an account of how rare is the appearance of a Supreme Buddha.

you that special person. The Buddha has stated clearly that false view is one of the unwholesome actions that leads to unwholesome results. The unwholesome effects of false view are lack of wisdom (avijja) for it is only in the Teachings of the Buddha that one finds a path that leads to the development of wisdom. Moving away from the Truth would be lengthening one's journey in samsara and moving away from the path to enlightenment.

There has to be a lot of tolerance for any marriage to be successful because no two people are alike. There has to be even more tolerance for an interfaith or inter-cultural marriage to be successful. And it will be more difficult if religion is important to both parties because we know that one has to compromise if the marriage results in children. Ven. Piyatissa, Mahā Thera of the New York Buddhist Vihāra, suggests that all children should be exposed to world religions because it makes them more tolerant. I agree. And it is even more important in interfaith marriages. Partners should, with compassion, study each other's religions with an open mind. There is compassion in every religion. Books such as Dr. Roy Amore's *Two Masters One Message* will highlight such similarities. However, one must be aware that Buddhism, unlike most other religions, does not accept an omnipotent Creator God or salvation through prayer. Discuss such matters beforehand. See if you can accept your partner just the way they are and if your partner will accept you just the way you are. See if they will fit in with your family and your way of life, culture and beliefs. And if they do not, be sure that you can accept him/her the way they are, because you cannot change another. At best, with love and compassion, you may be able to influence another. You can only change yourself.

Most of us at some time or other have tried to change. It is difficult to change – difficult to give up drinking, difficult to give up smoking and so very difficult to diet. A very simple change which we know is for our betterment is still so difficult to accomplish. Now think how much more difficult it is to change someone else because you feel that the change is for the better. It is not easy.

The most successful marriages are the ones where your partner is also your best friend. Your best friend is someone you accept just the way they are. None of us try to change our best friend. We like them and choose them for what they are. They are not perfect, and they definitely have faults but we chose them despite their faults, with awareness and acceptance of their faults. We like them for what they are, not for what they are not. In marriage it is much the

same.

It is best to have open discussions with parents and elders before you get involved so that expectations and views are shared by all. The important thing is not a person's birth, culture or beliefs, but that you and your family can accept another person's birth, culture and beliefs and that their family can accept your birth, culture and beliefs. As such there is no one answer as right and wrong are very subjective. It depends on all the parties involved.

The Buddha limited His answers to questions that lead to Nibbāna. His goal was the ultimate happiness or total destruction of suffering for all living beings. If this question was asked of the Buddha I think He would look at all persons who are affected by this union and give His answer based on their future happiness and spiritual growth on the path to enlightenment. As such we should use similar criteria when making our decisions.



## CHAPTER 15

### **Is morality possible without belief in an omnipotent Creator?**

*“If you can find Truth in any religion accept that Truth”*

*Anguttara Nikāya*

**Question** - Some theist religions claim that belief in an omnipotent Creator God is required for morality. How does Buddhism, a non-theist religion, respond to such claims?

**Answer** - The *Winnipeg Free Press* of Saturday, October 14, 2000, printed an article on the Faith page entitled, *Is evolution based on illogical premise?* by John M. Craig of Winnipeg. In the article Mr. Craig gives his reasons for not believing in evolution. The main reason given is the lack of fossils of transitional creatures (half fish/half amphibians). He then goes on to surmise that as such, creation must be accurate. However, no reasoning is given to prove that creation is accurate. After assuming that creation is accurate, Mr. Craig concludes his article as follows:

*“In conclusion, we are raising a generation of young people to believe that there is no God and that they are just accidents evolved from algae! What does this belief do to the value of human life and the basis for morality? If we are nothing but evolved animals, then why shouldn’t we live like animals? Isn’t the rise in bloodshed of the last century just ‘survival’ of the fittest. Aren’t teen pregnancies, mass abortions (30 million in the US alone since Roe V. Wade”) and STD’s including AIDS simply the end product of a philosophy that has people living with no foundation for morals?*

*Evolution is a 19th-century philosophy that has been destroyed by 20th-century science, yet the myth continues to be perpetrated, not on scientific grounds, but because it is what justifies our immoral*

*society today. If people admitted there was a Creator then they would become morally responsible to that Creator. Too many people today don't want to be morally responsible to anyone, other than to their own ego.*

*Christians and Jews can be confident that the first 11 chapters of Genesis records actual history, especially the six literal days for creation."*

John M. Craig  
Winnipeg

There was a host of scientific literature in response to the above article by professors and scientists who support the theory of evolution. The following article which was from a moral and ethical point of view, as opposed to a scientific point of view, was not printed by the *Winnipeg Free Press* due to lack of space.

### **Morality with and without a Creator God.**

I found the article *Is evolution based on illogical premise?* in the Saturday, October 14, 2000 issue of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, by John M. Craig, quite interesting and would like to share my views with your readers.

Many world religions claim that their holy books state that God created the universe and man. The interesting point is that each of these holy books claim that it is their God and only their God that created the universe and each holy book then describes an interesting story as to how this was accomplished.

Looking at the different holy books impartially, it is only fair to say that they all have an equal chance of being accurate. Each of these holy books has been read and researched by many of its followers who are convinced of the Truth found in their book. As acceptance is based on a book written many years after the death of its founder as opposed to direct experience, they all have equal right to their claim. As such if we have four religions that claim that their holy book is correct they each have a 25% chance of being accurate just as if we had five religions that make such a claim they each have 20% chance of being accurate.

In order to be fair by all the holy books, one could also presume that all of these Gods had a hand in the creation of the world. After

all, the universe is very complex. Unfortunately, none of the holy books talk of such cooperation and harmony. And as such, it is doubtful if any of the theist religions are willing to accept such a possibility.

The possibility also exists that it is the same God that each holy book refers to with different names. The problem with this is that each holy book has a different account of how creation took place and a different description of the characteristics of their God. Some portray God as being compassionate while others portray God as being jealous and cruel. Different books may have different names for God but which of the books has the authentic version? It would be arrogant for anyone to claim that his and only his holy book is correct, just because he happened to be born into a particular religious tradition.

I personally have no issue with any religion that wants to take the responsibility for creation so long as the said God takes full responsibility for His creation. If a scientist creates an advanced robot with super intelligence that benefits mankind, he gets credit and accolades for his creation. But if his robot malfunctions and starts maiming and killing indiscriminately, the scientist is held responsible for its actions. Similarly, a manufacturer of any item is fully responsible for its defects, and the result and suffering that may be caused by its defects just as he enjoys the profits and accolades of his success.

As such it is logical that whichever God created the universe should be held fully responsible for His creation. The earthquakes, volcanoes, floods and famine that take countless lives and cause untold suffering are the results of the flaws in the creation of the world. And just as we can credit the Creator God for the gentle rain and sun that resulted in a good harvest, we can credit the Creator God for the untold misery. Similarly the blind and the handicapped, the sick and the lame can credit God for their suffering and misery just as they credit God for their talents and good health. We could even go as far as to place all evil and good on God's shoulders. After all God created man. Even if He decided to give free-will to man it was His sole decision and as such He should take responsibility for any lack of wisdom (delusion) in such a decision. As an all-knowing God, I am sure He was aware that some of His creations would cause more suffering and misery than joy and happiness. (*Beyond Belief* - A.L. De Silva; Buddhasasana web site).

The question then arises, “Is God compassionate or is He omnipotent?” All the misery and suffering in the world leads me to believe that He cannot be both. Most people would like to assume that God is better than we are, that our goal is to be as God-like as possible, and as such, use Him as a role model. And yet, if we were omnipotent would we cause such misery? We now live in a society where we are taught to help our children grow with love and understanding as opposed to spanking and hitting them. How does one relate to a God who kills and maims to teach us to grow? As I have previously indicated, despite my non-belief in creation, I have no issue with religions claiming that their God created the world. They have to, however, in my opinion take full responsibility for His creation.

I do, however, take exception to Mr. Craig’s concluding statements. He writes, “In conclusion, we are raising a generation of young people to believe that there is no God and that they are just accidents evolved from algae! What does this belief do to the value of human life and the basis for morality?...” Mr Craig implies that one cannot be moral or value human life if one does not believe in a Creator God. There are many people who do not believe in creation or an omnipotent Creator God, who are moral. Compassion, loving kindness, generosity, tolerance, and universal responsibility exist in followers of every religion, and in those that do not subscribe to any religion.

I would like to draw the reader’s attention to Buddhism, one such religion that has boundless compassion and wisdom, and that does not believe in an omnipotent Creator God. This is what the great scientist Albert Einstein says of Buddhism (*Buddhism in the Eyes of Intellectuals*- Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda):

*“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God, avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.”*

The tolerance and compassion found in Buddhism has been acknowledged by all informed religious leaders, just as the compassion found on the Sermon on the Mount is acknowledged by all religious leaders. In fact, the similarities found in the

Sermon on the Mount and the Dhammapada of the Buddha have been the authorship of many scholars and academics.

Dr. Roy C. Amore, professor of religion at the University of Windsor, in his book *Two Masters One Message*, has done a wonderful comparison of the startling similarities and differences of the two religions, and has come to some enlightening conclusions. Morality exists in both religions despite their different beliefs on creation. Is this just coincidence or is it possible that one religion borrowed from the other? Dr. Amore concludes that there has been borrowing from the ancient Buddhist texts such as the Dhammapada. Gruber and Kirsten, in their book, *The Original Jesus - Buddhist Sources of Christianity*, goes into an in-depth study of not only the similarities in some of the teachings on morality but the historical beginning and spread of the teachings. These are but few of the books that address some of the similarities in two of the world's leading theist and non-theist religions, both of which advocate deep compassion.

Dr. Paul Dahlke of Germany in his *Buddhist Essays* states, “It is the knowledge of the law of cause and effect, action and reaction, that urges a man to refrain from evil and gather good. A believer in cause and effect knows only too well that it is his own actions that make his life miserable or otherwise”. Dr. Dahlke is referring to the Buddhist doctrine of kamma, where intentional wholesome and unwholesome actions have wholesome and unwholesome reactions at the opportune time, and to the doctrine of rebirth. Many scholars and academics have researched rebirth. *Many Lives Many Masters* - Brian Weiss MD, *Rebirth as Doctrine and Experience* - Francis Story, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* - Ian Stevenson MD, and *Many Mansions* - Dr. Gina Cerminara, are some written by Western authors that point towards rebirth and kamma. In this instance Dr. Dahlke shows that knowledge of the operation of the law of kamma and rebirth also leads its believers to morality. It is clear that belief in an omnipotent Creator God is not an essential requirement for morality.

Jack Kornfield, in his book *A Path with Heart* and Howard Cutler MD and His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, in their book *The Art of Happiness*, effectively convey the boundless compassion and loving kindness found in Buddhism – a religion that does not believe in an omnipotent God or creation. Buddhism is a non-violent, compassionate religion, and throughout its peaceful existence of over 2500 years, not a drop of blood has been shed in

the spread of the teaching of the Buddha. Unfortunately, history does not support Mr. Craig's claims that belief in a Creator God is required to value human life. Many theist religions have used the sword to spread their religion.

The compassion found in Buddhism extends to all living beings. Not only are Buddhists to refrain from killing all living beings, but they are advised by the Buddha to refrain from any livelihood that is harmful to living beings, such as the selling of animals for killing and the manufacture and sale of weapons and armaments used in warfare. Practising Buddhists accept these precepts or modes of discipline (which are not commandments) after careful examination and understanding. And then, with effort, they try to live up to their commitment.

I believe that it is prudent to study all world religions before one claims that belief in an omnipotent God and creation are necessary for one to be moral. It is understandable for one who is brought up in a particular religious tradition to view the holy scriptures of that religion as being authentic. We must remember, however, that the frog in the well thinks that the well is the whole world. As we embark on the 21st century it is prudent that we study all world religions to find truth, compassion and tolerance. One will then see that morality and wholesomeness exist in every religion. All one need do is seek out the religion/philosophy/path that appeals to one's intellect and heart. Once one has confidence, gained through question and analytical examination of one's chosen path, one will practice with effort in order to reach one's spiritual potential. Human beings are varied and have different needs. Is it not wonderful that we have so many religious traditions to assist us in reaching our full spiritual potential?





## GLOSSARY

<b>Abhidhamma Pitaka</b>	The books that contain higher teachings of the Buddha that require penetration or realization for full understanding
<b>Anatta</b>	The doctrine of no self
<b>Ānāpānasati meditation</b>	Meditation on breathing awareness
<b>Anicca</b>	The doctrine of impermanence
<b>Arahanth</b>	One who has realized the Truth using the teachings of a Buddha
<b>Bhavana</b>	Meditation
<b>Buddha</b>	One With Wisdom, The Enlightened One
<b>Bodhisatta</b>	One on His way to perfection (name given to a Buddha Aspirant)
<b>Dhamma</b>	Truth or the Law
<b>Dāna</b>	Generosity
<b>Dosa</b>	Aversion
<b>Dukkha</b>	Suffering
<b>Jataka Stories</b>	Birth stories of the Bodhisatta
<b>Kalapas</b>	Indivisible units
<b>Kamma</b>	Intentional or volitional actions (also known as the cause)

<b>Karunā</b>	Compassion and kindness to relieve others' sorrows
<b>Kāya-panidhana Kāla</b>	Era of action, (period during which the Bodhisatta completed the ten virtues)
<b>Lobha</b>	Greed
<b>Mahā Kappa</b>	World cycle
<b>Mettā</b>	Goodwill and loving kindness
<b>Moha</b>	Delusion
<b>Mudita</b>	Sympathetic joy in the progress of others
<b>Nibbāna</b>	The Buddhist goal; the total destruction (or absence) of suffering
<b>Pacceka Buddha</b>	One who realizes the Truth but cannot teach it to others
<b>Pāli</b>	Language spoken by the Buddha
<b>Paññā</b>	Wisdom
<b>Puthujjana</b>	Worldling; one who has not attained even the first stage of sainthood
<b>Saddhā</b>	Confidence through study and understanding
<b>Samatha meditation</b>	Meditation on mindfulness
<b>Samsāra</b>	The cycle of birth and death
<b>Sangha</b> <b>Sankhāra</b>	Order of the monks and nuns Volitional formations or responses
<b>Sasana</b>	Dispensation of the Buddha

<b>Sikkhapada</b>	Modes of discipline or precepts that the Buddha laid out for His followers
<b>Sila</b>	Morality
<b>Sinhalese</b>	The race and language spoken by the majority of the people of Sri Lanka
<b>Sotapanna</b>	First stage of spiritual development (One who has entered the stream of Nibbāna)
<b>Supreme Buddha</b>	A Fully Enlightened One who realizes the Truth and then teaches it for the benefit of men and gods
<b>Sutta Pitaka</b>	The books that contain the majority of the teachings of the Buddha
<b>Suttas</b>	Discourses of the Buddha
<b>Tanhā</b>	Craving to cling to pleasant sensations and avert unpleasant sensations. Tanha is the strong feeling that leads to “I want” for my happiness.
<b>Thera</b>	Elders: term used for male disciples who have attained Arahantship
<b>Theri</b>	Elders: term used for female disciples who have attained Arahantship
<b>Upekkhā</b>	Equanimity
<b>Vinaya Pitaka</b>	Books that contain the code of ethics and discipline for the sangha
<b>Vipaka</b>	The result of intentional actions (also known as the effect)
<b>Vipassanā meditation</b>	Meditation on insight



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