

# 1 Realms of Existence

Welcome to the sixth talk of this Practical Abhidhamma Course. We will now discuss the Realms of Existence.<sup>1</sup> The Realms of Existence are mentioned in the Suttas but Buddhist philosophy and [practice](#) are in no way related to beings from non-human Realms of Existence.

Sometimes the supernatural beings mentioned in the Suttas are used as literary devices to deliver a strong message to an ancient Indian audience. For example, when a Sutta says<sup>2</sup> that the king of the Gods, who was well known by non-Buddhists, comes to ask the Buddha questions or pays respect to the Buddha,<sup>3</sup> this implies that the Buddha is superior to gods from other belief systems.<sup>4</sup>

During this talk, we will be referring to Handouts 6 and 7. You should also have Handout 2 available for reference. Handout 6 lists each of the 31 Realms of Existence divided into four groups: The “Woeful States” (realms 1–4), the “Happy Destinations” (realms 5–11), the “Fine Material Plane” (realms 12–27) and the “Immaterial Plane (realms 28–31). For each realm, Handout 6 lists the name of the realm, the cause of rebirth into this realm, the Life-continuum Mind Moment for beings in this realm, and the lifespan for beings in this realm. Handout 6 also lists the possible destination realm in the next life, after expiring from this realm. For example, looking at realm 31, a non-saint who expires from this realm may be reborn into the Happy Destinations (realms 5–11) or back into realm 31. A saint (Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi or Anāgāmi) who expires from this realm will always be reborn back into realm 31.

Handout 7 combines information from Handouts 2 and 6. Handout 7 shows which Mind Moments can arise in each realm. The rows in Handout 7 are numbered 1–89, corresponding to the numbering of the Mind Moments in Handout 2. The columns in Handout 7 are grouped according to “Woeful States,” “Happy Destinations,” “Fine Material Plane” and “Immaterial Plane.” Where appropriate, types of beings (non-saints and saints) are shown. A grey square indicates that this Mind Moment arises in these realms, and a dark diagonal indicates that these are commonly arising kamma-creating Mind Moments in these realms. For example, for beings in the Woeful States, only Mind Moments 1–29 and Mind Moments 31–38 can arise. The most common kamma-creating Mind Moments for beings in Woeful States are 1–12.

<sup>1</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist\\_cosmology\\_of\\_the\\_Theravada\\_school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhist_cosmology_of_the_Theravada_school)  
“The Four Planes of Existence in Theravāda Buddhism:” <http://www.bps.lk/olib/wh/wh462.pdf>,  
More details in Chapter 5 of “A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma” (see Footnote 2 for link).

<sup>2</sup>DN 21: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.21.2x.than.html>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.tipitaka.net/tipitaka/dhp/verseload.php?verse=206>

<sup>4</sup>Buddhism “imported” gods from the Vedic culture and sometimes changed their personalities. For example, in the Vedas, Yama was the feared god of death and in the Suttas, Yama compassionately tries to minimize a person’s time in hell by asking them to reflect on signs that they have seen (MN 130: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.130.than.html#yama>). As another example, in the Vedas, Māra was the messenger of death (Yama) and in the Suttas, Māra is the personification of temptation.

## Woeful States

	Name	Cause of rebirth into this Realm	Life-continuum	Lifespan	Destination	
					Non-saints	Saints
4	Asura	-				
3	Peta (Hungry Ghosts)	-				
2	Animal	Behaving like an animal	19	Indefinite	1–11	-
1	Hell	Five heinous deeds				

Figure 1: A portion of Handout 6, focusing on the Woeful States. For all Woeful States, one Cause of rebirth into this Realm is “Completed” unwholesome kamma.

The Woeful States include four realms: Hell, Animal, Peta<sup>5</sup> and Asura.<sup>6</sup> The cause of rebirth in the Woeful States is “completed” unwholesome kamma from a previous existence. There are many types of unwholesome kamma but the Suttas<sup>7</sup> identify those that can cause rebirth in the Woeful States as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, abusive speech, idle talk, covetousness, ill will and **Wrong view**.

The Abhidhamma Commentary<sup>8</sup> lists conditions that must be met for kamma to be “completed,” to be sufficiently weighty to be able to cause rebirth in the Woeful States. For example, for killing to be a “completed” kamma, there must be life, knowledge of that life, intent to kill, effort to kill and consequential death. We will discuss the details during our talk on kamma.

According to the Suttas,<sup>9</sup> there are five deeds that guarantee a rebirth in hell in the next life: killing one’s mother, killing one’s father, killing an Arahāt, wounding a Buddha and causing a split in the Sangha. Performing any of these five heinous deeds will also make it impossible to attain sainthood in the same life. For example, at the end of a Sutta<sup>10</sup> spoken to King Ajātasattu, the Buddha explained that if King Ajātasattu had not killed his own father, King Bimbisāra, then King Ajātasattu would have been able to attain sainthood after listening to that discourse given by the Buddha.

In another Sutta, the Buddha explained that behaving like an animal will lead to rebirth in the animal realm, and the belief that behaving like an animal could lead to a fortunate rebirth is a **Wrong view**; this **Wrong view** could lead to rebirth in Hell.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Peta are often called hungry ghosts; they share our world but are invisible to most people.

<sup>6</sup>Asura are a type of demon; they do not share our world or interact with humans.

<sup>7</sup>See AN 10.177: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.177.than.html> and MN 41: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.041.nymo.html>

<sup>8</sup>Details can be found in the Atthasālinī, pages 128–134.

<sup>9</sup>AN 5.29: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.129.than.html>

<sup>10</sup>DN 2: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.02.0.than.html>

<sup>11</sup>MN 57: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.057.nymo.html>

A being's lifespan in a Woeful State depends on the weightiness of their kamma. A being in a Woeful State is reborn into realm I to realm II. There are stories of an animal reborn as a Deva,<sup>12</sup> but most of the time, beings in the Woeful States are reborn back into the Woeful States because while in a Woeful State, the mind is consumed by **Attachment, Aversion and Delusion**, and these thoughts create more unwholesome kamma.

Saints are never reborn into the Woeful States and it is not possible to become a saint while in a Woeful State. Handout 6 indicates this by leaving the column blank.

Switching to Handout 7 and scanning the first column, we can see that only Mind Moments 1–29 and Mind Moments 31–38 can arise. The commonly arising kamma-creating Mind Moments are Mind Moments 1–12, the Danger Zone. Jhāna and supramundane Mind Moments are not possible for beings in the Woeful States.

Hell<sup>13</sup> is the lowest realm and hell-beings are subject to painful suffering. The Buddha explained<sup>14</sup> that when a being arrives in Hell or moves between Hells, he is met by a compassionate judge<sup>15</sup> who asks, “Did you not see a baby, an old person, a sick person, a condemned person, a dead person? Did these sights not create in you a sense of urgency to do good?” The hell-being then experiences a series of increasingly nasty hells until the unwholesome kamma that caused rebirth in hell has exhausted its result.

Based on the kamma that caused rebirth as animals in Realm 2, some animals, such as household pets, have a relatively easy life and some animals have a difficult life. The Buddha mentions<sup>16</sup> that beings can be born from an egg, from a womb, from moisture or spontaneously. Animals can be born from an egg, from a womb or from moisture. Beings born into realms other than the animal realm and human realm are born spontaneously.

The *Tipiṭaka* includes a book<sup>17</sup> dedicated to stories of Peta and the kamma that resulted in rebirth into Realm 3. One of the Suttas in this book<sup>18</sup> explains that there are Peta that depend on food and drink offered by relatives living in the human realm. The Buddha explained<sup>19</sup> that only deceased relatives who have been reborn into the Peta realm are able to receive offerings dedicated to them. There are also other types of Peta that are unable to receive offerings; they always suffer from hunger and thirst.

When the Suttas<sup>20</sup> list realms, they do not include Realm 4, the Asura realm. The Asura realm was added by the Commentaries<sup>21</sup>. The Asuras mentioned in the Suttas<sup>22</sup> refer to a rebellious class of Deva in Realm 7, not to inhabitants of the Asura realm. According to the Commentaries, the inhabitants of realm 4 are a class of Peta. The Commentaries describe the Asura realm as being in darkness; the Asuras fight when they come into contact with each other.

<sup>12</sup>In *Vimānavatthu* 852–88, a frog dies listening to the Buddha's voice and is reborn into realm 7.

<sup>13</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naraka\\_\(Buddhism\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naraka_(Buddhism))

<sup>14</sup>MN 130: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.130.than.html>

<sup>15</sup>The God of death, King Yama: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yama\\_\(East\\_Asia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yama_(East_Asia)), who is from Catumahārājika Heaven, asks these questions to create a sense of spiritual urgency to generate wholesome kamma and thereby reduce the time that the hell-being must spend in hell.

<sup>16</sup>MN 12: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.012.ntbb.html>

<sup>17</sup>*Petavatthu*: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petavatthu>

<sup>18</sup>Pv 1.5: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/pv/pv.1.05.than.html>

<sup>19</sup>AN 10.177: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.177.than.html>

<sup>20</sup>MN 97: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.097.than.html>

<sup>21</sup>*Visuddhimagga* XIII.93 (see footnote 2).

<sup>22</sup>AN 9.39: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an09/an09.039.than.html>

<b>Attachment-rooted</b>	1	●	<b>Sense Sphere</b>	Wholesome	31–38	○
	2	●			39	
	3	●			40	
	4	●			41	
	5	●		Resultant	42	
	6	●			43	
	7	●			44	
	8	●			45	
<b>Aversion-rooted</b>	9	●		Functional	47–54	
	10	●				
<b>Delusion-rooted</b>	11	●	<b>Fine Material Sphere</b>	Wholesome	55–59	
	12	●		Resultant	60–64	
Past unwholesome resultant	13	○		Functional	65–69	
	14	○	<b>Im-material Sphere</b>	Wholesome	70–73	
	15	○		Resultant	74–77	
	16	○		Functional	78–81	
	17	○	<b>Supramundane</b>	Sotāpanna	82	
	18	○		Sakadāgāmī	83	
	19	○		Anāgāmī	84	
Past wholesome resultant	20	○		Arahat	85	
	21	○		Sotāpanna	86	
	22	○		Sakadāgāmī	87	
	23	○		Anāgāmī	88	
	24	○		Arahat	89	
	25	○				
	26	○				
	27	○				
Functional	28	○				
	29	○				
	30					

● Common kamma-creating Mind Moment      ○ Mind Moment that can arise

Figure 2: A portion of Handout 7, reformatted to focus on Mind Moments in the Woeful States. The most common kamma-creating Mind Moments are 1–12.

## Happy Destinations

	Name	Cause of rebirth into this Realm	Life- cont.	Lifespan	Destination	
					Non-saints	Saints
11	Gods wielding power of creation of others	3-rooted superior kamma → being with		9216 mil. years		
10	Gods delighting in creation	life-continuum of <b>39, 40, 43, 44</b> (3 roots)		2304 mil. years	Being with life- continuum of	
9	Heaven of the contented Gods	3-rooted superior kamma or 2-rooted	<b>39, 40, 43, 44</b>	576 mil. years	<b>39, 40, 43, 44</b> →	
8	Heaven of the Yāma Gods	superior kamma → being with		144 mil. years	1–22, 28–31	5–21
7	Heaven of the 33 Gods	life-continuum of <b>41, 42, 45, 46</b> (2 roots)		36 mil. years	Being with life- continuum of	23–31
6	Heaven of the Four Great Kings	2-rooted inferior kamma → being with	<b>27,</b>	9 mil. years / Indefinite	<b>27, 41, 42, 45, 46 →</b> 1–11	
5	Human ☺	life-continuum of <b>27</b> (0 roots)	<b>39–46</b>	Indefinite		

Figure 3: A portion of Handout 6, focusing on the Happy Destinations.

The Happy Destinations include seven realms; the human realm and six Deva realms.

Handout 6 indicates that if the rebirth-linking kamma from the previous existence is “3-rooted superior kamma,” then the Life-continuum Mind Moment in the Happy Destinations will be one of **39, 40, 43** or **44**. As can be seen in Handout 2, these four Life-continuum Mind Moments have three roots including the root of **Understanding**.

What is “3-rooted” kamma? As seen in Handout 2, kamma generated by Mind Moments **31, 32, 35** or **36** is 3-rooted because these Mind Moments are associated with **Understanding**. On the other hand, kamma generated by Mind Moments **33, 34, 37** or **38** is 2-rooted kamma because these Mind Moments are not associated with **Understanding**.

What differentiates “superior” kamma from “inferior” kamma are the Mind Moments shortly before and shortly after the wholesome kamma-creating Mind Moment. For a kamma to be “superior,” there must be a wholesome Mind Moment shortly before, and a wholesome Mind Moment shortly after, otherwise the kamma is “inferior.” If I make a donation reluctantly, unwholesome reluctance arises shortly before the donation and the kamma is “inferior.” If I make a donation and then regret it, unwholesome regret arises shortly after the donation and the kamma of the donation is “inferior.” If I prepare the donation with joy, donate and then share the merit of the donation, the donation is supported before and after by other wholesome Mind Moments

and the kamma is “superior.” In the Suttas,<sup>23</sup> the Buddha encouraged his son to reflect before, during and after an action; the Buddha encouraged his son to create superior kamma.

As shown in Handout 6, if the rebirth-linking kamma from the previous existence is “3-rooted superior kamma,” then the Life-continuum Mind Moment in the Happy Destinations will have three roots. If the rebirth-linking kamma from the previous existence is “3-rooted inferior kamma” or “2-rooted superior kamma,” then the Life-continuum Mind Moment will have two roots. If the rebirth-linking kamma from the previous existence is “2-rooted inferior kamma,” then the Life-continuum Mind Moment will have no roots.

Beings in Realms 7–11 will have 3-rooted Life-continuum Mind Moments, while beings in the Human Realm or Realm 6 may have Life-continuum Mind Moments with 0, 2 or 3 roots. Beings with 3-rooted Life-continuum Mind Moments can be reborn into the Sensuous Plane, the Fine Material Plane or the Immaterial Plane. Beings whose Life-continuum Mind Moment has 0 or 2 roots will be reborn into the Sensuous Plane.

As can be seen from Handout 7, beings whose Life-continuum Mind Moments have 0 or 2 roots cannot experience jhāna (Mind Moments 55–59, 70–73), nor can they attain sainthood (Mind Moment 82), but 3-rooted beings can experience jhāna and attain sainthood. For non-saints, the commonly arising kamma-creating Mind Moments include both Mind Moments 1–12, the Danger Zone and Mind Moments 31–38, the Faultless Zone.

A Sotāpanna cannot experience Mind Moment 11, which is associated with **Doubt**, or Mind Moments associated with **Wrong view** (Mind Moments 1, 2, 5 and 6). **Attachment to Wrong view** has been uprooted in a Sotāpanna. Reminds me of a joke: one becomes a Sotāpanna when your karma runs over your dogma. An Anāgāmi cannot experience **Aversion**-rooted Mind Moments (Mind Moments 9 and 10) and an Arahant cannot experience any unwholesome Mind Moments. For saints, the commonly arising kamma-creating Mind Moments are 31–38, the Faultless Zone.

The lowest of the Happy Destinations is Realm 5, the Human realm. The Pāli word for this realm is “*manussa*” which literally means “abundance of mind.” The Human realm is the perfect place for spiritual development. The minds of beings in the Woeful States are consumed with **Attachment**, **Aversion** and **Delusion**, so there is little opportunity for spiritual development. The minds of Deva are occupied with sensual bliss, so there is little motivation for spiritual development. In the Human realm, suffering, sickness, old age and death can create a sense of spiritual urgency. At the same time, the Human realm has joy and happiness, the teachings of the Buddha are available and exalted states of mind are possible.

The Buddha<sup>24</sup> said to some monks, “Imagine the whole world was an ocean and a single piece of wood with a hole was floating on the surface. There is a blind turtle in the ocean that comes to the surface once every 100 years. Is it likely that the turtle would put its head through the hole in the piece of wood?” The monks replied, “It would be a very rare event.” The Buddha replied, “It is also rare event to have a human rebirth at a time that there is a Buddha and the Dhamma shines brightly. Therefore, monks, an exertion should be made to understand the Four Noble Truths!”

Realms 6–11 are Deva realms. Those who can see Devas describe them as brightly shining. The Buddha<sup>25</sup> encouraged “*Devatānussati*,” the **practice** of the “recollection of Devas.” This is not worshipping Devas, but rather reviewing the faith, virtuous behaviour, learning, generosity

<sup>23</sup> MN 61: <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.061.than.html>

<sup>24</sup> SN 56.48: <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.048.than.html>

<sup>25</sup> AN 1.301, DN 33, DN 34, AN 6.9, AN 6.10, AN 6.25 (this Sutta explains *Devatānussati*), etc.

and wisdom of the meditator, and reflecting how these same qualities caused Devas to be reborn into Deva realms. The Buddha<sup>26</sup> said that Devas, along with parents, family, customers and ascetics are worthy of respect. The Ratana Sutta<sup>27</sup> is directed to the Devas; the Buddha asks the Devas to protect human beings because human beings share merit with the Devas. Whereas Peta depend on relatives to share food and drink, Devas are happy when they see humans performing meritorious deeds.

Realm 6, Heaven of Four Great Kings,<sup>28</sup> is called *Catumahārājika* and has four divisions, each ruled by its own guardian deity<sup>29</sup> and inhabited by a different class of demi-Gods. To the East, there are celestial musicians.<sup>30</sup> To the South, there are gnomes who take care of forests, mountains and hidden treasures.<sup>31</sup> To the West, there are *Nāgas*, dragon-like creatures.<sup>32</sup> To the North, there are *Yakkhas*.<sup>33</sup> The Pāli Text Society Dictionary defines a *Yakkha* as a “non-human being (ogre, ghost) that sometimes helps and sometimes hinders humans.” Some modern scholars<sup>34</sup> believe that *Yakkhas* were actually humans, members of displaced aboriginal tribes who lived outside Indian society.

Some of the Devas in Realm 6 are earthbound and live on mountains, in pagodas and in public houses like temples. Some of the Devas in Realm 6 live on top of trees; when their trees are chopped down they have to shift to unoccupied ones. The Devas from Realm 6 who live on the earth and on trees have an indefinite lifespan. The Devas in Realm 6 who have mansions in the sky have a lifespan of 9 million years. The *Tiṭṭaka* includes a book<sup>35</sup> dedicated to stories of the heavenly mansions of Devas in Realm 6 and Realm 7, and the kamma that resulted in the rebirth into these realms.<sup>36</sup>

Realm 7 is the Heaven of the 33 Gods; in Pāli, it is called *Tāvatiṃsa*. Realm 6 and Realm 7 share a common space. *Sakka*,<sup>37</sup> is the King of Realm 7, and the four Kings of Realm 6 are among *Sakka*’s retinue. According to the Commentary,<sup>38</sup> there was a group of thirty-three men who collectively dedicated their efforts to the happiness and well-being of other people. They passed their whole life with such wholesome actions that after death they were reborn into Realm 7.

Except for Realm 6 and Realm 7, Devas of higher realms are invisible to Devas of lower realms, and Devas cannot travel to realms higher than their own but can descend into a lower realm at will. The Buddha taught the Abhidhamma in *Tāvatiṃsa* Heaven in gratitude to his mother. The Buddha chose *Tāvatiṃsa* to teach the Abhidhamma because *Tāvatiṃsa* is accessible to Devas of all realms; lower as well as higher heavens. The Buddha wanted his sermon to benefit not only his mother, but also Devas of other realms who could benefit from his teachings.

The Devas of Realm 8 live without hardship, and the Devas of Realm 9 can always enjoy

<sup>26</sup>AN 5.58: <http://suttacentral.net/en/an5.58>

<sup>27</sup>Sn 2.1: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.01.piya.html>

<sup>28</sup>DN 32: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.32.0.piya.html>

See also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Heavenly\\_Kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Heavenly_Kings)

<sup>29</sup>East: Dhataratṭha, South: Virūlhaka, West: Virūpakka, North: Vessavaṇa/Kuvera.

<sup>30</sup>Gandhabbas: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandharva>

<sup>31</sup>Kumbhaṇḍas: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumbhanda>

<sup>32</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga>

<sup>33</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaksha>

<sup>34</sup>See entry in volume 8 of “Encyclopaedia of Buddhism,” published by the Government of Sri Lanka.

<sup>35</sup>Vimānavatthu: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vimanavatthu>

<sup>36</sup>The grandeur of the mansion (described in the Vimānavatthu) depends on the kamma of the owner.

<sup>37</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakra\\_\(Buddhism\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakra_(Buddhism)) sometimes also called Indra.

<sup>38</sup><http://www.tipitaka.net/tipitaka/dhp/verseload.php?verse=030>

the pleasures of life. In Pāli, Realm 9 is called *Tusita* heaven. All Bodhisatta are reborn into the Human Realm from Realm 9 to become a Buddha, and the Buddha's mother, who died seven days after giving birth to the Buddha, was reborn into Realm 9. The Devas of Realm 10 use their minds to create objects of sense-pleasure. The Devas of Realm 11 don't even have to bother creating objects of sense-pleasure; others create the objects of sense-pleasure for them and these Devas simply enjoy them.

*Māra* lives in Realm 11. *Māra* tries to disrupt spiritual progress by causing distractions, either by interrupting the meditation of the Buddha or monks, or by interfering with the Buddha's preaching. *Māra* is the personification of unwholesome Mind Moments.<sup>39</sup> Once *Māra* is recognized, he has no choice but to retreat. In other words, when the light of **Understanding** is directed onto *Māra*, *Māra* loses his power and disappears.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>The 10 armies of *Māra* are listed in Sn 3.2: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.3.02.than.html>

<sup>40</sup>SN 4.8: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn04/sn04.008.than.html>  
SN 4.13: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn04/sn04.013.than.html>  
SN 4.19: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn04/sn04.019.than.html>  
SN 4.20: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn04/sn04.020.than.html>



		0 / 2 Roots (Non-saint)	3 Roots (Non-saint)	Sotāpanna	Sakadāgāmi	Anāgāmi	Arahat
<b>Attachment-rooted</b>	1	●	●				
	2	●	●				
	3	●	●	○	○	○	
	4	●	●	○	○	○	
	5	●	●				
	6	●	●				
	7	●	●	○	○	○	
	8	●	●	○	○	○	
<b>Aversion-rooted</b>	9	●	●	○	○		
	10	●	●				
<b>Delusion-rooted</b>	11	●	●				
	12	●	●	○	○	○	
Past unwholesome resultant	13	○	○	○	○	○	○
	14	○	○	○	○	○	○
	15	○	○	○	○	○	○
	16	○	○	○	○	○	○
	17	○	○	○	○	○	○
	18	○	○	○	○	○	○
	19	○	○	○	○	○	○
Past wholesome resultant	20	○	○	○	○	○	○
	21	○	○	○	○	○	○
	22	○	○	○	○	○	○
	23	○	○	○	○	○	○
	24	○	○	○	○	○	○
	25	○	○	○	○	○	○
	26	○	○	○	○	○	○
	27	○	○	○	○	○	○
Functional	28	○	○	○	○	○	○
	29	○	○	○	○	○	○
	30						○

Figure 4: This figure is continued on the next page.

			0 / 2 Roots (Non-saint)	3 Roots (Non-saint)	Sotāpanna	Sakadāgāmī	Anāgāmī	Arahat
Sense Sphere	Wholesome	31–38	●	●	●	●	●	
	Resultant	39		○	○	○	○	○
		40		○	○	○	○	○
		41	○	○	○	○	○	○
		42	○	○	○	○	○	○
		43		○	○	○	○	○
		44		○	○	○	○	○
		45	○	○	○	○	○	○
		46	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Functional	47–54						○
Fine Material Sphere	Wholesome	55–59		○	○	○	○	
	Resultant	60–64						
	Functional	65–69						○
Im-material Sphere	Wholesome	70–73		○	○	○	○	
	Resultant	74–77						
	Functional	78–81						○
Supramundane	Path	Sotāpanna	82	○				
		Sakadāgāmī	83		○			
		Anāgāmī	84			○		
		Arahat	85				○	
	Fruit	Sotāpanna	86		○			
		Sakadāgāmī	87			○		
		Anāgāmī	88				○	
		Arahat	89					○

● Common kamma-creating Mind Moment      ○ Mind Moment that can arise

Figure 4: A portion of Handout 7, reformatted to focus on Mind Moments in the Happy Destinations. The most common kamma-creating Mind Moments for non-saints (0, 2 or 3 roots) are 1–12 and 31–38. The most common kamma-creating Mind Moments for saints are 31–38.

## Fine Material Plane

	Name	Jhāna	Cause of rebirth into this Realm	Life- cont.	Lifespan	Destination	
						Non- saints	Saints
27	Highest Pure Abode	5 <sup>th</sup> Jhāna	Understanding	<b>64</b>	16,000 Great aeons	-	-
26	Clear-sighted Abode		Concentration		8,000 Great aeons	-	27
25	Beautiful Abode		Mindfulness		4,000 Great aeons	-	26, 27
24	Serene Abode		Energy		2,000 Great aeons	-	25–27
23	Durable Abode		Faith		1,000 Great aeons	-	24–27
22	Gods without consciousness	4 <sup>th</sup> Jhāna	Dispassion to perception	<b>63</b>	500 Great aeons	5–11	-
21	Gods of great reward		-		500 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	21, 23–31
20	Gods of steady aura		Highest Degree		64 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	20–21, 23–31
19	Gods of infinite aura		Medium Degree		32 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	19–21, 23–31
18	Gods of minor aura		Minor Degree		16 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	18–21, 23–31
17	Gods of radiant luster	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Jhāna	Highest Degree	3 <sup>rd</sup> Jhāna <b>62</b>	8 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	17–21, 23–31
16	Gods of infinite luster		Medium Degree	2 <sup>nd</sup> Jhāna <b>61</b>	4 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	16–21, 23–31
15	Gods of minor luster		Minor Degree		2 Great aeons	5–22, 28–31	15–21, 23–31
14	Great Brahmās	1 <sup>st</sup> Jhāna	Highest Degree	<b>60</b>	1 Incalc. aeon	5–22, 28–31	14–21, 23–31
13	Ministers of Brahmā		Medium Degree		<sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> Incalc. aeon	5–22, 28–31	13–21, 23–31
12	Retinue of Brahmā		Minor Degree		<sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> Incalc. aeon	5–22, 28–31	12–21, 23–31

Figure 5: A portion of Handout 6, focusing on the Fine Material Plane.

As shown in Handout 6, the Fine Material Plane includes 16 realms: three related to the first jhāna, three related to the second or third jhāna, three related to the fourth jhāna and seven related to the fifth jhāna. The cause of rebirth into the Fine Material Plane is the attainment of a jhāna, Mind Moment **55–59**, in a previous life. After a very long lifespan, a non-saint is reborn into one of the Happy Destinations or higher. Once a saint has been reborn into the Fine Material Plane, they can only be reborn back into the Fine Material Plane or higher, until they become an Arahant.

Handout 7 shows that the Mind Moments in the Fine Material Plane are similar to those arising in the Happy Destinations for 3-rooted non-saints and for saints. There are two exceptions; there is no **Aversion** in the Fine Material Plane, and beings in the Fine Material Plane lack the “coarse” senses of smelling, tasting and tactile sense. The most common kamma-creating Mind Moment for beings in the Fine Material Plane will be the one Fine Material Sphere jhāna corresponding to that realm (Mind Moment **55–59**).<sup>41</sup>

There is an interesting Sutta in which the Buddha categorizes the types of **Wrong views**.<sup>42</sup> In this Sutta, the Buddha explains how the **Wrong view** of a “Creator God” arises. The Buddha explains that the world goes through cycles of contracting and expanding, and that when the world starts to expand after the “big bang,” beings from another world-system are reborn into Realm 14 as a “Great *Brahmā*” in the newly formed world. After a while, the Great *Brahmā* in Realm 14 gets lonely and wishes for companionship. This is a condition for beings from other world-systems to be reborn into Realm 12 and Realm 13 to accompany the Great *Brahmā* in Realm 14.

When this happens, the Great *Brahmā* is convinced that he is the All-seeing, All-powerful Creator God and the Supreme Being. He believes this because he arose first in this world and the other beings arose because he wanted them to arise. The beings in Realm 12 and Realm 13 are also convinced that the Great *Brahmā* is the Creator God. These beings have shorter lifespans than the Great *Brahmā*, and they are reborn in progressively lower realms: the Deva realms, the Human realm and the Woeful States. As they progress to these lower realms, many retain this memory of the Great *Brahmā* as being the All-seeing, All-powerful Creator God. The Buddha explained that this is why many humans believe in a Creator God.

In another Sutta,<sup>43</sup> a monk with the ability to visit the heavenly realms has a philosophical question. When he visits Realm 6, the Devas say they do not know the answer and suggest that he ask the Devas in Realm 7. The Devas in Realm 7 cannot answer and direct him to Realm 8. This happens repeatedly until the monk asks the Great *Brahmā* in Realm 14. The Great *Brahmā* says, “I am the All-seeing, All-powerful Creator.” The monk replies, “That is not what I asked” and repeats his question. Again, the Great *Brahmā* avoids the question and says, “I am the All-seeing, All-powerful Creator.” A third time, the monk repeats his philosophical question. Finally, the Great *Brahmā* takes the monk aside and says, “The beings in the lower realms believe there is nothing that I do not see, nothing that I do not know. That is why I answered you as I did. In fact, I do not know that answer to your question but I could not admit this in the presence of the other beings. The Buddha will know the answer to your question.”

World-systems are created and destroyed in a cyclical pattern over an extremely long time-frame called an “incalculable aeon.” The four phases can be described as “big bang,” “expanding universe,” “contracting universe” and “big crunch.” The lifespan of a Great *Brahmā* matches

<sup>41</sup> For example, the most common kamma-creating Mind Moment for beings in Realms 12–14 will be **55**.

<sup>42</sup> DN 1: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.01.0.bodh.html>

<sup>43</sup> DN 11: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.11.0.than.html>

with the lifespan of a world-system, one “incalculable aeon.” A Great *Brahmā* comes into existence when a world-system arises and after an incalculable aeon, the world-system is destroyed up to and including Realm 14 where the Great *Brahmā* resides. According to the Commentary,<sup>44</sup> the realms up to Realm 14 are destroyed seven times in a row by fire, and then realms up to Realm 17 are destroyed by water. Once Realm 17 has been destroyed by water seven times, the realms up to Realm 20 are destroyed by wind. This cycle of 64 destructions of world-systems then repeats itself. The lifespans of beings in Realm 15 and above are measured in “great aeons;” a “great aeon” is four times the duration of an “incalculable aeon.”

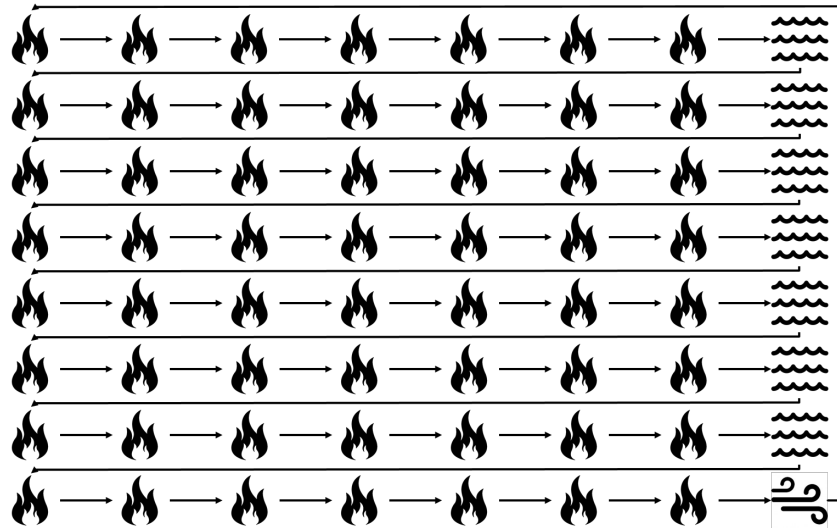


Figure 6: World-systems are destroyed up to Realm 14 by fire seven times in a row and then destroyed up to Realm 17 by water. This pattern repeats itself seven times and for the eighth repetition, the world-system is destroyed up to Realm 20 by wind and the cycle repeats.

Beings who attain the fifth jhāna together with a dispassion toward the mind can be reborn into Realm 22. For their entire lifespan here, the beings have no mind, only matter; they are like statues. When their lifespan in Realm 22 expires, kamma from a previous rebirth causes them to be reborn into some other realm.

Only Anāgāmi are born into Realms 23–27. Once reborn into these Pure Abodes, the Anāgāmi will continue to be reborn into the Pure Abodes until they become an Arahant. Anāgāmi who have attained the fifth jhāna will be reborn into Realms 23–27 according to their dominant faculty: **Faith, Energy, Mindfulness**, concentration or **Understanding**. Anāgāmi who have not attained the fifth jhāna can be reborn in any realm in the Fine Material Plane or the Immaterial Plane. Anāgāmi cannot be reborn into the Sensuous Plane as they have eradicated any **Attachment** to sense objects.

<sup>44</sup>See Commentary to AN 4.156.

		3 Roots (Non-saint) Sotāpanna Sakadāgāmī Anāgāmī Arahat
<b>Attachment</b> -rooted	1	○
	2	○
	3	○ ○ ○ ○
	4	○ ○ ○ ○
	5	○
	6	○
	7	○ ○ ○ ○
	8	○ ○ ○ ○
<b>Aversion</b> -rooted	9	
	10	
<b>Delusion</b> -rooted	11	○
	12	○ ○ ○ ○
Past un- wholesome resultant	13	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	14	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	15	No nose, tongue or body
	16	
	17	
	18	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	19	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Past wholesome resultant	20	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	21	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	22	No nose, tongue or body
	23	
	24	
	25	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	26	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	27	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Functional	28	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	29	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	30	○

			3 Roots (Non-saint)				
			Sotāpanna	Sakadāgāmī	Anāgāmī	Arahat	
Sense Sphere	Wholesome	31–38	○	○	○	○	
	Resultant	39					
		40					
		41					
		42					
		43					
		44					
		45					
	46						
Functional	47–54				○		
Fine Material Sphere	Wholesome	55–59	●	●	●	●	
	Resultant	60–64	○	○	○	○	
	Functional	65–69				○	
Im-material Sphere	Wholesome	70–73	○	○	○	○	
	Resultant	74–77					
	Functional	78–81				○	
Supramundane	Path	Sotāpanna	82	○			
		Sakadāgāmī	83		○		
		Anāgāmī	84			○	
		Arahat	85				○
	Fruit	Sotāpanna	86		○		
		Sakadāgāmī	87			○	
		Anāgāmī	88				○
		Arahat	89				○

● Common kamma-creating Mind Moment      ○ Mind Moment that can arise

Figure 7: A portion of Handout 7, reformatted to focus on Mind Moments in the Fine Material Plane. The one most common kamma-creating Mind Moment is 55–59, corresponding to that realm.

## Immaterial Plane

	Name	Jhāna	Cause of rebirth into this Realm	Life-cont.	Lifespan	Destination Non-saints	Saints
31	Neither perception nor non-perception		Mind Moment <b>73</b>	<b>77</b>	84,000 Great aeons	5–11, 31	31
30	Nothingness	Immaterial Jhāna	Mind Moment <b>72</b>	<b>76</b>	60,000 Great aeons	5–11, 30, 31	30, 31
29	Infinite consciousness		Mind Moment <b>71</b>	<b>75</b>	40,000 Great aeons	5–11, 29–31	29–31
28	Infinite space		Mind Moment <b>70</b>	<b>74</b>	20,000 Great aeons	5–11, 28–31	28–31

Figure 8: A portion of Handout 6, focusing on the Immaterial Plane.

As shown in Handout 6, the Immaterial Plane includes four realms, named after the four formless jhānas. The cause of rebirth into the Immaterial Plane is the attainment of the corresponding jhāna, Mind Moment **70–73**, in a previous life.<sup>45</sup> After an exceptionally long lifespan, a non-saint is reborn in one of the Happy Destinations or back in the Immaterial Plane. If a saint is reborn into the Immaterial Plane, he continues to be reborn into the Immaterial Plane until he becomes an Arahant.

Handout 7 shows that the Mind Moments in the Immaterial Plane are similar to those arising in the Fine Material Plane. One exception is that none of the Mind Moments associated with sensing can arise in the Immaterial Plane, as beings in the Immaterial Plane are pure mind with no body and no senses. Without senses, beings in the Immaterial Plane are unable to see the Buddha or hear the Dhamma. To explain how mind exists without a supporting body, the Commentary uses the analogy of a bar flung into the air. For a certain period, the bar remains in the air without support. The one most common kamma-creating Mind Moment for beings in the Immaterial Plane will be the Immaterial Sphere jhāna corresponding to that realm (Mind Moment **70–73**).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>For example, attaining Mind Moment **70** in a previous life is required to be reborn into Realm 28.

<sup>46</sup>For example, the most common kamma-creating Mind Moment for beings in Realm 28 will be **70**.

		3 Roots (Non-saint) Sotāpanna Sakadāgāmī Anāgāmī Arahat
<b>Attachment</b> -rooted	1	○
	2	○
	3	○ ○ ○ ○
	4	○ ○ ○ ○
	5	○
	6	○
	7	○ ○ ○ ○
	8	○ ○ ○ ○
<b>Aversion</b> -rooted	9	
	10	
<b>Delusion</b> -rooted	11	○
	12	○ ○ ○ ○
Past un- wholesome resultant	13	
	14	
	15	
	16	Only mind
	17	
	18	
	19	
Past wholesome resultant	20	
	21	
	22	
	23	Only mind
	24	
	25	
	26	
	27	
Functional	28	
	29	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	30	

		3 Roots (Non-saint) Sotāpanna Sakadāgāmī Anāgāmī Arahat
<b>Sense Sphere</b>	Wholesome	31–38 ○ ○ ○ ○
		39
		40
		41
	Resultant	42
		43
		44
		45
		46
	Functional	47–54 ○
<b>Fine Material Sphere</b>	Wholesome	55–59
	Resultant	60–64
	Functional	65–69
<b>Im-material Sphere</b>	Wholesome	70–73 ● ● ● ●
	Resultant	74–77 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	Functional	78–81 ○
<b>Supramundane</b>	Path	Sotāpanna 82 ○
		Sakadāgāmī 83 ○
		Anāgāmī 84 ○
		Arahat 85 ○
	Fruit	Sotāpanna 86 ○
		Sakadāgāmī 87 ○
		Anāgāmī 88 ○
		Arahat 89 ○

● Common kamma-creating Mind Moment      ○ Mind Moment that can arise

Figure 9: A portion of Handout 7, reformatted to focus on Mind Moments in the Immaterial Plane. The one most common kamma-creating Mind Moment is 70–73, corresponding to that realm.



## Summary of Key Points

Here is a summary of key points regarding Realms of Existence:

- The Realms of Existence are found in the Suttas but Buddhist philosophy and [practice](#) have no relevance to beings from non-human Realms of Existence.
  - I view the Realms of Existence as a literary device that enhances the Suttas.
- The Woeful States include four realms: Hell, Animal, Peta and Asura.
  - Unwholesome kamma can cause rebirth into the Woeful States.
  - Saints are never reborn in Woeful States, and beings in Woeful States cannot become saints.
  - Beings in Woeful States cannot attain jhāna.
- Human rebirth (Realm 5) is the lowest among the Happy Destinations.
  - Human realm is the ideal place for spiritual development.
  - Past wholesome rebirth-linking kamma can have either 3 or 2 roots (with or without **Understanding**) and can be either “superior” or “inferior” (supported or unsupported before and after).
    - \* Past 3-rooted superior rebirth-linking kamma produces present 3-rooted life-continuum in realms 5–11 (can achieve sainthood or jhāna).
    - \* Past 3-rooted inferior rebirth-linking kamma or past 2-rooted inferior rebirth-linking kamma produces present 2-rooted life-continuum in realms 5 or 6 (cannot achieve sainthood or jhāna).
    - \* Past 2-rooted inferior rebirth-linking kamma produces present rootless life-continuum in human realm (congenitally disabled).
- The Deva realms (Realms 6–11) are also Happy Destinations.
  - Deva realms include the earth-bound Devas, *Sakka* (king of Devas) and *Māra* (personification of temptation who disappears when recognized).
- The *Brahmā* realms (Realms 12–31) are the result of jhāna meditation.
  - *Brahmā* realms include “the Great Brahmā” (Creator God whose lifespan is the duration of a universe) and the Pure Abodes.
  - Beings in *Brahmā* realms spend most of their time in jhāna.
  - Beings in realm 12–27 have no nose, tongue or body (eyes and ears only), beings in realm 28–31 are mind-only.

Finally, in my opinion, the most important thing to remember about Realms of Existence is that supernatural beings are like spices in a meal. They add flavour, but are not essential to the nutritional value of the meal. Belief in supernatural beings is not a requirement for following the Buddha’s path.

*This concludes the sixth talk.*

## Questions & Answers

### Is there a correlation between our present Mind Moment and Realms of Existence?

Yes, there is a clear correlation. A mind that is consumed by anger is burning, painful and unpleasant, as if the mind is in the hell realm. A mind that is consumed by **Delusion** is working on instinct without **Understanding**, as if the mind is in the animal realm. A mind that is consumed by **Attachment** suffers from insatiable hunger, like the mind of hungry ghosts. A mind that is quarrelsome and argumentative is dark, like the mind of an Asura. The mind that is wholesome shines brightly, as the Devas shine. The meditating mind is deeply absorbed and stable, like *Brahmas*.

### Do the heaven and hell realms really exist or are they metaphorical? Is belief in these realms important to spiritual development?

I do not have a strong opinion as to whether the heaven and hell realms really exist or are metaphorical. I consider many of the details, especially those found in the Commentaries, to be legendary. In my opinion, belief in rebirth does not require belief in heaven and hell realms.

Shortly before his *parinibbāna*, the Buddha was asked if there were saints in any other religious tradition.<sup>47</sup> The Buddha replied that any religious tradition that included the Noble Eightfold Path could have saints. To me, this means that spiritual development involves the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path does not include any supernatural elements and does not depend on belief in heaven and hell realms.

### Does performing the 10 wholesome actions and observing the five precepts guarantee that one will not be reborn into woeful states?

Performing the 10 wholesome actions and observing the five precepts does not provide a guarantee, but does increase one's chances of a favourable rebirth. Even if performing the 10 wholesome actions and observing the five precepts does not condition favourable rebirth in the next life, the wholesome kamma generated will have a positive impact in this life, in the next life and in future lives.

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<sup>47</sup>DN 16: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html#para-5-60>