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Preface

THE PRESENT WORK OFFERS a complete translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, one of the major collections in the *Sutta Piṭaka* or "Basket of Discourses" belonging to the Pali Canon. This vast body of scriptures, recorded in the ancient Indian language now known as Pali, is regarded by the Theravāda school of Buddhism as the definitive recension of the Buddha-word, and among scholars too it is generally considered our most reliable source for the original teachings of the historical Buddha Gotama.

This translation is an extensively revised version of an original draft translation made by the distinguished English scholar-monk, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (1905–1960). During his eleven years' life in the Buddhist Order, passed entirely at the Island Hermitage in south Sri Lanka, Ven. Ñāṇamoli had rendered into English some of the most difficult and intricate texts of Pali Buddhism, among them the encyclopaedic *Visuddhimagga*. Following his premature death at the age of 55, three thick hand-bound notebooks containing a handwritten translation of the entire *Majjhima Nikāya* were found among his effects. However, although all 152 *suttas* of the *Majjhima* had been translated, the work was obviously still in an ongoing process of revision, with numerous crossouts and overwritings and a fair number of unresolved inconsistencies. The translation also employed an experimental scheme of highly original renderings for Pali doctrinal terms that Ven. Ñāṇamoli had come to prefer to his earlier scheme and had overwritten into the notebooks. He had used this new set of renderings in several of his final publications, offering an explanation for his choices in an appendix to *The*

Minor Readings and The Illustrator of Ultimate Meaning, his translation of the *Khuddakapāṭha* and its commentary.

In 1976 Bhikkhu Khantipālo made a selection of ninety suttas from the notebooks, which he edited into a fairly consistent and readable version rearranged according to a topical sequence he himself devised. This was published in Thailand in three volumes under the title *A Treasury of the Buddha's Words*. In this edition Ven. Khantipālo had endeavoured to make as few changes as possible in the original translation by Ven. Nāṇamoli, though he inevitably found it desirable to replace some of the latter's innovative renderings with better-known equivalents, generally choosing the terminology that Ven. Nāṇamoli had used in *The Path of Purification*, his excellent translation of the *Visuddhimagga*.

The present work contains finished translations of all 152 suttas. In editing the ninety suttas selected by Ven. Khantipālo, I have worked from the version found in *A Treasury of the Buddha's Words*, referring to Ven. Nāṇamoli's notebooks whenever questions arose or problematic passages were encountered. The other sixty-two suttas had to be freshly edited from the notebooks. The translations of all 152 suttas have been checked against the original Pali texts and I hope that all errors and omissions have been rectified.

My aim in editing and revising this material, I must frankly state, has not been to reconstruct the suttas in a way that would conform as closely as possible to the intentions of the original translator. My aim has been, rather, to turn out a translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya* that simultaneously approaches two ideals: first, fidelity to the intended meaning of the texts themselves; and second, the expression of that meaning in an idiom that would be intelligible to a modern reader seeking in the Pali suttas personal guidance in the proper understanding and conduct of life. Terminological exactitude and internal consistency have been important guidelines underlying the endeavour to achieve those ideals, but care has been taken that their pursuit should leave the translation transparent as to the meaning.

To produce a translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya* that is both technically precise and lucid in expression required numerous revisions in the manuscript version. Most were quite minor but a few were substantial. Numerous alterations were made in the

rendering of Pali doctrinal terms, most of Ven. Khantipālo's changes having been incorporated. In place of Ven. Nāṇamoli's novel renderings I have in most cases returned to the clearer and better established terminology he employed in *The Path of Purification*. When doubts arose I always turned for help to Ven. Nyanaponika Mahāthera, whose wise advice helped to steer this translation closer towards its two guiding ideals. The handling of several important technical terms is discussed at the end of the Introduction, to which is attached a list showing the terminological changes that were made for this edition. By consulting the list the reader can obtain some idea of how the manuscript translation read. A glossary in the back gives the English renderings used for the major Pali doctrinal terms found in the Majjhima Nikāya as well as Pali words and meanings not included in the Pali Text Society's *Pali-English Dictionary*. The subject index also includes, for most entries, the Pali term after its chosen English rendering. Botanical names that could not be easily rendered by familiar English equivalents have been left untranslated.

Ven. Nāṇamoli's translation was based primarily on the Pali Text Society's roman-script edition of the Majjhima Nikāya, published in three volumes, the first edited by V. Trenckner (1888), the second two by Robert Chalmers (1898, 1899). This edition was also used to check the translation, but on problematic passages I consulted as well two other editions: the Burmese Buddhasāsana Samiti's Sixth Buddhist Council edition in Burmese script and the Sinhala-script Buddha Jayanti edition published in Sri Lanka. Instances are not unusual where the reading in one or the other of these editions was preferred to that of the PTS edition, though only occasionally are these mentioned in the notes. Seldom too do the notes refer to I. B. Horner's long-standing English translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, with which I sometimes compared Ven. Nāṇamoli's translation. Since the first volume of that translation was published in 1954, and the next two in 1957 and 1959, while Ven. Nāṇamoli's manuscript indicates that he did his revised translation between 1953 and 1956, it seems unlikely that he had consulted Horner's version in preparing his own; at most, he might have had access to the first volume after he had completed his first volume.

The text of the translation is divided into numerical sections. These divisions were introduced by Ven. Nāṇamoli into his manuscript version of the suttas and are not found in the PTS edition of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Sometimes, when logic seemed to dictate it, I have made minor alterations in the divisions. The section numbers are included in the sutta references in the Introduction, Notes, and Indexes. Thus, for example, a reference to MN 26.18 means *Majjhima Sutta* No. 26, section 18.

The numbers at the top of the pages refer to the volume and page number of the PTS edition of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, as do the bracketed numbers embedded in the text (except for MN 92 and MN 98, wherein the numbers refer to the PTS edition of the *Sutta Nipāta*).

The Introduction aims to provide the reader with a thorough study guide to the *Majjhima Nikāya* by systematically surveying the principal teachings of the Buddha contained in this collection along with references to the suttas where fuller expositions of those teachings can be found. More elementary information on the Pali Canon and on Pali Buddhism in general will be found in Maurice Walshe's introduction to his recent translation of the complete *Digha Nikāya*, *Thus Have I Heard*, which the present publication is intended to parallel. As a way of easing the reader's entrance into the canonical texts themselves, a summary of the *Majjhima*'s 152 suttas follows the Introduction.

To clarify difficult passages in the suttas and to shed additional light on passages whose meaning is richer than appears at first sight, a copious set of back notes has been provided. Many of these notes are drawn from the commentaries on the *Majjhima*, of which there are two. One is the commentary proper, the *Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, also known as the *Papañcasūdanī*. This was composed in the fifth century by the great Buddhist commentator, Ācariya Buddhaghosa, who based it on the ancient commentaries (no longer extant) that had been preserved for centuries by the Sangha of the Mahāvihāra at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. The commentary is of value not only for elucidating the meaning of the texts but also for filling in the background of events that led to the promulgation of the discourses. The other commentarial work is the subcommentary, the *Majjhima Nikāya Tīkā*, ascribed to Ācariya Dhammapāla,

who probably lived and worked in South India a century or more later than Ācariya Buddhaghosa. The main purpose of the *Ṭikā* is to clear up obscure or difficult points in the *Aṭṭhakathā*, but in doing so the author often sheds additional light on the meaning of the canonical text. In order to keep the notes as concise as possible, almost always the commentaries have been paraphrased rather than quoted directly.

I am aware that the Notes sometimes repeat things already explained in the Introduction, but in a work of this nature such repetitions can be of use, particularly as novel ideas briefly treated in the Introduction may slip the reader's memory at the time of reading a sutta to which they pertain.

In conclusion I want to mention the contributions that others have made to the completion of this project.

First, I wish to thank Ven. Nyanaponika Mahāthera for first encouraging me to take up this task, which seemed so daunting at the outset, and then for providing valuable advice at every crucial turn along the way. Not only was he always ready to discuss difficult points, but despite deteriorating vision, which drastically reduced the time he had available for reading, he still read through the Introduction, the Notes, and the knottier suttas, offering helpful suggestions.

Second, I thank Ven. Khantipālo (now Laurence Mills) for permission to use his versions of the ninety suttas in *A Treasury of the Buddha's Words* as the working basis for this edition. The work he did on those suttas almost two decades ago greatly facilitated the preparation of this volume.

Third, I must mention the tremendous help received from Ayyā Nyanasirī, who subedited the initial draft, made numerous suggestions for minor improvements, and typed out the entire manuscript. Even though, as my conception of the editorial task changed, several suttas had to be typed a second time, and a few a third time, this was always done with patience and understanding.

Fourth, I thank two fellow bhikkhus, Ven. Ṭhānissaro (U.S.A.) and Ven. Dhammavihārī (Sri Lanka), for reading portions of the manuscript and suggesting minor improvements.

Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Nicholas Ribush for his encouragement and helpfulness and to Wisdom

Publications for doing such a fine job of production. I am particularly grateful to John Bullitt for his careful and precise management of this project.

For any errors or defects that remain, I myself am fully responsible.

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Introduction

THE MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA AS A COLLECTION

THE MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA is the second collection of the Buddha's discourses found in the Sutta Piṭaka of the Pali Canon. Its title means literally the Middle Collection, and it is so called because the suttas it contains are generally of middle length, compared with the longer suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya, which precedes it, and the shorter suttas making up the two major collections that follow it, the Saṃyutta Nikāya and the Anguttara Nikāya.

The Majjhima Nikāya consists of 152 suttas. These are divided into three parts called Sets of Fifty (*paññāsa*), though the last set actually contains fifty-two suttas. Within each part the suttas are further grouped into chapters or divisions (*vagga*) of ten suttas each, the next to the last division containing twelve suttas. The names assigned to these divisions are often derived solely from the titles of their opening sutta (or, in some cases, pair of suttas) and thus are scarcely indicative of the material found within the divisions themselves. A partial exception is the Middle Fifty, where the division titles usually refer to the principal type of interlocutor or key figure in each of the suttas they contain. Even then the connection between the title and the contents is sometimes tenuous. The entire system of classification appears to have been devised more for the purpose of convenience than because of any essential homogeneity of subject matter in the suttas comprised under a single division.

There is also no particular pedagogical sequence in the suttas, no unfolding development of thought. Thus while different suttas illuminate each other and one will fill in ideas merely suggested by another, virtually any sutta may be taken up for individual

study and will be found comprehensible on its own. Of course, the study of the entire compilation will naturally yield the richest harvest of understanding.

If the *Majjhima Nikāya* were to be characterised by a single phrase to distinguish it from among the other books of the Pali Canon, this might be done by describing it as the collection that combines the richest variety of contextual settings with the deepest and most comprehensive assortment of teachings. Like the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Majjhima* is replete with drama and narrative, while lacking much of its predecessor's tendency towards imaginative embellishment and profusion of legend. Like the *Saṃyutta*, it contains some of the profoundest discourses in the Canon, disclosing the Buddha's radical insights into the nature of existence; and like the *Anguttara*, it covers a wide range of topics of practical applicability. In contrast to those two *Nikāyas*, however, the *Majjhima* sets forth this material not in the form of short, self-contained utterances, but in the context of a fascinating procession of scenarios that exhibit the Buddha's resplendence of wisdom, his skill in adapting his teachings to the needs and proclivities of his interlocutors, his wit and gentle humour, his majestic sublimity, and his compassionate humanity. Naturally the greatest number of discourses in the *Majjhima* are addressed to the *bhikkhus* – the monks – since they lived in closest proximity to the Master and had followed him into homelessness to take upon themselves his complete course of training. But in the *Majjhima* we do not meet the Buddha only in his role as head of the Order. Repeatedly we see him engaged in living dialogue with people from the many different strata of ancient Indian society – with kings and princes, with brahmins and ascetics, with simple villagers and erudite philosophers, with earnest seekers and vain disputants. It is perhaps in this scripture above all others that the Buddha emerges in the role ascribed to him in the canonical verse of homage to the Blessed One as “the incomparable leader of persons to be tamed, the teacher of gods and humans.”

It is not the Buddha alone who appears in the *Majjhima* in the role of teacher. The work also introduces us to the accomplished disciples he produced who carried on the transmission of his teaching. Of the 152 suttas in the collection, nine are spoken by the venerable *Sāriputta*, the General of the Dhamma; three of

these (MN 9, MN 28, MN 141) have become basic texts for the study of Buddhist doctrine in monastic schools throughout the Theravāda Buddhist world. The venerable Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant during the last twenty-five years of his life, delivers seven suttas and participates in many more. Four suttas are spoken by the venerable Mahā Kaccāna, who excelled in elaborating upon the brief but enigmatic sayings of the Master, and two by the second chief disciple, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, one of which (MN 15) has been recommended for a monk's daily reflections. A dialogue between the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Puṇṇa Mantāniputta (MN 24) explores a scheme of seven stages of purification that was to form the outline for Ācariya Buddhaghosa's great treatise on the Buddhist path, the *Visuddhimagga*. Another dialogue (MN 44) introduces the bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, whose replies to a series of probing questions were so adroit that the Buddha sealed them for posterity with the words "I would have explained it to you in the same way."

The formats of the suttas are also highly variegated. The majority take the form of discourses proper, expositions of the teaching that pour forth uninterrupted from the mouth of the Enlightened One. A few among these are delivered in a series of unadorned instructional propositions or guidelines to practice, but most are interlaced with striking similes and parables, which flash through and light up the dense mass of doctrine in ways that impress it deeply upon the mind. Other suttas unfold in dialogue and discussion, and in some the dramatic or narrative element predominates. Perhaps the best known and most widely appreciated among these is the *Angulimāla Sutta* (MN 86), which relates how the Buddha subdued the notorious bandit Angulimāla and transformed him into an enlightened saint. Equally moving, though in a different way, is the story of Raṭṭhapāla (MN 82), the youth of wealthy family whose precocious insight into the universality of suffering was so compelling that he was prepared to die rather than accept his parents' refusal to permit him to go forth into homelessness. Several suttas centre upon debate, and these highlight the Buddha's wit and delicate sense of irony as well as his dialectical skills. Particular mention might be made of MN 35 and MN 56, with their subtle humour leavening the seriousness of their contents.

In a class of its own is the *Brahmanimantanika Sutta* (MN 49), in which the Buddha visits the Brahma-world to detach a deluded deity from his illusions of grandeur and soon finds himself locked in a gripping contest with Māra the Evil One – an inconceivable alliance of Divinity and Devil defending the sanctity of being against the Buddha's call for deliverance into Nibbāna, the cessation of being.

THE BUDDHA IN THE MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA

Biographical information for its own sake was never an overriding concern of the redactors of the Pali Canon, and thus the data the Majjhima provides on the life of the Buddha is scanty and uncoordinated, included principally because of the light it sheds on the Buddha as the ideal exemplar of the spiritual quest and the fully qualified teacher. Nevertheless, though it subordinates biography to other concerns, the Majjhima does give us the fullest canonical account of the Master's early life as a Bodhisatta, a seeker of enlightenment. With the *Dīgha* it shares the miraculous story of his conception and birth (MN 123), but its version of his great renunciation has been stripped to bare essentials and related in the stark terms of existential realism. In his youth, having seen through the sensual delights to which his princely status entitled him (MN 75.10), the Bodhisatta decided that it was futile to pursue things subject like himself to ageing and death and thus, with his parents weeping, he left the home life and went in search of the ageless and deathless, Nibbāna (MN 26.13). MN 26 tells of his discipleship under two accomplished meditation teachers of the day, his mastery of their systems, and his consequent disillusionment. MN 12 and MN 36 describe his ascetic practices during his six hard years of striving, a path he pursued almost to the point of death. MN 26 and MN 36 both relate in lean and unembellished terms his attainment of enlightenment, which they view from different angles, while MN 26 takes us past the enlightenment to the decision to teach and the instruction of his first disciples. From that point on connected biography breaks off in the Majjhima and can only be reconstructed partially and hypothetically.

Again, despite the absence of any systematic account, the Majjhima offers a sufficient number of cameo portraits of the

Buddha for us to obtain, with the aid of information provided by other sources, a fairly satisfactory picture of his daily activities and annual routine during the forty-five years of his ministry. A commentarial text shows the Buddha's daily schedule as having been divided between periods of instructing the bhikkhus, giving discourses to the laity, and secluded meditation, during which he usually dwelt either in the "abode of voidness" (MN 121.3, MN 122.6) or in the attainment of great compassion. The day's single meal was always taken in the forenoon, either received by invitation or collected on alms-round, and his sleep was restricted to a few hours per night, except in the summer, when he rested briefly during the middle of the day (MN 36.46). The annual routine was determined by the Indian climate, which divided the year into three seasons – a cold season from November through February, a hot season from March through June, and a rainy season from July through October. As was customary among the ascetics of ancient India, the Buddha and his monastic community would remain at a fixed residence during the rainy season, when torrential rains and swollen rivers made travel almost impossible. During the rest of the year he would wander through the Ganges Valley expounding his teachings to all who were prepared to listen.

The Buddha's main seats of residence for the rains retreat (*vassa*) were located at Sāvattī in the state of Kosala and Rājagaha in the state of Magadha. At Sāvattī he would usually stay at Jeta's Grove, a park offered to him by the wealthy merchant Anāthapiṇḍika, and accordingly a great number of Majjhima discourses are recorded as having been given there. Occasionally at Sāvattī he would reside instead at the Eastern Park, offered by the devout lay-woman Visākhā, also known as "Migāra's mother." In Rājagaha he often stayed at the Bamboo Grove, offered by the king of Magadha, Seniya Bimbisāra, or for greater seclusion, on Vulture Peak outside the city. His wanderings, during which he was usually accompanied by a large retinue of bhikkhus, ranged from the Angan country (close to modern West Bengal) to the Himalayan foothills and the Kuru country (modern Delhi). Occasionally, when he saw that a special case required his individual attention, he would leave the Sangha and travel alone (see MN 75, MN 86, MN 140).

Although the Canon is precise and reliable in affording such details, for the early Buddhist community interest focuses upon the Buddha not so much in his concrete historical particularity as in his archetypal significance. Whereas outsiders might view him as merely one among the many spiritual teachers of the day – as “the recluse Gotama” – to his disciples “he is vision, he is knowledge, he is the Dhamma, he is the holy one,... the giver of the Deathless, the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata” (MN 18.12). The last term in this series is the epithet the Buddha uses most often when referring to himself and it underscores his significance as the Great Arrival who brings to fulfilment a cosmic, repetitive pattern of events. The Pali commentators explain the word as meaning “thus come” (*tathā āgata*) and “thus gone” (*tathā gata*), that is, the one who *comes* into our midst bearing the message of deathlessness to which he has *gone* by his own practice of the path. As the Tathāgata he possesses the ten powers of knowledge and the four intrepidities, which enable him to roar his “lion’s roar” in the assemblies (MN 12.9–20). He is not merely a wise sage or a benevolent moralist but the latest in the line of Fully Enlightened Ones, each of whom arises singly in an age of spiritual darkness, discovers the deepest truths about the nature of existence, and establishes a Dispensation (*sāsana*) through which the path to deliverance again becomes accessible to the world. Even those of his disciples who have attained unsurpassable vision, practice, and deliverance still honour and venerate the Tathāgata as one who, enlightened himself, teaches others for the sake of their enlightenment (MN 35.26). Looking back at him following his demise, the first generation of monks could say: “The Blessed One was the arouser of the unarisen path, the producer of the unproduced path, the declarer of the undeclared path; he was the knower of the path, the finder of the path, the one skilled in the path,” which is followed by and attained to afterwards by his disciples (MN 108.5).

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Buddha’s teaching is called the Dhamma, a word that can signify both the truth transmitted by the teaching and the conceptual-verbal medium by which that truth is expressed in order that it can be communicated and made comprehensible. The

Dhamma is not a body of immutable dogmas or a system of speculative thought. It is essentially a means, a raft for crossing over from the "near shore" of ignorance, craving, and suffering to the "far shore" of transcendental peace and freedom (MN 22.13). Because his aim in setting forth his teaching is a pragmatic one – deliverance from suffering – the Buddha can dismiss the whole gamut of metaphysical speculation as a futile endeavour. Those committed to it he compares to a man struck by a poisoned arrow who refuses the surgeon's help until he knows the details about his assailant and his weaponry (MN 63.5). Being struck by the arrow of craving, afflicted by ageing and death, humanity is in urgent need of help. The remedy the Buddha brings as the surgeon for the world (MN 105.27) is the Dhamma, which discloses both the truth of our existential plight and the means by which we can heal our wounds.

The Dhamma that the Buddha discovered and taught consists at its core in Four Noble Truths:

- the noble truth of suffering (*dukkha*)
- the noble truth of the origin of suffering (*dukkhasamudaya*)
- the noble truth of the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodha*)
- the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā*)

It is these four truths that the Buddha awakened to on the night of his enlightenment (MN 4.31, MN 36.42), made known to the world when he set rolling the matchless Wheel of the Dhamma at Benares (MN 141.2), and held aloft through the forty-five years of his ministry as "the teaching special to the Buddhas" (MN 56.18). In the Majjhima Nikāya the Four Noble Truths are expounded concisely at MN 9.14–18 and in detail in MN 141, while in MN 28 the venerable Sāriputta develops an original exposition of the truths unique to that sutta. Yet, though they may be brought forth explicitly only on occasion, the Four Noble Truths structure the entire teaching of the Buddha, containing its many other principles just as the elephant's footprint contains the footprints of all other animals (MN 28.2).

The pivotal notion around which the truths revolve is that of *dukkha*, translated here as "suffering." The Pali word originally meant simply pain and suffering, a meaning it retains in the texts when it is used as a quality of feeling: in these cases it has

been rendered as "pain" or "painful." As the first noble truth, however, *dukkha* has a far wider significance, reflective of a comprehensive philosophical vision. While it draws its affective colouring from its connection with pain and suffering, and certainly includes these, it points beyond such restrictive meanings to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of everything conditioned. This unsatisfactoriness of the conditioned is due to its impermanence, its vulnerability to pain, and its inability to provide complete and lasting satisfaction.

The notion of impermanence (*aniccatā*) forms the bedrock for the Buddha's teaching, having been the initial insight that impelled the Bodhisatta to leave the palace in search of a path to enlightenment. Impermanence, in the Buddhist view, comprises the totality of conditioned existence, ranging in scale from the cosmic to the microscopic. At the far end of the spectrum the Buddha's vision reveals a universe of immense dimensions evolving and disintegrating in repetitive cycles throughout beginningless time – "many aeons of world-contraction, many aeons of world-expansion, many aeons of world-contraction and expansion" (MN 4.27). In the middle range the mark of impermanence comes to manifestation in our inescapable mortality, our condition of being bound to ageing, sickness, and death (MN 26.5), of possessing a body that is subject "to being worn and rubbed away, to dissolution and disintegration" (MN 74.9). And at the close end of the spectrum, the Buddha's teaching discloses the radical impermanence uncovered only by sustained attention to experience in its living immediacy: the fact that all the constituents of our being, bodily and mental, are in constant process, arising and passing away in rapid succession from moment to moment without any persistent underlying substance. In the very act of observation they are undergoing "destruction, vanishing, fading away, and ceasing" (MN 74.11).

This characteristic of impermanence that marks everything conditioned leads directly to the recognition of the universality of *dukkha* or suffering. The Buddha underscores this all-pervasive aspect of *dukkha* when, in his explanation of the first noble truth, he says, "In short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering." The five aggregates affected by clinging (*pañc'upādānakkhandhā*) are a classificatory scheme that the Buddha had devised for demonstrating the composite nature of

personality. The scheme comprises every possible type of conditioned state, which it distributes into five categories – material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. The aggregate of material form (*rūpa*) includes the physical body with its sense faculties as well as external material objects. The aggregate of feeling (*vedanā*) is the affective element in experience, either pleasant, painful, or neutral. Perception (*saññā*), the third aggregate, is the factor responsible for noting the qualities of things and also accounts for recognition and memory. The formations aggregate (*sankhārā*) is an umbrella term that includes all volitional, emotive, and intellectual aspects of mental life. And consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the fifth aggregate, is the basic awareness of an object indispensable to all cognition. As the venerable Sāriputta shows in his masterly analysis of the first noble truth, representatives of all five aggregates are present on every occasion of experience, arising in connection with each of the six sense faculties and their objects (MN 28.28).

The Buddha's statement that the five aggregates are *dukkha* thus reveals that the very things we identify with and hold to as the basis for happiness, rightly seen, are the basis for the suffering that we dread. Even when we feel ourselves comfortable and secure, the instability of the aggregates is itself a source of oppression and keeps us perpetually exposed to suffering in its more blatant forms. The whole situation becomes multiplied further to dimensions beyond calculation when we take into account the Buddha's disclosure of the fact of rebirth. All beings in whom ignorance and craving remain present wander on in the cycle of repeated existence, *saṃsāra*, in which each turn brings them the suffering of new birth, ageing, illness, and death. All states of existence within *saṃsāra*, being necessarily transitory and subject to change, are incapable of providing lasting security. Life in any world is unstable, it is swept away, it has no shelter and protector, nothing of its own (MN 82.36).

THE TEACHING OF NON-SELF

Inextricably tied up with impermanence and suffering is a third principle intrinsic to all phenomena of existence. This is the characteristic of non-self (*anattā*), and the three together are called the three marks or characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*). The Buddha

teaches, contrary to our most cherished beliefs, that our personality – the five aggregates – cannot be identified as self, as an enduring and substantial ground of personal identity. The notion of self has only a conventional validity, as a convenient shorthand device for denoting a composite insubstantial situation. It does not signify any ultimate immutable entity subsisting at the core of our being. The bodily and mental factors are transitory phenomena, constantly arising and passing away, processes creating the appearance of selfhood through their causal continuity and interdependent functioning. Nor does the Buddha posit a self outside and beyond the five aggregates. The notion of selfhood, treated as an ultimate, he regards as a product of ignorance, and all the diverse attempts to substantiate this notion by identifying it with some aspect of the personality he describes as “clinging to a doctrine of self.”

In several suttas in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha gives forceful expression to his repudiation of views of self. In MN 102 he undertakes a far-reaching survey of the various propositions put forth about the self, declaring them all to be “conditioned and gross.” In MN 2.8 six views of self are branded as “the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views.” In MN 11 he compares his teaching point by point with those of other recluses and brahmins and shows that beneath their apparent similarities, they finally diverge on just this one crucial point – the rejection of views of self – which undermines the agreements. MN 22 offers a series of arguments against the view, of self, culminating in the Buddha’s declaration that he does not see any doctrine of self that would not lead to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. In his map of the steps to liberation, personality view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), the positing of a self in relation to the five aggregates, is held to be the first fetter to be broken with the arising of the “vision of the Dhamma.”

The principle of non-self is shown in the suttas to follow logically from the two marks of impermanence and suffering. The standard formula states that what is impermanent is pain or suffering, and what is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change cannot be regarded as mine, I, or self (MN 22.26, MN 35.20, etc.). Other passages highlight the relationship among the three characteristics from different angles. MN 28

points out that when the external physical elements – earth, water, fire, and air – vast as they are, are periodically destroyed in cosmic cataclysms, there can be no considering this transitory body as self. MN 148 demonstrates by a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that impermanence implies non-self: when all the factors of being are clearly subject to rise and fall, to identify anything among them with self is to be left with the untenable thesis that self is subject to rise and fall. MN 35.19 connects the mark of non-self with that of dukkha by arguing that because we cannot bend the five aggregates to our will, they cannot be taken as mine, I, or self.

THE ORIGIN AND CESSATION OF SUFFERING

The second of the Four Noble Truths makes known the origin or cause of suffering, which the Buddha identifies as craving (*taṇhā*) in its three aspects: craving for sensual pleasures; craving for being, that is, for continued existence; and craving for non-being, that is, for personal annihilation. The third truth states the converse of the second truth, that with the elimination of craving the suffering that originates from it will cease without remainder.

The Buddha's discovery of the causal link between craving and suffering accounts for the apparent "pessimistic" streak that emerges in several suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya: in MN 13 with its disquisition on the dangers in sensual pleasures, form, and feeling; in MN 10 and MN 119 with their cemetery meditations; in MN 22, MN 54, and MN 75 with their shocking similes for sensual pleasures. Such teachings are part of the Buddha's tactical approach to guiding his disciples to liberation. By its own inherent nature craving springs up and thrives wherever it finds something that appears pleasant and delightful. It proliferates through mistaken perception – the perception of sense objects as enjoyable – and thus to break the grip of craving on the mind, exhortation is often not enough. The Buddha must make people see that the things they yearn for and frantically pursue are really suffering, and he does this by exposing the dangers concealed beneath their sweet and charming exteriors.

Although the second and third noble truths have an immediate psychological validity, they also have a deeper aspect

brought to light in the suttas. The middle two truths as stated in the general formulation of the Four Noble Truths are actually telescoped versions of a longer formulation that discloses the origin and cessation of bondage in *saṃsāra*. The doctrine in which this expanded version of the two truths is set forth is called *paṭicca samuppāda*, dependent origination. In its fullest statement the doctrine spells out the origination and cessation of suffering in terms of twelve factors connected together in eleven propositions. This formulation, laid down schematically, will be found at MN 38.17 in its order of arising and at MN 38.20 in its order of ceasing. MN 115.11 includes both sequences together preceded by a statement of the general principle of conditionality that underlies the applied doctrine. A more elaborate version giving a factorial analysis of each term in the series is presented at MN 9.21–66, and a version exemplified in the course of an individual life at MN 38.26–40. Condensed versions are also found, notably at MN 1.171, MN 11.16, and MN 75.24–25. The venerable Sāriputta quotes the Buddha as saying that one who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma and one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination (MN 28.28).

According to the usual interpretation, the series of twelve factors extends over three lives and divides into causal and resultant phases. The gist of it can be briefly explained as follows. Because of ignorance (*avijjā*) – defined as non-knowledge of the Four Noble Truths – a person engages in volitional actions or *kamma*, which may be bodily, verbal, or mental, wholesome or unwholesome. These kammic actions are the formations (*sankhārā*), and they ripen in states of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) – first as the rebirth-consciousness at the moment of conception and thereafter as the passive states of consciousness resulting from *kamma* that matures in the course of a lifetime. Along with consciousness there arises mentality-materiality (*nāmarūpa*), the psychophysical organism, which is equipped with the sixfold base (*saḷāyatana*), the five physical sense faculties and mind as the faculty of the higher cognitive functions. Via the sense faculties contact (*phassa*) takes place between consciousness and its objects, and contact conditions feeling (*vedanā*). The links from consciousness through feeling are the products of past *kamma*, of the causal phase represented by ignorance and formations. With the next link the kammically active phase of the present

life begins, productive of a new existence in the future. Conditioned by feeling, craving (*taṇhā*) arises, this being the second noble truth. When craving intensifies it gives rise to clinging (*upādāna*), through which one again engages in volitional actions pregnant with a renewal of existence (*bhava*). The new existence begins with birth (*jāti*), which inevitably leads to ageing and death (*jarāmaraṇa*).

The teaching of dependent origination also shows how the round of existence can be broken. With the arising of true knowledge, full penetration of the Four Noble Truths, ignorance is eradicated. Consequently the mind no longer indulges in craving and clinging, action loses its potential to generate rebirth, and deprived thus of its fuel, the round comes to an end. This marks the goal of the teaching signalled by the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering.

NIBBĀNA

The state that supervenes when ignorance and craving have been uprooted is called Nibbāna (Sanskrit, *Nirvāṇa*), and no conception in the Buddha's teaching has proved so refractory to conceptual pinning down as this one. In a way such elusiveness is only to be expected, since Nibbāna is described precisely as "profound, hard to see and hard to understand,...unattainable by mere reasoning" (MN 26.19). Yet in this same passage the Buddha also says that Nibbāna is to be experienced by the wise and in the suttas he gives enough indications of its nature to convey some idea of its desirability.

The Pali Canon offers sufficient evidence to dispense with the opinion of some interpreters that Nibbāna is sheer annihilation; even the more sophisticated view that Nibbāna is merely the destruction of defilements and the extinction of existence cannot stand up under scrutiny. Probably the most compelling testimony against that view is the well-known passage from the *Udāna* that declares with reference to Nibbāna that "there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned," the existence of which makes possible "escape from the born, become, made, and conditioned" (Ud 8:3/80). The Majjhima Nikāya characterises Nibbāna in similar ways. It is "the unborn, unageing, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled supreme security from

bondage," which the Buddha attained to on the night of his enlightenment (MN 26.18). Its pre-eminent reality is affirmed by the Buddha when he calls Nibbāna the supreme foundation of truth, whose nature is undeceptive and which ranks as the supreme noble truth (MN 140.26). Nibbāna cannot be perceived by those who live in lust and hate, but it can be seen with the arising of spiritual vision, and by fixing the mind upon it in the depths of meditation, the disciple can attain the destruction of the taints (MN 26.19, MN 75.24, MN 64.9).

The Buddha does not devote many words to a philosophical definition of Nibbāna. One reason is that Nibbāna, being unconditioned, transcendent, and supramundane, does not easily lend itself to definition in terms of concepts that are inescapably tied to the conditioned, manifest, and mundane. Another is that the Buddha's objective is the practical one of leading beings to release from suffering, and thus his principal approach to the characterisation of Nibbāna is to inspire the incentive to attain it and to show what must be done to accomplish this. To show Nibbāna as desirable, as the aim of striving, he describes it as the highest bliss, as the supreme state of sublime peace, as the ageless, deathless, and sorrowless, as the supreme security from bondage. To show what must be done to attain Nibbāna, to indicate that the goal implies a definite task, he describes it as the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion (MN 26.19). Above all, Nibbāna is the cessation of suffering, and for those who seek an end to suffering such a designation is enough to beckon them towards the path.

THE WAY TO THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING

The fourth noble truth completes the pattern established by the first three truths by revealing the means to eliminate craving and thereby bring an end to suffering. This truth teaches the "Middle Way" discovered by the Buddha, the Noble Eightfold Path:

1. right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*)
2. right intention (*sammā sankappa*)
3. right speech (*sammā vācā*)

4. right action (*sammā kammanta*)
5. right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*)
6. right effort (*sammā vāyāma*)
7. right mindfulness (*sammā sati*)
8. right concentration (*sammā samādhi*)

Mentioned countless times throughout the Majjhima Nikāya, the Noble Eightfold Path is explained in detail in two full suttas. MN 141 gives a factorial analysis of the eight components of the path using the definitions that are standard in the Pali Canon; MN 117 expounds the path from a different angle under the rubric of "noble right concentration with its supports and its requisites." The Buddha there makes the important distinction between the mundane and supramundane stages of the path, defines the first five factors for both stages, and shows how the path factors function in unison in the common task of providing an outlet from suffering. Other suttas explore in greater detail individual components of the path. Thus MN 9 provides an in-depth exposition of right view, MN 10 of right mindfulness, MN 19 of right intention. MN 44.11 explains that the eight factors can be incorporated into three "aggregates" of training. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood make up the aggregate of virtue or moral discipline (*sīla*); right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration make up the aggregate of concentration (*samādhi*); and right view and right intention make up the aggregate of understanding or wisdom (*paññā*). This threefold sequence in turn serves as the basic outline for the gradual training, to be discussed later.

In the Pali Canon the practices conducing to Nibbāna are often elaborated into a more complex set comprising seven groups of intersecting factors. The later tradition designates them the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment (*bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*), but the Buddha himself simply speaks of them without a collective name as "the things that I have taught you after directly knowing them" (MN 103.3, MN 104.5). Towards the end of his life he stressed to the Sangha that the long duration of his teaching in the world depends upon the accurate preservation of these factors and their being practised by his followers in harmony, free from contention.

The constituents of this set are as follows:

- the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*)
- the four right kinds of striving (*sammappadhāna*)
- the four bases for spiritual power (*iddhipāda*)
- the five faculties (*indriya*)
- the five powers (*bala*)
- the seven enlightenment factors (*bojjhanga*)
- the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya aṭṭhangika magga*)

Each group is defined in full at MN 77.15–21. As examination will show, most of these groups are simply subdivisions or rearrangements of factors of the eightfold path made to highlight different aspects of the practice. Thus, for example, the four foundations of mindfulness are an elaboration of right mindfulness; the four right kinds of striving, an elaboration of right effort. The development of the groups is therefore integral and not sequential. MN 118, for example, shows how the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness fulfils the development of the seven enlightenment factors, and MN 149.10 states that one engaged in insight meditation on the senses brings to maturity all thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment.

Factorial analysis of the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment brings to light the central importance of four factors among them – energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. From this a clear picture of the essential practice can be sketched. One begins with a conceptual understanding of the Dhamma and an intention to achieve the goal, the first two path factors. Then, out of faith, one accepts the moral discipline regulating speech, action, and livelihood. With virtue as a basis one energetically applies the mind to cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness. As mindfulness matures it issues in deepened concentration, and the concentrated mind, by investigation, arrives at wisdom, a penetrative understanding of the principles originally grasped only conceptually.

THE GRADUAL TRAINING

In the Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha often expounds the practice of the path as a gradual training (*anupubbasikkhā*), which unfolds in stages from the first step to the final goal. This gradual training

is a finer subdivision of the threefold division of the path into virtue, concentration, and wisdom. Invariably in the suttas the sequence on the gradual training is shown to start with the going forth into homelessness and the adoption of the lifestyle of a bhikkhu, a Buddhist monk. This immediately calls attention to the importance of the monastic life in the Buddha's Dispensation. In principle the entire practice of the Noble Eightfold Path is open to people from any mode of life, monastic or lay, and the Buddha confirms that many among his lay followers were accomplished in the Dhamma and had attained the first three of the four supramundane stages (MN 68.18–23; MN 73.9–22; the Theravādin position is that lay followers can also attain the fourth stage, arahantship, but having done so they immediately seek the going forth or pass away). However, the fact remains that the household life inevitably tends to impede the single-hearted quest for deliverance by fostering a multitude of worldly concerns and personal attachments. Hence the Buddha himself went forth into homelessness as the preliminary step in his own noble quest, and after his enlightenment he established the Sangha, the order of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, as the resort for those who wish to devote themselves fully to the practice of his teaching undeflected by the cares of household life.

The main paradigm for the gradual training found in the Majjhima Nikāya is that laid out in MN 27 and MN 51; alternative versions are found at MN 38, MN 39, MN 53, MN 107, and MN 125, and some of the more important variations will be briefly noted. The sequence opens with the appearance of a Tathāgata in the world and his exposition of the Dhamma, hearing which the disciple acquires faith and follows the Teacher into homelessness. Having gone forth, he undertakes and observes the rules of discipline that promote the purification of conduct and livelihood. The next three steps – contentment, restraint of the sense faculties, and mindfulness and full awareness – are intended to internalise the process of purification and thereby bridge the transition from virtue to concentration. Alternative versions (MN 39, MN 53, MN 107, MN 125) insert two additional steps here, moderation in eating and devotion to wakefulness.

The direct training in concentration comes to prominence in the section on the abandonment of the five hindrances. The five

hindrances – sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt – are the primary obstacles to meditative development and their removal is therefore essential for the mind to be brought to a state of calm and unification. In the sequence on the gradual training the overcoming of the hindrances is treated only schematically; other parts of the Canon provide more practical instruction, amplified still more in the commentaries. The passage on the hindrances is graced in MN 39 by a series of similes illustrating the contrast between the bondage imposed by the hindrances and the joyful sense of freedom that is won when they are abandoned.

The next stage in the sequence describes the attainment of the *jhānas*, profound states of concentration in which the mind becomes fully absorbed in its object. The Buddha enumerates four *jhānas*, named simply after their numerical position in the series, each more refined and elevated than its predecessor. The *jhānas* are always described by the same formulas, which in several suttas (MN 39, MN 77, MN 119) are augmented by similes of great beauty. Although in the Theravāda tradition the *jhānas* are not regarded as indispensable to the attainment of enlightenment, the Buddha invariably includes them in the full gradual training because of the contribution they make to the intrinsic perfection of the path and because the deep concentration they induce provides a solid base for the cultivation of insight. While still mundane the *jhānas* are the “footsteps of the Tathāgata” (MN 27.19–22) and foretokens of the bliss of Nibbāna that lies at the training’s end.

From the fourth *jhāna* three alternative lines of further development become possible. In a number of passages outside the sequence on the gradual training (MN 8, MN 25, MN 26, MN 66, etc.) the Buddha mentions four meditative states that continue the mental unification established by the *jhānas*. These states, described as “the liberations that are peaceful and immaterial,” are, like the *jhānas*, also mundane. Distinguished from the *jhānas* by their transcendence of the subtle mental image that forms the object in the *jhānas*, they are named after their own exalted objects: the base of infinite space, the base of infinite consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. In the Pali commentaries these states came to be called the immaterial or formless *jhānas* (*arūpajjhāna*).

A second line of development disclosed by the suttas is the acquisition of supernormal knowledge. The Buddha frequently mentions six types as a group, which come to be called the six kinds of direct knowledge (*chalabhiññā*; the expression does not occur in the Majjhima). The last of these, the knowledge of the destruction of the taints, is supramundane and thus properly belongs to the third line of development. But the other five are all mundane, products of the extraordinarily powerful degree of mental concentration achieved in the fourth jhāna: the supernormal powers, the divine ear, the ability to read the minds of others, the recollection of past lives, and the divine eye (MN 6, MN 73, MN 77, MN 108).

The jhānas and the mundane types of direct knowledge by themselves do not issue in enlightenment and liberation. As lofty and peaceful as these attainments are, they can only suppress the defilements that sustain the round of rebirths but cannot eradicate them. To uproot the defilements at the most fundamental level, and thereby yield the fruits of enlightenment and deliverance, the meditative process must be redirected along a third line of development, one which does not necessarily presuppose the former two. This is the contemplation of "things as they actually are," which results in increasingly deeper insights into the nature of existence and culminates in the final goal, the attainment of arahantship.

This line of development is the one the Buddha pursues in the sequence on the gradual training, though he precedes it by descriptions of two of the direct knowledges, the recollection of past lives and the divine eye. The three together, which figured prominently in the Buddha's own enlightenment (MN 4.27-30), are collectively called the three true knowledges (*tevijjā*). Although the first two among these are not essential to the realisation of arahantship, we may assume that the Buddha includes them here because they reveal the truly vast and profound dimensions of suffering in saṃsāra and thereby prepare the mind for the penetration of the Four Noble Truths, in which that suffering is diagnosed and surmounted.

The process of contemplation by which the meditator develops insight is not explicitly shown as such in the sequence on the gradual training. It is only implied by the exhibiting of its final fruit, here called the knowledge of the destruction of the

taints. The *āsavas* or taints are a classification of defilements considered in their role of sustaining the saṃsāric round. The commentaries derive the word from a root *su* meaning "to flow." Scholars differ as to whether the flow implied by the prefix *ā* is inward or outward; hence some have rendered it as "influxes" or "influences," others as "outflows" or "effluents." A stock passage in the suttas indicates the term's real significance independently of etymology when it describes the *āsavas* as states "that defile, bring renewal of being, give trouble, ripen in suffering, and lead to future birth, ageing, and death" (MN 36.47, etc.). Thus other translators, bypassing the literal meaning, have rendered it "cankers," "corruptions," or "taints," the latter being the choice of Ven. Nāṇamoli. The three taints mentioned in the suttas are virtual synonyms for craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and the ignorance that appears at the head of the formula for dependent origination. When the disciple's mind has been liberated from the taints by the completion of the path of arahantship, he reviews his newly won freedom and roars his lion's roar: "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being."

APPROACHES TO MEDITATION

The methods of meditation taught by the Buddha in the Pali Canon fall into two broad systems. One is the development of serenity (*samatha*), which aims at concentration (*saṃādhi*); the other is the development of insight (*vipassanā*), which aims at understanding or wisdom (*paññā*). In the Buddha's system of mental training the role of serenity is subordinated to that of insight because the latter is the crucial instrument needed to uproot the ignorance at the bottom of saṃsāric bondage. The attainments possible through serenity meditation were known to Indian contemplatives long before the advent of the Buddha. The Buddha himself mastered the two highest stages under his early teachers but found that they only led to higher planes of rebirth, not to genuine enlightenment (MN 26.15-16). However, because the unification of mind induced by the practice of concentration contributes to clear understanding, the Buddha incorporated the techniques of serenity meditation and the resulting

levels of absorption into his own system, treating them as a foundation and preparation for insight and as a "pleasant abiding here and now."

The attainments reached by the practice of serenity meditation are, as mentioned in the preceding section, the eight absorptions – the four *jhānas* and the four immaterial states – each of which serves as the basis for the next. Strangely, the suttas do not explicitly prescribe specific meditation subjects as the means for attaining the *jhānas*, but the commentarial literature such as the *Visuddhimagga* enables us to make the connections. Among the meditation topics enumerated in the suttas, eight of the ten *kaṣiṇas* (MN 77.24) are recognised as suitable for attaining all four *jhānas*, the last two being the respective supports for the first two immaterial attainments. The eight bases for transcendence seem to be a more finely differentiated treatment of meditation on the colour *kaṣiṇas*, as are the first three of the eight liberations (MN 77.22–23). Mindfulness of breathing, to which the Buddha devotes an entire sutta (MN 118), provides an ever accessible meditation subject that can be pursued through all four *jhānas* and also used to develop insight. Another method for attaining the *jhānas* mentioned in the suttas is the four divine abodes (*brahmavihāra*) – boundless loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy (i.e., gladness at others' success), and equanimity (MN 7, MN 40, etc.). Tradition holds the first three to be capable of leading to the three lower *jhānas*, the last of inducing the fourth *jhāna*. The immaterial attainments are to be reached by fixing the mind on the specific object of each attainment – infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and the state that can only be described as neither percipient nor as non-percipient.

Whereas in serenity meditation the meditator attempts to focus upon a single uniform object abstracted from actual experience, in insight meditation the endeavour is made to contemplate, from a position of detached observation, the ever-shifting flux of experience itself in order to penetrate through to the essential nature of bodily and mental phenomena. The Buddha teaches that the craving and clinging that hold us in bondage are sustained by a network of "conceivings" (*maññita*) – deluded views, conceits, and suppositions that the mind fabricates by an internal process of mental commentary or "proliferation" (*papañca*) and then projects out upon the world, taking them to

possess objective validity. The task of insight meditation is to sever our attachments by enabling us to pierce through this net of conceptual projections in order to see things as they really are.

To see things as they really are means to see them in terms of the three characteristics – as impermanent, as painful or suffering, and as not self. Since the three characteristics are closely interlinked, any one of them can be made the main portal for entering the domain of insight, but the Buddha's usual approach is to show all three together – impermanence implying suffering and the two in conjunction implying the absence of self. When the noble disciple sees all the factors of being as stamped with these three marks, he no longer identifies with them, no longer appropriates them by taking them to be mine, I, or self. Seeing thus, he becomes disenchanted with all formations. When he becomes disenchanted, his lust and attachment fade away and his mind is liberated from the taints.

Instructions for the development of insight in the Majjhima Nikāya, though concise, are many and diverse. The single most important lesson on the practice conducing to insight is the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (MN 10; also found in the Dīgha Nikāya with an amplified section on the Four Noble Truths). The sutta sets forth a comprehensive system called *satipaṭṭhāna* designed to train the mind to see with microscopic precision the true nature of the body, feelings, states of mind, and mental objects. The system is sometimes taken to be the paradigm for the practice of "bare insight" – the direct contemplation of mental and bodily phenomena without a prior foundation of jhāna – and, while several exercises described in the sutta can also lead to the jhānas, the arousing of insight is clearly the intent of the method.

Other suttas in the Majjhima Nikāya describe approaches to developing insight that either elaborate upon the *satipaṭṭhāna* contemplations or reach them from a different starting point. Thus MN 118 shows how the practice of mindfulness of breathing fulfils all four foundations of mindfulness, not the first alone as shown in MN 10. Several suttas – MN 28, MN 62, MN 140 – present more detailed instructions on the contemplation of the elements. MN 37, MN 74, and MN 140 contain illuminating passages on the contemplation of feeling. In some suttas the Buddha uses the five aggregates as the groundwork for insight

contemplation (e.g., MN 22, MN 109); in some, the six sense bases (e.g., MN 137, MN 148, MN 149); in some, the two combined (MN 147). MN 112 has sections dealing with insight based on the five aggregates, the six elements, and the six sense bases, and as resulting from the gradual training. MN 52 and MN 64 show that insight can also be aroused with the *jhānas*, the immaterial attainments, and the divine abodes as its objects: the disciple enters any of these states and contemplates its constituent factors as subject to the three characteristics.

Several sequences of meditative states mentioned in the *Majjhima* culminate in an attainment called the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). Although this state always follows the last immaterial attainment, it is not, as may be supposed, merely one higher step in the scale of concentration. Strictly speaking, the attainment of cessation pertains neither to serenity nor to insight. It is a state reached by the combined powers of serenity and insight in which all mental processes are temporarily suspended. The attainment is said to be accessible only to non-returners and arahants who have also mastered the *jhānas* and immaterial states. Detailed canonical discussions of it are found in MN 43 and MN 44.

THE FOUR PLANES OF LIBERATION

The practice of the Buddhist path evolves in two distinct stages, a mundane (*lokiya*) or preparatory stage and a supramundane (*lokuttara*) or consummate stage. The mundane path is developed when the disciple undertakes the gradual training in virtue, concentration, and wisdom. This reaches its peak in the practice of insight meditation, which deepens direct experience of the three characteristics of existence. When the practitioner's faculties have arrived at an adequate degree of maturity, the mundane path gives birth to the supramundane path, so called because it leads directly and infallibly out of (*uttara*) the world (*loka*) comprising the three realms of existence to the attainment of "the deathless element," *Nibbāna*.

Progress along the supramundane path is marked by four major breakthroughs, each of which ushers the disciple through two subordinate phases called the path (*magga*) and its fruit (*phala*). The phase of path has the special function of eliminating

a determinate number of defilements to which it is directly opposed, the mental impediments that hold us in bondage to the round of rebirths. When the work of the path has been completed, the disciple realises its corresponding fruit, the degree of liberation made accessible by that particular path. The canonical formula of homage to the Sangha refers obliquely to these four planes of liberation – each with its phase of path and fruit – when it extols the Blessed One's community of noble disciples as comprising "the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals" (MN 7.7). These four pairs are obtained by taking, for each stage, the one who has entered upon the way to realisation of the fruit and the one who has attained the fruit.

In the suttas the Buddha highlights the specific characteristics of each supramundane stage in two ways: by mentioning the defilements that are abandoned on each plane and the consequences its attainment bears on the process of rebirth (see, e.g., MN 6.11–13, 19; MN 22.42–45, etc.). He handles the elimination of the defilements by classifying these into a tenfold group called the ten fetters (*samyojana*). The disciple enters upon the first supramundane path either as a Dhamma-follower (*dhammānusārin*) or as a faith-follower (*saddhānusārin*); the former is one in whom wisdom is the dominant faculty, the latter one who progresses by the impetus of faith. This path, the path of stream-entry, has the task of eradicating the grossest three fetters: personality view, i.e., the view of a self among the five aggregates; doubt in the Buddha and his teaching; and adherence to external rules and observances, either ritualistic or ascetic, in the belief that they can bring purification. When the disciple realises the fruit of this path he becomes a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), who has entered the "stream" of the Noble Eightfold Path that will carry him irreversibly to Nibbāna. The stream-enterer is bound to reach final liberation in a maximum of seven more births, which all occur either in the human world or in the heavenly realms.

The second supramundane path attenuates to a still greater degree the root defilements of lust, hatred, and delusion, though without yet eradicating them. On realising the fruit of this path the disciple becomes a once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*), who is due to return to this world (i.e., the sense-sphere realm) only one more time and then make an end of suffering. The third path eradicates the next two fetters, sensual desire and ill will; it

issues in the fruit of the non-returner (*anāgāmin*), who is due to reappear by spontaneous birth in one of the special celestial realms called the Pure Abodes, and there attain final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world.

The fourth and last supramundane path is the path of arahantship. This path eradicates the five higher fetters: desire for rebirth in the fine-material realm and in the immaterial realm, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. By realisation of the fruit of this path the practitioner becomes an arahant, a fully liberated one, who "here and now enters upon and abides in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints." The arahant will be discussed further in the next section.

The commentaries (often referred to in the notes to this translation) develop an interpretation of the paths and fruits based upon the systemisation of the Buddha's teachings known as the Abhidhamma. Drawing upon the Abhidhamma depiction of the mind as a sequence of discrete momentary acts of consciousness, called *cittas*, the commentaries understand each supramundane path to be a single occasion of consciousness arising at the climax of a series of insights into the Dhamma. Each of the four momentary path *cittas* eliminates its own fixed set of defilements, to be followed immediately by its fruition, which consists of a string of momentary *cittas* that enjoy the bliss of Nibbāna made accessible by the breakthrough of the path. Though this conception of the paths and fruits is regularly employed by the commentators as an hermeneutical tool for interpreting the suttas, it is not explicitly formulated as such in the old Nikāyas and at times there even appears to be a tension between the two (for example, in the passage at MN 142.5 describing the four persons on the path as distinct recipients of offerings).

THE ARAHANT

The ideal figure of the Majjhima Nikāya, as of the Pali Canon as a whole, is the arahant. The word "arahant" itself derives from a root meaning "to be worthy." Ven. Ñāṇamoli renders it "accomplished" and "Accomplished One" when it is used as an epithet of the Buddha, probably to be consistent with his practice of translating all the Buddha's epithets. In its other occurrences he

leaves it untranslated. The word seems to have been of pre-Buddhist coinage but was taken over by the Buddha to designate the individual who has reached the final fruit of the path.

The suttas employ a stock description of the arahant that summarises his accomplishments: he is "one with taints destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge" (MN 1.51, etc.). Variant descriptions emphasise different aspects of the arahant's attainment. Thus one sutta offers a series of metaphorical epithets that the Buddha himself interprets as representing the arahant's abandoning of ignorance, craving, and conceit, his eradication of fetters, and his freedom from the round of births (MN 22.30–35). Elsewhere the Buddha ascribes a different set of epithets to the arahant – several of brahmanical currency – deriving these terms by imaginative etymology from the arahant's elimination of all evil unwholesome states (MN 39.22–29).

The Majjhima records differences of type among the arahants, which are ascribed to the diversity in their faculties. In MN 70 the Buddha introduces a basic distinction between those arahants who are "liberated-in-both-ways" and those who are "liberated-by-wisdom"; whereas the former are capable of abiding in the immaterial attainments, the latter lack that capacity. Arahants are further distinguished as those who possess, besides the knowledge of the destruction of the taints necessary to all arahants, all three of the true knowledges and all six of the direct knowledges. In MN 108 the venerable Ānanda indicates that those arahants who possessed the six direct knowledges were accorded special veneration and authority in the Sangha following the Buddha's passing away.

Beneath these incidental differences, however, all arahants alike share the same essential accomplishments – the destruction of all defilements and the freedom from future rebirths. They possess three unsurpassable qualities – unsurpassable vision, unsurpassable practice of the way, and unsurpassable deliverance (MN 35.26). They are endowed with the ten factors of one beyond training – the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path augmented by right knowledge and right deliverance (MN 65.34, MN 78.14). They possess the four foundations – the

foundations of wisdom, of truth, of relinquishment, and of peace (MN 140.11). And by the eradication of lust, hate, and delusion all arahants have access to a unique meditative attainment called the fruition attainment of arahantship, described as the unshakeable deliverance of mind, the immeasurable deliverance of mind, the void deliverance of mind, the deliverance of mind through nothingness, and the signless deliverance of mind (MN 43.35–37).

KAMMA AND REBIRTH

According to the Buddha's teaching, all beings except the arahants are subject to "renewal of being in the future" (*punabbhava*), that is, to rebirth. Rebirth, in the Buddhist conception, is not the transmigration of a self or soul but the continuation of a process, a flux of becoming in which successive lives are linked together by causal transmission of influence rather than by substantial identity. The basic causal pattern underlying the process is that defined by the teaching of dependent origination (see above, pp. 30–31), which also demonstrates how rebirth is possible without a reincarnating self.

The process of rebirth, the Buddha teaches, exhibits a definite lawfulness essentially ethical in character. This ethical character is established by the fundamental dynamism that determines the states into which beings are reborn and the circumstances they encounter in the course of their lives. That dynamism is *kamma*, volitional action of body, speech, and mind. Those beings who engage in bad actions – actions motivated by the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate, and delusion – generate unwholesome kamma that leads them to rebirth into lower states of existence and, if it ripens in the human world, brings them pain and misfortune. Those beings who engage in good actions – actions motivated by the three wholesome roots of non-greed, non-hate, and non-delusion – generate wholesome kamma that leads them to higher states of existence and ripens in the human world as pleasure and good fortune. Because the deeds a person performs in the course of a single life can be extremely varied, the type of rebirth that lies ahead of him can be very unpredictable, as the Buddha shows in MN 136. But despite this empirical variability, an invariable law governs the

direct relationship between types of actions and the types of results they yield, the basic correlations being sketched by the Buddha in MN 57 and laid out in greater detail in MN 135.

In several suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha refers to various planes of existence into which rebirth can occur and he also gives some indication of the types of kamma that lead to those planes. This cosmological typography is not, from the Buddhist standpoint, the product of conjecture or fantasy but a matter directly known to the Buddha through his "Tathāgata's powers of knowledge" (MN 12.36); to some extent the process is also verifiable by those who gain the divine eye (e.g., MN 39.20). A brief overview may be given here of the planes of rebirth recognised in Buddhist cosmology and of their kammic antecedents, as systematised in the developed Theravāda tradition.

The Buddhist cosmos is divided into three broad realms – the sense-sphere realm, the fine-material realm, and the immaterial realm. Each of these comprises a range of subsidiary planes, amounting to a total of thirty-one planes of existence.

The sense-sphere realm, so called because sensual desire predominates there, consists of eleven planes divided into two groups, the bad destinations and the good destinations. The bad destinations or "states of deprivation" (*apāya*) are four in number: the hells, which are states of intense torment as described in MN 129 and MN 130; the animal kingdom; the sphere of ghosts (*peta*), beings afflicted with incessant hunger and thirst; and the sphere of titans (*asura*), beings involved in constant combat (not mentioned as a separate plane in the Majjhima). The courses of kamma leading to rebirth into these planes are classified into a set of ten – three of body, four of speech, and three of mind. These are enumerated briefly at MN 9.4 and explicated in MN 41. Gradations in the gravity of the evil intentions responsible for these deeds account for specific differences in the mode of rebirth resulting from such actions.

The good destinations in the sense-sphere realm are the human world and the heavenly planes. The latter are sixfold: the gods under the Four Great Kings; the gods of the Thirty-three (*tāvātimsa*), who are presided over by Sakka, a Buddhist metamorphosis of Indra, depicted as a devotee of the Buddha, faithful, but prone to negligence (MN 37); the Yāma gods; the gods of the Tusita heaven, the abode of the Bodhisatta before his final

birth (MN 123); the gods who delight in creating; and the gods who wield power over others' creations. The last is said to be the abode of Māra, the Tempter in Buddhism, who besides being a symbol for Desire and Death, is also regarded as a powerful deity with evil designs, keen to prevent beings from escaping the net of saṃsāra. The kammic cause for rebirth into the good destinations of the sense-sphere realm is the practice of the ten courses of wholesome action, defined at MN 9.8 and in MN 41.

In the fine-material realm the grosser types of matter are absent and the bliss, power, luminosity, and vitality of its denizens are far superior to those in the sense-sphere realm. The fine-material realm consists of sixteen planes, which are the objective counterparts of the four jhānas. Attainment of the first jhāna leads to rebirth among Brahmā's Assembly, the Ministers of Brahmā and the Mahā Brahmās, according to whether it is developed to an inferior, middling, or superior degree. Baka the Brahmā (MN 49) and Brahmā Sahampati (MN 26, MN 67) seem to be residents of the last-named plane. The suttas mention especially the divine abodes as the path to the company of Brahmā (MN 99.24–27). Attainment of the second jhāna in the same three degrees leads respectively to rebirth among the gods of Limited Radiance, of Immeasurable Radiance, and of Streaming Radiance; the third jhāna to rebirth among the gods of Limited Glory, of Immeasurable Glory, and of Refulgent Glory. The fourth jhāna ordinarily leads to rebirth among the gods of Great Fruit, but if it is developed with a desire to attain an insentient mode of existence, it will conduce to rebirth among the non-percipient beings, for whom consciousness is temporarily suspended. The fine-material realm also contains five special planes that are exclusively for the rebirth of non-returners. These are the Pure Abodes – the Aviha, the Atappa, the Sudassa, the Sudassī, and the Akanitṭha. In each of these planes in the fine-material realm the lifespan is said to be of enormous duration and to increase significantly in each higher plane.

The third realm of being is the immaterial realm, where matter has become non-existent and only mental processes exist. This realm consists of four planes, which are the objective counterparts of the four immaterial meditative attainments, from which they result and whose names they share: the bases of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness,

and neither-perception-nor-non-perception. The lifespans ascribed to them are respectively 20,000; 40,000; 60,000; and 84,000 great aeons.

In Buddhist cosmology existence in every realm, being the product of a kamma with a finite potency, is necessarily impermanent. Beings take rebirth in accordance with their deeds, experience the good or bad results, and then, when the generative kamma has spent its force, they pass away to take rebirth elsewhere as determined by still another kamma that has found the opportunity to ripen. Hence the torments of hell as well as the bliss of heaven, no matter how long they may last, are bound to pass. For this reason the Buddha does not locate the final goal of his teaching anywhere within the conditioned world. He guides those whose spiritual faculties are still tender to aspire for a heavenly rebirth and teaches them the lines of conduct that conduce to the fulfilment of their aspirations (MN 41, MN 120). But for those whose faculties are mature and who can grasp the unsatisfactory nature of everything conditioned, he urges determined effort to put an end to wandering in *saṃsāra* and to reach Nibbāna, which transcends all planes of being.

THE BUDDHA AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

The Middle Country of India in which the Buddha lived and taught in the fifth century B.C. teemed with a luxuriant variety of religious and philosophical beliefs propagated by teachers equally varied in their ways of life. The main division was into the brahmins and the non-brahmanic ascetics, the *samaṇas* or "recluses." The brahmins were the hereditary priesthood of India, the custodians of the ancient orthodoxy. They accepted the authority of the Vedas, which they studied, chanted at countless rituals, sacrifices, and ceremonies, and turned to as the source of their philosophical speculations. Thus they are characterised in the suttas as traditionalists (*anussavika*), who teach their doctrines on the basis of oral tradition (MN 100.7). The Pali Canon generally depicts them as living a comfortably settled life, as marrying and begetting progeny, and in some cases as enjoying royal patronage. The more learned among them gathered a company of students – all necessarily of brahmin birth – to whom they taught the Vedic hymns.

The *samaṇas*, on the other hand, did not accept the authority of the Vedas, for which reason from the perspective of the brahmins they stood in the ranks of heterodoxy. They were usually celibate, lived a life of mendicancy, and acquired their status by voluntary renunciation rather than by birth. The *samaṇas* roamed the Indian countryside sometimes in company, sometimes as solitaries, preaching their doctrines to the populace, debating with other ascetics, engaging in their spiritual practices, which often involved severe austerities (see MN 51.8). Some teachers in the *samaṇa* camp taught entirely on the basis of reasoning and speculation, while others taught on the basis of their experiences in meditation. The Buddha placed himself among the latter, as one who teaches a Dhamma that he has directly known for himself (MN 100.7).

The Buddha's encounters with brahmins were usually friendly, their conversations marked by courtesy and mutual regard. Several suttas in the Majjhima Nikāya concern the brahmins' claim to superiority over those in other social classes. In the Buddha's age the caste system was only beginning to take shape in northeast India and had not yet spawned the countless subdivisions and rigid regulations that were to manacle Indian society through the centuries. Society was divided into four broad social classes: the *brahmins*, who performed the priestly functions; the *khattiyas*, the nobles, warriors, and administrators; the *veśsas*, the merchants and agriculturalists; and the *suddas*, the menials and serfs. From the Pali suttas it appears that the brahmins, while vested with authority in religious matters, had not yet risen to the position of unchallengeable hegemony they were to gain after the promulgation of the *Laws of Manu*. They had, however, already embarked on their drive for domination and did so by propagating the thesis that brahmins are the highest caste, the fairest caste, the divinely blessed offspring of Brahmā who are alone capable of purification. Anxiety that this claim of the brahmins might actually be true seems to have spread among the royalty, who must have been fearful of the threat it posed to their own power (see MN 84.4, MN 90.9–10).

Contrary to certain popular notions, the Buddha did not explicitly repudiate the class divisions of Indian society or appeal for the abolition of this social system. Within the Sangha, however, all caste distinctions were abrogated from the moment of ordination.

Thus people from any of the four castes who went forth under the Buddha renounced their class titles and prerogatives and instead became known simply as disciples of the Sakyan son (see Ud 5:5/55). Whenever the Buddha or his disciples were confronted with the brahmins' claim to superiority, they argued vigorously against them, maintaining that all such claims were groundless. Purification, they contended, was the result of conduct, not of birth, and was thus accessible to those of all four castes (MN 40.13–14, MN 84, MN 90.12, MN 93). The Buddha even stripped the term "brahmin" of its hereditary accretions, and hearkening back to its original connotation of holy man, he defined the true brahmin as the arahant (MN 98). Those among the brahmins who were not yet hampered by class prejudice responded appreciatively to the Buddha's teaching. Some of the most eminent brahmins of the time, in whom there still burned the ancient Vedic yearning for light, knowledge, and truth, recognised in the Buddha the All-Enlightened One for whom they longed and declared themselves his disciples (see especially MN 91.34). Several even renounced their class privileges and with their retinues entered the Sangha (MN 7.22, MN 92.15–24).

The *samaṇas* were a much more diversified group which, lacking a common scriptural authority, promulgated a plethora of philosophical doctrines ranging from the diabolical to the superdivine. The Pali Canon frequently mentions six teachers in particular as contemporaries of the Buddha, and as they are each described as "the head of an order...regarded by many as a saint" (MN 77.5), they must have been quite influential at the time. The *Majjhima Nikāya* mentions both the set of six and, separately, states their individual doctrines; it does not, however, correlate the names with the doctrines. The connections between names and doctrines are made in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.

Pūraṇa Kassapa, who is always mentioned first in the list, taught a doctrine of inaction (*akiriya-vāda*) that denied the validity of moral distinctions (MN 60.13, MN 76.10). Makkhali Gosāla was the leader of the sect known as the *Ājīvakas* (or *Ājīvikas*), which survived in India down into the medieval period. He taught a doctrine of fatalism that denied causality (*ahetuka-vāda*) and claimed that the entire cosmic process is rigidly controlled by a principle called fate or destiny (*niyati*); beings have no

volitional control over their actions but move helplessly caught in the grip of fate (MN 60.21, MN 76.13). Ajita Kesakambalin was a moral nihilist (*natthikavāda*) who propounded a materialist philosophy that rejected the existence of an afterlife and kammic retribution (MN 60.5, MN 76.7); his doctrine is always cited by the Buddha as the paradigmatic instance of wrong view among the unwholesome courses of action. Pakudha Kaccāyana advocated an atomism on the basis of which he repudiated the basic tenets of morality (MN 76.16). Saṅgya Belaṭṭhiputta, a sceptic, refused to take a stand on the crucial moral and philosophical issues of the day, probably claiming that such knowledge was beyond our capacity for verification (MN 76.30). The sixth teacher, the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, is identified with Mahāvīra, the historical progenitor of Jainism. He taught that there exists a plurality of monadic souls entrapped in matter by the bonds of past kamma and that the soul is to be liberated by exhausting its kammic bonds through the practice of severe self-mortification.

Whereas the Pali suttas are generally cordial but critical towards the brahmins, they are trenchant in their rejection of the rival doctrines of the samaṇas. In one sutta (MN 60) the Buddha contends that the firm adoption of any of the first three doctrines (and by implication the fourth) entails a chain of unwholesome states generating evil kamma strong enough to bring a descent into the lower realms. Similarly the venerable Ānanda describes these views as four "negations of the holy life" (MN 76). The scepticism of Saṅgya, while not regarded as so pernicious, is taken as an indication of its proponent's dullness and confusion; it is described as "eel-wriggling" (*amarāvikkhepa*) because of its evasiveness and classified among the types of holy life that are without consolation (MN 76.30-31). The Jain doctrine, though sharing certain similarities with the Buddha's teaching, was held to be sufficiently mistaken in basic assumptions as to call for refutation, which the Buddha undertook on several occasions (MN 14, MN 56, MN 101). The repudiation of these erroneous views was seen, from the Buddhist perspective, to be a necessary measure not only to sound a clear warning against tenets that were spiritually detrimental, but also to cut away the obstacles against the acceptance of right view, which as the forerunner of the Buddha's path (MN 117.4) was a prerequisite to progress along the road to final deliverance.

TECHNICAL NOTES

There remain to be discussed only a few technical points concerning this translation: first a general problem inevitably facing any translator from the Pali Canon, then certain changes that have been made in Ven. Nāṇamoli's renderings of important doctrinal terms.

THE REPETITIONS

Readers of Pali suttas, particularly in the original language, will immediately be struck by the frequency and length of the repetitive passages. The repetitions, if examined, will be found to be of different kinds and thus probably stem from different sources. We may consider three main types.

First are the narrative repetitions within a single sutta as well as the repetition of statements in ordinary conversation. These doubtlessly originate from the method of oral transmission by which the suttas were preserved for the first four centuries of their existence, such repetition serving as a useful mnemonic device to ensure that details would not be lost. In this translation these repetitions have usually been bridged over with ellipsis points and occasionally the liberty was taken of contracting them.

A second type of repetition stems from the use of stock formulas to describe fixed sets of doctrinal categories or aspects of the training. A common example of this is the formulas for the four jhānas and the three true knowledges. These formulas were almost certainly part of the Buddha's repertory of instructions, employed by him in the countless discourses he gave during his forty-five years' ministry in order to preserve the unity and consistency of his teaching. Here the shorter stereotyped formulas have generally been allowed to stand except when they play a subordinate role to a larger theme, in which case only the main clauses have been retained; an example is the treatment of the jhāna formula at MN 53.18. The longer formulas that appear very often have been abridged, with references usually given to the passages where they appear in full; examples are the treatment of the first two true knowledges at MN 27.23-24 and of the gradual training at MN 38.31-38.

A third type of repetition stems from the Buddha's application of an identical method of exposition to a series of doctrinal terms belonging to a fixed set. Examples are the formula for insight that is attached to each of the exercises in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10.5), and the exposition on the three characteristics applied to each of the five aggregates (MN 22.26). These repetitions, contrary to modernistic suppositions, were very likely integral to the Buddha's own pedagogical method and served to drive home the points he wanted to convey. We can well imagine that such repetitions, delivered by a fully enlightened teacher to those earnestly striving for awakening, must have sunk down deep into the minds of those who heard them and in many cases triggered off a glimpse of the truth. In the translation this type of repetition has usually been handled by repeating the method of exposition only for the first and last terms in the set – as is often done in the Pali editions of the texts – except when the method of exposition is especially long (as at MN 118.37–39), in which case it is shown in full only for the first term and in much abbreviated form for the rest. Those who read the suttas as an exercise in contemplation, and not merely for information, may try mentally filling in the entire sequence and exploring its range of implications.

DHAMMA

In his later translations Ven. Nāṇamoli appears to have set himself two goals: to render virtually every Pali word into English (*arahant* and *bodhisatta* are rare exceptions); and to do so in obedience to a very rigorous standard of consistency. In effect the principle that guided his work was: one Pali word, one corresponding English word. This principle he also applied to his treatment of the multiplex word *dhamma*, of which he wrote elsewhere that "the need for unity in the rendering is so great as to be almost desperate" (*Minor Readings and Illustrator*, p. 331). He chose as his root rendering the word "idea," which he attempted to deploy for the Pali word in all its diverse occurrences. Even when *dhamma* is used in the suttas to signify the Buddha's teaching, he still remained faithful to his choice by translating it "the True Idea."

Needless to say, this experiment was not successful. Recognising this, Ven. Khantipālo, in his edition of the ninety suttas, opted instead to retain the Pali word in most of its occurrences.

This decision, however, seems to have been unnecessary when the relinquishing of the demand for strict consistency allows for smooth and reliable translation without loss of meaning. While the many different uses of the Pali word *dhamma* may originally have had some underlying connection of meaning, by the time of the Pali Canon such connection had already receded so far into the background as to be virtually irrelevant to the understanding of the texts. The commentaries ascribe at least ten different contextual meanings to the word as it occurs in the Canon and they do not try to read any philosophical significance into this variability of application. The goal of lucid translation therefore seems to require that the word be rendered differently according to its context, which generally makes the intended meaning clear.

In revising Ven. Nāṇamoli's translation I have retained the Pali word *Dhamma* only when it refers to the Buddha's teaching, or in several cases to a rival teaching with which the Buddha's is contrasted (as at MN 11.13 and MN 104.2). In its other uses the context has been allowed to decide the rendering. Thus when *dhamma* occurs in the plural as a general ontological reference term it has been rendered "things" (as at MN 1.2 and MN 2.5). When it acquires a more technical nuance, in the sense either of the phenomena of existence or of mental constituents, it has been rendered "states" (as at MN 64.9 and MN 111.4). This term, however, must be divested of its overtone of staticity, *dharmas* being events within a dynamic process, and it must also not be taken to refer to some persisting entity that undergoes the states, entities themselves being nothing but connected series of *dharmas*. The last two meanings of *dhamma* are not always separable in the texts and sometimes naturalness of English diction had to be used as the factor for deciding which should be selected.

As the fourth foundation of mindfulness and as the sixth external sense base (*āyatana*), *dhamma* has been rendered "mind-objects" (even here "ideas" is too narrow). In still other contexts it has been rendered as factors (MN 10.5), qualities (MN 15.3, MN 48.6) and teachings (MN 46.2, MN 47.3). When used as a suffix it acquires the idiomatic sense of "to be subject to" and so it has been translated, e.g., *vipariṇāmadhamma* as "subject to change."

SANKHĀRA

Although this word as used in the suttas has different specific references in different contexts, unlike *dhamma* it retains enough unity of meaning to permit, with rare exceptions, a uniform rendering. The problem, however, is to decide which of the many proposed renderings is the most adequate, or, if none are found fitting, to coin a new one that is.

The root idea suggested by the word *sankhāra* is "making together." The Pali commentators explain that the word allows for both an active and a passive sense. Thus the *sankhāras* are either factors (or forces) that function together in producing an effect, or they are the things that are produced by a combination of co-operating factors. In his translation of the *Visuddhimagga* Ven. Nāṇamoli had rendered *sankhāras* as "formations," a rendering favoured by many other translators. In his later translation scheme he had experimented with rendering it as "determinations" and had attempted to incorporate that new choice into his manuscript of the *Majjhima*. In editing the manuscript Ven. Khantipālo chose to return to the translator's earlier and better known "formations," and in this edition I have followed suit. Though this word has the disadvantage of accentuating the passive aspect of *sankhāras*, it avoids the problems into which "determinations" runs and seems colourless enough to take on the meaning determined by the context.

The word *sankhāra* occurs in four major contexts in the Pali suttas: (1) As the second factor in the formula of dependent origination it is used to mean volitional actions, suggesting their active role of generating results in the process of rebirth. (2) As the fourth of the five aggregates the *sankhāras* comprise all the mental factors not included in the other three mental aggregates; this group is probably assigned the name *sankhārakkhandha* after its chief member, volition (*cetanā*), which is responsible for forming all the other aggregates. (3) *Sankhāra* is also used in a very comprehensive sense to signify everything produced by conditions. In this sense it comprises all five aggregates (as at MN 35.4 and MN 115.12). Here the word bears the passive sense, being explained by the commentators as *sankhata-sankhārā*, "formations consisting in the conditioned." This usage comes close in meaning

to the ontological use of *dhamma*, except that the latter is wider in range since it includes the unconditioned element Nibbāna and concepts (*paññatti*), both of which are excluded from *sankhāra*. (4) In still another context the word *sankhāra* is used in relation to *kāya*, *vacī*, and *citta* – body, speech, and mind – to mean the bodily formation, which is in-and-out breathing; the verbal formation, which is applied thought and sustained thought; and the mental formation, which is perception and feeling. The first and third are things that are dependent respectively upon the body and the mind, the second the things that activate speech. This triad is discussed at MN 44.13–15.

Sankhāra is also employed outside these major contexts, and in one such case Ven. Nāṇamoli's sense of "determination" has been retained. This is where it occurs in the compound *padhānasankhāra*, which has been rendered "determined striving" (as at MN 16.26). The rare and involved idiom, *sankhāraṃ padahati*, has similarly been rendered "he strives with determination" (MN 101.23). In another case (MN 120), following the commentarial gloss, *sankhāra* is rendered "aspiration."

NĀMARŪPA

Ven. Nāṇamoli had translated this compound literally as "name-and-form." In this edition the compound has been changed back to the rendering used in his translation of the *Visuddhimagga*, "mentality-materiality," though with regret that this cumbersome Latinate expression lacks the concision and punch of "name-and-form." The word *nāma* originally meant "name," but in the Pali suttas it is used in this compound as a collective term for the mental factors associated with consciousness, as will be seen in the definition at MN 9.54. The commentaries explain *nāma* here as deriving from the word *namati*, to bend, and as being applied to the mental factors because they "bend" towards the object in the act of cognizing it. *Rūpa* is used in two major contexts in the suttas: as the first of the five aggregates and as the specific object of eye-consciousness. The former is a broader category that includes the latter as one among many other species of *rūpa*. Ven. Nāṇamoli, aiming at consistency in his manuscript translation, had used "form" for *rūpa* as visible object (in preference to the "visible-datum" used in his earlier

translation scheme). But when *rūpa* is used to signify the first of the five aggregates, it has been changed to "material form." This rendering should indicate more precisely the meaning of *rūpa* in that context while preserving the connection with *rūpa* as visible object. Occasionally in the texts the word seems to straddle both meaning without allowing an exclusive delimitation, as in the context of certain meditative attainments such as the first two liberations (MN 77.22).

BRAHMA

The word *brahma* provided Ven. Nāṇamoli with another challenge to his endeavour to achieve complete consistency. The word itself, going back to the Vedic period, originally meant holy power, the sacred power that sustains the cosmos and that was contacted through the prayers and rituals of the Vedas. Though the word retained its significance of "holy" or "sacred," by the Buddha's time it had undergone two distinct lines of development. One culminated in the conception of Brahman (neuter) as an impersonal absolute reality hidden behind and manifesting through the changing phenomena of the world. This conception is the keynote of the Upanishads, but the word *brahma* never appears in this sense in the Pali Canon. The other line of development culminated in the conception of Brahmā (masculine singular) as an eternal personal God who creates and regulates the world. This conception was held by the brahmins as depicted in the Pali suttas. The Buddhists themselves asserted that Brahmā was not a single creator God but a collective name for several classes of high deities whose chiefs, forgetting that they are still transient beings in the grip of kamma, were prone to imagine themselves to be the omnipotent everlasting creator (see MN 49).

Ven. Nāṇamoli attempted to fulfil his guideline of consistency by rendering the word *brahma* in its various occurrences by "divine" or its cognates. Thus Brahmā the deity was rendered "the Divinity," *brāhmaṇa* (= brahmin) was rendered "divine" (as a noun meaning a priestly theologian), and the expression *brahma-cariya*, in which *brahma* functions as an adjective, was rendered "the Life Divine." The result of this experiment was again the sacrifice of clarity for the sake of consistency, even at the risk of

generating misunderstanding, and therefore in the revisionary process I decided to treat these expressions in line with more conventional practices. Thus *Brahmā* and *brahmin* have been left untranslated (the latter word is probably already more familiar to modern readers than the archaic noun "divine"). The word *brahma*, as it appears in compounds, has usually been rendered "holy" – e.g., *brahmacariya* as "the holy life" except when it is used to signify total sexual abstinence, in which case it has been rendered in accordance with its intended meaning as "celibacy." The word "divine" has, however, been retained in the expression *brahmavihāra*, rendered "divine abode" (MN 83.6) with reference to the "immeasurable" meditations on loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity, which are the dwellings of the divinity *Brahmā* (MN 55.7) and the path to rebirth in the *Brahma-world* (MN 99.22).

A NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

The pronunciation of Pali words and names is quite easy providing the following simple rules are heeded. Among the vowels:

- a i u as in "but," "pin," "duke";
- ā ī ū as in "father," "keen," "pool";
- e and o as in "way" and "home."

Among the consonants, *g* is pronounced as in "girl," *c* as in "church," *ṇ* as in "canyon." The cerebrals – *ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, ḷ* – are spoken with the tongue on the roof of the mouth; the dentals – *t, d, n, l* – with the tongue on the upper teeth. *m* is a nasal as in "sing." The aspirates – *kh, gh, ch, jh, ṭh, ḍh, th, dh, ph, and bh* – are single consonants pronounced with a slight outward puff of breath, e.g., *th* as in "Thomas" (not as in "that"), *ph* as in "top hat" (not as in "phone"). Double consonants are always enunciated separately, e.g., *dd* as in "mad dog," *gg* as in "big gun."

An *o* and an *e* always carry a stress, otherwise the stress falls on a long vowel – *ā, ī, or ū* – or on a double consonant, or on *m*.

MAJOR CHANGES IN TERMINOLOGY

This list shows the most important of the changes in Ven. Nāṇamoli's manuscript terminology that were made for this edition. Changes marked with an asterisk were already introduced by Ven. Khantipālo in *A Treasury of the Buddha's Words*.

PALI TERM	MS RENDERING	REVISED RENDERING
<i>akusala</i>	unprofitable	unwholesome
<i>ajjhosāna</i>	cleaving	holding
<i>abhinivesa</i>	insistence	adherence
<i>arūpa</i>	formless	immaterial
* <i>asekha</i>	the Adept	one beyond training
<i>iddhi</i>	success	(1) supernormal power; (2) spiritual power; (3) success
<i>uddhacca-kukkucca</i>	agitation and worry	restlessness and remorse
<i>upadhi</i>	essentials of existence	(1) attachment; (2) object of attachment
<i>ottappa</i>	shame	fear of wrongdoing
<i>kāmā</i>	sensual desires	sensual pleasures
<i>kusala</i>	profitable	wholesome
<i>khaya</i>	exhaustion	destruction
* <i>citta</i>	cognizance	mind
<i>chanda</i>	zeal	(1) desire; (2) zeal
* <i>jhāna</i>	illumination	jhāna
* <i>tathāgata</i>	the Perfect One	the Tathāgata
<i>thīna-middha</i>	lethargy and drowsiness	sloth and torpor
* <i>dhamma</i>	the True Idea	the Dhamma
<i>dhammā</i>	ideas	(1) things, states, factors; (2) mind-objects; (3) qualities; (4) teachings
<i>nandi</i>	relishing	delight
<i>nāma</i>	name	mentality

PALI TERM	MS RENDERING	REVISED RENDERING
<i>nāmarūpa</i>	name-and-form	mentality-materiality
* <i>nibbāna</i>	extinction	Nibbāna
<i>nibbidā</i>	dispassion	disenchantment
<i>paññā</i>	understanding	wisdom
<i>paṭigha</i>	resistance	(1) sensory impact; (2) aversion
<i>padhāna</i>	endeavour	striving
<i>papañca</i>	diversification	proliferation
<i>paritassanā</i>	anguish	agitation
<i>pīti</i>	happiness	rapture
* <i>buddha</i>	the Enlightened One	the Buddha
<i>brahma</i>	divine	holy, divine
<i>brahmā</i>	the Divinity	Brahmā
<i>brāhmaṇa</i>	divine (caste)	brahmin
<i>bhāvanā</i>	maintaining in being	development
<i>muditā</i>	gladness	appreciative joy
<i>rūpa</i>	form	(1) form; (2) material form, materiality; (3) fine-material (being)
<i>vicāra</i>	pondering	sustained thought
<i>vicikicchā</i>	uncertainty	doubt
<i>vitakka</i>	thought, thinking	thought, applied thought
<i>virāga</i>	fading away of lust	dispassion
<i>sakkāya</i>	embodiment	personality
* <i>sankhārā</i>	determinations	formations
* <i>sangha</i>	the Community	the Sangha
* <i>sattā</i>	creatures	beings
<i>samaṇa</i>	monk	recluse
* <i>sekha</i>	the Initiate	the disciple in higher training
<i>hiri</i>	conscience	shame