

Discourse on

SAKKAPAÑHA SUTTA

(THE QUESTIONS OF SAKKA)

by

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

of

Burma



An Abridged Translation by U Aye Maung

Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization
Mahāsi Thāthana Yeikthā
Rangoon

DISCOURSE ON SAKKA-PANHA SUTTA

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AN ABRIDGED TRANSLATION

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U AYE MAUNG

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FOREWORD

This is the abridged translation of the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw's discourse on Sakkapanha sutta. The discourse was given in December, 1977 at the request of U Pwint Kaung, the President of Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Organization on the occasion of the annual gathering of Buddhist devotees who came from all over Burma to pay respect to the Sayadaw and hear his teaching.

The President requested the Venerable Sayadaw to give a Buddhist sermon that would be universally applicable. Therefore Mahāsi Sayadaw chose to give a series of talks on Sakkapañha sutta which was in fact the subject of a manuscript that he had been preparing for publication. The sutta tells us about the Buddha's dialogue with Sakka, the king of devas and his penetrating analysis of the causes of conflicts, frustrations and sufferings that beset all living beings. The Sayadaw rightly describes the sutta as the Buddha's talk on world peace and indeed it has an important message for people all over the world.

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The Venerable Sayadaw's discourse on the sutta is much informative and illuminating. Many of his observations are essential to the proper understanding and practice of the Dhamma. Thus according to the Sayadaw, the introduction to a sutta is not as important as its central teaching. It serves to establish the authenticity of the sutta but as in the case of Abhidhammā Pitaka its absence does not necessarily cast doubt on the origin of a Buddhist teaching. The melodious recitation of scriptures as is customary among some Buddhist preachers and the mass slaughter of animals for food at pagoda festivals are to be deprecated in that such practices run counter to the teaching of the Buddha. No less incompatible with the spirit of the Dhamma is the fondness for lengthy prayers which probably stem from the tendency to rely on external help rather than effort for the attainment of one's object.

Apart from these passing remarks on matters of general interest to Buddhists, the Sayadaw's discourse on the essence of the Buddha's teaching in Sakkapanha sutta is superb. It is based on rational observations, anecdotes and teachings in the Pitakas and commentaries. The Sayadaw's clarification of the wholesome sorrow, wholesome depression, etc will certainly inspire the yogis who are in low spirits because of lack of spiritual

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progress. His other explanations will also enlighten those who do not have much knowledge of the Dhamma or much experience in vipassana practice.

The importance of Sakkapañha sutta as expounded by Mahasi Sayadaw is not confined to Buddhists or for that matter to a particular segment of world population. It concerns the whole of mankind as well as all other beings in the universe and those who practise it diligently may rest well assured of the end of suffering.

Bhikkhu Indaka (Nyaunggan)

Mahāsi Dhammakathika

16, Sasanayeiktha, Rangoon

DISCOURSE ON SAKKA-PANHA SUTTA

SUBSTANCE OF THE SUTTA

Sakka in Buddhist literature is the name given to the king of devas and pañha means question. So Sakka-pañha sutta is the discourse on the welfare of living beings which the Buddha gave in response to the questions of the king of devas.

Sakka asks the Buddha as follows. "Lord, There are devas, human beings, asuras, nagas, gandhabbas and many other living beings. These beings wish to be free from quarrels, armed conflicts, animosity and unhappiness. Yet they are not free from these evils of life. What is the fetter (saṃyojana) that makes them unable to fulfill their desire?"

Here the devas referred to are apparently the Catumahārāja and Tavatimsa devas for these devas were well known to Sakka. Asura devas were originally the enemies of Tavatimsa devas who battled with them as mentioned in Dhajagga and other suttas. Formerly they lived in Tavatimsa heaven but while they were drunk they were hustled down by Sakka to the foot of mount Meru. The nagas were a species of serpents who could work wonders with their psychic power. The gandhabbas were a kind of

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The introduction to a sutta tells us where, why, to whom and by whom the discourse was delivered. Thus it serves to establish the authenticity of the Buddha's teaching. Without it the origin of a sutta is open to question as in the case of Abhidhamma pitaka which has no such introduction.

The Abhidhamma was preached in Tāvātimsa heaven by the Buddha. At that time the Buddha went daily to the Himalayan forest to take rest in the daytime, leaving his proxy, the Nimmita Buddha to carry on the teaching regularly. The Buddha gave thera Sāriputta a summary of the Abhidhamma that he had taught for the day. The chief disciple in turn preached it to five hundred monks. So the Abhidhamma is to be ascribed to Sāriputta but as the commentary says, since he heard it from the Lord, it is the teaching of the Buddha. The Abhidhamma pitaka has no introductory statement such as "*Evam me sutam* : Thus have I heard". Hence according to the commentary, some did not accept it as the true teaching of the Buddha.

In order that posterity might have no doubt about the authenticity of the Buddha's teaching, most of those canonized at the first Buddhist Council have introductions based on the questions and answers among the leading theras of

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the assembly. The exceptions are Dhammapada and a few other suttas.

The introduction to the Sakka-pañha sutta is superb and it makes the sutta impressive and points up to the substance of the Buddha's teaching. In order to record such an important event, Mahākassapa asked Anandā where, to whom and why the sutta was preached and the latter answered as follows.

Once the Buddha was dwelling in a cave that lay east of Rajāgaha city in Magadha country. At that time Sakka sought to see the Buddha. He had seen the Lord on the eve of his supreme enlightenment and at another time in Jetavana monastery at Sāvatti. As he was then not yet spiritually mature, the Buddha did not give him an interview. Now Sakka decided to see the Lord with his retinue of devas because he hoped to hear the sermon which the Lord might preach to someone among his followers who was worthy of liberation. But it was largely his fear of death that aroused his strong desire to see the Buddha. For being aware of the approaching end of his life, he was anxious to have something to rely upon for his salvation.

When a deva is about to pass away, there appear five signs. (1) The flowers on his head wither away. (2) His garments become dirty and outworn. (3) The devas who have never sweated before sweat from the armpits when

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their end is near. (4) Their youthful appearance gives way to signs of old age. (5) Finally they become weary of life in the last week of their existence. Having seen these five signs, Sakka thought of his imminent death and became much depressed. To get over his depression, he decided to see the Lord and hear the Dhamma. Then he instantly appeared with a retinue of devas near the residence of the Buddha.

According to the commentary on Visuddhimagga, it took Sakka and his followers no longer than the stretching or bending of a hand to move from Tāvātimsa heaven to Magadha country. As Mahātika says, the phenomena that arise in one place pass away in the same place. They do not pass on to another place. The yogi who watches the bending and stretching according to Satipaṭṭhāna method is aware of the passing away of phenomena for several times in an instant. Just as the psycho-physical phenomena arise and pass away instantly, so also the devas reached Magadha country through the successive flux of nāma-rūpa within a split second. This was due to divine power or *kammajiddha* that gives the devas a speed which is far greater than that of modern rockets or space-ships.

Sakka wanted first to seek the Buddha's permission for his visit. So he told Pancasikha deva to go and find out whether the Lord was

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well disposed to welcome him. In Sakka's statement there occurs the word "pasadeyyāsi" which literally means "to make one cheerful". According to the commentary, it means to gratify a person and seek his consent. It is a Pali expression that ancient Indians used in speaking politely. It is somewhat like the saying of the jackal to the elephant in the Sanskrit work Hitopadesa. The jackal said, "My Lord! Kindly make your eyes clear", which means, says the expositor, "Kindly help me or do me the favour".

So in compliance with the request of Sakka, Pancasikha went to the residence of the Buddha and standing respectfully at a suitable distance from the Lord, he played his harp and sang songs about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and the Arahats. The Buddha would not have approved of the deva's way of honouring him with songs and music any more than he would have approved of some modern Burmese Buddhist practices such as the melodious recitation of Pali scriptures, holding pagoda festivals on a big scale, killing a lot of animals for food on festive occasions and so forth, - practices that do disservice to the Buddhist religion. But the Buddha said nothing as he knew that his dialogue with Sakka would benefit many people. Some of Pancasikha's songs were sensual in character. For his songs describe his infatuation for a beautiful goddess that had made him

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almost crazy. His frustration shows that the deva-world does not guarantee the fulfilment of all your desire and that the life of a deva is not always a bed of roses. His songs also contain references to the Buddha, the Arahāt and the good deeds he had done on earth. He speaks of the bodhisatta who is always mindful, absorbed in jhāna and bent on Nibbāna.

Here jhāna means watching and the object which one watches may be the object of concentration or it may be the nature of mind and body such as impermanence, etc. After giving up self-mortification, the bodhisatta resorted to breathing exercises and attained jhāna. These jhanic attainments center on a single object of attention and may last a couple of hours. Through the power of this jhāna the bodhisatta, while sitting under the Bo tree became aware of previous existences in the early part of the night. (*pubbenivāsañāṇa*). At midnight he attained the divine-eye (*dibba-cakkhu*) that enabled him to see the passing away and coming into existence of all beings in the universe. In the last part of the night the bodhisatta reflected on dependent origination and attained insight into the arising and dissolution of nāma-rupa while seeing, hearing, etc. This constant mindfulness of the nature of existence is a mark of mature wisdom but it does not seem to be well known to Pancasikha deva.

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He knew only that the bodhisatta constantly reflected and was bent on the Deathless (*amata*) Nibbāna. The word *amata* comes from the Sanskrit *amrita* which means deathlessness and so *amata* refers to the deathless or Nibbāna.

Questioned by the Buddha as to the origin of his songs, Pancasikha said that he had composed them for serenading his beloved goddess. The goddess was so much pleased with his songs about the Buddha that she allowed him to spend a day with her, a favour which she did not grant him again. Distraught and frustrated over his unrequited love, the deva gave vent to his feelings in his songs. Here the deva was not different from the ordinary person who is so much overwhelmed with desire that he cannot think rationally.

Once the disciple of a famous Sayadaw left the holy order following an affair with a woman. His followers blamed the couple but the Sayadaw admonished them thus: "You should not blame them. They have come to such a pass under the pressure of their craving. So you should blame their craving." This is indeed a realistic teaching.

When the deva paid respect to the Buddha on behalf of his master, the Lord wished Sakka happiness both in body and mind. The Buddha expressed this wish because all living beings want to be happy. That is the way the

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Buddha himself blessed those who worshipped him. There is no prayer in the words of Sakka when he expressed adoration of the Buddha through the deva. But by the Pali words *abhivadeti abhivandati vandati* we are to understand that he expected to be assured of happiness. In other words, he hoped that the Buddha would say, "May you be happy!"

The Buddha blessed other devotees in the same way. This gives us food for thought on the modern practice of giving a lot of blessing as a reward for mere devotion. The devotee prays for many things but his prayer is often at odds with the effusive blessing of the officiating monk. In fact it is not necessary for the devotee to say anything further after expressing his reverence for the three jewels (*Tiratana*). Not that there are somethings for which you should not pray. But there should be no incongruity between the prayer and the blessing. Since the monk usually mentions all the benefits accruing to one who performs a good deed, all that he or she has to do is to express the desire to have them. In paying respect to the Buddha, Sakka did not pray for anything but he was assured of the due benefits as mentioned in the words: *abhivadanasilissa niccam*, etc. So it will do as well for the devotees to pray just for longevity, health and security and the monk should bless them accordingly. He should not act like someone decree-

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ing the fulfilment of their wishes but only as someone contributing to it.

Now Sakka and his followers came to pay respect to the Buddha. Sakka said that despite his ardent desire to see the Lord, he had been unable to do so because of his preoccupation with the affairs of the devas. He told the Lord how his experience accorded with what he had heard before. It was said that the deva-population increased when there appeared a Buddha. He had now found that this was true. Following the Buddha's preaching of Dhammacakkapavattana sutta some observed the five precepts, some gave alms and most of them attained the deva-world after death. At the very least those who had faith in the Buddha were assured of rebirth in the deva-world. This was the view which the Buddha did not reject when it was expressed by a Brahmā.

Faith in the Buddha means faith in the Dhamma and the Sangha and as such it ensures protection from rebirth in the lower worlds. Moreover even alms-giving to the worthy disciples of the Buddha carry more kammic weight than any other act of dāna. Thus a deva who as a lay follower of the Buddha in his previous existence had given a spoonful of rice to an Arahant was more powerful than another deva who while on earth had fed many people gratis free for many years.

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Out of about 100 million people in the middle Ganges valley, the original home of Buddhism, about 80 million people might have been Buddhists. With the exception of Arahats and those at the *anāgāmi* stage, a large number of these Buddhists might have attained the deva-world. This probably accounts for the rise in deva-population in those days.

Then Sakka narrated the story of Gopaka. A princess in Sāvatti city named Gopika had much faith in the Buddha and observed the five precepts strictly. She loathed womanhood and wished to be a man. After death she became the son of Sakka and was called Gopaka.

One day Gopaka saw three *gandhabbas* who came to entertain Sakka. He found out that they were formerly three monks whom he had supported. He wondered why they were now reborn as low-class devas despite their commitment to the holy path in their previous lives whereas he himself, a mere woman in his past existence, had become the son of Sakka by virtue of his faith and morality. The three *gandhabbas* then recalled their past lives. They realized that their rebirth in the lower order of devas was due to their craving for the world of *gandhabbas*. Two of the devas practised meditation and attained *anāgāmi* stage in a moment. The other deva was, however, unable to overcome his sensual attachment and so he remained stuck up in his lowly life.

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Here renewal of existence as a *gandhabba* due to attachment to a former life of the same kind is especially noteworthy. People are likely to be reborn in their native place and environment which have a special influence over them. The three monks we have mentioned are no exception in this respect. King Bimbisāra who adored the Buddha and gave alms to the Sangha liberally for 37 years became after his death a subordinate of a Catumahārāja-deva. He could have attained a higher deva-world but for his attachment in his previous lives. This leaves no doubt about the need for overcoming attachment to one's native place.

The two devas attained jhāna as a result of their reflection on the Dhamma that they practised in their past lives and through meditation they reached *anāgāmi* stage on the holy path. You need not be disheartened for lack of success in meditation for persistent effort will certainly lead to rebirth in heaven. There you are assured of unusual spiritual experience if you remember and continue to practise the Dhamma. For as a sutta in Anguttara-nikaya says, the physical body of a deva is pure and radiant and the Dhamma becomes clear to the deva who has practised it in his previous life. It may take time to recollect it but recollection is instantly followed by attainment of insight knowledge. Some may forget it because of heavenly pleasure. But as

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devas, they are physically and mentally alert and once they turn their attention to the Dhamma through reflection or sermons, they understand and attain insight in a short time. If the yogis who strive for spiritual experience do not have it in this life, they will certainly have it in the deva-world.

As the deva-world teems with sensual pleasure, those who have attained *anāgāmi* stage cannot stay there and so they pass on to the Brahmā world instantly. For Sakka the transformation of the two devas into Brahmās right under his eyes was indeed impressive. When he heard Gopaka's explanation, he wished to share their spiritual experience. Moreover the signs of his imminent death fueled his desire for the life of a Brahmā. If he heard the Dhamma, he might have a better future life even if he did not attain any insight. Hearing the Dhamma is indeed the best thing a deva can do on his death-bed.

SAKKA'S QUESTION AND THE BUDDHA'S ANSWER

Sakka first sought the Buddha's permission to ask questions. It is customary for a highly cultured being to get permission before making any inquiry. Then Sakka asked the following question.

"Lord! All living beings wish to be free from anger and ill-will. They do not want to quarrel,

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or to be ill-treated. They pray for happiness, security, peace and freedom. Yet they are not free from danger and suffering. What is the cause of this situation?"

The Buddha answered: "O King of devas! All living beings long for happiness, security, peace and freedom. Yet they are not free from hatred, conflicts, danger and suffering. This unhappy condition of living beings is due to the fetters of envy (*issā*) and miserliness (*macchariya*)".

The characteristic of envy is aversion to the prosperity and welfare of others which makes one malicious and destructive. These evil desires give rise to suffering here and now as well as in the future life of the person who harbours them. They also lead to the suffering of those who are envied. All over the world it is envy that causes much suffering. The envious person hates to see happy or prosperous people. Hence the characteristic of envy is dislike of other person's welfare, its function (*rasa*) is to make the envious person miserable and its phenomenon that strikes us on reflection (*paccupaṭ-
thāna*) is shutting one's eyes to another person's welfare.

One who is dominated by envy does not want to see another person prosperous, successful, good-looking, educated or promoted to high official position. Envy is indeed an evil which does

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not benefit in any way the person who harbours it. It provides a fertile soil for bad kamma and makes one miserable. A powerful man will seek to ruin the person whom he envies and by so doing he turns the other into his enemy who may pay him back in kind. Even if there is no danger of retaliation, he will surely suffer in afterlife.

The Culakammavibhanga sutta sums up the kammic consequences of envy as impotency and dearth of attendants. Some men and women do not want to hear any thing about the good fortunes of another person his wealth, affluence, intelligence, eloquence, good health or popularity. They say or do things detrimental to the person's interest. Propaganda in modern times is motivated by envy. The envy-ridden person suffers in hell for many years and after his release from there he is reborn in the human world, he becomes a man of low birth with few attendants and little reputation.

On the other hand one who rejoices at the good fortune of another person has good-will. He is happy when he sees or hears of another man's prosperity. He helps to promote others' welfare as much as possible thereby cultivating much good kamma. He attains the deva-world after death, enjoys a happy life and on return to the human world he is powerful and has many followers. So those who wish to prosper in

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the present life and hereafter should overcome envy and cultivate *mudita* (sympathetic joy) or in other words, rejoice at the welfare of other people.

MACCHARIYA (MISERLINESS)

Macchariya is miserliness to the point of keeping one's possessions secret. It does not want others to have anything to do with the objects of one's attachment. It is characterized by extreme possessiveness. It is of five kinds according as it relates to (1) dwelling (2) friends and intimates, (3) material things (4) material goods (5) commendable attributes and (5) learning.

The first kind of *macchariya* is to be found among some monks who do not want to see other monks of good moral character dwelling in their communal monastery. A monk may not want his lay followers to give alms to other monks. Such envious monks have to undergo many kinds of suffering after death because of their ill-will.

Vaṇṇa macchariya is the desire to possess a special quality such as physical beauty exclusively and to begrudge those who have the same quality. It may lead to ugliness as a kammic consequence. Again it is *dhamma-macchariya* to begrudge a person his learning or to keep back any knowledge from him. This *macchariya*

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may make its victim a moron or an idiot in afterlife. Thus *macchhariya* over the good fortune of other people makes a man unhappy, poor, friendless and subject to much suffering after death.

Āvāsa-macchhariya largely concerns the bhikkhus. It is the tendency to regard a *sanghika* (communal) monastery as one's private residence and for the lay men and women it is the tendency to have similar attitude in regard to public religious buildings such as temples, meditation retreats and so forth. *Kula-macchhariya* dominates those monks who do not want their lay followers to have close relations with other monks. Some monks forbid their disciples to see other monks or hear their sermons. As for the lay people it is *macchhariya* to insist on the undivided and exclusive loyalty of one's followers.

Lābha-macchhariya of some monks is the desire to have a monopoly of alms and to deny them to good monks. As an example of the *samsāric* suffering rooted in this evil, there is the story of Losakatissa.

In the lifetime of Kassapa Buddha there lived a monk in a certain village. He depended on a lay disciple for the necessities of life. One day another monk came and put up at his monastery. Fearing that his disciple's reverence for the new arrival might become a threat to his

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security, the resident monk tried to get rid of his guest. When the disciple invited both of them to have meals at his house, he went there alone and on his return he dumped by the wayside the food that had been offered for the visiting monk. On his death he suffered for aeons in hell and from there he passed on to the animal world where he suffered extreme hunger for many lifetimes.

In his last existence he was reborn in a fishermen's village in Kosala country. From the time of his conception misfortunes befell the villagers and his parents. At last the pangs of hunger made his mother so desperate that she abandoned the child while he was out begging. Then therā Sāriputta saw the starving child. Moved with pity, the therā took the child to his monastery where some years later he became a bhikkhu. He was called therā Losakātissa because he was so unlucky that he never had a square meal even at a great feast. All he got was barely enough to sustain life.

This kammic evil dogged him even when he attained Arahatship. Shortly before his parinibbana, Sāriputta took him into Sāvatti city to see to it that he had a square meal on the last day of his life. It is said that there was then no one to offer food to the therā. He therefore sent his companion to a rest-house. Then the disciples offered food some of which he sent to

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Losakatissa but the men who took the food ate it up on the way. So the thera himself had to bring the food and hold the bowl while the bhikkhu ate it. In this way Losakatissa had his last meal and passed away on that very day.

This story leaves no doubt about the frightful kammic consequences of *macchhariya*. Many kinds of *macchhariya* afflict lay people, as for example, *lābha-macchhariya* in the case of those who seek to monopolize a lucrative business, *vaṇṇa-macchhariya* of those who do not recognize the good attributes of others, *dhamma-macchhariya* of those who do not wish to share their knowledge with any other person.

The Buddha's statement attributing mankind's unhappiness to envy and ill-will was directly relevant to Sakka. For in view of his approaching end he was unhappy over the prospect of his wives falling into the hands of his successor or at the thought of the latter outshining him. So from experience he realized the truth of the Buddha's answer and asked another question.

LOVE AND HATRED

"Lord, what is the cause of envy and ill-will? What is the cause that we must remove in order to be free from them?"

The Buddha answered: "O King of devas! Envy and ill-will are caused by objects of

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love and hatred. If there were no such objects, there would be no envy and no ill-will".

The Buddhist way to the end of suffering is to remove its cause. It is like the treatment of a disease by a competent physician who seeks its cause and eliminates it. The Buddha points out love and hatred as the cause of mankind's unhappiness.

Objects of love are living and non-living objects that please us such as men, women, sight, sound, etc, and objects of hatred are those which displease us. We envy a person whom we dislike but who owns valuable objects. Ill-will plagues us when we wish to deny to others the objects of our attachment. So envy and ill-will have their roots in hated persons and cherished objects. The object of our envy is usually one whom we hate. If a person who excels us happens to be our beloved one, it is a cause not for envy but for joy. A boy who outshines his parents does not excite envy in them; on the contrary they will pride themselves on his superior qualities.

The man who has ill-will (*macchhariya*) wants to deny to others the kind of wealth that he has, the use of his goods and association with his friends. So the jealous men and women frown on their spouses who have close relationship with members of the opposite sex or even engage

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in friendly conversation. In short, *macchariya* is the desire to be excessively possessive, to oppose any close contact between one's cherished objects and other people and so it is rooted in love and hatred.

DESIRE AS THE CAUSE OF LOVE AND HATRED

Sakka then asked the Buddha about the cause of love and hatred. The Buddha said that the cause of love and hatred is desire. Here the desire the Buddha referred to is not the purely wholesome desire but the desire that is associated with pleasure and craving (*taṇhā chanda*).

Desire is of five kinds, viz., (1) the insatiable desire to seek sensual objects. This desire is the driving-force behind men's ceaseless activities until death in every existence. (2) The insatiable desire to acquire sensual objects. When one desire is fulfilled, there arises another desire and so in this way the acquisitive desire never comes to an end. No wonder that even millionaires crave for more wealth and money instead of being content with what they have. (3) The insatiable desire to consume various sensual objects and material goods. People who like shows, songs, etc never tire of enjoying them.

(4) The insatiable desire to store gold, silver, etc or to hoard money in any form to be used in case of an emergency in future. (5) The

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desire of some people to give money to their followers, employees, etc.

These five kinds of desire give rise to love and hatred. Objects and living beings that help to fulfil the desire causes love while those that obstruct the desire cause hatred.

Sakka then asked the Lord about the origin of desire. The Buddha answered that desire is caused by *vitakka* or discursive thinking. According to the commentary, *vitakka* means thinking and deciding. This characteristic of *vitakka* is of two kinds; one is based on desire while the other has its origin in belief. In other words, you think and decide when you regard a sense-object as a pleasant, desirable object or when you regard a living object as a person or a being. Thus if you are not mindful at the moment of seeing, hearing, etc you think and decide and this mental act leads to craving and attachment.

Then Sakka asked the Buddha about the cause of *vitakka*. The Buddha replied that *vitakka* is due to perception that tends to expand or diffuse (*papañca-sañña*). There are three kinds of such perception, viz., craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*) and belief (*diṭṭhi*). An unmindful person usually falls a prey to one of these agents of expansion. He expands every sense.

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object that he perceives and remembers because of his attachment, conceit or ego-belief. Like a small photograph that can be enlarged, every mental image or thought lends itself to expansion.

THE CONQUEST OF CRAVING, ETC

At the moment of seeing, one sees only visual form but then reflection brings into play *taṇhā*, *māna* and *diṭṭhi*. *Taṇhā* makes it pleasant and tends to magnify it and so do *māna* and *diṭṭhi* that give rise to conceit and ego-illusion respectively. So later on every recollection of the moment of seeing leads to thinking and decision which in turn cause desire. Again desire gives rise to love and hatred that makes a man a prey to envy and ill-will which bring about the frustration and suffering of mankind.

In response to the request of Sakka the Buddha spells out the practice for the conquest of craving, conceit and ego-illusion. According to the Buddha, there are two kinds of pleasant feeling and two kinds of unpleasant feeling viz., the pleasant or unpleasant feeling that we should harbour and the pleasant or unpleasant feeling that we should avoid. Then there is neutral feeling or *upekkhā* that we have when we are neither happy nor unhappy. *Upekkhā* is also of two kinds, viz., *upekkhā* that we should welcome and *upekkhā* that we should avoid.

THE CONQUEST OF FEELING

Pleasant or unpleasant or neutral feeling is to be harboured if it leads to wholesome states of consciousness; it should be avoided if it leads to unwholesome states of consciousness. The commentary describes this teaching as *vipassnā* practice on the Ariyan path.

The Pali text of the Buddha's teaching may be translated as follows.

"Sakka, I teach two kinds of pleasant feeling (*vedanā*), viz., the pleasant feeling that is to be harboured and the pleasant feeling that is to be avoided. If you know that a pleasant feeling helps to develop unwholesome states of consciousness and hamper wholesome states of consciousness, you should not harbour such feeling. If you know that a pleasant feeling helps to develop wholesome states of consciousness and hamper unwholesome states of consciousness, you should harbour such feeling. The pleasant feeling is of two kinds, viz., one which is bound up with thinking and reflection and the other which has nothing to do with these mental activities (*vitakka-vicāra*). Of these two the pleasant feeling that has nothing to do with *vitakka-vicāra* is much superior."

(*Vitakka* and *vicāra* are translated as thought-conception and discursive thinking respectively in Nyanatiloka's "Buddhist Dictionary")

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PLEASANT FEELING AND UNWHOLESOME THOUGHTS

Pleasant feelings that lead to unwholesome thoughts are rooted in sensual objects. Most people are preoccupied with sensual objects such as sex and food. If they get what they want, they rejoice but their joy leads to more desire and the so-called happiness of many people is founded on desire. If their desire is not fulfilled, they are frustrated and unhappy. This means the emergence of unwholesome thoughts that bring into play the agents of expansion, viz., *taṇhā*, *māna* and *diṭṭhi*. The pleasant feelings that we should avoid are mentioned in *Sālāyatanaṭṭhapaṇṇāsa* sutta of Majjhima nikaya. The sutta likens the sensual objects to human dwellings because they keep people in confinement. People derive pleasure from contact with them or from recollections of their contact. There are six kinds of pleasant feelings rooted in six sense-objects and their respective sense-organs.

The way to avoid pleasant but unwholesome feelings is to be mindful at the moment of seeing, etc. If sensual thoughts cause pleasure, the yogi must note and reject them. But the beginner in meditation cannot follow and note all the mental processes; so he starts with the object of contact and becomes aware of one of the primary elements, viz., earth, water, heat and wind. (*paṭhavi*, *āpo*, *tejo* and *vāyo*).

PLEASANT FEELING

In Satipaṭṭhāna sutta the Buddha says: *Gacchanto vā gacchāmiti pajānāti*; (The yogi) knows that he walks when walking." This saying refers to clear awareness of the rigidity and motion (*vāyo* element). But as he notes walking, the yogi is also aware of the rigidity and motion, hardness and softness (*pathavi* element) in the feet and the body, also of the warmth, cold and lightness (*tejo* element), of the heaviness and dampness (*āpo* element). *Āpo* element is intangible but can be known through contact with other elements that are bound up with it.

The yogis at our meditation center begin with contact and motion in the abdomen that are most obvious and easy to note while sitting. The tenseness and motion in the abdomen are the marks of *vāyo* element. They practise noting in their own common language the rising and falling of the belly. This practice has helped many yogis to attain insights and make much progress on the holy path.

In the beginning the yogi constantly watches the abdominal rising and falling. He notes any mental event that occurs while engaged in such concentration. A feeling of joy may arise but it disappears when it is noted. It usually does not intrude if the yogi keeps on watching the rising and falling. When the Buddha speaks of the unwholesome joy, it means that we should focus

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on *nāmarupa* in order to head off the sensual joy and that if such joy arises we should note and reject it at once.

WHOLESOME JOY

Then there is the wholesome joy which the Buddha describes as follows in the same sutta. Having realized the impermanence and dissolution of *rūpa*, the yogi knows that all the *rūpas* that he has seen before and those he is seeing are subject to *anicca* and *dukkha*. This insight-knowledge causes joy and such joy may be described as the pleasant feeling rooted in liberation from sensual desire.

This is part of the teaching in the sutta. The commentary adds that the yogi is joyful because he attains insight into impermanence, etc as a result of his mindfulness of the six sense-objects. Such joy is wholesome and desirable.

The commentary describes four kinds of wholesome joy; (1) the joy due to renunciation of worldly affairs, (2) the joy associated with *vipassanā* practice, (3) the joy based on contemplation of the Buddha, etc and the joy resulting from absorption in first *jhāna*, etc.

Some are joyful when they think of their^r renunciation of worldly affairs, their ordination as bhikkhus, practice of *vinaya* morality, concentration, and so forth. This joy is wholesom

WHOLESOME JOY

since it is bound up with renunciation or dissociation from secular life. So are the feelings of joy that we have when we hear a sermon on the Dhamma or when we go to a meditation center for practice of *vipassanā*.

The joy dependent on *vipassanā* may be the joy that arises while being mindful. In particular the highest joy is the joy associated with the emergence of *udayabbaya-ñāṇa* (insight into the arising and passing away of all phenomena).

The joy that we have when we contemplate the Buddha, etc is obvious. The commentaries say that concentration on the joy derived from the contemplation of the Buddha, of the Dhamma, of the Sangha, of morality, of liberality and of heavenly beings can bring about knowledge and fruition of the path. Even Arahatsip may be attained if the yogi notes and reflects on the dissolution and cessation of joy (*pīti*) that is born of the six contemplations. *Pīti* implies joy and obviously the joy derived from six contemplations is wholesome and so is the joy based on the three *jhānas* or their *upacāra* (neighbourhood) *jhāna*.

Of the four kinds of renunciation (*nekkhamma*) joining the holy order means liberation from matrimonial ties and so does the *vipassanā* practice since it is opposed to matrimony and all sensual objects. So the commentary on Itivuttaka describes ordination, first *jhāna*,

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Nibbāna, *vipassāna* and all wholesome dhamma as *nekkhamma*.

The joy which is marked by *vitakka-vicara* is of two kinds, viz happiness (*sukha*) that is associated with access-concentration (*upacāra-samādhī*) and happiness associated with first *jhāna*. Then as mentioned before, there are various types of mundane joy, viz., joy over one's ordination, joy that results from *vipassanā* practice, joy over the contemplation of the Buddha, etc. Again we have four kinds of supramundane joy associated with the four paths of the first *jhāna*.

Superior to these types of joy are those that have nothing to do with *vitakka-vicāra*. These are the attributes of the second *jhāna* that is marked by ecstasy, joy, one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*) and the third *jhāna* marked by joy and *ekaggatā*. Such *jhānic* joy is mundane joy. Likewise the joy derived from the four supramundane paths and the second and third *jhānas* are free from *vitakka-vicāra* and therefore wholesome. These second and third *jhānic* joys are far higher than the first *jhānic* joy and the joy associated with wholesome thoughts in sensual sphere; and so is the *vipassanā* joy resulting from attentiveness to second and third *jhānic* joy.

A discussion of these joys with or without *vitakka-vicāra* is above the comprehension of

VIPASSANA CONTEMPLATION

those who have little knowledge of scriptures. It can be understood thoroughly only by those who have attained *jhānas*.

According to the commentary, when Sakka asked the Buddha how to overcome desire, conceit and belief, (*taṇhā*, *māna* and *diṭṭhi*) he was asking the Lord about the *vipassanā* practice on the Ariyan path. The Buddha stressed wholesome pleasure, wholesome displeasure and wholesome indifference (*upekkhā*) as the remedy. It may be hard for common people to understand but the Buddha's answer was relevant to the question.

For the devas mind is more obvious than matter and among the elements of mind feeling is more obvious than others. So the Buddha told Sakka to watch his feelings (*vedanā*). In many of the Buddha's teachings on *vipassanā* contemplation of *rūpa* takes precedence over that of consciousness. This is also true of Sakka-panha sutta but here no mention is made of *rūpa* since it is implicit in the contemplation of feeling.

VIPASSANA CONTEMPLATION

The object of *vipassanā* practice is to note all psycho-physical phenomena that arise from contact with sense-objects. It involves the effort to see empirically all phenomena as they really are together with their characteristics such as

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impermanence, etc. At first the yogi cannot focus on every *nāma-rupa* process and so he should begin with a few obvious events. He must note, "walking" when he walks and so on. He must watch every bodily behaviour. In this way he usually becomes aware of *vāyo* and other primary elements. This accords with the teaching of Satipaṭṭhanā sutta: *Gacchunto va gacchāmiti pajānāti*: (The yogi) knows that he is walking when he walks.

The yogi tends to be slack if he focuses on one posture, say, sitting and so in order to keep him mindful, we instruct him to focus on the rising and falling of the belly. With the development of concentration, he becomes aware of *vāyo* element (rigidity and motion) whenever he focuses on rising and falling. Later on there dawns on him the distinction between the rising or falling and consciousness, between lifting a foot and consciousness and so forth. This discriminative insight into *nāma-rupa* is called *nāmarpapariccheda-ñāṇa*.

With the further development of concentration, the yogi knows that he bends his hand because of his desire to bend, that he sees because of his eyes and the object to be seen, that he knows because of the object to be known; that he does not know because of his unmindfulness; that he likes a thing because of his ignorance; that he seeks to fulfil his desire

VIPASSANA CONTEMPLATION

because of his attachment; that good or bad results follow his actions and so on. This is *paccayappariggaha ñāṇa* or insight into the primacy of the law of cause and effect.

This is followed by *sammāsana ñāṇa* which means [insight into the *inicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* of all phenomena, an insight born of reflection on their arising and passing away.

Then the yogi knows that everything arises and vanishes rapidly. His perception is so keen that nothing escapes his attention. He tends to see lights and to be overly ecstatic and joyful. This is the pleasant feeling that arises together with the extraordinary insight (*udayabbaya ñāṇa*) into the flux of *nāma-rūpa*. It surpasses all other kinds of joy and is described as a mental state that we should welcome. The Dhammapada speaks of the surpassing joy (*rati*) that occurs to the yogi who contemplates the dhamma, that is, *nāma-rupa* in a flux rightly. He derives joy and ecstasy and this state of consciousness is called *amata* (the Deathless) because it is the forerunner of *Nibbāna* which the yogi will surely attain if he strives for it with faith, will and diligence.

The joy and ecstasy are called *pamojja* and *piti* in Pali. *Pamojja* is the joy that occurs with the emergence of *sammāsana-ñāṇa* while *piti* means extreme joy that accompanies the

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udavabbaya-ñāṇa, the rapid perception of the arising and dissolution of phenomena. It develops while the yogi is mindful of the rising and falling of the belly or the sensations in the body or while his attention is focussed on his bodily movements. He rarely suffers unbearable pain. If pain occurs sometimes, it vanishes instantly when he notes it and then he feels very much elated. The elation continues to be intense as long as he is mindful of the rapidity with which every phenomenon arises and passes away.

As in the first three *jhānas*, the yogi feels very happy when he attains *udavabbaya-ñāṇa*. He describes his happiness at this stage as ineffable experience that surpasses all similar states of consciousness. In the *Sakkapanha sutta* it is labelled *sevita'hasomanassa*, that is, the pleasant feeling that we should seek.

UNPLEASANT FEELING THAT SHOULD BE SOUGHT OR AVOIDED

The sutta mentions two kinds of unpleasant feeling, viz., the unpleasant feeling that leads to unwholesome kamma (acts, words or thoughts) and the unpleasant feeling that results in wholesome kamma. The former is to be avoided while the latter is to be welcomed. The latter is not to be deliberately sought but it is commended because it is conducive to the practice of *jhāna*, the holy path and its fruition.

UNPLEASANT FEELING

Salhāyatanaṭṭhāna sutta tells us what kind of sorrow we should welcome and what kind of sorrow we should avoid. We usually grieve over the failure to get pleasant, desirable sense-objects or over the lack of these objects in the past. We are unhappy when we have to face dangers and unpleasant objects or when we worry over the possibility of suffering and danger in the future or when we think of suffering, etc in the past. Such unpleasant feelings do us no good but produce only pain and unwholesome thoughts.

These unpleasant feelings are a hindrance to good deeds. Those who harbour them cannot make devotions before the Buddha image. Even while making devotions they are so distracted that they lack zeal and concentration. A calm mind is essential if contemplation of the Buddha is to be worthwhile. Without it there will be only unwholesome thoughts. So we should try to overcome these feelings. Yet there are some people who seem to welcome suffering. They may not like you if, for example, you tell them not to grieve over the loss of their beloved one. On the contrary, they may thank you when you say something to justify their grief.

We should keep in mind the law of kamma or the Buddha's teaching that everything happens according to one's actions and bear our misfortunes calmly. The best remedy in such a crisis

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is the practice of *samatha* or *vipassanā*. If sorrow, grief or depression afflicts us during meditation hours such unwholesome states of consciousness must be noted and removed. The Buddha describes the Satipaṭṭhāna method as the only way to get over grief and end all suffering. So long as we keep ourselves mindful according to Satipaṭṭhāna teaching, we never feel depressed and if depression arises, it passes away when we focus our attention in it.

There are many things in life that makes one unhappy such as frustration of desire, lack of success, loss of property and so forth. Brooding over our misfortunes leads to depression but we should get over it through mindfulness and our method is to watch constantly the abdominal rising and falling, the act of sitting, etc.

The practice of mindfulness was crucial to Sakka. For in the face of imminent death that would surely bring about the loss of heavenly bliss and sensual pleasure, he was much depressed. So the Buddha's teaching was realistic and very important.

We will now give a translation of the Pali text in Saḷhāyatanaṭṭhāna sutta about the unpleasant feeling that we should welcome.

"After having observed and realized the impermanence of the present visual form (*rupa*),

UNPLEASANT FEELING

their dissolution and passing away, the yogi gains a true insight into the nature of things as they are, that is, into their *anicca*, *dukkha*, etc and so there arises in him the desire for the goal of the Ariyan path, the matchless and the noblest freedom. He looks forward to the day when he would attain the abode of Ariyas who have won such freedom. This longing for the Ariyan liberation causes pain and sorrow, This unpleasant feeling is called *nekkhamassita-domanassa*, that is, *domanassa* (pain or sorrow) due to desire for renunciation.

Those who observe the psycho-physical phenomena as they arise from six senses realize their impermanence, etc and with their mere hearsay knowledge of the Ariyan dhamma they may keep on meditating in the hope of attaining the goal. But if their hope does not materialize in due course they will get dejected. This is the mental pain caused by the desire for renunciation.

This needs some explanation. The yogi who lacks experience in *samatha*, *jhāna* or *samādhi* begins with *nāma-rupa* arising from six sense-organs. But it is not easy for a beginner to follow their process thoroughly. So he would be well-advised to begin with the four primary elements as suggested in *Visuddhimagga* or with *vāyo* element in the abdomen in terms of

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common language, a method that we teach at our meditation-center.

While he is mindful of the rising and falling of the abdomen, he must note any thought (intention, desire, etc) sensation (heat, pain etc) or contact with sense-objects (seeing, hearing, etc) that occurs. But the true nature of *nāma-rupa* is not apparent when concentration is weak. With the development of *samādhi* the mind is calm, pure and free from hindrances. Every thought or feeling is noted and removed. The yogi is then at the stage of *cittavisuddhi* (purification of mind). Later on he knows the distinction between the cognizing *nāma* the cognized *rupa*. This is the discriminative insight into *nāmarupa* (*nāmarupapariccheda-ñāṇa*) and purification of view (*ditthivisuddhi*). The yogi gains insight into the distinction between cause and effect (*paccayapariggaha-ñāṇa*) and he is then free from all doubts (*kankhāvitaraṇavisuddhi*).

The yogi now realizes that every phenomenon is subject to *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. This is *samasana-nāṇa*. He quickly perceives the instant dissolution of everything that arises (*udayabbaya ñāṇa*).

At this stage there arises in the yogi the desire to be liberated. He longs to attain a certain stage on the holy path and he hopes to do so within a certain period of time. If his hope is not fulfilled he is sad and disappointed, a prey

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to doubt and despair. But since this feeling may serve as an incentive to further effort, it is a blessing in disguise although it is not to be sought deliberately.

Of course the best thing for the yogi to do is to make uninterrupted progress from the outset so that the insights and experiences will afford him much pleasure. So the sutta lays emphasis on the joy rather than the sorrow to be derived from renunciation. Nevertheless for the yogi who fails to achieve success within his target date depression is inevitable.

At our meditation-center we explain successive stages of insight to a few qualified yogis to help them evaluate their experiences. We confine the teaching to the select few because it serves no purpose in the case of those who have no experience in meditation. It is beneficial only to the experienced yogis insofar as it serves as a spur to further effort. Those who hope to hear our teaching without having gained sufficient insights are dejected over the non-fulfilment of their wish. But this dejection will do them good since it makes them exert more effort and leads to experiences which accord with our teaching and which they can evaluate joyfully.

Some yogis are disheartened because of their weak concentration at the outset but as a result

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some redouble their effort and attain unusual insights. So the yogi may benefit by his despair at this stage. According to the commentary, we should welcome the despair that results from the non-fulfilment of desire in connection with renunciation, meditation, reflection (*anussati*) and *jhāna*. We should turn to good account the despair or sorrow over our inability to become a bhikkhu, to practise meditation or even to hear the Dhamma or visit a pagoda. As an example of the wholesome sorrow, there is the story of a Buddhist woman in Sri Lanka (Ceylon).

The woman's parents went to a pagoda, leaving their daughter at home as she was in the family way. The pagoda being not far away, she saw it illuminated and heard the Dhamma being recited by the monks. Her heart sank at the thought of the bad kamma that made her unable to go along with her parents but then she rejoiced over the good kamma of the pilgrims at the pagoda. Her rejoicing turned into ecstasy (*ubbegapiti*) and suddenly she rose into the air and found herself on the platform of the pagoda. Thus wholesome sorrow helped to bring about the fulfilment of a woman's wholesome desire miraculously.

The commentary on Sakkapanha sutta cites the story of Mahasiva therā as an example of wholesome sorrow that leads to Arahatsip.

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Mahāsiva therā was a great teacher who had many disciples. Those who practised *vipassanā* under his guidance became Arahats. Seeing that his teacher had not yet attained the supreme goal, one of these Arahats asked him for a lesson in Dhamma. Mahāsiva said that he had no time to teach the lesson as he was engaged the whole day answering the questions of his disciples, removing their doubts and so forth.

Then the bhikkhu said, "Sir, you should at least have the time to contemplate the Dhamma in the morning. As matters now stand, you will not have even the time to die. You are the mainstay of other people but you have no support for your own self. I do not therefore want your lesson". So saying, he rose into the air and went away.

Now Mahāsiva realized that the bhikkhu had come not to learn the Dhamma but to warn him against self-complacency. Thus disillusioned, he left the monastery and retired to a secluded place where he practised *vipassanā* strenuously. But despite his persistent and painstaking effort he failed to have any unusual insight and even after many years he was still far from his goal. At last he became very much depressed and was shedding tears when a goddess appeared and started crying. The therā asked her why she was crying and she said

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that she thought she could attain insights by crying.

This brought the therā to his senses. He pulled himself together, practised mindfulness and having passed through successive stages of illumination on the holy path, he finally attained Arahātship. After all insight is an experience that the yogi can attain in a short time under favourable circumstances. The therā's initial failure despite his strenuous effort might have been due to discursive thinking, that stemmed from his extensive learning.

Thus the sorrow which prompted therā Mahā-siva to make further effort on the path is a kind of wholesome sorrow that we should welcome. Sakkapanha sutta mentions two kinds of wholesome sorrow, viz., one with *vitakka vicāra* (discursive thinking) and the other without it. But in reality every sorrow is bound up with thinking and we speak of sorrow without thinking only metaphorically.

In short, sorrow is unwholesome if it originates in sensual desire or worldly affairs and so we should avoid thoughts that lead to such sorrow. If it arises spontaneously, we must not harbour it. We should fix the mind on other objects and sorrow will vanish of its own accord. On the other hand sorrow is wholesome when it arises from frustration over any effort to promote one's spiritual life such as the

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effort to join the holy order, the effort to attain insights and so forth. We should welcome such sorrow for it may spur effort and lead to progress on the holy path. It is not, however, to be sought deliberately. The best thing is to have wholesome joy in the search for enlightenment.

WHOLESOME AND UNWHOLESOME UPEKKHĀ

Upekkhā is neither joy nor sorrow but indifferent feeling. It arises more often than other feelings, joy and sorrow being only occasional states of consciousness. But it is apparent only when the power of concentration is effective. Again *upekkhā* is of two kinds, viz., wholesome *upekkhā* that leads to good deeds and unwholesome *upekkhā* that leads to bad deeds. *Salhāyatanavibhanga* sutta mentions six kinds of *upekkhā* according as they arise from each of the six senses, viz., eye, ear and so forth.

The unwholesome *upekkhā* that arises from the senses in ignorant and confused persons is termed *gehasita upekkhā*. We feel joy at the sight of a pleasant object, sorrow at the sight of an unpleasant object. But we also have indifferent feeling that is neither good nor bad at the sight of a person or an object that we see every day. For example, our feeling is neither pleasant nor unpleasant when we see a tree or a stone.

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This state of consciousness is to be found among common people (*puṭhujjana*) who differ from Ariyas or even from the higher type of worldlings (*kalyāṇa puṭhujjana*) who are aware of *anicca*, etc. Here we mean the ignorant people who do not know the real nature of sense-objects. The unwholesome *upekkhā* arises in the ignorant commoners who, because of their unmindfulness, remain unaware of *anicca*, etc and wedded to the illusion of permanence and goodness of all phenomena.

The commentary gives further details about the commoner who is subject to unwholesome *upekkhā*. He is not at the *sotāpanna* stage which marks the conquest of defilements leading to the lower worlds, or at the *sakadāgāmi* stage that ensures freedom from gross sensual desire and ill-will or at the *anāgāmi* stage which means the total elimination of these two defilements. The commoner with unwholesome *upekkhā* is not any one of these three Ariyas in that he has not done away with any one of the defilements.

He is also not a person who has neutralized the effect of kamma. It is only the Arahāt who can overcome the kammic effects such as rebirth-consciousness, etc. These two negative attributes, viz., being still prone to defilements and being still subject to the law of kamma show that the unwholesome *upekkhā* arises only

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in non-Ariyan *puthujjana*. But by *puthujjana* the commentary means only the commoner who is devoid of *vipassanā* insight and knowledge.

He is described as a person who does not see the evils of ignorance (*moha*). Owing to his unmindfulness he does not know the truth and has the illusion of permanent ego-entity. This illusion leads to pleasant desire, attachment and effort for self-fulfilment. The effort in turn gives rise to good or bad kamma which results in rebirth with old age, sickness, death and all other sufferings.

The *puthujjana* does not see these evils of illusion and he lacks knowledge, too. Knowledge is of two kinds, viz., knowledge of the Buddha's teaching through sermons, etc and empirical knowledge through meditation and insight on the path. Both kinds of knowledge are foreign to the ordinary person who therefore has *upekkhā* that is born of illusion. The sense-objects cause neither joy nor pain in him but he remains steeped in the world of senses. Hence the term *gehisita-upekkha* where *geha* means the house of senses. In other words, the *puthūjjana* does not outgrow the phenomenal or the sensual world and remains blind to its real nature, viz., its impermanence and so forth.

In contrast to unwholesome *upekkhā* there is wholesome *upekkhā* which the commentary

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explains at length on the basis of *Salhāyatānavibhanga sutta*. It is termed *nekkhammasita-upekkhā* (renunciation-oriented *upekkhā*). It is of six kinds, depending on the six senses. Being mindful of the passing away of all sense-objects, the yogi realizes that every phenomenon is subject to impermanence, suffering and dissolution. This insight into the reality of the universe leads to equanimity (*upekkhā*) which helps the yogi to outgrow the sensual world and free himself from attachments. He is then indifferent to both pleasant and unpleasant sense-objects.

For the yogi who is mindful and has developed concentration, everything arises only to pass away instantly. The suttas stress this fact usually in the first place with reference to visual objects but in practice it is first apparent in regard to the objects of contact and thought. If while being attentive to the rising and falling of the abdomen any thought arises, it vanishes instantly when the mind is fixed on it. With the development of concentration the yogi becomes aware of the rising and falling separately and later on his awareness extends to the disappearance of the rising and falling in series. At the stage of *bhanga* insight he finds the belly, hands, etc not as substances but as phenomena that vanish ceaselessly and instantly.

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The ceaseless dissolution of phenomena becomes more apparent with the development of *bhanga-ñāṇa* so that the yogi finally realizes the law of impermanence. Knowing thus the nature of *nāma-rūpa* as it really is, he has neither joy nor sorrow but remains just aware of the sense-objects. This fleeting awareness leads to *upekkhā* which is more manifest when *bhanga* and *sankhārupekkha* insights flash across the mind.

At these stages on the path the yogi is neither pleased nor displeased with the sight of pleasant or unpleasant objects. So he is above attachment in regard to sights, sounds, etc. His *upekkhā* is beyond the sensual world and in fact it means freedom and the goal of *vipassanā* practice.

The yogi should seek this wholesome, *vipassanā* oriented *upekkhā*. It is to be first experienced at the advanced stage of *udayabbaya* insight and is most pronounced at the stage of *sankhārupekkha* insight. According to the sutta, it is of two kinds, viz., *upekkhā* with discursive thinking (*vitakka-vicāra*) and *upekkhā* without such thinking. In reality all *upekkhā* that occur during contemplation involve discursive thinking but the *upekkhā* that arises while watching the sensual and first *jhānic* consciousness is called *upekkhā* with discursive thinking while the *upekkhā* that occurs while absorbed in the second *jhānic* state is called *upekkhā* without discursive thinking.

DISCOURSE ON SAKKA-PANHA SUTTA

Of the two kinds of *upekkhā* the one without discursive thinking is superior.

THE REBIRTH OF SAKKA

In any case the main object of *vipassanā* practice is to seek and cultivate the *upekkhā* that is bound up with *sankhārūpekkhā* insight. To this end we should avoid sensuous joy and seek wholesome joy in good deeds and contemplation. Likewise we should welcome wholesome sorrow stemming from frustration on the holy path and avoid unwholesome sorrow. In the same way we should avoid unwholesome *upèkkhā* of the sensual world and seek wholesome *upekkhā* of the holy path.

Here the emphasis is on the positive aspect of the practice. In other words, we should concentrate on wholesome joy, wholesome sorrow and wholesome *upekkhā*. For the cultivation of these wholesome states of consciousness means the elimination of their negative, that is, unwholesome counterparts.

We should also eliminate wholesome sorrow through wholesome joy. This means that if we are depressed because of the failure to make much progress on the holy path, we must overcome the depression by exerting effort for *vipassanā* insight. Likewise wholesome joy must be rejected through wholesome *upekkhā*. This wholesome or *vipassanā upekkhā* is the *summum bonum* of the holy life. But the joy in *vipassanā*

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is not to be wholly rejected for this *vipassanā* with joy forms the basis of the first three *jhānic* paths and fruitions. Moreover, the yogi who does not attain *jhāna* cannot attain the fourth *jhānic* path with *upekkhā*. He can attain only the first three *jhanās* with joy. He usually attains the path and fruition through the *anuloma vipassanā* with joy. Hence the Buddha's emphasis on *vipassanā upekkhā* as the highest state of consciousness.

Thus *sankhārupekkhā* insight with joy or with *upekkhā* is only a step removed from the holy path and fruition. If the yogi is not content with his insight, he usually attains the path in four or five days. So the *upekkhā* with renunciation-joy has to be sought since it is conducive to holy life on the level of *vipassanā* path.

So the yogi should subordinate wholesome sorrow to wholesome joy and even the wholesome joy to *upekkhā* until he attains the *sankhārupekkha* insight. This means the attainment of the four stages on the holy path and the extinction of desire, conceit and belief. Thus summing up, the Buddha says to Sakka; "O King of devas! The bhikkhu who avoids unwholesome dhammas and seeks the wholesome dhammas is committed to the middle way of the good life that leads to *Nibbānā*, the extinction of all defilements."

DISCOURSE ON SAKKA-PANNA SUTTA

While following the Buddha's discourse Sakka watched his states of consciousness, cultivated wholesome joy and wholesome *upekkhā*, developed insight-knowledge and became a *sotāpanna*. This was followed by his demise and rebirth as a new Sakka. He attained only the first stage on the holy path as his spiritual potential was limited.

The rebirth of Sakka shows that a dying deva can benefit by hearing the Dhamma. Through mindfulness of wholesome emotions the yogi can make good progress on the holy path and the most common of these emotions is wholesome joy. In Sri Lanka one Phussadeva thera became an Arahāt after contemplating the joy that arose in him at the sight of a Buddha image. So also the queen of king Asoka attained the *sotāpanna* stage after contemplating the joy that welled up in her when she heard the singing of a bird that sounded like the voice of the Buddha. According to the commentaries, the yogi may attain even Arahātship while contemplating the wholesome joy or he may attain the holy path and its fruition through the contemplation of *danā*, *sīla* and the impermanence of wholesome joy resulting from their practice.

On the attainment of the first stage Sakka became wholly free from doubt and the illusion of ego-entity. The freedom that he now enjoyed

PĀTIMOKKHASAMVARA-SILA

was different from the freedom that he had in the past in that it was the freedom of a *sotāpanna* whereas the latter was based on knowledge and thinking.

PĀTIMOKKHASAMVARA-SILA

Sakka asked the Buddha about the relation of morality to the holy life. "Lord, what is the moral practice that protects one from the lower worlds or from unwholesome deeds, words or thoughts?"

The Buddha says that there are two kinds of deeds, viz., wholesome deeds and unwholesome deeds. He classifies speech and livelihood in the same way. Any action or speech or livelihood that contributes to good kamma is wholesome and any action, etc that contributes to bad kamma is unwholesome. Unwholesome actions are killing, stealing and indulging in illicit sex. Abstinence from these actions constitutes wholesome acts. These are precepts for lay disciples and there are many other precepts which the bhikkhus have to observe in accordance with the teachings of the Vinaya pitaka.

Unwholesome verbal actions are lying, slandering, abusing and idle, frivolous talk. Wholesome verbal actions mean abstinence from these unwholesome speeches. To make one's living through unwholesome actions or speech is unwholesome livelihood. Wholesome livelihood

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is one that has nothing to do with such actions or speech. In short, for the layman strict observance of the five precepts ensure moral purity. Some people may say that the five precepts refer only to lying and do not explicitly enjoin abstinence from the other three kinds of wrong speech and wrong livelihood. But abstinence from lying implies abstinence from other kinds of unwholesome speech since all these verbal evils involve the utterance of falsehood. Likewise we avoid wrong livelihood if we avoid killing, etc since the five precepts forbid killing, etc for one's living or for any other reason. So the five precepts constitute in brief the *pātimokkha-sīla* for the laity.

INDRIYASAMVĀRA-SILA (CONTROL OF THE SENSES)

Then Sakka asked the Buddha how a bhikkhu should practise *indriyasamvara-sīla*. *Indriya* means to govern or control and it concerns the six governing sense-organs, viz., the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind which govern seeing, hearing, smelling, taste, contact and consciousness respectively. Sakka asked the Buddha how one should guard these governing senses.

The Buddha made a distinction between two kinds of sense-objects, viz., the sense-objects which should be accepted and those which should be rejected. One should accept the sense-objects that discourage bad kamma and

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encourage good kamma; and one should ignore those that discourage good kamma and encourage bad kamma. We must avoid looking at objects that cause pleasure, anger, etc. If they are unavoidable, we must stop thinking and practise some kind of contemplation; or we must make a note of seeing and stop short of letting the mind wander beyond bare awareness. This is the way to reject unwholesome sense-objects.

Similarly we should not attend to unwholesome kamma. On the other hand we should listen to the recitation of the Dhamma as it is obviously the mainspring of good kamma. Whatever the sound may be, if we focus on hearing and note its impermanence, etc it will contribute to the development of *vipassanā* insight.

The sense of smell usually causes bad kamma. On rare occasions it induces good kamma as, for instance, when we note the fragrance of flowers offered at the shrine with reference to the three marks of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*. The same may be said of tastes. But we cannot live without food and we can avoid bad kamma only by eating mindfully. It is also good for us if we can avoid very delicious food. We should of course always avoid any food or drink that is intoxicating. Although we eat good food we can avoid defilement if

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we do not care or crave for its delicacy. This is control of the senses that is impossible for unmindful persons.

Bodily contact also usually leads to unwholesome kamma. It is not possible to avoid all bodily contact. But we should avoid as far as possible the sexual contact that causes pleasure and attachment. We should control the senses so that we can detach ourselves and forget the delightful or painful sensations. The best way to gain total control is, as before, to note impermanence, etc of all tactile sensations. Good kamma arises through the mindfulness of all tactile impressions in accordance with *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*. Discriminative and discursive thinking about men, women, enemy, etc is to be avoided since it leads to passion, ill-will and so forth. Should such thoughts occur, they must be replaced with meditation on the Buddha, sila etc and their arising and passing away should be noted.

There are many other suttas that contain the Buddha's teaching about the control of the senses. Typical of these teachings is the following advice.

"When you see a man or a woman with the eye, you should not think of his or her physical features. You should avoid making a note of the eyes, the eyebrows and other parts

CONTROL OF THE SENSES

of the body in detail that will surely give rise to defilements.”

Men should not think of a woman's physical features as a whole and likewise women should avoid doing so *vis-a-vis* a man. For such thinking fuels passions and so do thoughts about the particular features of the opposite sex such as hair, mouth, breast and so forth. The yogi must remain barely aware of seeing and avoid thinking about the physical form as a whole or the different parts of the body of a human being.

The Buddha points out the evils arising from lack of control of the senses. “One who does not guard his eyes is forever beset with craving and ill-will,” says the Buddha. But the control of the senses must be exercised in the proper way. The yogi must avoid looking at unwholesome objects (pleasant or unpleasant) that he has once seen. If he sees it by chance, he pays no attention to its form, colour, etc or retains no impression of them. He keeps himself barely aware of seeing and bears in mind their impermanence, etc.

The same may be said of other senses, viz., hearing, smelling, eating, touching and thinking. With the development of concentration, the yogi can in this way focus on all psycho-physical phenomena and realize their *anicca, dukkha* and

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anatta, thereby leaving little room for the emergence of defilements. This is the best way of controlling the senses and through such control the yogi can attain the holy path and the fruitions after passing through the stages of insight successively. The attainment of Arahathship in this way is mentioned in the following story of Mahātissa thera from Visud-dhimagga.

THE STORY OF MAHATISSA THERA

While going to Anuradha city to collect food, Mahātissa thera met a woman on the way. The woman had quarrelled with her husband and set out for her parents' home. She was well dressed and at the sight of the thera she laughed seductively. Formerly the thera had often reflected on the impurity of the human body and so on looking at the woman, he had the vision of a loathsome skeleton. Thereupon he attained the first *jhāna* and through *vipassanā* meditation he became an Arahath. The husband who had followed the woman met the thera and asked him whether he had seen a woman. The thera said that he had seen only a skeleton that had gone along the road.

The thera might have practised contemplation on the impurity of the human body for a long time. His experience is a lesson for the yogis who need not be disheartened for lack of

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progress. For they will attain insight in due course if they keep on trying.

THE STORY OF CITTAGUTTA THERA

The control of the senses as practised by another therā is cited in Visuddhimagga.

Therā Cittagutta dwelt in a cave in Sri Lanka. High up on the walls of the cave there were frescoes of the Buddha's birth-stories (*jātakas*). Being always on his guard in regard to the senses, the therā never looked up and so he remained wholly ignorant of the pictures.

Then one day some young monks came to the cave. They were fascinated by the pictures and they told the therā about their beauty. The therā said that he never noticed the pictures although he had lived in the cave for over sixty years. His reply was an indirect rebuke to the visitors for their lack of mindfulness in respect of their eyes.

There was a Gangaw tree near the entrance of the cave. The therā never looked up and so he knew that the flowers were in full bloom only when he saw the pollens on the ground. Hearing the news about the therā's holiness, the king invited him to the palace. In spite of the repeated invitations, the therā refused to see the king. Then the king forbade the suckling of infants by their mothers in the village

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where the therā went about to collect food in the morning. So out of compassion for the children the therā went to the palace.

The king and the queen paid respects to the therā. The therā blessed them, one after another saying, "May your Majesty be happy!" Then the young monks asked the therā why he addressed both the king and the queen as "your Majesty." The therā replied that he made no distinction between the king and the queen. This is a lesson for those who practise the restraint of the senses.

The most important thing is to avoid sights that give rise to defilements and if these sights are unavoidable, to contemplate their impurities or to make a note of seeing. Here we should bear in mind the Buddha's reply to Ananda on the eve of his *parinibbāna* when the latter asked him how a bhikkhu should behave *vis-a-vis* women. The Buddha said that a bhikkha should avoid seeing women. If he cannot avoid seeing them, he should not speak to them. If he cannot avoid speaking to them, then he should be mindful and regard a woman as his mother or sister or daughter according to her age.

This is the first practice as suggested in *Bhāradvāja sutta* of *Samyutta-nikāya* for the conquest of sensual desire. The second practice mentioned in the same sutta is reflection on the

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impurity of the human body. The third practice is the restraint of the senses.

The Buddha's teaching applies to other sense-objects as well. We should avoid listening to sounds such as songs, etc that lead to defilements. If we cannot avoid them, we must make a note of hearing. The need for such mindfulness is obvious in the case of monks and yogis. But the Buddha's teaching was addressed to Sakka and other devas. The devas are usually mired in sensual pleasure and so it is necessary for them to restrain the senses as far as possible. The same may be said of the lay disciples when they observe sabbath or practise meditation.

Scents of flowers, perfumes, etc that cause defilements are to be treated in the same way. So is the food which the yogi should eat only after due reflection (that he eats not for pleasure but to preserve his health.) Sensations of taste and touch that lead to defilements are also to be avoided and if unavoidable, they should be dealt with in the same way. Making a note of walking, sitting, etc constitutes mindfulness of sensation of touch.

According to the commentary, the practice of *Nissajji dutanga* is the pursuit of wholesome sensation of touch. *Nissajji dutanga* is the ascetic practice of some yogis who never lie down but remain in a sitting position even

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when asleep. Sāriputtā, Mahākassapa and other prominent disciples of the Buddha practised it for long periods ranging from 12 years in the case of Rāhulā to 120 years in the case of Mahākassapa. Since they were Arahats their object was not to acquire merit but to serve as examples for posterity.

The yogi should patiently make a note of wholesome sensations of touch and practise *vipassanā*, keeping himself mindful of wholesome sense-objects. When he has unpleasant sensations in the body, he should not fidget but exercise patience as far as possible and keep on contemplating them in accordance with the teaching of *Sakka-pañhā sutta*.

Moreover the yogi should not think of anything that can give rise to craving or ill-will; and he must abstain from doing so not only in respect of the mind-objects or thoughts that occur to him at present but also in regard to those in the past and the future as well. They should be noted and rejected.

THE SELF RESTRAINT OF THE THREE THERAS

The commentary mentions the story the three theras whom we should emulate in our effort to remove unwholesome thoughts and practise mindfulness. On the first day of their rain-retreat they admonished one another and pledged to have no sensual or aggressive thoughts during

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the three months. On the *pavāraṇā* day that marked the end of the lent the eldest therā asked the youngest therā how he controlled his mind during the lent. *Pavāraṇā* day is the day on which a bhikkhu invites another to point out his faults or breaches of Vinaya rules that he had unconsciously committed during the retreat. The young monk said that he did not allow his mind to leave the monastery but kept it confined within the building.

He meant of course that if his mind went astray during his meditation, he restricted it to the monastery, that he never thought of anything in its neighbourhood. His accomplishment was indeed laudable in view of the fact that by and large yogis do not have a firm hold over their mind before they develop concentration so that they cannot prevent their minds from wandering when they practise mindfulness.

When the therā asked the second young monk the same question, the latter said that he did not allow his mind even to leave his room. So his power of concentration was more developed and superior to that of the younger monk.

Then the two young monks asked the elder therā how much control he had over his mind. The therā said that he did not allow his mind to leave his five internal *khandhās*. This shows that he confined his attention to the psycho-

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physical phenomena that arise at the six senses at every moment of seeing, hearing, etc. The thera's ability to concentrate is most wonderful and perhaps he was an Arahant. The three theras' attainment in mind-control is indeed an inspiration for the yogis who practise mindfulness.

The commentary commends the contemplation of mind-objects together with *mettā*, etc. So we should cultivate *mettā* (loving-kindness) etc, saying, "May all beings be free from danger" and so forth. Moreover, since the commentary says, "*mettā*, etc" it is to be assumed that all mind-objects should be contemplated for insight-knowledge (*vipassanā*). In short, *vipassanā* contemplation of any kind is commendable because it means the accumulation of wholesome kamma.

SATIPAṬṬHĀNA: A BIG HEAP OF GOOD KAMMA

Of the many kinds of contemplation the Buddha describes the four Satipaṭṭhāna as the sum-total of all wholesome dhammas or kammas. Giving a lot of alms or leading a very good moral life may mean a big accumulation of wholesome kammas. But the donor or a morally good man may be occasionally harassed by irrelevant thoughts and of course it is impossible to perform *dāna* or practise strict morality all day and night. So it is not true if you call *dāna* or *sīla* a big heap of wholesome dhammas.

DIVERSITY OF VIEWS

On the other hand the practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā* requires constant mindfulness of all bodily behaviour, feelings, thoughts acts of seeing, hearing, etc. Barrings sleeping, hours at night, the yogi has to be mindful at every moment. He makes a note of his feeling, etc at least once in a second and this means he acquires one wholesome dhamma in that period of time. He has 3600 wholesome dhammas in an hour or if we exclude four sleeping hours he gains merit to the tune of 720,000 wholesome dhammas in a day. Merit accrues to him at every moment of sitting, etc. He acquires it even while he is urinating. So *Satipaṭṭhāna* is no doubt a big heap of wholesome dhammas that should be cultivated.

DIVERSITY OF VIEWS

The Buddha's discourse was much gratifying to Sakka. Before he came to see the Buddha, he had met the self-styled sages and made inquiries about their teachings. He then found that they held different views. Now that he had attained the first stage on the holy path after hearing the words of the Buddha, he knew the true Dhamma and hence he knew also the true Buddha and the true Sangha. He was now free from all doubts. He did not tell the Buddha about it explicitly but it was implied in his question to the Buddha.

DISCOURSE ON SAKKA-PANHA SUTTA

"Lord, do all those who call themselves *samaṇa-brahmaṇas* hold the same views? Do they all lead the same moral life? Do they have the same desire or do they have the same goal?"

Of course Sakka knew the answers to these questions. He asked them only as a prelude to the question about their differences. The Buddha answered his second question as follows.

"O Sakka! In this world people do not have the same kind of temperament. Their temperaments are different. They reflect wrongly and they firmly and obsessively cling to the views that suit their temperaments. They insist that only their views are right and that all other views are wrong. Because of their bigotry all the self-styled sages and holy men hold different views. They are committed to different systems of moral values, they have different desires and different goals in life."

Owing to their different temperaments people differ from one another in their inclinations and preferences in regard to colour, sound, clothes and so forth. Likewise they talk about the beliefs which they have accepted on the basis of their attachments and speculations. Some cherish the belief in the immortality of the soul. They say that the soul (*atta*) exists for ever, that it is not subject to destruction

ETERNITY BELIEF AND BUDDHISM

like the gross physical body. This is the eternity (*sassata*) belief. It has mass appeal and it does not differ basically from the religions which teach that man is created by God, that after death those whom He likes achieve salvation in heaven while those whom He dislikes are condemned to eternal hell. Then there is the annihilation (*uccheda*) belief which denies the future life and insists on the complete extinction of the individual after death. These are the doctrines of religions which claim the monopoly of truth and reject all other teachings as false. Such bigotry is the cause of differences in beliefs, moral life, aspirations and goals of life.

ETERNITY (*sassata*) BELIEF AND BUDDHISM

According to Buddhism, a man who dies is reborn, the new existence being conditioned by his kamma. This raises the question of whether the Buddhist theory of rebirth smacks of the eternity belief. But the Buddhist teaching is a far cry from the idea of a permanent ego. For Buddhism denies the ego-entity and recognizes only the process that involves the ceaseless arising and passing away of all psycho-physical phenomena. When the rebirth-consciousness ceases, there arises *bhavanga-citta* (subconsciousness) which also passes away one after another. With the *bhavanga-citta* always in

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this state of flux, there arises the consciousness that reflects on the visual form, sound, etc. This reflecting consciousness is followed by eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness and so forth. When this consciousness ceases, *bhavanga-citta* takes its place. In this way the two streams of *bhavanga-citta* and ordinary consciousness flow alternately and at the moment of death the *cuti-citta*, the last unit of subconsciousness passes away. The extinction of *cuti-citta* is termed death which therefore means the cessation of *nāmarūpa* process without the arising of new consciousness.

Immediately after the cessation of *cuti-citta*, there arises the rebirth consciousness and conditioned by one's kamma, this rebirth-consciousness marks the beginning of a new existence. So rebirth has nothing to do with ego-entity or the transfer of *nāmarūpa* from the previous life. With the cessation of this new consciousness, there arises the continuous flow of *bhavanga*, etc as in the past existence. The person representing this *nāmarūpa* does not embody any *atta* or ego-entity. This fact can be realized by those who practise *vipassanā* meditation.

Buddhism is not *sassata vāda* since it teaches that craving leads to rebirth. When the yogi attains Arahathship, he is wholly free from craving and other defilements. The Arahath is

MAHĀYANA AND THERAVĀDA

not attached to any sense-object on his death-bed and this rules out the arising of new *nāmarūpa*. But it does not follow that Buddhism teaches annihilation or *uccheda vāda*. For the annihilation-view presupposes the ego in the living being, the ego which is the subject of experiences, good or bad. Buddhism rejects the ego and recognizes only the stream or process of *nāmarūpa*. On the death of the Arahāt it is not the ego but the *nāmarūpa* process that becomes extinct. This extinction is brought about through the practice of *vipassanā* that ensures the end of the craving for life.

MAHĀYANA AND THERAVĀDA

There are now four great religions of mankind. Their differences are due to different temperaments of their followers and so is the diversity of views among the followers of the same religion. There are two schools of Buddhism, viz., Theravāda and Mahāyana and they have held different views for over 2,000 years. This is due to the difference in the inclinations of the adherents of each school.

The basic teaching of Mahāyana Buddhism is that all living beings achieve complete freedom from *samsāric* suffering only after attaining Buddhahood. Being an Arahāt or a *Pacceka Buddha* does not mean full liberation. After becoming a Buddha, the Mahāyanist does

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not enter the Nibbānic state alone. He enjoys the peace of Nibbāna only with other beings, that is, only after all other beings have become Buddhas.

This is an indirect repudiation of egoism but the view is quite untenable. For if the Buddhas are to defer their *parinibbāna* and wait till the attainment of Buddhahood by all other livings, where and how are they to live for such a long time? Insects and other forms of lower life are innumerable and so are the Buddhas to wait and suffer old age, sickness and death till the liberation of the lowest living being? This Mahāyana view makes little sense and yet it is acceptable to some people because it suits their temperaments.

It differs from the doctrine of Theravāda which is the true dhamma based on the Buddha's teaching in Pāli pitaka. According to Theravāda, among the yogis who reach the last stage on the holy path there are those who aspire to be the close disciples (*sāvaka*) of the Buddha. After their *parinibbāna* these Arahats cease to have *nāmarūpa* for rebirth and so there is an end to their *samsāric* suffering. They need not wait for anybody nor is it possible for them to do so. This is the destiny too of *Paccekabuddhas* and *Sammāsambuddhas*. This Theravāda view is quite reasonable.

MAHĀYANA AND THERAVĀDA

Mahāyana Buddhists identify their Nibbāna with Sukhavati abode. They describe it as a paradise and say that as Buddhas all living beings live there happily for ever, being free from old age, sickness and death. Sukhavati does not differ essentially from heaven that is glorified by those who believe in immortality. The belief is probably based on the writings of those who sought to spread the *sassata* (eternity) view among the Buddhists.

Later on there arose many Mahāyana sects and this was also due to different temperaments of their followers.

The commentaries tell us how Theravāda split into eighteen sects. In Burma today there are differences of opinion regarding the Buddha's teaching. No doubt the Buddha emphasized the threefold way, viz, *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* comprising the eightfold noble path and the four noble truths. But some say that it is not necessary to practise *vipassanā*, that they can follow their easy way to salvation. Some dismiss *sīla* as irrelevant to the goal of Buddhism, a view that is shared by those who do not care for morality. They talk of such views because they do not accept the teaching in Sakkapañhā and other suttas.

The Buddha's teaching to the wandering ascetic Subhadda provides a criterion for deciding

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whether a certain doctrine is the true Dhamma for the conquest of defilements. The gist of the teaching which is to be found in *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* is that no doctrine that is devoid of the eightfold path can lead to *sotāpanna* and other stages on the holy path. The eightfold path is found only in the Buddha-dhamma and so it is only this Dhamma that will make a man a *satāpanna*, etc. We can judge a doctrine by this criterion and see whether it accords with the Buddha's teaching.

But the fact is that most people accept those teachings that accord with their inclinations. Some Buddhists believe that theirs is Ariyan morality if they regard what they practise as *Ariyasila*. Some people want to enjoy life only as human beings, devas, etc. They do not relish the prospect of the cessation of *nāmarūpa* process and suffering. Some do not wish to be reborn in the Brahmā worlds that are devoid of sensual pleasure. They prefer rebirth in the sensual world. Some crave for the renewal of both *nāma* and *rūpa* but some want only one of them to be renewed. On the other hand the wise men who realize the evils of *saṃsāra* (life-cycle) seek the extinction of both *nāma* and *rūpa*.

Some believe in eternal happiness in heaven or annihilation after death as their destiny. For some the supreme goal is the perception-

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less *asaññā* world which they believe is free from all suffering. Again some regard the formless *arūpa* world as their ultimate objective while some say that their goal is to make a clear distinction between *atta* and mind-body complex. These various goals depend on the different temperaments of the people who pursue them. In reality the highest goal of life is the Nibbāna of the Arahāt which means the complete cessation of *nāmarupa* continuum after *parinibbāna* due to total extinction of defilements.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Sakka was pleased with the Buddha's answer and he asked another question: "Lord, do the so-called *samaṇa-brahmaṇas* really attain their ultimate goal? Is there a real end to their yoga? Do they live the really noble life? Do they really have the ultimate Dhamma?" Here the really ultimate goal, the real end to yoga (*iccantayogakekhami*) and the really ultimate Dhamma (*iccantapariyosana*) refer to Nibbāna. The noble life means the practice of *vipassanā* and the Ariyan path. In other words, by these four questions Sakka asks the Buddha whether the ascetics and the brahmaṇas practise *vispassanā* and the eightfold path and whether they have attained Nibbanā.

The Buddha answered in the negative. According to the Buddha, only the bhikkhus who

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are liberated through the practice on the path leading to the extinction of craving achieve the supreme goal, put an end to yoga, lead the noble life and attain the ultimate Dhamma.

Here the bhikkhus referred to in the Buddha's statement are the Buddhas, *Paccekabuddhas* and Arahats. In short, they are all Arahats. The Arahata has done away with the four yogas (*āsavas*: biases) that give rise to new existence. In fact he has uprooted the yogas and so he has attained the ultimate goal and the ultimate Dhamma; and his final victory is due to his practice of the eightfold noble path.

Those who have not yet freed themselves from the yogas or biases through the eightfold path are far from Nibbāna. They continue to be subject to rebirth and suffering. So when Baka Brahmā invited the Buddha to what he regarded as his eternal paradise, the Buddha told him to have no illusion about his mortality and to have no craving for any kind of existence.

Says the Buddha, "Having seen the perils of all kinds of existence,—whether it be that of a human being, a deva, a Brahmā or the denizen of the lower worlds....I do not glorify any kind of existence but deprecate it."

Every kind of existence is subject to suffering. It is worst in the lower worlds. But human

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existence is also bedevilled by old age, sickness and death. The devas too have to suffer because of their frustrated desires. Nor is the Brahmā world free from dukkha attendant on thinking, planning and ceaseless change.

“I have seen the perils of every kind of existence; I have also seen the existence of those who do not want it and who therefore seek its extinction. So I deprecate all kinds of existence.”

Being aware of the evils of existence, some wise men became ascetics to seek liberation. But they did not know Nibbāna or the eightfold path leading to it. They knew only *jhāna* that made one's mind tranquil and so they practised *samīdhi* that led to it. Some attained *rūpajhāna* and believed that they would enjoy immortality in *rūpavacarabrahmā* world, the goal of such *jhāna*. For some ascetics eternal life was to be found in *asaññā* (perceptionless) abode of the *rūpavacara* Brahmā-world while for others it was to be enjoyed only in the *arupavacara* world. So they were content with the *rūpa-jhāna* and the *arūpa-jhāna* that they had attained.

Contrary to their expectations, these jhānic yogis were not immortal in the Brahmā worlds and so after death they returned to the sensual worlds of devas and human beings. From there they passed on according to their kamma. As

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a result of their evil kamma they might find themselves in the lower worlds. Thus although they had sought the extinction of existence, they did not achieve their object and had to go on suffering. Hence the Buddha's disdain for all kinds of existence.

The renewal of existence is due to attachment to life. This attachment (*taṇhā*) is the same as sensuous bias (*kāmayoga*) and the bias for existence (*bhavayoga*). The Buddha repudiated and overcame this attachment.

According to the commentary, there were altogether fourteen questions which Sakka put to the Buddha. He was much pleased with the answers and after expressing his deep appreciation, he stated his view about *taṇhā* (attachment) as follows.

"Lord, the active *taṇhā* is a disease; it is like a boil, an arrow or a thorn in the flesh. It attracts living beings to existence and so they have to live miserably.

"*Taṇhā* is active because it craves for this or that. It attaches itself to pleasant objects and it longs to consume them. Like a leaf rustling with the wind, it is always in a flurry, restless, hungry and greedy. *Taṇhā* is a chronic disease that is not curable but not so acute as to cause immediate death. It sets a man at ease when it is gratified but it is insatiable however much he

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pampers it with the sense-objects which it likes. It craves for all sense-objects which it seeks to enjoy again and again."

"*Taṇhā* is loathsome and terrible like a boil. It is also like a thorn in the flesh. A thorn may be hidden in the flesh so that we cannot see any sign of it. We cannot extricate it and so it will keep on causing pain. Likewise it is hard to get rid of *taṇhā* that is always harassing us. We worry so much about the object of our desire that we cannot sleep at night and because of our attachment to life we have to wander from one existence to another, the nature of each existence depending on our kamma."

After thus commenting on the Buddha's teaching, Sakka said that he was now free from all doubts as a result of hearing the Buddha's discourse. He had attained the first stage on the holy path and this of course ruled out the possibility of his landing in the lower worlds after death. He was assured of good rebirth and he could now attain the higher stages of insight independently.

MORAL PRACTICE OF A CANDIDATE FOR SAKKA'S OFFICE

The commentary mentions the seven duties of a man who aspires to be a Sakka. These are spelled out in *Sagathavagga Samyutta* as follows.

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(1) He supports and looks after his parents during his whole life. (2) He always reveres old people among his relatives. (3) He speaks gently and sweetly. (4) He never speaks ill of another person. (5) He manages and keeps his household with his mind always free from the taint of miserliness. (6) He always speaks the truth. (7) He sees to it that he is never angry. If he sometimes gets angry, he removes his anger instantly.

As for Sakka who had the dialogue with the Buddha in Sakkapañhā sutta, the commentary on tha sutta gives an account of his previous life as the youth Māgha in Macala village in the kingdom of Magadha long before the rise of Buddhism.

Māgha was the leader of thirty three young men who repaired roads and bridges, built rest-houses and did other good deeds collectively for the welfare of the community. The headman of the village hated these social workers because he was corrupt and formerly he used to get money from them when they were given to drinking and doing unlawful things but now that they were devoting themselves entirely to social service, there was an end to his illegal source of income. So he went to the king and made false charges against the young men. Without making any inquiry, the king ordered them to be arrested and trampled to death by elephants.

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Then Māgha said to his friends, "It is but natural that misfortunes befall all beings who are mired in the round of *samsāric* existence. The real refuge of the people in this world is speaking the truth. So you all should say solemnly: 'If we are thieves or robbers, let the elephant trample us. If we are not, let it not trample us.'"

Māgha's friends acted on his advice. Then the elephant did not even approach near them but ran away trumpeting loudly. They harassed and goaded the animal with spears, etc but it was in vain. So the young men were brought before the king. Questioned by the king, Māgha said that it was their invocation of the power of truth (*saccā*) that had helped to repel the elephant. He also told the king what they were doing before and how it was greed that had prompted the village headman to frame false charges against them.

On hearing this, the king at once set them free and conferred on them gifts and permanent ownership of Macala village. The young men devoted themselves to community service more zealously and vigorously than ever and on their death Māgha became Sakka and his thirty three comrades became devas in his celestial abode.

Such in brief is the account of Māgha's good deeds that led to his rebirth as Sakka. There

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is one thing that we should note in the story of Māgha. Their performance of good deeds was not due to their thorough knowledge of the Buddha-dhamma. Perhaps they might have heard only that good deeds bear good fruits and it was this simple teaching that motivated Māgha to do good. He did not hope to attain the holy path or Nibbāna by so doing. But because of his good deeds he became the king of devas and after hearing the Buddha's discourse, he attained the first stage on the holy path.

This shows that a person may not have *magga-phala* and Nibbāna in mind while he is doing good deeds, but if he believes in the law of kamma and performs good deeds sincerely, he will as a result pass onto the deva or human world to be reborn there with wholesome predispositions (*Tihetupatisandhika*: being reborn with three noble root-conditions viz., lack of greed, lack of hatred and lack of ignorance). Thanks to such predispositions he can attain special insights after hearing and practising the Dhamma. So when we do good deeds our actions should be based on the belief in kamma. The best thing of course is to do good in the hope of attaining the Path or Nibbāna.

THE ELATION OF SAKKA

When Sakka expressed his joy for the attainment of the first stage on the holy path, the Buddha

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asked him whether he had ever experienced such joy before. Sakka replied thus: "Lord, I was once overjoyed when I came out victorious in my fight against Asuras. But that joy over victory had its origin in the clash of weapons. It had nothing to do with disillusion. It did not lead to special insight-knowledge or Nibbāna. But now my joy over the attainment of *sotāpanna* stage is not rooted in the clash of weapons. It is bound up with disillusion and detachment. It will also lead to illumination and Nibbāna."

Sakka went on to say that he was overjoyed in view of the six benefits that would accrue to him.

(1) The first thing that had made him joyful was his attainment of *sotāpanna* stage and the renewal of existence as Sakka. For his good deeds in his previous life as Māgha, he first became the king of devas. His first existence lasted 36 million years by human reckoning. Then seeing that his death was imminent, he came to hear the Buddha-dhamma. While hearing the Buddha's talk on wholesome *upekkhā* he practised *vipassanā* and attained the first stage on the holy path. He was overjoyed because of his permanent liberation from the lower worlds and the prospect of enjoying the heavenly bliss for another 36 million years.

(2) He will be reborn in the human family of his own choice when his life in the deva world

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has run its course. It is said that the span of life among human beings is now decreasing by one year in every century. 2500 years have elapsed since the time of the Buddha and so we have to assume that the span of human life has fallen off by 25 years. This assumption is plausible since today only a few people live up to 75 years.

Man's life-span is likely to be reduced to 10 years in the next 6500 years. It is said that by that time the delicacies in the human world such as butter, honey, etc will have disappeared. Good varieties of rice will become a thing of the past, and poor quality grain will become the best staple food.

People will no longer avoid killing, stealing and other misdeeds. Immoral acts will become rampant and nobody will have any sense of moral values. Those who do not respect their parents, elderly relatives or virtuous monks will be extolled and honoured by many people. Even now there is a trend towards such disregard of traditional values in some places. Moreover there will be sexual perversions such as incest and the moral life of mankind will degenerate to the level of animals.

People will become extremely malicious, aggressive and murderous and so will the parents and children in their relationship. Fratricidal strife will mark the interpersonal relations

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among brothers and sisters. There will occur armed conflicts followed by a holocaust that will lead to mutual destruction, with men mistaking one another for animals. It will then be easy to produce powerful weapons. The possibility of such a holocaust does not seem remote in view of the production of extraordinary weapons in modern times.

Mutual destruction will eventually bring mankind to the verge of total extinction. Only those who do not want to kill or to be killed and take refuge in forests will escape death. It will not be easy for these few survivors to meet one another. They will meet only after travelling a long way and as a result there will be mutual love and abstention from killing and other evil deeds. This will lead to gradual increase in the span of life. People will again do good, avoid evil and enjoy long life. As Sakka's rebirth in the human world will take place in that age of progress, he will have to associate with good people.

Sakka says that he will be conceived in his mother's womb without confusion. This shows what naturally happens to a *sotāpanna* in his passage from one existence to another. Obviously a deva's mind is clear and serene at the moment of death because he dies without suffering. Likewise he will not be confused when he is in the womb of his human mother. The human *sotāpanna* too dies without confusion. He may

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be afflicted with physical pain but his consciousness is clear and normal. Although he is unable to speak, he usually dies with his mind free from confusion and obscurity. Sakka is happy because he will die peacefully and pass on to the human world to be reborn in the noble family of his own choice.

(3) Sakka says that it will give him much pleasure to live by the teaching of the Buddha.

If the span of human life is to decrease by one year in every century, it will be reduced to ten years at the end of 90 centuries. Suppose a great part of the human race were to be wiped out by a nuclear war, Sakka would be only 90 hundred-years old and he would live more than another 35 million years. The years of the average man's life would then run into hundreds of thousands.

In view of the prediction about the 5000 year-existence of the Buddha's teaching and mass destruction by global conflict in the age of man's ten year life-span, it is to be assumed that Buddhism will become extinct by that time. There will be nobody who has memorized the Buddha-dhamma nor will there be Buddhist books and scriptures. Inscriptions from the Pitaka may still exist in Burma but there will be no one who can preach the Dhamma. But since Sakka is a *sotāpanna*, the Dhamma will remain fresh in his memory as in the case of all other Ariyās. Therefore although Buddhism

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will be unknown to the majority of people at that time, it will continue to be a living force in the life of the man who is Sakka incarnate. He will observe the five precepts, understand *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* on the *sotāpanna* level and overcome some defilements. In other words, he will continue to be a dedicated disciple of the Buddha.

A *sotāpanna* in the immaterial (*arupa*) world will not forget to practise mindfulness. He can contemplate the mental process and attain Arahathship. He may be in the *rūpavacara-Brahmā* world during the lifetime of the next Buddha but as the disciple of the former Buddha he will become an Arahant and attain Nibbāna. These *sotāpannas* do not practise *vipassanā* as disciples of the succeeding Buddha. This is evident in the *Suddhavāsa* realm where some former disciples of the preceding six Buddhas identified themselves during the visit of Gotama Buddha. So it is pointless to pray for Arahathship under the guidance of another Buddha if one has already attained the *sotāpanna* state on the basis of the former Buddha's teaching.

Sakka also says that while living by the Buddha-dhamma, he will for ever be mindful. He will continue to practise mindfulness just as he is practising now. This prospect affords him much pleasure because thereby he is assured of successive attainment of other insights.

(4) Sakka says, "Lord, if through the right practice of *vipassanā* I attain *sambodhi*, I will try

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and contemplate to attain higher insights. That *sambodhi* which I attain as a human being will mark the last of my human existence.”

Here *sambodhi* means the three higher stages of insight. But he says later that he will again become the king of devas, that after attaining *anāgāmi* stage in his present life, he will pass on to *Suddhavāsa* realm and that he will finally attain Arahantship in *Akaniṭṭha* realm. In view of these statements the commentary holds that *sambodhi* refers to *sakadāgāmi* insight.

So Sakka will be at *sakadāgāmi* stage when he passes on to the human world. It will be his last existence to be bound up with old age sickness and other sufferings of human life. This is the fourth reason why he is joyful.

(5) Sakka says that after his death in the human world he will again become the great deva (*uttamo devo*) in the deva-worlds.

According to the commentary, he will become the chief deva in *Tavatimsa* heaven. So if he has to pass through a single life-time as a human being, the human life-span must be the same as that of the deva in *Tavatimsa*. In other words, Sakka incarnate on earth must be as old a Sakka who holds the office of deva-chief, that is, he must live for 36 million years.

Alternatively, the *sotāpanna* Sakka may pass through several life-times. In that case what are we to understand by the seven life-times of a

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sotāpanna? Here Sakka's rebirths in the human world should be understood in the same sense as that of an *anāgāmi* person. The *anāgāmi* person is said to be subject to a single rebirth. He may be reborn up to five times in *Suddhavāsa* realm. But since this takes place only in the material world and has nothing to do with the sensual or immaterial (*arūpa*) worlds, we may say that he is reborn only once. Likewise Sakka may have many rebirths in terms of conceptions in the human world but as his rebirth is restricted to human existence, it may be regarded as a single life-time on earth.

Sakka was overjoyed over the prospect of attaining *sagadīgāmi* stage as a human being and rebirth as the chief of devas.

(6) Sakka says, "*Akaniṭṭha* world is so called because there the devas are endowed with power, wealth, longevity and so forth. They are the noblest devas. I will have my last existence in that super-world."

Akaniṭṭha is the highest of the five *Suddhavāsa* worlds. Although its inhabitants are called devas, they are in fact Brahmās. Presumably there are many Brahmās since each Brahmā is said to have many attendants. Sakka will be *sakadīgāmi* on earth, *anāgāmi* in the deva-world and he will pass on to *Aviha* which is the lowest of the *Suddhavāsa* worlds. Then after passing through other celestial worlds, he will get to *Akaniṭṭha* world where he will attain Nibbāna.

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According to the commentary, Sakka will be in the Brahmā-worlds for 31,000 *kappas*. There, are only two other persons, viz., Anāthapīndika the merchant and Visakhā, the great woman disciple of the Buddha who will enjoy the same longevity in the Brahmā-worlds. Thus Sakka, Anāthapīndika and Visākha have no peer in respect of their high quality of life among beings subject to *samsāric* existence.

So the sixth cause of Sakka's joy was the prospect of attaining Nibbāna in *Akaniṭṭha* Brahmā-world. Then Sakka concluded his statement to the Buddha as follows.

“Lord, today I pay respect to you just as the devas are doing so to Brahmā. Lord, you are the only true Buddha (*Sambuddha*). You are the real teacher who can instruct the devas and human beings for their welfare. In the worlds of Brahmās, devas and human beings you have no peer.”

Then Sakka uttered thrice: *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa* (Glory be to the Buddha) and made obeisance to the Buddha joyfully. Here *arahato* means “worthy of honour” and *Sammāsambuddha* means one who knows the four noble truths independently.

This is the end of Sakkapañha sutta. The sutta has enlightened many living beings as it did to Sakka and many other devas and those who study and apply its teaching will certainly attain unusual insight—knowledge on the Ariyan holy path.

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- 1. Vipassanā Meditational Exercises**
- 2. Mahāsi Abroad**
- 3. Practical Basic Exercises**
- 4. Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā Meditation**
- 5. Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā Meditation:
 Criticisms and Replies**
- 6. Discourse on Ariyavasa Sutta**
- 7. „ „ Lokadhamma**
- 8. „ „ Bhāra Sutta**
- 9. „ „ Hemavata Sutta**
- 10. „ „ To Nibbāna via The Noble
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