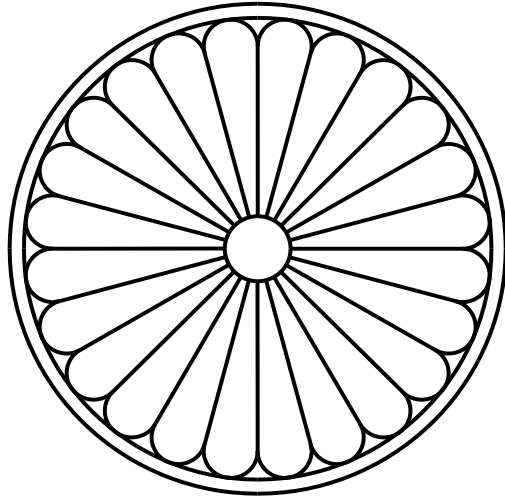


Fundamentals of Insight Meditation

Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw



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Fundamentals of Insight Meditation

by

Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw

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Bhikkhu Pesala
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The Venerable Sayādaw's discourses were addressed to meditators practising intensively at Mahāsī Sāsana Yeikthā, in Rangoon. Because the Sayādaw was very learned and his audience were familiar with the subject, some of his discourses are not easy to follow. On this occasion, since it was the Burmese New Year, many in his audience were unacquainted with the practice of insight meditation. This is how the Sayādaw introduced his published talk:

"Today, insight meditation needs no special introduction. Everybody says it is good. This was not the case twenty years ago. People thought insight meditation was only for monks and recluses, not for them. When I began teaching insight meditation, I had a hard time. Now the situation has changed, and people keep asking me to give lectures on insight. However, when we begin to tell them the basic principles of insight practice they seem unable to appreciate it. Some even get up and leave. We should not blame them. They have no foundation in meditation to understand it. Some think that tranquillity is the same as insight. The insight practice taught by some teachers sounds impressive, but proves impractical, so their listeners are left confused. For the benefit of such people I will talk about the fundamentals of insight meditation."

The translator used the books of the Pali Text Society for quotes from the Suttas, but I have used Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's edition of the Visuddhimagga (the Path of Purification), Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the Majjhimanikāya, and Maurice Walshe's translation of the Dīghanikāya. References are given to the Pāli texts of the PTS, which are consistent whichever translation you refer to.

As always, I will be grateful if readers could point out any errors so that I can correct them in later editions.

Bhikkhu Pesala
 December 2010

Translator's Foreword

"The Fundamentals of Insight Meditation" is a series of discourses delivered by the Venerable Mahāṣī Sayādaw during the Burmese New Year in 1959. The discourses were first published in Burmese in 1961, and enjoyed such popularity that they ran to several editions. This is their first English translation.

As the reader will see, the discourses were addressed to lay people to whom the subtleties of *vipassanā* practice were totally new. The Sayādaw took great pains to make his language plain, easy, and concise. He led his audience gradually from the basics — like the difference between calm and insight meditation — to more subtle aspects of the Dhamma such as concepts and reality, the process of consciousness, the progress of insight, and the realisation of nibbāna. The listener, or the reader in our case, begins with the first lesson — what insight is, and how it is developed. He or she is then instructed how to begin contemplation, how to progress, how to guard against pitfalls in meditation, and, most important, how to recognise insight. He or she is thrilled, encouraged, and made to feel as if he were already on the path to bliss.

Buddhism is a practical religion, a creed to live by, not just another metaphysical philosophy, as most outsiders might imagine. It examines the ills of sentient existence, discovers their cause, prescribes the removal of the cause, and points out the path to the release from all suffering. Anyone who aspires to liberation can walk along the path, but he or she must make the effort. No one can get a free ride to eternal peace.

"You yourselves should make an effort,
The Tathāgatas only show the way.
The meditative ones who follow the path
Are delivered from the bondage of Māra." (*Dhp. v 276*)

What, then, is this path to liberation? The Buddha tells us in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta that there is only one way — the way of mindfulness. Setting up mindfulness is the essence of the practice of insight meditation, expounded and popularised by the Venerable Mahāṣī Sayādaw for about fifty years.

One must not forget that teaching insight meditation is unlike teaching any other aspect of the Dhamma, such as metaphysics or morality, which anyone well-versed in the scriptures can do. Only those who have genuine insight can convince others about the practise of insight meditation. The

bodhisatta searched for the correct method, practised it himself, and only then taught others.

“Even so, monks, have I discovered an ancient path followed by the Fully Enlightened Ones of former times. Having followed that path, I teach the monks, nuns, and lay followers.” (S.ii.105-6)

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, undertook the practice taught by the Buddha, realised the Dhamma, and then taught his disciples from his personal experience. They, in turn, have also realised the Dhamma, as the Sayādaw said in his discourses. “Here in the audience are lots of meditators who have come to this stage of knowledge. I am not speaking from my own experience alone. No, not even from the experience of forty or fifty of my disciples — there are hundreds of them.”¹

One attribute of the Buddha's Dhamma is that it invites investigation (*ehipassiko*). Millions came and saw it over 2,500 years ago. Today, many thousands have come and seen it, and many thousands will follow them, as we can see in the many meditation centres around the world. It only remains for the aspirant to awake and join the multitude in their quest. This book maps out the way that lies ahead. As the learned author of the foreword to the Burmese edition remarks, it is not the kind of book that one reads for reading's sake. It is one's guide as one ventures from one stage of insight to the next.

Fundamentals of Insight Meditation

Tranquillity and Insight

What do we meditate on? How do we develop insight? These are very important questions.

The two kinds of meditation are tranquillity and insight. Meditating on the ten devices (*kaṣiṇa*) only gives rise to tranquillity, not insight. Meditation on the ten foul things (a swollen corpse, for example) only gives rise to tranquillity, not insight. The ten recollections, such as recollection of the Buddha or the Dhamma, also only give rise to tranquillity, not insight. Meditating on the thirty-two parts of the body such as hair, nails, teeth, and skin, also does not give rise to insight. It only develops concentration.

Mindfulness of the respiration is also used for the development of concentration, but one can also develop insight from it. The Visuddhimagga, however, includes it in the category of objects for tranquillity meditation, so we will also include it as such.

Then there are the four divine abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy, and equanimity, the four formless meditations leading to the formless jhānas, and contemplation on the loathsomeness of food. All of these are objects for tranquillity meditation.

When you meditate on the four elements inside your body, it is called the analysis of the four elements. Although this develops concentration, it helps to develop insight as well.

All these forty subjects of meditation are used to develop concentration. Only respiration and the analysis of the four elements are used for insight. The other objects will not give rise to insight — to gain insight, you will have to work further.

To return to our initial question, “How do we develop insight?” The answer is, “We develop insight by meditating on the five aggregates of attachment. The mental and physical phenomena inside living beings are aggregates of attachment. They may be grasped with delight by craving, which is ‘sensual attachment,’ or they may be grasped by wrong view, which is ‘attachment to views.’ You have to meditate and see them as they really are. If you don’t, you will grasp them with craving and wrong view. Once you see them as they really are, you will no longer grasp them. This is how you develop insight. We will discuss the five aggregates of attachment in detail.

The Five Aggregates

The five aggregates of attachment are: material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. What are these? They are the things that you experience all of the time. You do not have to go anywhere to find them. They are within you. When you see, they are in the seeing. When you hear, they are in the hearing. When you smell, taste, touch, or think, they are there in the smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking. When you bend, stretch, or move your limbs, the aggregates are there in the bending, stretching, or moving. Only you do not know them as aggregates because you have not meditated on them, and do not know them as they really are. Not knowing them as they really are, you grasp them with craving and wrong view.

What happens when you bend your arm? It begins with the intention to bend it. Then the material processes of bending arise successively. In the intention to bend the arm there are four mental aggregates. The mind that intends to bend is the consciousness. When you think of bending your arm, you may feel happy, unhappy, or neutral in doing so. If you do it with happiness, there is pleasant feeling. If you do it with unhappiness, there is unpleasant feeling. Otherwise, there is neutral feeling. So when you intend to bend your arm, the feeling aggregate is there. The aggregate of perception recognises or perceives the bending. The mental formations urge you to bend the arm, as if saying, "Bend! Bend!" So, in the action of bending the arm, all four aggregates are involved: feelings, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. The movement itself is the material aggregate, making five aggregates altogether.

In a single bending of the arm, these five aggregates occur. Each time you move, the five aggregates arise repeatedly. Every movement gives rise to the five aggregates. If you have not meditated on them correctly, and have not known them as they really are, we need not tell you what happens. You know for yourself. What you think is "I intend to bend the arm, and I bend it," don't you. Everybody thinks like this. Ask the children, and they will give the same answer. Ask adults who cannot read or write, and they will say the same. Ask someone who can read, and he will give the same answer. If he has read a lot, he might give an answer in scriptural language, referring to mind and matter, but this is not what he knows for himself, only what he has read. What he actually thinks is, "I intend to bend the arm, and I bend it. I intend to move, and I move." He also thinks, "I have done this before, do it now, and will do it again in the future." This way of thinking is the notion of permanence. Nobody thinks, "This intention to bend exists only

now." Ordinary people always think, "This mind existed before. The same 'I' that existed before, now thinks of bending the arm." They also think, "This thinking 'I' that exists now, will go on existing."

When you bend or move your limbs, you think, "The same limbs that existed before are moving now. The same 'I' that existed before is moving the limbs now." After moving the limbs, you again think, "These limbs, and this 'I' always exist." It never occurs to you that they pass away. This, too, is the notion of permanence. It is clinging to what is impermanent as permanent; clinging to what is not a person or self, as a person or self.

After you have bent or stretched your arm according to your wish, you think it is good. For example, because you feel stiffness in the arm, you move it and the stiffness is gone. Then you feel comfortable again. You think it is good, and a source of happiness. Dancers bend and stretch as they dance, and take delight in doing so. They enjoy it and are pleased with themselves. When you chat among yourselves you often move your limbs and head, and are pleased, thinking it to be happiness. When something you are doing meets with success, you think it is good, and a source of happiness. This is how you delight in craving and clinging to things. What is impermanent you take to be permanent, and you delight in it. What is not happiness, nor personality, but just aggregates of mind and matter, you take to be happiness or personality, and delight in it. You delight in and cling to these aggregates, and mistake them for your self or ego.

When you bend, stretch, or move your limbs, thinking "I will bend" is the aggregate of attachment. Bending is the aggregate of attachment. Stretching is the aggregate of attachment. Thinking, "I will move" is the aggregate of attachment. Moving is the aggregate of attachment. When we speak of the aggregates of attachment, which should be meditated on, we mean just these things.

The same thing happens in seeing, hearing, etc. When you see, the base of seeing — the eye, is manifest, and so is the object that is seen. Both are material things. They cannot cognise. If one fails to meditate while seeing, one grasps them. One thinks that the whole body with the eye is permanent, happy, and self — so one grasps it. One thinks the whole material world with the object seen is permanent, beautiful, good, happy, and self — so one grasps it. So the form, the eye, and the visible object are aggregates of attachment.

When you see, "seeing" arises. It includes the four mental aggregates. Mere awareness of seeing is the aggregate of consciousness. Pleasure or

displeasure at seeing is the aggregate of feeling. What perceives the object is the aggregate of perception. What brings the attention to see is the aggregate of mental formations. If one fails to meditate while seeing, one is inclined to think that seeing has existed before, and exists now. Or, as one sees beautiful things, one may think that seeing is good. Thinking thus, one constantly searches out beautiful and interesting things to enjoy seeing. One goes to see festivals and films, though it costs money, takes time, and endangers one's health, because one thinks it is enjoyable. Otherwise, one would not waste one's time and effort. To think that what one sees is "I" or to think "I enjoy it" is to grasp the seeing with craving and wrong view. Because they grasp objects, the mind and matter that arise while seeing are called the aggregates of attachment.

You grasp in the same way when hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking. You grasp especially to the mind that thinks, imagines, and reflects — to the ego. So the five aggregates of attachment are just the mental and physical things that arise at the six sense doors whenever one sees, hears, feels, or perceives. You must try to see the aggregates as they really are. To meditate and see them as they really are is insight knowledge.

Knowledge and Freedom

The Buddha's teaching is that meditating on the five aggregates of attachment is insight meditation. The teachings of the Buddha are called "*suttas*," which means "threads." When a carpenter is about to plane or saw a piece of timber he draws a straight line using a thread. In living the holy life we use a *sutta* as a thread to draw straight guidelines for our actions. In the *suttas*, the Buddha has given us guidelines on how to train in morality, concentration, and wisdom. You should not step out of line, and speak or act just as you like. Here are a few excerpts from the *suttas* regarding meditation on the five aggregates:

"Material form, monks, is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent, that is unsatisfactory. What is unsatisfactory, that is not self. What is not self should be regarded, 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' One should discern it as it really is through perfect wisdom." (S.iii.21)

You must meditate so that you will realise this impermanent, unsatisfactory, egoless material form as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without any self

or ego. You should meditate similarly on feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness.

What is the benefit of regarding these aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self? The Buddha tells us:

“Regarding all things thus, the instructed disciple of the Noble Ones disregards material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. By disregarding them he becomes dispassionate towards them. Through dispassion he is liberated.” (S.iii.68)

If one realises the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of the five aggregates, one becomes weary of them. That is to say, one reaches the noble path. Once one has reached the Noble Path, one attains the fruition too, which means freedom from defilements. “Being free, he knows ‘I am free’.” When you are free, you will know for yourself that you are free. In other words, when you have become an arahant in whom all the defilements are extinguished, you will know that you have become one.

All these excerpts are from the Yadanिकासutta (S.iii.21). The entire Khandhavaggasamyutta is a collection of them. Two *suttas* are especially noteworthy: the Sīlavanta Sutta (S.iii.167), and the Sutavanta Sutta (S.iii.169). In both *suttas* the Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika puts some questions to the Venerable Sāriputta, who gives very brief, but vivid answers. Venerable Mahākoṭṭhika asks: “What things, friend Sāriputta, should be attended to thoroughly by a monk of moral habit?” Note the attribute of ‘moral habit’ in this question. If you want to practise insight meditation with a view to attaining the path, its fruition, and nibbāna, you will need the basic qualification of moral habit. If you don’t even have moral habit, you cannot hope for the higher states of concentration and insight.

The Venerable Sāriputta answered: “The five aggregates of attachment, friend Koṭṭhika, should be attended to thoroughly by a monk of moral habit, as being impermanent, unsatisfactory, as a disease, as a boil, as a dart, as pain, as illness, as alien, as decay, as void, as not-self.”

What is the benefit of meditating like that? Venerable Sāriputta continued: “Indeed, friend, it is possible for a monk of moral habit who thoroughly attends to these five aggregates of attachment to attain the fruit of stream-winning.”

So, if you want to be a stream-winner, and never to be reborn in the four lower realms, you have to meditate on the five aggregates of attachment to

realise their impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature. However, that is not the end of it. You can become an arahant too. Venerable Koṭṭhika went on to ask: “What things, friend Sāriputta, should be attended to thoroughly by a monk who is a stream-winner?”

Venerable Sāriputta replied that the same five aggregates of attachment should be thoroughly attended to by a stream-winner, as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The result is that one progresses to the stage of a once-returner. The once-returner meditates on them again to reach the stage of a non-returner, and the non-returner continues to meditate in the same way to attain arahantship. Even the arahant meditates on the same five aggregates.

What benefit does the arahant gain by meditating further? He will not become a Solitary Buddha or an Omniscient Buddha by so doing. An arahant will put an end to the cycle of existence as an arahant by attaining parinibbāna at his death. The arahant has no defilements left to remove and doesn't need to cultivate morality, concentration, or wisdom since they are already perfect. One benefit the arahant gets by meditating on the five aggregates is abiding in ease here and now. Notwithstanding the fact of being an arahant, if he or she remains without meditation, disquiet and discomfort arise at the six sense doors. Here, disquiet does not mean mental distress. As sense objects keep on arising, his or her peace of mind is disturbed — that is all. Not to speak of arahants, even present-day meditators feel ill at ease when they have to meet sense objects because they are intent on gaining insight. When they return home from the meditation centre, they see sights, hear sounds, get involved in worldly affairs, and there is no peace at all, so some of them soon return to the meditation centre. For others, however, the disquiet does not last very long. Just five or ten days. All too soon, worldly thoughts overwhelm them and they get caught up in household cares again. The arahant never returns to his or her old habits. If an arahant meets various sense objects while not meditating, disquiet results. Only when absorbed in insight meditation does the arahant find peace of mind. Thus meditating on the five aggregates of attachment brings peace of mind to the arahant. Again, as one lives in earnest meditation, mindfulness and comprehension of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self keep arising. This is another benefit. The arahant in whom mindfulness and comprehension keep arising, is able to enjoy the attainment of fruition at any time and for as long as he or she wishes. These are the two benefits for the arahant who meditates on the five aggregates of attachment.

The above answers given by Venerable Sāriputta in the *Sīlavanta Sutta* are also found in the *Sutavanta Sutta*. The only difference between the two *suttas* is in the terms “*sīlavanta*” — “of moral habit,” and “*sutavanta*” — “well-informed.” All the other words are the same. Based on these two *suttas*, and others on the aggregates, the dictum can be formulated: “Insight knowledge comes from meditating on the five aggregates of attachment.”

Now, I will return to the grasping that arises through the six sense doors. When people see, they think of themselves or others as being permanent, as having existed before, as existing now, as going to exist in the future, as existing always. They think of them as being happy, good, or beautiful. They think of them as living beings. They think in a similar way when they hear, smell, taste, or touch. The sensation of touch is spread over the entire body — wherever there is flesh and blood. Wherever touch arises, attachment arises. The bending, stretching, and moving of the limbs mentioned earlier are all instances of touch. So are tension and relaxation of the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. We will look at this in detail later.

When one thinks or imagines, one assumes, “The self that existed before is thinking now.” Thus one assumes oneself to be a permanent person or being. One also regards the thinking as enjoyable, as delightful. One regards it as happiness. If told that thinking will disappear, one cannot accept it, one is displeased. This is because one clings to it. Thus one clings to whatever enters through the six sense doors as permanent, happy, and self. One delights in it with craving, and clings to it. You must meditate on the five aggregates that cling and grasp.

The Right Method

When you meditate, you must have a method. Only the right method can give rise to insight. If you regard things as permanent, how can insight arise? If you regard them as happy, beautiful, as soul or ego, how could insight arise?

Mind and matter are impermanent. These impermanent things have to be contemplated to see them as they really are — as impermanent. They rise and pass away, and keep on oppressing you, so they are dreadful suffering. You have to meditate to see them as they are — as suffering. They are processes that lack any personality, soul, or self. You have to meditate to see that this is so. You must try to see them as they really are.

Every time you see, hear, touch, or perceive, you must try to see the mental and physical processes that enter through the six sense doors as they really

are. When you see, the seeing is real. This you must note as “seeing, seeing.” In the same way, when you hear, note “hearing.” When you smell, note “smelling.” When you taste, note “tasting.” When you touch, note “touching.” Tiredness, hotness, aches, and such unpleasant or unbearable sensations arise from contact too. Observe them: “tiredness,” “hot,” “pain,” and so on. Thoughts and ideas may also occur. Note them as “thinking,” “imagining,” “pleasure,” “delight,” etc., as they arise. For the beginner in meditation to observe everything that enters the six sense doors is hard. So one should begin by noting only a few things.

You must begin like this. When you breathe in and out, the movement of the abdomen is conspicuous. Begin by observing this movement. You should observe the rising movement as “rising,” and the falling movement as “falling.” Because this observation of rising and falling does not use scriptural language, some people inexperienced in meditation speak contemptuously about it: “This rising and falling technique is not mentioned in the scriptures.” However, the rising and falling are realities that can be observed. The movement of the air element is a reality. We use the ordinary words “rising” and “falling” for convenience. In scriptural terminology, the rising and falling movement is the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*). If you observe the abdomen attentively as it rises and falls, firmness can be observed, motion can be observed, extension can be observed. Here, “firmness” is the characteristic of the air element, and extending [of the abdomen] is its manifestation. To know the air element as it really is means to know its characteristic, function, and manifestation. We meditate to know these things. Insight begins with the discrimination of mind and matter. To achieve this the meditator begins with matter. How?

“The meditator should seize by way of characteristic, manifestation, and so on.” (*Visuddhimagga*).

When you begin meditating on mind or matter, you should do so by way of either the characteristic, function, manifestation, or proximate cause. As the *Compendium of Philosophy* (*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*) says: “Purity of view is the understanding of mind and matter with respect to their characteristics, function, manifestation, and proximate cause.”

The meaning is that insight begins with analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*). Among the seven stages of purity, first you must purify morality; then mind; then view. To achieve analytical knowledge of mind and matter, and purity of view, you have to meditate on

mind and matter, and know them by way of their characteristics, function, manifestation, and proximate cause. Once you know them in this way, you gain the analytical knowledge of mind and matter. When this knowledge matures, you gain purity of view.

Here, “to know them with respect to their characteristics” means to know the intrinsic nature of mind and matter. “Function” means to know their function. “Manifestation” is their mode of appearance. To know the proximate cause is not necessary at the initial stage of meditation practice, so we will just explain their characteristics, function, and manifestation.

In both the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, just quoted, it is not said that mind and matter should be contemplated by name, number, material particles, or as incessantly arising processes. It is only said that they should be contemplated by way of their characteristics, function, and manifestation. One should take careful note of this. If not, one may be led to concepts of names, numbers, particles, or processes. The commentaries say that you should meditate on mind and matter by way of their characteristics, function, and manifestation. So when you meditate on the air element, you should do so by way of its characteristics, function, and manifestation. What is the characteristic of the air element? It is the characteristic of support. This is its intrinsic nature. Supporting is the characteristic of the air element. What is the function of the air element? Its function is to move. What is its manifestation? The manifestation is what appears to the meditator’s mind. It appears to the meditator’s mind as expanding, contracting, pushing, or pulling. This is the manifestation of the air element.

As you contemplate the rising and falling of the abdomen, “firmness”, “moving”, and “extending” become clear to you. These are the characteristic, function, and manifestation of the air element. This air element is important to know. In the sections on the four postures, clear comprehension, and body contemplation in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the commentator stresses the air element. The Buddha’s teaching is “*Gacchanto vā gacchāmi’ti pajānāti*” — “When he walks, he is aware ‘I am walking’.”

The Buddha instructs us to be mindful of walking by noting “walking, walking” every time that we walk. How knowledge develops from noting thus is explained by the commentator: “The intention ‘I will walk’ arises. This produces the air element. The air element produces the intimation. The moving forward of the whole body as the air element spreads is called walking.”

The meaning is as follows. The meditator who notes “walking, walking” every time he walks realises like this. First, the idea ‘I will walk’ arises. This intention gives rise to tension all over the body, which in turn causes the body to move forward, step by step. This movement we call “I walk,” or “He walks.” In reality, there is no “I” or “He” who walks. Only the intention to walk and the material phenomena of walking. This is what the meditator realises. The commentary emphasises the realisation of the moving of the air element. If you understand the air element by way of its characteristics, function, and manifestation, you can decide for yourself whether your meditation is right or not.

The air element has the characteristic of support. In a football, it is the air that fills and supports so that the ball expands and remains firm. In colloquial speech we say that the ball is full and firm. In philosophical terms the air element has the characteristic of support. When you stretch out your arm, you feel some stiffness there. It is the air element in support. Similarly, when you rest your head on an air pillow, it stays up, because the air element in the pillow is supporting your head. In a stack of bricks, the lower ones support the upper ones. If this were not so, the upper ones would fall down. Similarly, the human body is full of the air element, which gives support so that it can stand erect and firm. The term ‘firm’ is relative. Compared to something firmer, it is soft. Compared to something softer, it is firm.

The function of the air element is moving. It moves from place to place when it is strong. It is the air element that makes the body bend, stretch, sit, stand, go, and come. Those inexperienced in insight meditation often say, “If you note ‘bending,’ or ‘stretching,’ only concepts like arms will appear to you. If you note ‘left,’ ‘right,’ only concepts like legs will appear to you. If you note ‘rising,’ ‘falling,’ only concepts like the abdomen will appear to you.” This may be true for some beginners, but it is not true to think that the concepts will keep recurring. Both concepts and realities appear to the beginner. Some people instruct beginners to meditate on realities only. This is impossible. To forget concepts is quite impracticable at the beginning. You must combine concepts with realities. The Buddha himself used concepts and told us to be aware “I am walking, bending, or stretching” when we walk, bend, or stretch. He did not tell us to be aware “It is supporting, moving,” etc.

Although you meditate using concepts like “walking, bending, stretching,” as your mindfulness and concentration grow stronger, all the concepts disappear and only the realities like support and moving appear to you.

When you reach the knowledge of dissolution, although you note “walking, walking” neither the legs nor the body appear to you. Only the movement itself is there. Although you note “bending, bending” you will not notice any arms or legs, just the movement. Although you note “rising, falling” you will not be aware of the shape of the abdomen or the body, only of the inward and outward movements. These are the functions of the air element.

What appears to the meditator’s mind as expanding or contracting, is the manifestation of the air element. When you bend or stretch your arm, it seems that something is drawing it in or pushing it out. This is even more obvious in walking. To the meditator whose concentration has grown sharp by noting “walking,” “left step, right step,” or “lifting, pushing, dropping,” the forward movement as if being driven from behind becomes quite distinct. The legs seem to be pushing forward of their own accord. How they move forwards without the meditator making any effort is very clear. It is so good to walk noting in this way that some meditators spend a lot of time doing it.

So when you meditate on the air element, you should know it by way of its characteristic of supporting, its function of moving, and its manifestation of expanding. Only then is your knowledge correct.

You may ask, “Are we to meditate only after learning the characteristic, function, and manifestation?” No. You need not learn them. If you meditate on the rising movement, you will inevitably know its characteristic, function, and manifestation. When you look up at the sky on a stormy night, you see a flash of lightning. This bright light is the characteristic of lightning. As lightning flashes, darkness is dispelled. This dispelling of darkness is the function of lightning. You also see what it is like — whether it is long, short, curved, straight, or wide. You see its characteristic, its function, and its manifestation all at once. You may not be able to explain that brightness is its characteristic, dispelling darkness is its function, or that shape is its manifestation, but you see them all the same.

Similarly, when you meditate on the rising movement of the abdomen, you will know its characteristic, function, and manifestation. You need not learn about them. Some learned persons think that you have to learn about them before meditating. This is not so. What you learn are only concepts, not realities. The meditator who is contemplating the rising movement knows it as if touching it with the hand. One need not learn about it. If there is an elephant before your very eyes, you do not need to look at a picture of an elephant.

One who meditates on the rising and falling of the abdomen knows its firmness or softness — its characteristic. He or she knows the moving in or out — its function. If one knows these things as they really are, does one need to learn about them? Not if one only wants to gain realisation for oneself. One will need to learn about them only if one will teach others.

When you note “right step, left step,” you know the tension in each step — its characteristic. You know the moving forward — its function, and you know its stepping out — its manifestation. This is right knowledge of the realities.

To know for yourselves how to discern the characteristics, function, and manifestation, you must do some meditation. You certainly have some hotness, pain, stiffness, or aching somewhere in your body now. These unpleasant feelings are hard to bear. Concentrate on this unpleasantness and note “hot, hot,” or “pain, pain.” You will find that you are experiencing unpleasant feelings, which is the characteristic of suffering.

When this unpleasant feeling occurs, you become low-spirited. If the unpleasantness is slight, you will be only slightly low-spirited. If it severe, your spirits will be very low. Even those who are very strong-willed will find that their spirits go low when unpleasant feelings are intense. When you are very tired, you cannot even move. Making the spirits go low is the function of unpleasant feeling. When we say ‘spirits’ we mean the mind. When the mind is low, its mental concomitants become low too.

The manifestation of unpleasant feeling is physical oppression. It manifests as physical affliction, something unbearable to the meditator’s mind. As one meditates on “hot, hot,” “pain, pain,” it manifests as something oppressing the body, something very hard to bear. It may oppress you so much that you have to sigh or groan.

If you meditate on the unpleasant feeling in your body as it arises, you will know that you experience an unpleasant feeling — its characteristic. You will know that your spirits sink — its function, and you will know the physical affliction — its manifestation. This is the way that meditators gain insight knowledge.

The Mind

You can meditate on mind too. The mind cognises and thinks. What you think of and imagine is mentality. Contemplate this mental process as “thinking,” “imagining,” or “planning,” whenever it arises. You will find that its nature is to cognise the object — which is the characteristic of consciousness.

Every kind of consciousness cognises — seeing cognises the sight, hearing cognises the sound, smelling cognises the odour, tasting cognises the flavour, touching cognises a tangible object, and thinking cognises mental objects.

When you work in a team, you have a leader. Consciousness is the leader that cognises objects appearing at the sense doors. When a visible object contacts the eye, consciousness cognises it first. Only then, can feeling, perception, desire, delight, dislike, admiration, and so on occur. Similarly, when a sound contacts the ear, it is consciousness that cognises it first.

It is more obvious when you think or imagine. If an idea comes to mind while you are contemplating the rising and falling movements, you have to note the idea. If you can note it the moment it appears, it disappears immediately. If you cannot, several of its followers will come up in succession: delight, desire, etc. So the meditator realises that consciousness is the leader, which is its function. As the Dhammapada says, “*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā* — mind precedes things.” If you note consciousness whenever it occurs, you will see clearly how it acts as the leader, going first to this object, then to that one.

The commentaries say that the manifestation of consciousness is continuous arising. As you note “rising, falling,” etc., the mind sometimes wanders away. You note it, and it disappears. Then another consciousness arises, you note it, and it disappears. You have to note the arising and disappearance of consciousness very often. You come to realise, “Consciousness is a succession of events that arise and vanish one after another. As soon as one disappears, another one appears.” Thus you realise the continuous manifestation of consciousness. The meditator who realises this also realises death and birth. “Death is nothing strange after all. It is just like the passing away of the consciousness I have been noting. Being reborn is like the arising of the present consciousness following on from the one preceding it.”

To show that one can understand the characteristic, function, and manifestation of things even though one has not learnt about them, we have highlighted the air element among material phenomena, and unpleasant feeling and consciousness among mental phenomena. You just have to note them as they arise. The same applies to all other mental and material phenomena. If you note them as they arise, you will comprehend their characteristics, function, and manifestation. A beginner can understand the aggregates of attachment only by way of their characteristics, function, and manifestation. At the initial stages of insight — analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*) and knowledge by discerning conditionality (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*) — understanding that much is enough.

When you come to the further stage of knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-nāṇa*) you will know the characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, too.

What is the Purpose of Meditation?

One may ask, “What is the purpose of meditating on the aggregates of attachment?” One may wonder, “Do we meditate on the past, present, future, or on some indefinite time?”

What do we meditate for? Is to gain material prosperity? Is to cure diseases? Is it to gain clairvoyance, to levitate, or for other such supernormal powers? The aim of insight meditation is none of these. Some people have been cured of serious diseases through the practice of insight meditation. In the time of the Buddha, many who gained perfection through insight meditation also gained supernormal powers. Some people today, too, may also gain such powers. However, gaining such powers is not the aim of insight meditation.

Should we meditate on the phenomena that have already passed away? Should we meditate on those phenomena yet to arise, or only on presently arising phenomena? Should we meditate on those phenomena that we can imagine because we have read about them in books?

The answer to these questions is: “We meditate to let go of grasping, and we meditate on what is arising in the present.”

People who have not practised meditation, grasp at the arising mind and matter every time they see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or know anything. They grasp these things with craving because they are pleased with them. They grasp them with wrong views as permanent, happy, and as self or ego. We meditate for the non-arising of this grasping, to be free from it. This is the basic aim of insight meditation.

We meditate only on what is arising in the present moment. We do not meditate on things in the past or future, nor on concepts. Here, I am speaking about practical insight meditation, but in inferential meditation we do meditate on things in the past and future, or on concepts. Let me explain. Insight meditation is of two kinds: practical and inferential. The knowledge that you gain by meditating on what is actually arising by way of its characteristics, function, and manifestation is practical insight. From this practical knowledge, you infer the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self nature of things in the past and future, or things you have not experienced. This is inferential insight. As it is says in the Paṭisambhidāmagga,

“The fixing both (the seen and unseen) as one by inference ...” The Visuddhimagga explains this statement as follows: “... by inference, by induction, from the object seen by actual experience he defines both [the seen and the unseen] to have a single individual essence thus ‘The field of formations dissolved in the past, and will break up in the future, just it does [in the present]’.” (Vism. 643)

“The object seen” means practical insight, and “by inference, by induction” is inferential insight. However, note that inferential insight is possible only after practical insight. No inference can be made without first knowing the present object. The same explanation is given in the commentary on the Kathāvatthu: “Seeing the impermanence of even one formation, one draws the conclusion regarding the others as ‘impermanent are all the things of life’.”

Why don’t we meditate on things past or future? Because they will not help us to understand the real nature of phenomena or remove any defilements. You do not remember your past existence; you do not even remember most of your childhood. So by meditating on things past, how could you know things as they really are with their characteristics, function, and manifestation? Things from the recent past may be recalled, but as you recall them you think, “I saw, I heard, I thought. It was I who saw at that time, and it is I who am seeing now.” The notion of “I” is always retained, and there will be perceptions of permanence and happiness. So meditating on memories does not serve our purpose. You will grasp them, and this grasping is hard to overcome. Although you may regard them as mind and matter with all your learning and thinking, the notion of “I” persists, because you have already grasped them. You may say to yourself that they are impermanent, but you perceive them as permanent. You may say that they are unsatisfactory, but the perception of happiness keeps on arising. You reflect on not-self, but the self notion remains strong and firm. You argue with yourself, and your meditation has to give way to your preconceived ideas.

The future has not yet come, and you cannot be sure what it will be like when it comes. You may meditate on it in advance, but you fail to do so when it arrives. Then craving, wrong view, and defilements arise again. So meditating on future objects with the help of learning and thinking is not the way to know things as they really are. Nor is it the way to remove defilements.

Concepts (things of indefinite time) have never existed, will not exist, and do not exist in oneself or in others. They are just imagined by learning and thinking. They seem impressive and intellectual, but are found to be just concepts of names, signs, and shapes. Suppose someone is meditating, "Matter is impermanent, it arises and passes away from moment to moment." Ask him, "What matter is it? Is it from the past, present, or future? Is it in yourself, or in others? If it is in yourself, is it in your head, your body, your limbs, your eye, or your ear?" One will find that it is none of this, but just a concept — mere imagination. So we do not meditate on concepts.

The Present Phenomenon

The present phenomenon is what occurs at one of the six sense doors right now. It has not yet been defiled. It is like a new cloth or a blank sheet of paper. If you are quick enough to note as soon as it occurs, it will not be defiled. If you fail to note it, it gets defiled. Once it is defiled, it cannot be undefiled. If you fail to note mind and matter as they arise, grasping always intervenes — grasping with sensual desire, with wrong view, with rites and rituals, or with self. What happens when grasping takes place?

"Conditioned by grasping, becoming arises. Conditioned by becoming, birth arises. Conditioned by birth, old age, death, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair arise. Thus arises this entire mass of suffering." (M.i.266)

Grasping is no small matter. It is the root cause of good and bad deeds. One who grasps, strives to accomplish what he believes are good things. Everyone does what he thinks is good. What makes him think it is good? It is grasping. Others may think it is bad, but to the doer it is good. If he thinks it is not good, he will not do it. There is a noteworthy passage in one of King Asoka's inscriptions, "One thinks well of one's work. One never thinks ill of one's work." A thief steals because it seems good to him to steal. A robber robs because it seems good to rob. A killer thinks it is good to kill. Ajātasattu thought it was a good thing to kill his own father, King Bimbisāra. Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha, because he thought it was good. One who takes poison to kill himself does so because he thinks it is good. Moths rush to a flame thinking it is a very nice thing. All living beings do what they do because they think it is good to do so. To think it is good is grasping. Once you have really grasped an idea, you do things. What is the outcome? It is good and bad deeds.

It is good to refrain from causing suffering to others. It is a good deed to render help to others. It is a good deed to give, or pay respect to those deserving respect. Good deeds bring about mental peace, a long life, and good health in this very life. They will bring good results in future lives, too. Such grasping is good, right grasping. Those who grasp good deeds make good kamma by giving charity and observing the precepts. What are the results? “Conditioned by becoming, birth arises.” After death they are born as human beings or gods. If born as human beings, they enjoy long life, beauty, health, status, many associates, and wealth. You can call them “happy people.” As gods, too, they will have many attendants and live in magnificent palaces. They have been grasped by notions of happiness, and in a worldly sense they can be said to be happy.

However, in the ultimate sense, these happy human beings and gods are not free from suffering. “Conditioned by birth, aging and death arise.” Although born as happy human beings, they will become old. Look at all the happy old people in the world. Once they are over seventy or eighty, everything becomes suffering for them. Grey hair, broken teeth, weak eyesight, defective hearing, poor posture, wrinkled skin, feeble strength — they become good for nothing. In spite of their wealth and good reputations, can such old men and women be happy? They suffer the disabilities of old age. They cannot sleep well, they cannot eat well, they have difficulty sitting down or getting up. Finally, they have to confront death. A rich man, a king, or an emperor has to die one day. Then he has nothing to rely on. Friends and relatives surround him, but he just lies on his bed, closes his eyes, and dies. At death he leaves to begin another existence alone. He must find it really hard to leave behind all his wealth. If he has not done enough good deeds, he will be worried about his destiny.

Great gods, too, have to die like this. A week before they die, five signs appear to them. The flowers they wear begin to fade, their clothing begins to wear out, sweat comes out of their armpits, their bodies begin to look old, and they feel dissatisfied with their lives. When these five signs appear, they immediately realise that their death is imminent, and are greatly alarmed.

In the time of the Buddha, Sakka (the king of Tāvātimsa) saw these signs appear. Greatly alarmed, realising that he was soon going to die, he went to the Buddha for advice. The Buddha taught the Dhamma to him and he became a stream-winner. After he died, he was reborn again as the king of Tāvātimsa. He was lucky to meet the Buddha, otherwise it would have been disastrous.

Not only aging and death, but also grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair come into being dependent on birth. So even a fortunate existence resulting from grasping is dreadful suffering after all. Men, and even gods, have to suffer. If a fortunate existence resulting from good deeds is suffering, is it better not to do them? No, not at all. If we do not do good deeds, we will do bad ones, which can lead us to hell, or to rebirth as an animal or ghost. The suffering of these lower realms is far worse. Human or celestial existence is suffering when compared with the bliss of nibbāna, but compared with the suffering of the lower realms, it is fortunate and happy.

Right grasping gives rise to good deeds, and wrong grasping gives rise to bad deeds. Thinking that it is good to do so, some people kill, steal, rob, and harm others. As a result, they are reborn in the lower realms. To be reborn in hell is like falling into a great fire. Even a powerful god is powerless to escape from hell-fire. In the time of Buddha Kakusandha, there was a powerful Māra god called Dūsī. He was contemptuous of the Buddha and his disciples. One day he caused the death of an Arahant. As a result of this evil deed he was instantly reborn in Avīci hell. Once there, he was at the mercy of the guardians of Avīci. Those people who torture others in this world will meet a similar fate to Dūsī one day. After suffering for a long time in hell, they will be reborn as animals or ghosts.

How Grasping Arises

Grasping is terrible, and very important to understand. We must meditate to let go of grasping, to put an end to it. We meditate to avoid grasping with craving or wrong view — that is not to grasp things as permanent, happy, self or ego. Those who fail to meditate, grasp whenever they see, hear, feel, or perceive. Ask yourselves if you grasp or not. The answer will be all too obvious.

Let's begin with seeing. Suppose you see something beautiful. What do you think of it? You are delighted and pleased with it, aren't you? You won't say, "I don't want to see, I don't want to look at it." In fact, you are thinking, "What a beautiful thing! How lovely!" Beaming with smiles you are pleased with it. At the same time, you think it is permanent. Whether the object is a human being or an inanimate thing, you think it existed before, exists now, and will go on existing for ever. Although it is not your own, you mentally take possession of it and delight in it. If it is a piece of clothing, you mentally put it on and are pleased. If it is a pair of sandals, you mentally put them on. If it is a human being, you mentally enjoy him or her, and are pleased.

The same thing happens when you hear, smell, taste, or touch. You take pleasure on each occasion. With thoughts, the range of your delight is far wider. You fantasise and take delight in things that are not your own. You long for them, and imagine them to be yours. If they are your own things, needless to say, you keep thinking of them, and enjoy them constantly. We meditate to check such taking delight and grasping.

You grasp things with wrong views, too. You grasp with personality view. When you see, you think that what you see is a person, an ego. You take the consciousness of seeing to be a person, or an ego. Without a thorough insight knowledge, we grasp at things the moment we see them. If you reflect for a moment, you will see how you have such grasping within you. You think of yourself and others as individuals who have lived the whole life long. In reality there is no such thing. Nothing lives for the whole life long. Only mind and matter arise and vanish in continuous succession. You take this impermanent mind and matter to be a person, and grasp it. We meditate to avoid grasping things with wrong view.

We have to meditate on things just as they occur. Only then will we be able to prevent grasping. Grasping comes from seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. It comes through six doors. Can we cling to things we cannot see, or hear? Not at all. The Buddha himself asked these questions to Mālukiya-putta.

“Now what do you think, Mālukiya-putta? There are certain visible objects that you have never seen before, do not see now, nor hope to see in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?” (S.iv.72)

What are these visible objects you have not seen before? Towns, villages, and countries you have never visited, men and women living there, and other scenes. How can anyone fall in love with someone they have never met? How could they be attached to them? You do not cling to things you have never seen. No defilements arise in respect of such things. So you do not need to meditate on them. However, things that you see are another matter. Defilements can arise if you fail to meditate to prevent them.

The same is true of things heard, smelled, tasted, touched, or thought about.

Meditate Right Now

If you fail to meditate on the arising phenomena, and so do not realise their real nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, you may grasp them and let defilements grow. This is the case with latent defilements. Because they arise from objects, we call them “object-latent.” What do people cling to and why do they cling to those things? They cling to things or persons they have seen because they have seen. If you fail to meditate on them as they arise, grasping inevitably arises. Defilements are latent in whatever we see, hear, taste, etc.

If you meditate, you find that what you see passes away, what you hear passes away. They pass away in no time at all. Once you see them as they really are, there is nothing to love, nothing to hate, nothing to cling to, so there can be no grasping.

You must meditate right now. The moment you see, you must meditate. You cannot put it off. You can buy things on credit, but you cannot meditate on credit. Meditate right now. Only then will grasping not arise. In terms of Abhidhamma, you must meditate as soon as the eye-door process ends, and before the subsequent mind-door process begins. When you see a visible object, the process takes place like this. First, you see the object that arises. This is the seeing process. Then you review the object seen. This is the reviewing process. Then you put the forms seen together and see the shape or colour. This is the form process. Lastly, you know the concept or name. This is the name process. In the case of objects you have never seen before, and so cannot name, this naming process will not occur. Of the four processes, when the seeing process occurs, you see the present form, the reality, as it arises. When the second or reviewing process occurs, you review the past form seen, which is also a reality. Both processes focus on reality, the object seen. No concepts have arisen yet. The difference is between the present reality and the past reality. With the third process you come to the concept of shape. With the fourth you come to the concept of name. The processes that follow are all various concepts. All these are common to people inexperienced in insight meditation.

There are fourteen thought moments in the process of seeing. If neither seeing, hearing, nor mind-consciousness arises, life-continuum goes on occurring. It is identical to rebirth consciousness. It is the consciousness that continues when you are fast asleep. When a visible object appears, life-continuum ceases, a thought-moment arises adverting consciousness to the object that comes into the eye door. When this ceases, seeing consciousness

arises. Then comes the investigating consciousness, Then the consciousness that determines whether the object seen is good or not. Then, in accordance with the determination reached, moral or immoral apperceptions arise violently for seven thought moments. When these cease, two retentive thought moments arise. When these cease, consciousness subsides into life-continuum again, like falling asleep. From adverting to retention there are fourteen thought moments. All these manifest as one seeing consciousness. This is how the process of seeing takes place. When one is well-practised in insight meditation, after the arising of life-continuum following the seeing process, insight consciousness that reviews 'seeing' takes place. You must try to meditate immediately, like this. If you are able to do so, it appears to your mind as though you were meditating on things as they are seen, as soon as they arise. This kind of meditation is called "meditation on the present" in the *suttas*. "He discerns things present as they arise here and now." (M.iii.187) The Paṭisambhidhāmagga says, "Understanding in reviewing the perversion of present states is knowledge of arising and passing away."

These extracts from the *suttas* clearly show that we must meditate on present states. If you fail to meditate on the present, apprehending arises from life-continuum. This consciousness arises to review what has just been seen. The thought moments included are: apprehending (1), apperception (7), and registering (2) — a total of ten thought moments. Every time you think, these three types of consciousness and ten thought moments occur, but to the meditator they will appear as one thought moment only. This is in conformity with the explanations in the Paṭisambhidhāmagga and the Visuddhimagga regarding the knowledge of dissolution. If you can meditate beyond the apprehending, you may not get to concepts, and can stay with the reality — the object seen. However, this is not easy for the beginner.

If you fail to meditate even at the apprehending, you get to the form process and name process. Then grasping comes in. If you meditate after the emergence of grasping, it will not disappear. That is why we instruct you to meditate immediately, before the concepts arise.

The processes for hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching are to be understood along similar lines.

With thinking at the mind-door, if you fail to meditate immediately, subsequent processes arise after the thought. So you must meditate immediately, so that they do not arise. Sometimes, as you note "rising, falling, sitting, touching," a thought or idea may arise in between. You notice it at the moment it arises. You note it and it ends right there. Sometimes the mind

is about to wander. You note it and it quiets down. In the words of some meditators, “It is like a naughty child who behaves himself when shouted at to be quiet.”

So, if you note the moment that you see, hear, touch, or perceive, no subsequent consciousness will arise to bring about grasping. “... when you see, you just see it; when you hear, you just hear it; when you think, you just think it; and when you know, you just know it.” As this extract from the *Mālukiya-putta Sutta* shows, the mere sight, the mere sound, the mere idea is there. Recall them and only the real nature you have understood will appear, and no grasping. The meditator who notes whatever arises as it arises, sees how everything arises and passes away, and it becomes clear how everything is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. The meditator knows this directly — not because a teacher has explained it. Only this is real knowledge.

Incessant Work

To arrive at this knowledge requires incessant work. There is little chance that you will gain such knowledge at one sitting — only one in a million might do that. In the Buddha’s time there were many people who attained the path and its fruition after listening to a single verse, but one cannot expect to do that today. When the Buddha was teaching, he knew the disposition of his listeners perfectly, and his listeners had excellent perfections. These days the preacher is just an ordinary person who teaches what he has learnt. He does not know the dispositions of his listeners. It is hard to say that the listeners have excellent perfections, if they had, they would have attained enlightenment at the time of the Buddha. So we cannot expect you to attain special knowledge at once — you can attain only it if you work hard enough.

How long do you have to work? Understanding impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self begins with knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-nāṇa*), but that does not come at once. It must be preceded by purity of mind (*citta visuddhi*), purity of views (*ditṭhi visuddhi*), and purity by overcoming doubt (*kaṅkhāvitaraṇa visuddhi*). From my experience of present-day meditators, a specially gifted person can achieve this knowledge in two or three days. Most will take five, six, or seven days, but they must work assiduously. Those who slacken their efforts, may not gain it even after fifteen or twenty days have passed. So I will first talk about working in earnest.

Insight meditation is incessant work. You must meditate whenever you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think, without missing anything. For beginners to note everything is just impossible. They should begin by noting only a few

things. It is easy to observe the rising and falling movements of the abdomen, which I have already spoken about. Note “rising, falling,” “rising, falling” without letting up. As your mindfulness and concentration grow stronger, add “sitting” and “touching.” Note “rising, falling, sitting, touching.” As you continue to note, thoughts may come up. Note them too, “thinking, planning, knowing.” They are hindrances, unless you expel them, you will not have purity of mind, and will not gain a clear understanding of mental and material phenomena. So don’t let them in. Note them and expel them.

If unpleasant feelings like tiredness, heat, pain, or itchiness appear, concentrate on them and note: “tired, tired,” “hot, hot,” etc. as they arise. If the desire arises to stretch or bend the limbs, note this too, “wanting to bend,” “wanting to stretch.” When you bend or stretch, every movement should be noted, “bending, bending,” “stretching, stretching.” When you rise from your seat, note every movement. When you walk, not each step. When you sit down, note the action of sitting down. If you lie down, note that too.

Every bodily movement made, every thought that arises, every feeling that comes up, must be noted. If there is nothing in particular to note, continue noting “rising, falling, sitting, touching.” You must also note while eating, or taking a bath. If there are particular things that you see, note them too. Except for the four to six hours that you sleep, you must note everything continuously. You must try to note at least one thing every second.

If you keep on noting like this in earnest, in two or three days you will find that your mindfulness and concentration are quite strong. Then wanton thoughts come up only rarely. If they do, you are able to note them the moment they arise, and they pass away at once. The object noted and the mind that notes it are well synchronised. You note with ease. These are signs that your mindfulness and concentration have become strong. In other words, you have developed purity of mind.

Things Fall Apart

From now on, every time you note, the object noted and the mind that notes it appear as two distinct things. You come to know that the material form, such as the rising and falling movement, is one thing, and the mind that notes it is another. Ordinarily, the material form and the mind that notes it do not seem separate. They seem to be one and the same thing. Your book knowledge may tell you that they are separate, but your personal experience knows them as one thing. Shake your index finger. Do you see the mind that intends to shake? Can you distinguish between the mind and the shaking? If you are

sincere, the answer will be “no.” However, to the meditator whose mindfulness and concentration are well-developed, the object of attention and the awareness of it are as separate as a wall and a stone that is thrown at it.

The Buddha used the simile of the gem and the thread (D.i.76). When you look at a string of lapis lazuli you know the gems are threaded on a string — these are the gems, that is the string. Similarly, the meditator knows, this is material form, that is the consciousness that is aware of it, which depends on it, and is related to it. The commentary says that the consciousness here is the insight knowledge that observes the material form. The lapis lazuli is the material form and the string is the consciousness that observes. The thread is in the gem, as insight knowledge penetrates the material form.

When you note “rising,” the rising is one thing, and the awareness is another. Only these two things exist. When you note “falling,” the falling is one thing, the awareness of it is another — just these two things exist. This knowledge becomes clear to you of its own accord. When you lift one foot in walking, the lifting is one thing, the awareness of it is another. Only these two things exist. When you push it forward, there is the pushing forward and the awareness of it. When you put it down, there is the putting down and the awareness of it. These two things only — nothing else.

As your concentration improves further, you understand how the material and mental things you have been noting keep passing away each in its own time. When you note “rising,” the form of rising comes up gradually, then passes away. When you note “falling,” the form of falling comes up gradually, then passes away. With every noting you find only arising and passing away. When noting “bending,” one bending and the next do not get mixed up. “Bending” passes away, the next “bending” passes away. The intention to bend, the form bending, and the awareness, come and go each at its own time and place. When you note tiredness, heat, or pain, these also pass away as you are noting them. It becomes clear to you that they appear and then disappear, so they are impermanent.

The meditator personally understands what the commentaries say, “They are impermanent in the sense of being nothing after becoming.” This knowledge comes to the meditator, not from books, nor from teachers. He or she understands it directly. This is real knowledge. To believe what other people say is faith. To remember out of faith is learning. It is not direct knowledge. You must know from your own experience. This is vital. Insight meditation is contemplation to know for yourself. You meditate, you see for yourself, and you know — this alone is insight.

Regarding contemplation on impermanence, the Visuddhimagga says: "... the impermanent should be understood ... impermanence should be understood ... the discernment of the impermanent should be understood." (Vism. 290)

This brief statement is followed by the explanation: "Here, 'the impermanent' means the five aggregates." You must know that the five aggregates are impermanent. Although you may not yet understand it by your own knowledge, you should know this much. You should also know that they are unsatisfactory, and without any self. If you know this much, you can take up insight meditation. This understanding based on learning is referred to in the Cūḷataṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta (Majjhimanikāya, Sutta 37): "Here, ruler of gods, when a monk has heard that nothing is worth adhering to, he directly knows everything." (M.i.251)

To "directly know" means to meditate on mind and matter, and be aware of it. It is the basic insight knowledge called "analytical knowledge of mind and matter" and "knowledge by discerning conditionality." If you have learnt that mind and matter are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, you can begin meditating from the analysis of mind and matter. Then you can go on to the higher knowledges such as knowledge by comprehension.

It is further said "... having directly known everything, he fully understands everything." So the least qualification required of a beginner in insight meditation is that he must have heard or learnt about the three characteristics of mind and matter. To Buddhists in Burma, this is something that everyone has learnt since childhood.

We say that mind and matter are impermanent because they arise, then pass away. If a thing never arises, we cannot say it is impermanent. What is it that never arises? It is a concept. Concepts never arise, never really exist. Take a person's name. It comes into use from the day a child is named. It appears as though it has arisen, but actually people just say it in speaking to him. It has never arisen, it never really exists. If you think it exists, try to find it.

When a child is born, the parents give it a name. Suppose a boy has been named "Master Red." Before the naming ceremony, the name "Master Red" is unknown to anybody. However, from the day the boy is named, people start calling him "Master Red," but we cannot say the name has arisen since then. The name "Master Red" just does not exist. Let's try to find it out.

Is the name “Master Red” in the boy’s body? On his head? On his chest? On his face? No, it does not exist anywhere. The people have agreed to call him “Master Red,” that is all. If he dies, does the name die with him too? No. As long as the people do not forget it, the name will live on. So it is said, “A name never gets destroyed.” Only when the people forget it will the name Master Red disappear, but it is not destroyed. If someone should rediscover it, it will come into use again.

Think of the bodhisatta’s names in the Jātakas: Vessantara, Mahosadha, Mahājanaka, Vidhura, Temiya, Nemi. These names were known in the times of the stories, but were lost for millions of years until the Buddha restored them. Four aeons and a hundred thousand world cycles ago, the names Dīpaṅkara Buddha and Sumedha were well known. They were lost to posterity afterwards, but our Buddha Gotama restored them, so the names are known to us today. They will be known as long as the Buddha’s teaching lasts. Once Buddhism disappears from the earth, these names will be forgotten too. However, if a future Buddha were to speak about them, they would become known again. So concepts and names are just conventions. They never exist. They have never been and they will never be. They never arise, so we cannot say that they pass away. Nor can we say that they are impermanent. Every concept is like that — no existence, no becoming, no passing away, so no impermanence.

Nibbāna, although it is a reality, cannot be said to be impermanent, because it never arises nor passes away. It is regarded as permanent because it remains as peace for ever.

Impermanence

Realities other than nibbāna like mind and matter, never existed in the beginning. They arise whenever their causes exist. After arising, they pass away. So we say that these realities are impermanent. Taking “seeing” for example. In the beginning there was no seeing, but if the eye is not blind, if there is an object to be seen, if there is light, and your attention is drawn to the object, then with these four causes, seeing occurs. Once it has arisen, it passes away, and is no more. So we say that seeing is impermanent. It is not easy for an ordinary person to know that seeing is impermanent. Hearing is easier to understand. There was no hearing in the beginning, but if the ear is not deaf, the sound occurs, there is no barrier, and your attention is drawn to it, then there is hearing when these four factors concur. It arises and then passes away, and is no more. So we say that hearing is impermanent.

Now you hear me talking. You hear one sound after another. Once you have heard them, they are gone. Listen! “Sound,” “Sound.” When I say “soun” you hear it, then it is gone. When I say “ound” you hear it, then it is gone. That is how they arise and pass away. The same is true of other psycho-physical phenomena. They come and go. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, bending, stretching, moving — all of them come and go away. Because they keep passing away, we say that they are impermanent.

The passing away of consciousness is especially clear. If your mind wanders while you are noting “rising,” falling,” you note “wandering.” As you note it, the wandering mind disappears. It has gone. It did not exist before. It occurs just for a moment. Then it is gone in no time at all when it is noted. So we say that it is impermanent. The passing away of unpleasant feelings is obvious, too. As you go on noting “rising, falling,” stiffness, heat, or pain appears somewhere in the body. If you concentrate on it and note “stiff,” “hot”, “pain” it sometimes disappears completely, and it sometimes disappears, at least when you are noting it. So it is impermanent. The meditator realises its impermanent characteristic as he notes it arising and passing away.

This realisation of the fleeting nature of things is insight knowledge of impermanence (*aniccānupassanā-ñāṇa*). It comes from your own experience. Mere reflection without personal experience is not genuine insight. Without meditating, you will not realise that things arise and pass away. It is just academic knowledge. It may be a meritorious deed, but it is not genuine insight.

Genuine insight is what you realise for yourself by meditating on things as they arise and pass away. Here in the audience are lots of meditators who have come to this stage of insight. I am not speaking from my own experience alone. No, not even from the experience of forty or fifty of my disciples. There are hundreds of them. Beginners may not have such clear insight yet — it is not easy to gain, but it is not too difficult either. If you work hard enough as we instruct, you can get it. If you don’t work, you cannot. Educational degrees, distinctions, honours, are all the result of hard work. No pain, no gain. The insight knowledge taught by the Buddha, too, must be worked for.

As your concentration grows sharper, you will be able to see a great number of thought moments in a single act of bending or stretching the limbs. You will see large numbers of thoughts coming up, one after the other, as you intend to bend or stretch. It is the same when you walk, too. A huge number of thought moments arise in the blinking of an eye. You have to note

all these fleeting thoughts as they arise. If you cannot name them, just note “knowing, knowing.” You may see that there are four, five, or more thoughts arising in succession every time you note “knowing.” Sometimes, when the awareness is very swift, even the mental note “knowing” is unnecessary. Just follow the thoughts with awareness.

A thought arises, and the noting mind is aware of it; another thought arises, and the mind knows it. It is like saying, “A morsel of food, a stroke of the stick.” For every thought that arises there is a corresponding consciousness to be aware of it. When you note like this, the arising and passing away is plain. The wandering mind that arises as you are noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, is caught by the observing consciousness like an animal that falls into a snare, or like a target that is hit by a well-aimed stone. As soon as you are aware of it, it is gone. You see this as clearly as something held in your hand disappears. It is like this every time consciousness arises.

When tiredness arises, you note “tired,” and it is gone. It comes up again, you note it again, and it is gone again. This kind of passing away will become even more clear in the higher stages of insight. Tired — noted — gone; tired — noted — gone. They pass away one by one. There is no connection between one tiredness and the next. It is the same with pain. Pain — noted — gone; pain — noted — gone. Each pain disappears at each noting. One pain does not mix with another. Each pain is distinct. To ordinary people there is no interruption in tiredness or pain. They seem to be continuous for a long time. In fact, there is no continuous tiredness or pain, but only one phenomenon after another, just very short separate pieces. The meditator realises this as he or she notes.

When you note “rising,” the abdomen expands gradually and passes away at each stage. When you note “falling,” it falls gradually and each part of the falling passes away. Those inexperienced in meditation think of the rising and falling in terms of the absurd abdominal shape.¹ So they think that meditators will also be observing the absurd abdominal shape, and some make accusations to this effect. Please don’t guess, try to see for yourselves. If you work hard enough you will see what we mean.

When you note “bending,” you see clearly how the movement passes away at each stage, one movement after the next. You now understand the statement that realities like mind and matter do not move from place to place. Ordinary people think it is the same hand that moves, that has existed before the bending, and that will exist after the bending. They think that the same hand moves inwards and outwards. To them it is ever unchanging. This is

because they fail to penetrate the continuity of matter, the way matter arises in succession. They lack penetrative knowledge. Impermanence is said to be hidden by continuity. It is hidden because one does not meditate on what arises and passes away. As the Visuddhimagga says:

“Firstly, the characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent because, when rise and fall are not given attention, it is concealed by continuity.”²

Since the meditator is watching every arising, all mental and physical phenomena appear as separate, discontinuous pieces — not as things complete or continuous. From a distance, a line of ants looks like a line, but when you come nearer you see the individual ants. The meditator sees things in broken pieces, so continuity cannot hide the fact from him. The characteristic of impermanence unfolds itself to him. He is no longer under any illusions.

“However, when continuity is disrupted by discerning rise and fall, the characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent in its true nature.” (Ibid)

This is how you meditate and gain the knowledge of impermanence (*aniccānupassanā-ñāṇa*). Mere reflection without meditation will not give rise to this knowledge. Once this knowledge is developed, knowledge of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*), and knowledge of not-self (*anattānupassanā-ñāṇa*) follow.

“To one, Meghiya, who has perceived impermanence, the perception of not-self is established.” (A.iv.358)

How could you regard what you know very well is arising and passing away to be a self, ego, or a being? People cling to the self because they think they have been the same person for the whole life. Once it is clear from your own personal experience that life consists of things that pass away incessantly, you will not cling to them as self.

Some obstinate individuals say that this discourse was intended for Meghiya alone. This should not be said. We fear that others may say that what the Buddha taught was intended for the people of his day, not for the people living today. This statement is not found only in the Meghiya Sutta. In the Sambodhi Sutta the Buddha says, “To one, monks, who has perceived

impermanence, the perception of not-self is established.” (Sambodhi Sutta, A.iv.353)

If one realises impermanence, one realises suffering too. The meditator who realises how things are arising and passing away, can see how they oppress him. The commentary to the Sambodhi Sutta says, “When the characteristic of impermanence is seen, the characteristic of not-self is seen too, since when one of the three characteristics is seen the other two are seen too.” So it is very important to understand the characteristic of impermanence.

Rediscovery

In this connection, let me tell you a story from my own experience as a teacher. It concerns a meditator from my native village of Seikhun in Shwebo district. He was, in fact, one of my cousins. He was one of the first three persons in the village to take up insight meditation. The three of them agreed among themselves to work for a week at first. They worked very hard. They had brought cigars and betel quids to the monastery to take one each day, but when they returned they took home all seven cigars and betel quids untouched. They worked so hard, that within three days they attained the knowledge of arising and passing away and were overjoyed to experience tranquillity, and to see brilliant lights. They remarked with delight, “Only at this old age have we discovered the truth.” Because they were the first to take up meditation, I thought of letting them enjoy their new-found bliss, and just go on noting as before. I did not tell them to note the joy itself. So, although they worked for four more days, they did not get any deeper insights.

After a few weeks’ rest they returned for another week of meditation. That cousin of mine then reached the knowledge of dissolution. Although he was noting “rising, falling, sitting,” he did not see the abdominal shape, and his body seemed to have disappeared. He told me that he had to touch it with his hand to see if it was still there. Wherever he looked, everything seemed to be breaking up. The ground and trees looked as if they were dissolving. It was contrary to any previous experience he had had, and he began to wonder what was happening. He had never imagined that such gross material things could be incessantly breaking up. He had thought that they perished only after a considerable length of time. They lasted for quite a long time, so he thought. His insight knowledge gained momentum while contemplating the arising and passing away of phenomena, and the dissolution appeared to him without any special effort. Things were passing

away and breaking up before his eyes. It was completely contrary to his former experience. He thought that his eye-sight was beginning to fail, so he asked me. I told him that the dissolution and breaking up of everything he saw was really happening. As insight grows sharper and quicker, the dissolution of everything become apparent without special effort. Later, he told me about his experiences as his insight knowledge progressed. He is no longer alive — he has been dead for many years.

When insight knowledge becomes really sharp, it will prevail over wrong views and thoughts. You see things as they really are: as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. When concentration is undeveloped, mere reflection without meditation cannot give you genuine insight into the true nature of things. Only insight meditation can lead to that realisation. Once you realise impermanence, you see how things oppress you with constant arising and passing away. You see that you can derive no pleasure from them. They can provide no security because they can perish at any moment. So they are fearful, dreadful, and suffering.

Previously you thought, “This body will not perish yet. It will last for quite a long time.” So you regarded it as a secure refuge. However, as you meditate and gain insight, you find only incessant arising and passing away. If new phenomena do not arise to replace the ones that have ceased, that is the moment to die, and this can happen at any moment. To regard these unstable mental and physical phenomena as a permanent self is as unwise as buying a condemned house.

You also find that nothing happens according to your wish. Things just follow their natural course. Previously you thought that you could go if you wished to go, sit if you wished to sit, get up, see, hear, or do anything if you wished to. Now, as you meditate, you find that it is not so. Mind and matter are seen to function as a team. Only when the intention to bend arises, is there the physical phenomenon of bending. Only when the intention to stretch arises, is there the physical phenomenon of stretching. There is an effect only when there is a cause. You see, only when there is something to see. You hear only when there is something to hear. You feel happy only when there is a reason to feel happy, and you worry when there is a reason to worry. If there is a cause, the effect follows, and there is nothing you can do about it. There is no such thing as a self, which lives and does whatever it wishes. There is no self, no ego, no I — only mental and physical phenomena that arise and pass away.

To understand this is the most important thing in insight meditation. Of course, you will experience joy, tranquillity, and bright lights in the course of your training, but they are not important. What is vital is to understand impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. These characteristics become clear as you continue meditating as instructed.

The Cessation of Clinging

Things must become clear by your own efforts, not by believing what others tell you. If any of you beginners have not gained such insights yet, you can know that you have not yet reached that stage. Keep on working. If others can attain such insights, you can too. It will not take very long. The knowledge will come to you if you continue meditating. Only if you know by personal experience that all things are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, will you stop clinging to sense objects, which you now regard as permanent, happy, beautiful, and good. You will no longer cling to them as self, soul, or I. All such clinging will be eradicated. What happens after that? All the defilements will be calmed, and nibbāna will be realised. “When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he personally attains nibbāna.” (M.i.251)

Whenever you meditate, you have no obsession with the object noted. So no grasping arises. There is no grasping to what you see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or know. They all seem to arise and pass away, one by one. They are all suffering. There is nothing to cling to as happy, good, or beautiful. They arise and pass away, which is their intrinsic nature, so there is nothing to cling to as a self, soul, or I that lives and lasts. All these facts become very clear to you. At that point, all grasping ceases. Then you realise nibbāna through the Noble Path. I will explain this in terms of Dependent Origination and the five aggregates of attachment.

“From the cessation of craving, attachment ceases. From the cessation of attachment, becoming ceases. From the cessation of becoming, birth ceases. From the cessation of birth, aging, death, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair cease. Thus, this whole mass of suffering ceases.” (M.i.270)

One who meditates on the mental and physical phenomena that appear at the six sense doors and knows their intrinsic nature of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self does not delight in them or cling to them. As he does not grasp them, he makes no effort to enjoy them. As he makes no effort to enjoy them, there is no new kamma or “becoming.” Since there is

no new kamma, there is no new birth, When there is no new birth, there is no condition for aging, death, grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair. This is how one realises momentary nibbāna through the path of insight whenever one meditates. We will explain about the Noble Path later.

In the *Sīlavanta Sutta* quoted earlier, the Venerable Sāriputta explained how a monk of moral habit can become a stream-winner if he meditates on the five aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. If a stream-winner meditates in the same way he can become a once-returner. Likewise, a once-returner can become a non-returner, and a non-returner can become an arahant. In this way, the four Noble Fruitions are realised through the four Noble Paths.

The Progress of Insight

To gain the Noble Path, one must start with the path of insight, which begins with analytical knowledge of mind and matter. Next, one arrives at knowledge by discerning conditionality. Then, with continued effort, one gains knowledge by comprehension. At this stage one enjoys reflecting on things and investigating them. Learned persons often spend a long time at this stage. If you do not want to reflect or investigate, just keep on meditating. Your awareness becomes light and swift, and you see clearly how the things noted arise and pass away, which is knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*).

At this stage, noting is easy. Bright lights, joy, and tranquillity appear. When one experiences such things that one has never experienced before, one is thrilled and delighted. At the initial stage of meditation, the meditator had to take great pains not to let the mind wander here and there. Nevertheless it wandered, and for a great part of the time he or she was not able to meditate. Nothing seemed to be going right. Some had to fight very hard indeed, but with firm faith in one's teacher, good intentions, and strong determination, one gets past this difficult stage. When one comes to the knowledge of arising and passing away, everything is fine. Noting is easy and effortless. It is good to note, and bright lights appear. Rapture seizes the mind and causes goose-flesh. Both the body and mind are at ease and one feels very comfortable. The objects seem to drop onto one's mindfulness of their own accord, and mindfulness seems to drop onto the objects. Everything that arises is automatically noted, and one never fails or forgets to note. At each noting, awareness is very clear. To attend to something and reflect on it is easy. Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self are plain, so you

feel like preaching. You think you would make a very good teacher, but if you have no education, you will make a very poor teacher. Nevertheless, you feel like preaching, and some meditators can become quite talkative. We call this stage the “imitation nibbāna,” which is not the real nibbāna of the Noble Ones. It is “the immortality of the knowers.”

Training in meditation is like climbing a mountain. When you begin climbing from the base-camp, you soon get tired. You question people who are coming down, and they encourage you by saying, “It is not far now.” Though you are tired, you climb on and soon come to a resting place in the shade of a tree with a cool breeze. All your tiredness is gone. The beautiful scenery fascinates you. You get refreshed to climb on. The knowledge of arising and passing away is the resting place for you on your climb to higher insight knowledge.

Meditators who have not yet reached this stage of insight may be losing hope. Many days have passed and they still have no taste of insight. They often get disheartened, and some leave the meditation centre thinking that meditation is nothing after all. They have not yet discovered the “meditator’s nibbāna,” so we have to encourage newcomers with the hope that they will attain this knowledge at least. We ask them to work to attain it soon, and most succeed as we advise. Then they don’t need further encouragement because they are full of faith and determination to work on until they reach the ultimate goal.

The “meditator’s nibbāna” is often referred to as “non-human delight.” You derive delight from all kinds of things: from education, wealth, and family life. The “meditator’s nibbāna” surpasses all of them. A meditator told me that he had indulged in all kinds of worldly pleasures, but nothing could compare with the pleasure he derived from meditation. He just could not express how delightful it was. However, this delight is not the final stage. You must work on, and continue with your noting. As you progress, forms and features no longer manifest and you find them always disappearing. Whatever appears, disappears the moment you note it. You note “seeing” and it disappears at once. You note “hearing” and it disappears. You note “bending,” “stretching,” etc., and they all disappear. Not only the object disappears, but the mind that notes it also disappears at once. This is the knowledge of dissolution. Every time you note, things dissolve immediately. After witnessing this dissolution for a long time, you become fearful of these dissolving phenomena. This is the knowledge of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*). Then you find fault with these things that keep passing away, which is the

knowledge of misery (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*). As you continue meditating you get weary of them, which is the knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*).

“Seeing thus, the well-taught noble disciple becomes disenchanted with material form, disenchanted with feeling...”
(M.i.139)

At the previous stage, your body was a source of delight. Sitting or rising, going or coming, bending or stretching, speaking or working — everything seemed very nice. Your body seemed dependable and delightful. Now that you realise how everything dissolves, you no longer regard your body as dependable or delightful. It is just burdensome.

You have enjoyed both mental and physical pleasures, thinking, “This is nice,” “I feel happy.” Now, feelings are no longer pleasurable since they pass away as you note them. You become weary of them. Previously, you thought well of your perceptions, but now they pass away as you note them, and you feel disgusted with them too.

Mental formations are responsible for all your bodily, verbal, and mental behaviour. To think, “I sit, I rise, I go, I act,” is clinging to mental formations. You thought well of them too, but now that you have seen how they pass away, you feel revulsion for them.

You used to enjoy thinking. When new meditators are told not to indulge in thinking, but to keep noting, they are not at all pleased. Now you see how thoughts and ideas arise and pass away, and you are weary of them too. The same thing happens with your six senses. Whatever occurs at the six sense doors is disgusting and tiresome. Some meditators have strong feelings of disgust and loathsomeness.

Next, the desire arises to be rid of all these mental and physical phenomena. Once you are weary of them, naturally you want to be rid of them. You think, “They arise and pass away incessantly. They are no good. It would be better if they stopped completely.” This is the knowledge of desire for deliverance (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*). The cessation of all phenomena is nibbāna, so desire for deliverance means to long for nibbāna. What must one do if one wants to attain nibbāna? One must work harder and continue noting. This is the knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*). Working with special effort, the characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self become even more vivid. After re-observation you gradually come to the knowledge of equanimity with regard to formations (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). Now the meditator is quite at ease. Without much

effort, the noting runs smoothly and is very clear. On sitting down to meditate he or she makes an initial effort, then everything runs its course like clockwork. For an hour or so the meditator makes no change of posture and continues noting without interruption.

Before this stage there were many disturbances. Your mind may have been distracted by sounds or wandering thoughts. Painful feelings like tiredness, heat, aches, itching, and coughs appeared and disturbed you frequently, so you had to build up concentration again and again. However, now everything goes well, since there are no more disturbances. You may hear sounds, but you can ignore them and continue noting. Whatever comes up, you note it without being disturbed. The mind no longer wanders. Though pleasant objects may arise, no delight or pleasure arises in you. If you meet unpleasant objects, you feel no displeasure or fear. Painful feelings like tiredness, heat, or aches rarely appear, but if they do, they are not unbearable. Your noting overcomes them. Itching, pain, and coughs disappear once you attain this knowledge. Some meditators get cured of serious illnesses. If their illnesses are not completely cured, they get some relief while noting in earnest. For an hour or more there will be no interruption. Some meditators can sit for two or three hours without interruption, and yet they feel no weariness in the body. Time passes quickly, and even three hours does not seem like a long time to sit.

On a hot summer day such as today, it would be very good to have attained this knowledge. While other people are groaning due to the oppressive heat, the ardent meditator with this knowledge of equanimity is not aware of the heat at all. The whole day seems to fly by in no time at all. It is a very good stage of insight knowledge, but there can be dangers like excess of worry, ambition, or attachment. If these cannot be removed, no progress will be made. Once they are removed, the path knowledge (*magga-ñāṇa*) will be realised. How?

The Noble Path

Every time you note “rising,” “falling,” “sitting,” “touching,” “seeing,” “hearing,” “bending,” “stretching,” and so on, an effort is being made. This is the right effort of the Noble Eightfold Path. When you note, you are mindful, which is right mindfulness. Your concentration penetrates the object noted and remains fixed on it, which is right concentration. These three are the concentration constituents of the Path. As you note with concentration, initial application alights onto the object being noted. It is the application of

the mind and its concomitants onto the object. Its characteristic is “lifting” of the concomitants onto the object (*abhiniropanalakkhaṇa*), according to the commentary. This is right thought. Then there is the realisation that the object thus attended to is movement, non-cognition, seeing, cognition, impermanence, and so on, which is right view. Right thought and right view are the wisdom constituents of the Path. The three constituents of morality: right speech, right action, and right livelihood, were perfected when you took up the practice of insight meditation by undertaking the precepts. Besides, there can be no wrong speech, wrong action, or wrong livelihood in respect of the object noted. So whenever you note, you perfect the morality constituents of the Path too.

The eight constituents of the Noble Path occur in every moment of awareness. They constitute the path of insight that arises when clinging is eradicated. You have to develop this path gradually until you reach the knowledge of equanimity with regard to formations. When this knowledge matures, you will arrive at the Noble Path. It is like this: when the knowledge of equanimity with regard to formations has matured and grown strong, your noting gets sharper and swifter. While thus noting with swift awareness, all of a sudden you fall into the peace that is nibbāna. It is rather strange. You have no prior knowledge of it, and you cannot reflect on it when you attain it either. Only after the attainment can you reflect. You reflect because you experienced something unique. This is the knowledge of reviewing (*paccavekkhaṇā-ñāṇa*). Then you know what has happened. This is how you realise nibbāna through the Noble Path.

If you want to realise nibbāna, it is important to work for freedom from clinging. In the case of ordinary people, clinging arises everywhere — in seeing, in hearing, in touching, and in knowing. They cling to things as permanent, happy, good, as self, ego, or persons. You must work for complete liberation from clinging. To work, means to meditate on whatever arises — whatever is seen, heard, touched, or thought of. If you keep meditating thus, clinging will cease, and the Noble Path will arise, leading to nibbāna. This is the process.

How is insight developed? Insight is developed by meditating on the five aggregates of attachment. Why and when do we meditate on the aggregates? We meditate on the aggregates whenever they arise, so that we do not cling to them. If we fail to meditate on mind and matter, clinging arises. We cling to them as permanent, good, and as self or ego. If we keep meditating on mind and matter, clinging ceases. Then we plainly see that all phenomena

are merely impermanent, unsatisfactory, and soulless processes. Once clinging ceases, the Path arises, leading to nibbāna. These are the fundamentals of insight meditation.

The Weaver's Daughter

Now a few words of encouragement. When the Buddha taught, his listeners meditated as they listened to him and gained insight. According to the commentary, eighty-four thousand gained insight after each discourse. Reading about this, some people remark, "It seems quite easy to gain insight, but though we are working very hard, we are unable to gain anything? Why is there such a difference?"

You must remember that the commentary is just giving an account of the occasion and so does not go into details as to the qualifications of the listeners. The teacher was the Buddha himself, and his listeners had good perfections. To illustrate this, let me relate a story from the time of the Buddha.

Once the Buddha was teaching at Ālavī — present-day Allahabad. His theme was mindfulness of death. He told his listeners to reflect, "Life is uncertain; death is certain." Then he returned to Sāvattthī. Among his audience was a sixteen-year old girl — the daughter of a weaver. She developed mindfulness of death from that time onwards.

Three years later, the Buddha came to Ālavī again. As the Buddha was sitting among the people, he saw the young woman coming towards him. He asked her, "Young lady, where have you come from?" She replied, "I do not know, Lord." "Where are you going to?" he continued. "I do not know, Lord" was the answer. "Do you not know?" he asked. "I know, Lord" she replied. "Do you know?" he asked. "I do not know, Lord" she replied. Some people in the audience became annoyed with her. They thought she was being disrespectful to the Buddha. So the Buddha asked the young woman to explain her answers. She explained, "Lord, you would not engage in small-talk. When you asked me where I had come from, I knew at once that you were asking me about my past existence, so I answered that I do not know. When you asked me "Where are you going?" you meant to ask to which existence am I going, so again I replied, "I do not know." Then you meant to ask me if I know that I am going to die, so I replied, "I know." Finally, you asked if I know when I will die. Since I do not know when I will die, I replied, "I do not know." The Buddha approved of her answers by saying "*Sādhū*."

In reply to the third question, we know that we will certainly die, but it is uncertain when. Let us ask ourselves the second question: "Where am I

going?” It is rather difficult to answer, isn’t it? However, there are ways to make the answer less difficult. Think about your physical, verbal, and mental deeds. Which are more numerous, good deeds, or bad deeds? If bad deeds are more numerous, you will be heading for a bad destination. So you must strive to do good deeds. The best way is to engage in insight meditation, so that you will gain liberation from the lower realms for ever. You should try to reach at least the stage of stream-winning. Is this enough? If you can reach that stage, I will be happy, but according to the Buddha’s advice you must work until you attain the fruition of arahantship.

Now, to return to the story of the weaver’s daughter. She became a stream-winner after her dialogue with the Buddha and one brief verse. She gained insight as a result of developing mindfulness of death diligently for three years. We can infer that many people must have been like her. While the Buddha was staying at the Jeta Grove in Sāvathī, there were Dhamma discourses every day. The citizens of Sāvathī came in the evening dressed in clean clothes and bringing offerings of flowers and incense to listen to the Dhamma. The same thing must have happened while the Buddha was staying at the Bamboo Grove, near Rājagaha. After listening to the Dhamma, the people must have taken up meditation just as they had taken to keeping the five precepts. Today, people also begin to practise meditation after listening to meditation teachers. If the Buddha himself was teaching, how could they not be inspired to practise? Such people later gained insight while listening to other discourses.

There were monks, nuns, men and women lay disciples — all types of people. Those who had the opportunity to listen to the Buddha in person must have had very good perfections. Whenever the Buddha taught, he did so to suit the disposition of the audience, which is very important.

Importance of the Right Method

A monk named Cūlapanṭhaka could not learn a single stanza of forty-four syllables even in four months. His brother Mahāpanṭhaka grew impatient with him, and sent him away. The Buddha called him, gave him a piece of white cloth, and instructed him to handle it while reciting, “Removing impurities, removing impurities.” The monk did as instructed, realised the nature of mind and matter within himself, and became an arahant. It must have taken him two or three hours at the most. He gained insight so easily because he was given a subject of meditation that suited his disposition perfectly.

A disciple of the Venerable Sāriputta meditated on decaying corpses for four months, but in vain. So the Venerable Sāriputta took him to the Buddha, who created a beautiful golden lotus using his mystic powers, and gave it to the monk. The monk had been a goldsmith for five hundred existences in succession. He liked beautiful things and had no interest in decaying corpses. When he saw the golden lotus, he was fascinated and quickly developed jhāna while looking at it. Then the Buddha made the lotus fade away, and the monk realised the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self nature of conditioned things. The Buddha then taught him a single verse, on the hearing of which he became an arahant.

The Elder Channa was unsuccessful in his efforts to attain insight, so he asked Venerable Ānanda for advice. Venerable Ānanda said to Channa, "You are 'soil to be sown on,' one in whom insight can be cultivated." The elder was filled with delight, followed Ānanda's advice, and soon gained insight.

Some modern meditation teachers do not know how to teach to suit the dispositions of their students. They speak to them in ways that do not suit their temperaments. As a result, they become discouraged and go home. However, some teachers know what to say, and their disciples, who thought to stay only a few days, are encouraged to stay and gain insight. It is very important to teach to suit the disposition of the listeners. No wonder, then, that thousands of people gained insight at the end of a discourse by the Buddha.

Among the audience there may be one or two who have attained perfections like those people in the days of the Buddha, and there will be those whose perfections have matured after many days or months of training. These few can gain insight while listening to the Dhamma now. If you cannot get it now, you will get it very soon if you go on working. Those who have never worked before have now learned the right method. If you start work at some convenient time, you will gain insight. Whether you have gained insight or just done good deeds, you will all be born in the six celestial realms after you die. There you will meet those devas who are Noble Ones, who have been there since the days of the Buddha. You will meet Anāthapiṇḍika, Visākḥā, and others. Then you can ask them about what they have learnt from the Buddha, and how they have practised. It would be delightful to discuss the Dhamma with the wise beings in the celestial realms.

You Can Be Reborn Wherever You Wish

However, if you do not want to be born in the celestial realm, but in the human realm, you will be reborn here. Once, about twenty-five or thirty years ago, a Chinese donor invited some monks to an almsgiving at his home in Moulmein. After the meal, the presiding monk, in his thanksgiving discourse, said that as a result of feeding the monks, the Chinese donor would be reborn in the celestial realms, where life is full of delights with magnificent palaces and beautiful gardens. The monk then asked the donor, "Lay supporter, don't you want to be reborn in the celestial realm?" "No," the donor replied, "I don't want to be reborn in the celestial realm." "Why not?" the monk asked. "I just want to be reborn in my own house, in my own place." "Well," said the monk, "then you will be reborn in your own house, in your own place." The monk was right. The donor's good kamma will lead him to where he wants to be.

"The aspiration, monks, of a virtuous man is realised because of his purity." (A.iv.239)

You listeners here are of pure morality. At a time when most people in Rangoon are enjoying themselves for the New Year, you are here doing meritorious deeds, far away from such merry-making. Some of you have donned the yellow robes, and are training in meditation. Some of you are observing the eight precepts while practising meditation. So your morality is pure. If you want to be reborn in celestial realms, you will be reborn there. If you want to be reborn in this human world, you will be.

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In this connection there is something that has been of concern to us. Today, the countries in Europe and America are prospering. We fear that those Burmese who do good deeds may get inclined towards those countries and will be reborn there. I think it is already happening. Some people ask, "Although Buddhists do good deeds, why aren't Buddhist countries prospering?" They seem to think, "When a Burmese dies, he or she is reborn only in Burma." It is not so. A person of merit can be reborn anywhere he or she wishes.

Those wealthy people in other countries may have been good Buddhists from Burma. There are so many people who do meritorious deeds here, but there are not enough wealthy parents here to receive them in their next existence. So they will have to be reborn elsewhere. If you are born there, and if you are just a worldling, you will have to adopt the religion of your parents there. This is noteworthy. To be steadfast in your religious faith, you must try to reach the stage where your faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha will never waver. Once you are a stream-winner your faith in the Three Gems will never falter, whatever country you may be reborn in.

These days it is not very good to be born in the human world. Life is short, diseases are plentiful, ideologies are confusing, and dangers abound. If you do not want to be reborn in the human world, you will be reborn in the celestial realms. Even if you have not attained the Path and its Fruition, your good deeds of giving alms and observing the precepts will take you to wherever you wish. If you have attained the Path and its Fruition, it will be better.

The celestial realm is not too hard to gain. One person named Indaka gave a spoonful of rice to the Saṅgha and was reborn in Tāvatiṃsa. Donors in Burma make far greater gifts than a spoonful of rice. Regarding the precepts, observing them for a while sent many people to celestial realms. Some kept the eight precepts for just half a day, and were reborn in heaven. You now observe the eight precepts very well and also practise meditation. You will easily get to the celestial realms. Why not? Once there, you can ask the Noble Ones about the Dhamma and discuss it with them. Please do so.

Upasathā the Goddess

In the Buddha's time a young woman called Upasathā lived at Sāketa, in the Kosala region of central India. She lived according to the Dhamma and became a stream-winner. When she died she was reborn in Tāvatiṃsa, where she lived in a magnificent palace. One day the Venerable Moggallāna met her while on a tour of the celestial realms. The monks in those days were

perfect in higher knowledge and had acquired supernormal powers. They could travel to celestial realms, see them with the divine-eye, or hear the devas with the divine-ear. Today, no monks are known to possess such powers. We cannot go to celestial realms. If we managed to get there, we would not be able to see them. Let alone the devas in the higher planes, we cannot even see the earthbound devas, such as guardians of trees and treasures.

Venerable Moggallāna often toured the celestial realms by his supernormal powers. It was his intention to get first-hand reports from the devas on how they had got there. What good deeds had they done to deserve celestial bliss. He could have learned of their past deeds without asking them, but he wanted their personal accounts. When the elder came to Uposathā's palace, she greeted him. Venerable Moggallāna asked her, "Young goddess, your splendour is like the brightness of the planet Venus. What good deeds have you done to deserve this splendour and bliss?"

She replied, "I was a woman named Uposathā, living at Sāketa. I listened to the Buddha's teaching, gained faith in the Dhamma, and became a lay disciple, going to the Three Gems for refuge."

Putting your faith in the Three Gems, means taking refuge. You do this by reciting the formula, "I go to the Buddha for refuge. I go to the Dhamma for refuge. I go to the Saṅgha for refuge."

The Buddha knew all the Dhamma. Having personally realised nibbāna, the end of all sufferings like aging, disease, and death, he taught the Dhamma so that other beings might enjoy the bliss of nibbāna too. If one follows the teaching of the Buddha, one can avoid the four lower realms, and gain liberation from all suffering. Believing this, you go to the Buddha for refuge. When you are ill, you have to put your faith in a doctor. You must trust him, thinking, "This doctor is an expert. He can cure my illness." In the same way, you must put your trust in the Buddha, knowing that you will be liberated from all suffering by following his teachings. However, some people do not appreciate the significance of the formula. They just repeat it because their parents or teachers make them repeat it. This is not the right way. You must know the meaning, reflect on it, and repeat it slowly. If you cannot do this every time, at least try to do it sometimes. When you say, "I go to the Dhamma for refuge," you are putting your faith in the teachings of the Buddha — teachings on the Path, its Fruition, and nibbāna. You are confirming your belief that the practice of these teachings will liberate you from the four lower realms and from all suffering in the round of rebirth. When you say, "I go to the Saṅgha for refuge," you are putting your faith in the Noble Ones who,

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by practising the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha, have attained or are about to attain the Path and its Fruition. You are confirming the belief that reliance on the Saṅgha will lead you to freedom from the lower realms and the round of rebirth. A man who has taken the Three Refuges is called an “*upāsaka*,” and a woman is called an “*upāsikā*.” Being an *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* is a good deed that will send you to the celestial realms.

“Who takes refuge in the Buddha, no downward path will go;
having left the body he’ll join the deva host.” (D.ii.255)

Uposathā had done other good deeds, too. She continued, “I observed morality, gave alms, and kept the Uposatha.”

Those who do not know Dhamma, make fun of keeping the Uposatha saying, “If you keep the Uposatha, you get hungry, that is all!” They know nothing about good and bad deeds. They do not know how, by overcoming the desire to eat, which is greed, wholesome kamma is gained. Yet they may know how fasting can be good for sick people, and then they praise it. They understand the current material welfare only. They are totally ignorant of mind and the life after death. Observing the Uposatha requires one to prevent bad thoughts from arising, and to cultivate good thoughts like self-restraint and patience throughout the day and the following night. One thinks, “Throughout their lives, the arahants avoid unwholesome deeds like killing, stealing, sexual activity, falsehood, intoxicants, and eating at improper times. I will follow their example for one day and honour them by doing the same.” Good people think like this when they observe the eight precepts. When you feel hungry, you control yourself, and strive to remove the defilement of greed. This is a wholesome deed. As such noble deeds arise in your mind, it gets purified. It is like fasting and cleansing your intestines when you are sick. Since your mind is pure, when you die, a pure consciousness results. Thus we say that one is reborn as a man or a deva.

The goddess Uposathā continued, “I came to live in this palace as a result of restraint and generosity.” Here ‘restraint’ is very important. Even in this world, if there is no restraint in your spending you will soon become poor. If there is no restraint in your actions, you will catch infectious diseases or get involved in crime. As for the next life, restraint is important as it purifies the heart. That generosity can lead to celestial realms is common knowledge among Buddhists.

Next, the goddess said, “I know the Noble Truths.”

These are the truths to be known by the Noble Ones. Once you understand these truths for yourself, you become a Noble One. They are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The path is the most important part. “To know the Noble Truths” does not mean to learn them by hearsay. It means realisation by yourself. You should understand them well, give up what ought to be given up, realise cessation, and develop the path yourself. This is what the commentary explains. The five aggregates of attachment are the truth of suffering. Noting the aggregates to know them as they really are is understanding the truth of suffering. As you continue, you see how they arise and pass away, and so are suffering. You understand this as you meditate. When you reach the Noble Path, you see nibbāna, the end of suffering. On reflection, you understand that whatever has not come to an end is suffering. You understand this at the Path moment. It is not understanding by way of attention to the object, but rather by way of function.

As you meditate, there can be no attachment to the object noted. This is understanding by way of giving up. On reflection, no craving or attachment will arise for objects that you have seen are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. So craving has been extinguished. This is how you understand while meditating. When you realise the Noble Path and nibbāna, no craving will ever arise with respect to the Path. With the path of stream-winning, any gross craving that can lead one to the lower realms is eradicated. With the attainment of the path of non-returning, all craving for sensual pleasures is abandoned. With arahantship, all craving is finally destroyed.

Whenever you note, no defilements, kamma, or suffering will arise in respect of the objects noted. All are extinguished. Such cessation of suffering is experienced with every act of noting. This is how you realise the truth of cessation. At the moment of the Noble Path you realise nibbāna. Every time you meditate, right view regarding the true nature of mind and matter arises. Once there is right view, its concomitants such as right thought arise too. We have dealt with them already. To develop the eight constituents of the Path is to develop the Path. This is how you understand while meditating. At the Noble Path moment, the eight constituents arise and nibbāna is realised. One who has gained the Path and its Fruition can see on reflection how the Noble Path came to be. This, too, is understanding.

Thus, if you have understood how mind and matter are suffering; if you have given up craving, which is the cause of suffering; if you have realised

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the end of suffering; and if you have developed the eight constituents of the Path, we can say that you know the four Noble Truths. When the goddess Uposathā said that she knew the Noble Truths, she meant she had seen the insight path and the Noble Path by her own experience. In other words, she was a stream-winner.

Once you know the four truths, you know the noble dhammas as well. We will give excerpts from the *suttas*.

“... the well-instructed noble disciple, one who sees the Noble Ones, who is skilled in the noble Dhamma.” (M.i.11; 136; 310)

If you are not a Noble One, you will not know by right wisdom what kind of person a Noble One is. Those who have never been initiated into the Saṅgha will not know from personal experience how a monk behaves and lives. Those who have never taken up meditation will not know how a meditator behaves and lives. Only when you yourself are a Noble One, will you discern who a Noble One is.

According to the commentary, the noble dhammas consists of the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the eight constituents of the Path — the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*). There are seven groups. If you know any one of the seven, you know the other six. We have said that if you know the four truths you know the noble dhammas, because the eightfold path, which is included in the Four Noble Truths, is one group of the noble dhammas.

When you try to develop any of the seven groups of noble dhammas such as the four foundations of mindfulness, you understand them from your own experience. This is true understanding — learning from hearsay will not do.

“A monk, when he walks, knows ‘I am walking’.” So if you want to become a Noble One, note “walking, walking” or “lifting, pushing, dropping” when you walk. As you walk, mindfulness arises whenever you note, and so does knowledge that cognises the object noted. You know how the intention to walk, the material form of walking, and the awareness of it, arise and pass away. This mindfulness and knowledge that arise whenever you note, is the foundation of mindfulness of the body.

“He is aware ‘I feel a painful feeling’.” A meditator notes “hot, hot,” or “pain, pain,” whenever heat or pain arise. Thus he or she becomes mindful

and knows how feelings arise and pass away. This is the foundation of mindfulness of feelings.

“He is aware of a passionate mind as passionate.” Every time a thought arises, the meditator notes “attachment,” or “delighting.” He or she is mindful and knows how such thoughts arise and pass away. This is the foundation of mindfulness of thoughts.

“One who has sensual desire is aware ‘sensual desire is present in me’.” One notes “desire,” “delight,” and so on, and is mindful. One knows how dispositions like sensual desire arise and pass away. This is establishing mindfulness by way of contemplating mental states.

Those of you who are training here are learning from personal experience. You become skilled in the noble dhammas — the four foundations of mindfulness. At the same time, you are making the four right efforts. As you note, you are making an effort to discard unwholesome states that have arisen, or to prevent the arising of unarisen ones. You are striving to develop the good deeds of insight and the Path that have not yet arisen, or to augment the insight knowledge that has already arisen. The four bases of success are also involved. When you work, you have to rely on will, effort, thought, or wisdom. The five faculties of confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom are also present, and the five powers are the same. The seven factors of enlightenment are mindfulness, investigation (of the Dhamma), effort, joy, tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity, which are also present when you note. That the eight constituents of the path are involved need not be repeated here.

To return to the story of the goddess Uposathā. She said, “I kept the five precepts. I was a lay disciple of Gotama the Buddha. I often heard tell of Nandana and wanted to go there. As a result, I came to be reborn here in Nandana.”

Nandana is the name of a garden in the celestial realm. In those days people talked of Nandana as they do of America or Europe these days. Uposathā heard people talk about the celestial garden and wished to be reborn there, so she was. However, she had become dissatisfied. She told Venerable Moggallāna, “I failed to heed the Buddha’s words. Having turned my mind to this lowly plane, I now regret it.”

The Buddha taught us that all forms of existence are unsatisfactory — merely suffering. He taught us to work for the end of suffering, but Uposathā had disregarded the Buddha’s advice and longed for life in the celestial realm. Now she realised her mistake.

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You may ask, “Why should one not work for the end of suffering in the celestial realms?” It is not easy to work there. The devas are always singing, dancing, and making merry. There is not a single quiet place like in the human realm. Even in this world, when you return home, you cannot practise well, can you? So work hard now.

Venerable Moggallāna consoled her, “Don’t worry, Upasathā. The Fully Enlightened One has declared that you are a stream-winner with special attainment. You are free from suffering in the lower realms.

Upasathā is still in Tāvatiṃsa, and has not been there long by the reckoning of life in celestial realms. A century here is equivalent to a single day there. From the Buddha’s time to now is 2,500 years, which is only twenty-five days according to the calendar in Tāvatiṃsa. So she is not even a month old. If you attain special insight now, in forty, fifty, or sixty years you will be reborn in the celestial realm, meet this goddess, and discuss the Dhamma with her. If you have not got any insight, do not be discouraged. At least you will be reborn in the celestial realm. Then you can question the Noble devas, listen to their teachings, and practise what they teach. Then you will soon attain the Path and its Fruition. The devas’ bodies are very refined. The consciousness that arises depending on this subtle matter is very sharp and swift. So if you remember how you meditated in your human existence, you will understand the arising and passing away of mind and matter, and reach the Noble Path and its Fruition in no time at all.

“Verses of Dhamma appear to him in his happiness there. The arising of recollection, monks, is slow, but then he quickly gains special insight.” (A.ii.185)

A Sākyan woman, Gopika by name, who was a stream-winner, died and was born as Gopaka, the son of Sakka, in Tāvatiṃsa. There he saw three *gandhabbas* who had come to dance at his father’s palace. On reflection Gopaka saw that the three gods had been monks he had worshipped in his former existence, and he told them. Two of the gods remembered the Dhamma they had practised, meditated on it, immediately attained jhāna, became non-returners and rose to the Brahmāpurohita realm.

There are lots of gods and goddesses like Upasathā now living in the celestial realms who practised the Dhamma in the Buddha’s time. There are gods like Gopaka who have been born as gods after being women. All of them practised the Dhamma just like you are doing now. It is very heartening. This is the ancient path taken by the Noble Ones. You are following the same

