



Not only in Sri Lanka but all over the world today, there is a growing interest in Buddhism at the scholarly level as well as at the level of actual practice. However, it is very rarely that we get to hear about Lord Buddha's teachings from an experienced practitioner. Professor Ravi Koggalage whom I have known for about two decades has a keen interest in practicing the dhamma and also in teaching meditation. He has been teaching meditation not only in Sri Lanka, but also in many other

countries, such as Australia and Singapore. The dhamma discussions in this book, which have also been broadcast on 'The Buddhist' TV, have the ability to draw the attention of many Buddhist practitioners as well as scholars who have a keen interest in Lord Buddha's teachings. The discussions are very interesting and focus on profound teachings such as the Five Aggregates, the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination, which are essential parts of Buddhism. It is my great pleasure to recommend this book to anyone who has a keen interest in learning and practicing Theravada Buddhism.

Most Venerable Kirama Wimalajothi Nayaka Thero
Director, Buddhist Cultural Centre



"Therefore all five aggregates of clinging arise in relation to a single sensory object, i.e. the clinging aggregate of rūpa, the clinging aggregate of feeling, the clinging aggregate of perception, the clinging aggregate of thought - formation and the clinging aggregate of consciousness.

But what we do not realise is that suffering is present when this happens. When we accept that flowers exist, we get a happy feeling. But according to the Dhamma this means that we have generated the five aggregates of clinging. And Lord Buddha has said that the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. At the mundane level of wisdom we do not realise this. We do not see this. We may have gained knowledge through the Dhamma that this has to be suffering, but we still cannot feel this. This is the gap between the undeveloped mind of the worldlings and the developed mind of the Perfected Ones. This is why we need to do something to develop our wisdom to see the true nature of rūpa."

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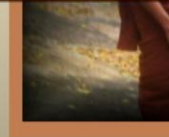
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LET US SEE BUDDHISM - 1

An Introduction to Vipassana Meditation

(based on Dhamma Hadaya TV Discussions)



Ravindra Koggalage

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An Introduction to Vipassanā Meditation

(based on Dhamma Hadaya TV discussions)

By

Ravindra Koggalage



Buddhist Cultural Centre

125, Anderson Road, Nedimala,
Dehiwala, Sri Lanka.

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INTRODUCTION

Do you like to be happy? Who would not like to have permanent bliss, relief, happiness that The Buddha and the other Awakened Ones enjoyed? This book by Professor Ravindra Koggalage, which is based on the Dhamma Hadaya English Dhamma Discussion telecast on The Buddhist TV, is a comprehensive explanation of Lord Buddha's analysis of the path that leads to higher levels of wisdom and ultimately to *Nibbānic* Bliss.

The book touches on the very depths of the core of Lord Buddha's teachings based on the five clinging aggregates (*pañca upādānakkhandha*) whilst explaining the role of *Sathara Satiṭṭahāna* meditation and the reaching of the Supra Mundane states of *Maggaphala* that leads to *Nibbāna*. The explanations (especially those that lead to the understanding of the nature of the five clinging aggregates) are made simple to understand with the use of appropriate examples enriched by the author's exposure to Dhamma knowledge as well as his own experience of meditation. The author has not forgotten to provide references from the Sutra Pitaka, to those who would like to do further reading.

This book will be useful for not only ones who intend to learn the Dhamma, but also to those who practice meditation and feel the need of appropriate assistance of the doctrine in order to solve the practical issues faced during meditation.

Reading this book mindfully, would assist you soar to greater heights of insight and I hope that the questions asked by me (the host of the TV Programme) are worthwhile (at least up to some extent) in assisting your journey towards pure wisdom.

With Mettā,

Sewwandi Gunawardhana

PREFACE

This book contains several discussions that were broadcast on the Dhamma Hadaya English Dhamma discussion program on The Buddhist TV. The main focus of the discussions was the first Noble Truth known as “Dukkha Satya”, as revealed by Lord Buddha. He explained it briefly as the five aggregates (*pañca upādānakkhandha*). Therefore, we first discussed the five aggregates as a whole, and then one by one in detail. The ideas in these discussions are based on my own experience as a meditation teacher and practitioner for more than twenty years, and so may be a little different from what we find in other available books. It is up to the reader to investigate these ideas with their own wisdom without accepting any of them blindly, just as Lord Buddha has clearly advised us to do in ‘*Kālāma Sutta*’.

I must thank Venerable Daranagama Kusaladhamma Thero for founding ‘The Buddhist’ TV channel and giving me the opportunity to conduct the discussions in English on the Dhamma Hadaya program. With the blessing of the Noble Triple Gem, may the Thero have the strength to continue with this valuable effort and overcome any barriers he may encounter in this difficult task of *Dhamma dāna*.

Without our program presenter, Sewwandi Gunawardhana, who hosts the Damma Hadaya English Dhamma discussion program, we would not have been able to have such valuable discussions. It was very easy and pleasant to have these discussions with her, as she would raise important questions from time to time without interrupting me unnecessarily when I explained profound Dhamma concepts. She also kindly agreed to write a foreword for this book, and my sincere thanks go to her for this kind offer.

Dilrukshi and her husband Sunil Weeraratne started transcribing these discussions and were later assisted by Mr H.A. Amaratunga who volunteered to contribute to this effort. Listening to an audio and

transcribing it word for word is a very difficult and tedious task. However, in spite of their efforts, publishing this collection of discussions in book form went into cold storage for a while due to competing priorities. Then quite unexpectedly it began to materialize, when Geetha Premaratne who had been listening to my Sinhala *Dhamma* programs from Australia asked me whether I would like to have any of my Sinhala discussions translated into English. I suggested that we continue with this project as we already had a number of transcribed discussions. Geetha kindly agreed to edit and proofread the discussions. The cover page for the book was designed by Amil Kumara who never turns down such requests made by me in spite of his busy work schedule. So, a lot of team work went into this book without which this book would never have been possible. May the Noble Triple Gem bless them all and may this great *dhamma dāna* help them realize the *Dhamma* in this very life!

I would also like to thank Venerable Daranagama Kusaladhamma Thero and Sashika Jayathilaka for their expressions of appreciation and their permission to print these discussions as a book, and also Venerable Kirama Wimalajothi Thero for the back cover blurb. May the Noble Triple Gem Bless them all!

Last but not least, I would like to pay my respects to all my teachers, parents, family members, and also *dhamma* friends who participated in many *Dhamma* discussions over the years which helped me gain the knowledge and experience necessary to deliver such discussions. May this great *dhamma dāna* help them all attain ultimate happiness, *Nibbāna!!!*

Sadu Sadu Sadu!!!

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Expression of Appreciation

by the President of the Buddhist Media Network



First of all, I would like to mention that ‘The Buddhist’ TV which began under our auspices on the 26th of June 2007 has been involved up to now in a great Dhamma dissemination activity. I would also like to mention that the ‘Dhamma Hadaya’ English Dhamma discussion program, which has been broadcast for some time now through this channel on Monday nights at 9.00 pm, is a very beneficial program that is popular throughout the world.

I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation for Professor Ravi Koggalage’s effort to publish in book form a collection of the *Dhamma* discussions in which he participated on ‘The Buddhist’ TV. As a major contributor to the program, Prof Ravi Koggalage frequently devotes his time to disseminate the *Dhamma* to the devout viewers of the program.

We appreciate the noble efforts Professor Koggalage has made by sacrificing his time and money and by visiting various places in Sri Lanka and overseas to explain the sacred teachings of Lord Buddha in simple language to people of different walks of life. Although he had the opportunity to head a number of educational institutions, he has given priority to the commendable task of disseminating the *Dhamma*.

There is no doubt that Professor Koggalage’s effort to publish the *Dhamma* discussions in book form is valuable because it can reach an even wider audience than a cd/dvd or a live discussion on TV. We wish that with the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem he will have the good health to successfully continue with his *Dhamma* talks and *Dhamma* writings in the future.

Most Venerable Daranagama Kusaladhamma Nayaka Thero
Chief Incumbent of Sri Sambodhi Viharaya
President, Buddhist Media Network

Expression of Appreciation by the Programme Director of the Buddhist Media Network



We understand that the ‘Dhamma Hadaya’ English *Dhamma* discussion program presented by media journalist, Sewwandi Gunawardhana, airing Monday nights at 9.00 pm on ‘The Buddhist’ TV is a program that has won the love and respect of Buddhist devotees. ‘The Buddhist’ TV is a channel solely devoted to the broadcasting of the sacred teachings of Lord Buddha throughout the world, 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

Prof Ravi Koggalage makes a tremendous contribution to make the ‘Dhamma Hadaya’ program a success by frequently participating in the program and by trying to make it beneficial for many Sri Lankans living overseas as well as those who mostly use English in Sri Lanka.

We were delighted when we heard about the effort made by Professor Koggalage to publish in book form the *Dhamma* discussions to which he contributed through broadcast media. Although Professor Koggalage has several higher degree qualifications and has held positions in many different institutions and organizations in Sri Lanka, his preference is for disseminating the *Dhamma*. We all at the Buddhist Media Network led by our President, the Venerable Thero, offer our good wishes to Professor Koggalage in appreciation of his commitment to the *Dhamma*. We also wish that with the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem he will have the opportunity to generate peace and tranquility in people for many years to come, through the gift of the *Dhamma* which is the greatest of all gifts.

Shashika Jayathilaka

Attorney-at-law

Director Programmes

Buddhist Media Network

Pañca Upādānakkhandha

We have spoken about the five clinging aggregates (*pañca upādānakkhandha*) in many previous discussions, but we must talk about it again and again because it is very important to understand this subject thoroughly. If one understands the real nature of the five clinging aggregates, this alone will pave the way to *Nibbāna*. Lord Buddha has clearly said that one should cultivate the perception of impermanence (*aniccasaññā*) on the five clinging aggregates in order to achieve the first fruit of the path to *Nibbāna* (*Sotāpatti*). Even the stream-winner (*Sotāpanna*) must practice the perception of impermanence on the five clinging aggregates to become a once-returned (*Sakadāgāmi*). The once-returned must also practice the perception of impermanence on the five clinging aggregates to become a non-returned (*Anāgāmi*). Even a non-returned has to do the same to become a perfected one (*Arahant*), but of course the practice is at different levels, based on the different levels of wisdom (*paññā*) attained by the practitioners. So, the level of practice that we talk about in relation to the five clinging aggregates or any other *Dhamma* is based on each person's level of wisdom or the level of defilements (*kilesa*). At a scholarly level we can talk a lot about these things, but when we really try to practice, the level we are at and the level we understand may be different from the level we talk about or debate about. This is why we need to discuss the *Dhamma* and try to see its deeper meaning.

Again if we question why we need to learn about the five clinging aggregates, it is because Lord Buddha has said that the five clinging aggregates themselves are suffering (*saṃkhittena*

pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha). So if we want to end suffering (*dukkha*), we must understand the five clinging aggregates well. This is because without knowing or realising suffering, which is the First Noble Truth, it is impossible to realise the other three Noble Truths.

When we talk about the five clinging aggregates there are five items to understand - material form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), thought-formation (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). The starting point is material form. Even in the path leading to *Nibbāna*, known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satara satipaṭṭhāna*), the first foundation of mindfulness is contemplation on material form (*kāyānupassanā*). Therefore, *kāyānupassanā* is given for us to understand or see the true nature of material form (*rūpa* or *kaya*).

Kāyānupassanā has to be practiced upto the supra-mundane (*lokuttara*) level. This means until we are able to see the true nature of *rūpa*. Of course, we all know *rūpa* at a worldly level, but this is not the true nature or the reality of *rūpa*.

Q: You mentioned that *kāyānupassanā* has to be practiced upto a certain level. Then is *kāyānupassanā* an insight meditation (*vipassanā*)? Are you talking about the *vipassanā* level now?

A: Yes, *kāyānupassanā* covers both concentration (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*) meditation. I am now talking about how to move from the worldly level to the supra-mundane level - from the worldly *samatha* level to the supra-mundane *vipassanā* level. We must have a clear understanding of the true nature of material form in order to go up to the supra-mundane level. This is not my personal idea. It is clearly mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

If you take the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*¹, in the *kāyānupassanā* section it says, ‘*Kāye kāyānupassī viharathi, ātāpī sampajāno satimā*’. This is how it has been explained: ‘*Kāye kāyānupassī viharathi*’ means, you have to contemplate on the *kāya*, commonly known as *rūpa*. ‘*Ātāpī sampajāno satimā*’ means, you have to contemplate on the *kāya* in three different ways i.e. *Satimā* which means maintaining mindfulness (*sati*); *ātāpi* which means making a strong effort (*virīya*) to maintain your mindfulness; and *sampajāno* which means applying wisdom. To gain *sampajañña* you have to listen to or learn Lord Buddha’s teachings. It does not come automatically. This point is very important. We are very fortunate to be born in this time when the *Dhamma* exists, because we need the *Dhamma* to attain wisdom. This is why it is called a moment of good fortune (*kshana sampaththi*).

Q: Talking about *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditations, when practising *samatha*, even when you go upto the level of absorption (*jhana*), after some time that state might be lost and if you want to go upto that level again you have to start from the very beginning. But in *vipassanā* meditation, can you continue from where you stopped?

A: Yes. In *samatha* we are merely suppressing certain defilements - only suppressing, not completely eradicating them. There are three ways of doing this and the Pali terms are *tadaṅga*, *vikkhambhana* and *samuccheda*. *Tadaṅga* and *vikkhambhana* mean suppressing temporarily. It may be for a very short time, or may be for a longer period. You can suppress defilements for longer periods when you develop your practice upto the levels of meditative absorption. There are eight such levels – four fine-material

¹ *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta - MN 10 (Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa Pali, Mūlapariyāya Vagga)*

(*rūpāwacara*) states of meditative absorption and four formless (*arūpāwacara*) states of meditative absorption. If the states of absorption are maintained until your death, you can be reborn in the brahma worlds where during that total life span your defilements remain suppressed.

However, even within this life we can suppress our defilements, that is the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇas*) - *kāmacchanda*, *vyāpāda*, *thīna-middha*, *uddhacca-kukkucca* and *vicikicchā* - for shorter periods. *Kāmacchanda* is sensual desire - desire for sight, sound etc. to satisfy the five senses. *Vyāpāda* means anger or ill-will – anger at not getting the things you want. *Thīna-middha* is sloth and torpor - lethargy, or sleepiness. *Uddhacca-kukkucca* is restlessness and worry – the mind being very busy without any reason. *Vicikicchā* is skeptical doubt. When these defilements are present, we cannot see the *Dhamma*. We cannot progress along the path to *Nibbāna*.

Samatha can be at different levels. But at the initial level, it is due to those five defilements that we cannot keep our mind at one point for an extended period of time. Our mind keeps wandering because we live our day to day life with these defilements. Suppressing the defilements by keeping our mind at one point is known as *samādhi*. Even for five minutes if we can attain *samādhi*, during those five minutes we have suppressed the five hindrances. This is done through *samatha*. But after those five minutes, the defilements can come up again.

Q: Then do we have to start from the beginning?

A: Yes, we have to suppress the defilements again using *samatha*. But in contrast, with *vipassanā* meditation, we are not

suppressing the defilements. We are trying to see the causes for those defilements. For example, we can look at anger, find out the causes that bring up anger and try to remove those causes. So if we manage to do that, it will never appear again. This is done by developing wisdom and it is this technique that is known as *vipassanā* meditation.

Samatha is temporary suppression of the defilements. But if we do *vipassanā* properly, defilements can be completely eradicated. In Pali it is known as *samuccheda*. When cutting down a tree, if all the roots are removed, it cannot grow again. *Samuccheda* is similar to that. This is the main difference between the mundane and supra-mundane levels of meditation. The technique practiced at the mundane level can be called *samatha*.

Coming back to *kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna*, here again we cannot practice directly at the supra-mundane level. First, the *samatha* part has to be practiced. The mind has to be calm to suppress the five hindrances. To achieve this, *samatha* meditation objects are used. But for the person who has suppressed the five hindrances, there is a possibility of moving to the *vipassanā* level. If the defilements are suppressed at the worldly level, then that developed mind is very clear because it is free of disturbances. That clear mind has the ability to see the truth - the *Dhamma* as taught by Lord Buddha.

Q: Relatively, does the mind have a better capability of seeing the truth as it is when we start with *samatha*? Better than a beginner of *vipassanā* who has not practiced *samatha*? In other words, would having practiced *samatha* help?

A: Yes. This is clearly mentioned in many *suttas* (Buddhist scriptures). In many *suttas*, Lord Buddha advises us to practice *samatha* saying, ‘*Samadhiṃ bhikkhave bhāvētha*’. So we must try again and again to practice *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is gained through the *samatha* meditation technique. Lord Buddha says, ‘*Samadhiṃ bhikkhave bhāvētha samāhito bhikkhave bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*’² which means *samatha* leads to true realisation. This is the supra-mundane level. Here we should not misunderstand that we have to practice *samatha* for a number of years to practice *vipassanā*. That is not the case because people have different abilities, different *saṃsāric* habits etc. Some people might attain *samādhi* very quickly. Such people can directly practice *vipassanā*. But for some people it is very difficult to attain *samādhi* and so they may need to practice *samatha* for a longer time.

Q: Do we have to find out which practice is better suited for us?

A: To practice *kāyānupassanā* we have to start with *samatha*. Sometimes people think that just because they are practising *satipaṭṭhāna* that they are practising *vipassanā*. But they do not realise that they are doing it only at the worldly level. This is the point I am trying to explain, because this is very important for the practitioner.

Q: Even in *Dhamma* schools when we discuss the *satara satipaṭṭhāna* - the four foundations of mindfulness, it is usually discussed under the category of *vipassanā*. So people think that they are practising *vipassanā* after all?

² *Samādhi Sutta SN 56 (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Sacca Saṃyutta, Samādhi Vagga)*

A: Yes, very often, not knowing the main difference between these two, we can hear people say, ‘I am practising *kāyānupassanā*, so it is *vipassanā*’.

For example, under *kāyānupassanā* there are fourteen different meditation techniques. *Kāyānupassanā* uses the body or bodily actions as the meditation object. It could be establishing mindfulness on breathing (*ānāpāna-sati*), walking, or any other posture; or the different states of bodily decay after death, which means visualising the nine different stages of a dead body and thinking about how it is decaying; or the composition of the body, that is the thirty two parts of the body - twenty solids and twelve liquids; or the four elements that comprise the body. In these techniques, we accept that there is a body. Even the breath is a kind of body - *rūpa*, commonly known as *kāya*.

Q: Yes. Sometimes we even think that it is the body breathing on its own. So there is a body. Am I correct?

A: Yes, in that interpretation, without a body you cannot breathe. But when you practice breath meditation there is a point where you may not feel your body, except the breathing. At that point, the breath itself is *kāya*.

Q: Later on, you hardly feel the breathing also?

A: Yes. It can be so subtle that you may not even feel it. These are different stages of the meditation. To get to this stage, you first have to be attentive of the whole breath (*sabba kāya paṭisaṃvedī*). It is after this that you are able to experience the calmness of the breathing which is given as calming the bodily processes (*passambhayaṃ kāya saṅkhāraṃ*).

Today, the purpose of my discussion is not to describe one technique. Commonly if we consider breathing, it is known as *kāya*. It belongs to the category of *rūpa*. Even the bodily actions are done by the *kāya* - the physical body. This is why they all come under *kāyānupassanā*. Even when we contemplate on a dead body, the physical body is used. In all these techniques, we believe that there is a body. This is the important factor. We believe that there is a *kaya*, something called a body and that it is a *rūpa*. This is what we believe. We should know that this is a belief at the worldly level. If we ask anyone in this world, they will agree that the body exists.

In that case, who is the person who knows that the body exists? If there is a body, there is a person who knows that. So ‘Personality belief’ also comes in with this worldly view. Even when someone is breathing, whether the breathing is short, long or whatever, there is a person who is doing it, and a ‘Person’ who is aware of it. This is personality belief. In other words, there is a *rūpa* present and the knower of that *rūpa* is also present. We have to understand that this belief is at the worldly level. The purpose of *vipassanā* is to get rid of this personality belief.

However much we analyse the body and break it into different parts like head hair, body hair, nails, teeth etc., still we accept that the body parts are present and also that the person who is aware of those parts is also present. This is why these meditations are at a worldly level or why they come under *samatha* meditation. Of course they can be very useful. We should not think mistakenly, ‘Why should we practice these meditations if they are at the worldly level?’ There is a purpose in doing these meditations because these techniques help us to reduce or suppress the five hindrances. They help us to develop a clear mind.

For example, if we are angry with someone, we can reduce that anger by contemplating on the thirty two parts of the body, or by keeping our mind at one point or by *mettā* meditation. This does not mean that we will never get angry again with that person. This is why we say that it is a temporary solution. The same principle applies to attachment. If we are very attached to someone and then contemplate on the thirty two body parts or the decaying dead body, that attachment can be reduced to a great extent. But we need to remember this is only reducing or suppressing anger or attachment, and not completely eradicating them. This is why these meditations are called *samatha* meditation techniques.

Then how can someone who starts with *samatha* at the worldly level move onto the supra-mundane level as shown in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*?³ The first part, as explained before, is making an effort to establish mindfulness and wisdom to contemplate on the body. It also has an additional bit which explains the purpose of this practice as to remove attachment and aversion (*vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassaṃ*). *Vineyya* means removing and *abhijjhā-domanassaṃ* means attachment and aversion.

Subsequently, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* explains how to practice *vipassanā*. First it says, ‘*Iti ajjhataṃ vā kāye kāyānupassi viharati, bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassi viharati*’. This means contemplate on the internal or external *rūpa*. Then it says, ‘*Ajjhatta bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassi viharati*’. This means contemplate on both the internal and external *rūpa*. Then it says, ‘*Samudaya dhammānupassi vā kāyasmim viharati, vaya dhammānupassi vā kāyasmim viharati.*’ *Samudaya* means the arising nature and *vaya* means the ceasing

³ *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* MN 10 (*Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa Pali, Mūlapariyāya Vagga*)

nature. So this line means contemplate on the arising and passing away of *kāya* or *rūpa*. Finally it says, ‘*Samudaya vaya dhammānupassi vā kāyasmim viharati.*’ This means contemplate on both the arising and passing away nature of *kāya* or *rūpa*.

The next part is very important because it refers to the results of the practice. What are the results obtained by practising *kāyānupassanā*? It is given as ‘*Yāwadewa ñāṇa mattāya paṭissati mattāya*’. This means that you attain a special kind of wisdom or knowledge (*ñāṇa mattāya*) and are able to maintain mindfulness continuously (*paṭissati mattāya*). So, we are able to attain *vipassanā* insights through this practice.

The final achievement is given as ‘*Na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*’. In this *rūpa* world there will be nothing that you get attached to. Here *loke* means *rūpa loka* because we are talking about *kāyānupassanā*. Although at the worldly level there are so many *rūpa*, once you get *vipassanā* insights and attain the supra-mundane level of wisdom, there won’t be any *rūpa* to get attached to. So until one attains that state, one must practice *kāyānupassanā* or contemplate on *rūpa*.

Q: There is nothing to be attached to? Is that a guideline to double check whether you have achieved spiritual progress?

A: That is a guideline. If there is attachment or aversion that means one has not practiced *kāyānupassanā* properly. This guideline shows how long or how much we should practice *kāyānupassanā*. Generally people practice for some time and then ask the teacher whether they have practiced enough. They tell the teacher what they have experienced and ask the teacher what to do next. Then it does not become the knowledge of the practitioner.

Lord Buddha has given all the instructions and asked us to keep the *Dhamma* as our teacher. If we understand these terms, we should know whether we have done enough or not.

Q: What is that level of wisdom?

A: We should know that if there is any *rūpa* remaining that we are attached to, then we have to practice *kāyānupassanā* some more. Our practice is not perfect yet.

Q: Does that final stage have a name like *jhana*?

A: These are *vipassanā* insights that can go up to a very high level of awakening (*magga-phala*). *Kāyānupassanā* can take us up to the level where we do not get attached to any *rūpa*. This means complete liberation from the sensuous worlds (*kāma loka*). Beings in the sensuous worlds seek to satisfy the five senses – the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body. All these five sense bases cognise *rūpa*. For example, the eye using colour senses external *rūpa*; the ear using sounds senses external *rūpa*; the nose using smells senses external *rūpa*. It is the same with the tongue and the body. We depend on external *rūpa* to satisfy our senses.

Q: What about thoughts? Can you be attached to thoughts?

A: Yes, this is why I mentioned that liberation is only from the sensuous worlds i.e. the human realm, the six heavenly realms and lower brahma realms. But there are two other brahma levels – the *rūpa* and *arūpa* levels. So this is not *Nibbāna* yet.

Practicing *kāyānupassanā* or realising the true nature of *rūpa* can help us escape from the sensuous worlds. This shows that it is not that easy to see the true nature of *rūpa*. If you see the true nature

of the body, there is a possibility of going upto the level of non-returner (*Anāgāmi*).

With regard to your question about the mind, there is a *sutta* called the *Unnabha Bharahmana Sutta*⁴. In this *sutta*, the *Brahmana* questions Lord Buddha about the five sense faculties. He starts by saying that there are five senses (*pañca indriya*). He is referring to the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body. Then he explains their qualities. You have to remember that he was not a Buddhist. He was a *Brahmana* who came to Lord Buddha to ask for clarification. First, he explains what he knows about the five senses.

He says that the five sense faculties belong to different spheres and have different functions (*nānāvisayāni nānāgocarāni*) and do not share the spheres or functions of one another. This means the eye is only capable of seeing pictures, colours and shades. The eye cannot sense sounds or smells. Similarly the ear is sensitive only to sound. It cannot sense colours, smells and so on.

So these five senses have their own specific spheres. This is what he refers to as *nānāvisayāni*. Each sphere has specific objects for the senses to consume. The eye has its own *gocara bhumi*, where it can consume only colour. The ear has its own *gocara bhumi*, where it can consume only sound. This is what the *Brahmana* refers to as *nānāgocarāni*.

Q: As for the sounds humans can recognise, there is a specific range. It is 20 – 20000 hertz, isn't it?

⁴ *Unnābha Brāhmana Sutta SN 48 (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pali, Indriya Saṃyutta, Jarāvagga*

A: There is a range, but within that range differences exist. Sound perceptions (*sadda saññā*) have different frequencies. This is why the ear can distinguish one sound from another. So, within each *gocara bhumi* there are differences. The senses can recognise the differences within their own sphere.

Then the Brahmana explains another quality of the senses. The sensor itself, or the *indriya* itself cannot consume the object. Or it does not know what it is receiving. And he asks Lord Buddha, ‘Who helps the five senses?’ The Pali term used here is *paṭisarana*. As the senses themselves cannot appreciate what they consume, he wants to know who helps the five senses. Lord Buddha answers that the mind (*mano*) helps them.

Q: I was just wondering whether the Brahmana asked the question because he actually did not know the answer, or whether it was just to check Lord Buddha’s knowledge.

A: If you think at the worldly level, anyone can understand this. *Unnabha Brahmana* was a very bright person. He might have known the answer for the first question, but not the others. Lord Buddha’s reply to his question was that it is the mind (*mano*) that helps the senses. Then the Brahmana asks, ‘Who helps the mind?’ Then Lord Buddha replies that it is mindfulness (*sati*) that helps the mind. Then the Brahmana asks, ‘Who helps mindfulness?’ Lord Buddha replies that it is liberation or freedom (*vimutti*).

Q: Is it freedom from the mind?

A: You have to find the deeper meaning to Lord Buddha’s answer, but generally you can say release or freedom from

something. You have to think about all this and try to understand what was meant.

Then the next question he asks is, ‘Who helps liberation or freedom? Lord Buddha replies that it is *Nibbāna*. So this sutta goes right up to *Nibbāna*.

The Brahmana asks one more question before leaving, ‘Who helps *Nibbāna*?’ and Lord Buddha replies, ‘You have gone too far in your questioning.’ After the Brahmana leaves, Lord Buddha explains to the others and said if the Brahmana dies, he will not be re-born in the sensuous world. From this we can assume that he has reached the level of non-returner, just by reflecting on Lord Buddha’s answers.

So there is a gradual process here from one step to the next. We have to start with the five senses and if we know and understand them properly, we can progress to the next level – that of the mind. There is a relationship between the two. It is after we get rid of the sensual level that we can tackle the other two levels – the fine material level and the formless level - both of which involve dealing with the mind. This is why first we have to completely understand what is going on with the five physical senses.

So again it is referring to *rūpa*. The five physical senses and the sensory objects are commonly known as *rūpa* or material form. At the worldly level we do not know the true nature of material form. Therefore we have to practice *kāyānupassanā* to develop wisdom to see the reality, or the true nature of material form.

We can discuss further how to practice in order to gain the supra-mundane view of *rūpa*. At the worldly level, we believe that *rūpa* exists and that there is a ‘Person’ who knows about it. For

example, we can see these flowers, tables, chairs, our bodies etc. which are all *rūpa*. We believe that what we see does exist. This is the worldly level, but this is not the reality of *rūpa*. So one has to practice *kāyānupassanā* to get an understanding about *rūpa*. We can gain some knowledge of *rūpa* at the worldly level when we analyse these flowers, our own bodies or those of others. One type of knowledge that we get from such an analysis is that they are a collection of different parts. For example, the human body is made up of thirty two parts - head hair, body hair, nails, teeth etc. So, what we call a body is actually a collection of thirty two parts.

If we go further, we can see that each of these parts is a collection of the four elements - earth, water, fire, air (*paṭhavī, āpo, tejo, vāyo*), or is a collection of *rūpa kalāpa*, the smallest particles of matter made up of the elements. This is a different level of seeing the physical body - still it is worldly knowledge. Even scientists use terms like atoms to refer to the smallest particles of the physical world. All *rūpa* consists of these smallest particles - this knowledge is at the worldly level.

If we practice *kāyānupassanā* and gain this kind of knowledge, it belongs with the worldly level of *samatha*. Still we are at the *samatha* stage, which is a pre-practice (*poorwa prathipada*). This knowledge is also important and so we must do this practice because it helps to reduce the five hindrances. The purpose of this practice is to reduce the five hindrances and develop *samādhi* to progress further. It is only then that we are in a position to develop our wisdom up to the supra-mundane level.

One way of contemplating is: ‘there is an external body, but it consists of 32 parts or four elements.’ Another way to contemplate is: ‘we get the concept of body within ourselves, when externally

only 32 parts or the four elements exist.’ But there is a huge difference between these two methods. Lord Buddha advised us to see the world and the cause of it within this fathom long body, if we want to realize the true nature (*Rohitassa Sutta*)⁵. To move from *samatha* to *vipassanā* one has to keep this advice in mind.

⁵ *Rohitassa Sutta AN 4.45 ((Aṅguttara Nikāya, Catukka Nipāta, Rohitassa Vagga)*

Kāyānupassanā

In the last discussion we spoke about why we need to practice *kāyānupassanā*. The purpose of *kāyānupassanā* is to see the reality or the true nature of *rūpa*. There are four contemplations (*anupassanās*) mentioned in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*⁶ – contemplation on material form (*kāyānupassanā*), contemplation on feeling (*vedanānupassanā*), contemplation on the mind (*cittānupassanā*), and contemplation on mental processes (*dhammānupassanā*). *Kāyānupassanā* helps us see the true nature of *rūpa*. Therefore we have to practice *kāyānupassanā* until the true nature of *rūpa* is realised, the final result of which would be not having any attachment to absolutely anything at all (*na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*). In other words, if we practice *kāyānupassanā* properly, there will be no *rūpa* remaining for us to be attached to. This is the final goal of *kāyānupassanā*. So there is a way for us to double check whether the practice has been done properly. Once we attain this goal, we can go to the other contemplations.

But if we are not yet at that level, this is an indication that we must practice *kāyānupassanā* some more. Or perhaps change the way we practice it.

Q: Do you mean that by the time we reach this stage, we probably have reached the level of non-returner?

⁶ *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* MN 10 (*Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa Pali, Mūlapariyāya Vagga*)

A: Yes, the possibility is there. This raises another point. When we practice any one of the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhānas*), whether it is contemplation on *rūpa*, contemplation on feeling, contemplation on the mind, or contemplation on the mental processes, without our knowledge the other foundations of mindfulness also develop. However, what we are really practicing is *kāyānupassanā*.

Q: This is what I wanted to clarify. I was wondering whether we have to first complete *kāyānupassanā* and then move onto *vedanānupassanā*.

A: This is only a guideline. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* itself mentions the purpose of the practice is not being attached to any *rūpa*. These are Lord Buddha's words. So until we reach that state, we have to practice. This is not only for *kāyānupassanā* but for the other contemplations as well.

Q: Without starting with *kāyānupassanā* can we start with another *satipaṭṭhāna* instead? For example, can we start with *cittānupassanā* if we think it suits us better?

A: Anyone can try any *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Q: But is it going to work?

A: The possibility is there, but not for everyone. There is a possibility because we don't know our *samsāric* habits. We may have practiced one *satipaṭṭhāna* more than the others in our previous lives. So, it is alright to try and see whether it suits us, and if it does, then we can continue with it. But if we feel that we are still getting attached to *rūpa*, then we must realise that there is something lacking in our practice of *kāyānupassanā*.

We humans born into this sensuous world have not given up sensual pleasures. We continually seek to satisfy the five senses. We are attached to *rūpa*. This is why we are born as human beings. When we talk about our senses; for example the eye, we need to know that they are conditioned by certain factors. Lord Buddha has mentioned these in some *suttas*⁷. According to the *suttas*, ‘What are the causes for the eye?’ Material food (*kabalīṅkārāhāra*) is one cause, but it is not the only one. There are other causes as well and they are known as *pratya*. Our past words, deeds and thoughts (*kamma*) are an example of this. We have got a human eye because there is a relevant *kamma* behind it – generally good *kamma*. Getting an animal eye is considered as the result of a bad *kamma*. Craving (*taṇhā*) is another cause. Then not knowing the reality of things (*avijjā*) is also a cause for this eye. Like that, there are different causes for our senses and we are born as human beings into this sensuous world due to these causes. Had we suppressed these in our previous lives, we might have been born as a *brahma* or at a higher level within this sensuous world itself.

Q: When you say a *brahma*, is it a *brahma* in a fine material *brahma* world?

A: Whether it is the fine material level or the formless level depends on the level of the concentration absorption (*samādhi jhānas*) gained in the previous life. At least in this life, if we can enter the fine material absorption level and maintain that level upto our death, there is a possibility of being re-born in a *brahma* world which is not a sensuous world. The difference between the sensuous, fine material and formless levels is in the number of sense faculties one is born with.

⁷ *Khuddaka Nikāya, Paṭisambhidāmagga, Nāṇakathā, 16th VattuNāṇa*

Q: That is very interesting, can you explain that further?

A: In the sensuous world, all six senses are present - the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. We try to satisfy all six senses in the sensuous world. In the fine material world, three of these senses - the body, the tongue and the nose - are not present.

Q: Only the eye and the ear?

A: Yes, the eye, the ear and the mind. So this is the difference between the sensuous world and the fine material world. Then in the formless world, even the eye and the ear are not present. So only the mind is working. This is why it is called the formless world. Those who are born into this formless world have no physical body.

Q: Isn't it something that is difficult to explain until you experience it yourself? How free it must be to be free from the bulky body that we have!

A: If you really want to experience it, there is a practical way. Practice *samatha* meditation and enter a formless absorption level. Then you can experience something similar in this life itself.

Q: The experience of the formless level as well?

A: Yes, at this level, you don't feel even the physical body. You feel as if you are floating. What you experience is only the mind. There is the possibility of experiencing all this.

Q: But there is also the possibility of losing it and coming back to the experience of the sensuous world?

A: You will definitely come back, because this is only a temporary suppression of the defilements. If you are able to maintain your meditative absorption until you die, you will be re-born in the respective *brahma* world. If you were at the fine material absorption level, you will be re-born in the fine material brahma world.

Q: Even after attaining the meditative absorptions, you will not be in a *brahma* world until you die?

A: Correct, but you can experience something similar to that of the *brahma* worlds when you are in meditative absorption.

Q: Some could misunderstand this and think it is like travelling to the *brahma* world.

A: This experience is different from being re-born in the *brahama* world. You are still in the human world, but you can experience the different levels in those worlds as your sense faculties change when you enter meditative absorptions.

Having this experience is not impossible. Even lay persons can experience this if they attain the meditative absorptions. The basic requirement is to develop deep *samādhi*. If you can keep your mind at one point for about thirty to forty five minutes, then there is a possibility of developing the meditative absorptions. It is not as difficult as some may think. If one really makes the effort and practices with proper instructions for at least one hour per day, there is a possibility of entering the absorptions. Sometimes people think that they cannot achieve the absorption states in this world unless they give up everything and go to a forest. This is not correct.

Travelling to the *brahma* world using psychic powers (*iddhi bala*) or (*abhiññā*) is different from experiencing the states of

absorption during meditation. It is a different ability. You do not have to be a Buddhist to achieve these states of absorption or any of the psychic powers. Ascetic Asitha, the adviser of King Suddhodhana (Siddhartha *Bodhisatta's* father), used to go to the *deva* worlds to meditate. He was on such a visit when the *Bodhisatta* was born into this world. Seeing that the *devas* were very happy, he asked why they were celebrating. They told him that a *Bodhisatta* was born into the human world. Then he came back to the human world to see the *Bodhisatta*. Asitha used to go to the *deva* worlds using his psychic powers. This is different from getting into the meditative absorptions.

Q: Don't you have to achieve the states of absorption first to attain these psychic powers?

A: According to the *Visuddhī Magga*, you must achieve at least the fourth meditative absorption to attain any kind of psychic power. But according to my understanding, people have different *samsāric* habits. For example, if in your last life you had attained a certain psychic power, then when you practice *samatha* in this life and go into *samādhi*, you may regain that power. So there is a possibility of gaining certain powers even without getting into the fourth absorption. During meditation, when your mind gets calmer and calmer, suddenly you might realise that you have attained a particular psychic power. Some people attain psychic powers like this. For example, hearing far away voices known as the divine ear (*dibba-sota*), or seeing far away things known as the divine eye (*dibba-cakkhu*) and so on.

The important point is that if you gain these psychic powers you have two possibilities. One is to use them to improve your spiritual progress. The other is to use them to gain worldly benefits which

will hamper your spiritual progress. The stages of awakening at the supra-mundane level (*lokuttara magga-phala*) have no relationship with psychic powers. For example, to achieve the stage of stream-winner, you do not need any psychic powers. You do not need any such powers even to become a Perfected One (*Arahant*). There were *Arahants* in the past without any psychic powers⁸. So if you see a person with psychic powers, you should not think that he or she has necessarily achieved any stages of awakening on the path to *Nibbāna*. I want to stress this point because this is what most people tend to think these days.

When people hear that a Venerable Thero or some other person has attained psychic powers, they are keen to see them or listen to them. But those who practice *vipassanā* and have a clear knowledge of the *Dhamma* know that the supra-mundane stages of awakening have nothing to do with psychic powers. Of course we can respect those who have attained such powers because they have developed their concentration to a high level. But we should not allow such practices to take priority over *Dhamma* knowledge and *vipassanā* meditation. Unfortunately, we can see such things happening these days. So it is important to understand that there is no relationship between psychic powers and the stages of awakening on the path to *Nibbāna*.

You might attain psychic powers automatically if you have practiced them in your previous lives. When you try to develop *samādhi* or any other type of meditation and when your mind calms down, you might attain those powers. But if you want to develop psychic powers in this life without having had such experience in your previous lives, you still have the possibility of attaining them.

⁸ *Susīma Sutta SN 12.70 (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Sagathavagga Pali, Devaputta Saṃyutta)*

For this, you have to first develop *samādhi*, then enter the first, second, third and fourth meditative absorptions respectively. When you master the fourth stage you can develop psychic powers.

The method of developing psychic powers is explained in the *Visuddhi Magga*. For example, if you want to see your previous births, after coming out of the fourth absorption, you need to see what happened yesterday, or the day before yesterday, or the previous week and come back again to the present moment. Then the next time, you need to go further and see what happened the previous month or three months ago and again come back to the present moment. Like this you need to go back to the past gradually. If you want to practice other psychic powers, there are different methods for each of those psychic powers. Whatever psychic powers you attain, you must keep in mind that it is not the path leading to *Nibbāna*.

But if you have *sammāditṭhi*, clear knowledge about the path shown by Lord Buddha, then it is alright to have psychic powers if you are able to attain them. It is also alright to practice the meditative absorptions.

Q: But won't it lead to mental illness if you go on craving for these powers?

A: If you do not have clear knowledge of Lord Buddha's Path, you may end up not perhaps with a mental illness, but with a high possibility of diminishing your spiritual progress. Perhaps you may be reborn in a lower realm (*duggati*) in your next life, unless you are able to maintain the meditative absorption you have attained. This is because the absorptions are based on craving. This is why I said before that if you have a clear knowledge of the *Dhamma*, you can

make use of those meditative absorptions to progress along the path shown by Lord Buddha. You will attain not only *samādhi*, but wisdom (*paññā*) as well. This is because when you attain the absorptions your mind is very clear and so it is easy to practice *vipassanā*. When you are in a meditative absorption you have suppressed the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*) - attachment to sensuous pleasure (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*), and skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*).

Q: So the mind is very clear and ready to attain wisdom?

A: Yes, you are ready to practice *vipassanā*, the supra-mundane level of meditation.

Now coming back to *kāyānupassanā* - how can we see the reality of *rūpa*? We can start with whatever *rūpa* we know - maybe our own body or another person's body, that is the physical body. There are different techniques mentioned in *kāyānupassanā*. One is to start with our own body and reflect on its composition in terms of the thirty-two parts it is made of. We can practice further by reflecting on the four elements (*dhātu*) - earth, water, fire, and air elements.

Another method is to see the changing nature, the impermanent nature of our body because it is changing continuously. At the level of the four elements, it is changing all the time. It is mentioned in *Abhidhamma* that the lifespan of the smallest particle of matter (*rūpa kalāpa*) is just seventeen consciousness moments (*cittakkhaṇa*).

Those who study the *Abhidhamma* must know that all these methods help only to suppress the hindrances. This is important

because sometimes people, without understanding what they are really doing, mistakenly think that by having such knowledge and practicing such meditations they are on the supra-mundane path.

We can think that physical *rūpa* consists of the smallest particles of matter known as *rūpa kalāpa*. Even scientists are aware of these very small particles of matter and have named them as atoms and so on. *Rūpa kalāpa* and atoms are not exactly the same, but the concept is similar. Atoms can be broken down to electrons and so on. Atoms are also continuously changing. There are theories like the Heisenberg's Uncertainty Theory according to which one cannot see an electron twice at the same point. In Einstein's Quantum Theory it is explained how matter changes to energy. These are concepts. The scientists have gone quite far in experimenting with physical matter. But where Buddhism is concerned, what we have to realise is that this knowledge has not helped them achieve even the level of Stream Winner.

One important fact that Lord Buddha has clearly mentioned is that we have to see the world, the cause of the world (*samudaya*), and the cessation of the world to achieve the stages of awakening. But we cannot do this by looking at the external world. We have to see the world, the cause of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to its cessation within our fathom long body⁹. Scientists try to understand the world by analysing external matter. According to the *Dhamma*, even our body is considered as external matter - physical matter - and it can be broken down in to smaller parts. So when contemplating on the thirty two component parts of the body, we assume that the body exists out there and that it is made up of head hair, body hair and so on. What we are doing here is

⁹ *Rohitassa Sutta SN 2.26 (Sagatha Vagga, Devaputta Samyutta, Nānātita Vagga)*

again breaking up physical matter into smaller parts, breaking up the external thing we call the body which we believe is existing out there. Even if we breakdown the head hair, body hair etc, into the four elements - earth, water, fire and wind - still we assume that the elements exist and that the thirty two body parts are made up of the still smaller elements. So in terms of these practices, there is not much difference between what the scientists say and what our so called *vipassanā* practitioners say. We may go a bit further and reflect on the impermanence of physical matter and call it *vipassanā*, but still we are no better than the scientists because they have also seen the changing nature of matter.

Some practitioners argue that when they reflect on impermanence (*anicca*), they see the changing nature of the world, and that this is what Lord Buddha taught us to do and so on. Unfortunately, this shows that they haven't fully understood Lord Buddha's teachings. This is why we have to refer to the Buddhist scriptures (*Suttas*) in the Pali canon (*Tipitaka*) to get proper guidance and understanding about how to reflect on impermanence.

As mentioned previously, there are two different ways to see impermanence. One is at the worldly level where we believe that something that exists outside is changing. To say that something has changed, we need to experience two states - a previous state and a current state. Then we can compare the two states and see their relative changes. We can see that one state is different from the other. This is accepted as change at the worldly level.

So when we say that something is impermanent because it is changing, this means that we have already accepted two states - a state in the past and a state in the present and sometimes a state in the future as well. So now we know that when we say that something

is changing in the worldly sense, it is only by comparing these different states. This is only seeing impermanence in a worldly way. Lord Buddha has shown us how to see impermanence beyond this worldly level. Lord Buddha has explained how to see impermanence from the supra-mundane perspective. He has shown us how to practice the perception of impermanence (*aniccasaññā*) on the five clinging aggregates.

To practice *aniccasaññā*¹⁰ on *rūpa* the proper way, we have to contemplate on three things. The first one is ‘What is *rūpa* (*iti rūpaṃ*)?’ Then ‘What is the cause of *rūpa* (*iti rūpassa samudayo*)?’ And then ‘What is the cessation of *rūpa* (*iti rūpassa atthaṅgamo*)?’ So if we are trying to see all these three aspects of *rūpa*, this means that we are practising *aniccasaññā* according to Lord Buddha’s teachings. This is the supra-mundane perception of impermanence. So even when we want to see the *anicca* nature of our body, we have to see it according to this teaching - ‘What is the body; what are the causes of the body; and what is the cessation of the body?’ Cessation means that the body does not exist (*atthaṅgama*) because the causes of the body are not present.

So the real practice of *aniccasaññā* is not just an utterance of words and saying, ‘This body is changing, my body is changing’. This is clearly explained in the *Aniccasaññā Sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikāya*. This explanation is very relevant to *kāyānupassanā* because it tells us not only how to practice impermanence in the worldly way, but also how to practice it in the supra-mundane way, that is to gain supra mundane knowledge or wisdom up to the point where there

¹⁰ *Aniccasaññā Sutta SN 22.102 ((Samyutta Nikāya, Khanda Samyutta, Puppha Vagga)*

will be nothing left to grasp in this *rūpa* world (*na ca kiñci loke upādiyati*) as mentioned in the *Satiptṭahāna Sutta*.

To achieve this we have to start with understanding ‘What is *rūpa*?’ Whatever we see using our eye is considered as *rūpa*. Or whatever we hear using our ear is also considered as *rūpa*. We have to practice in this manner for all the five senses - the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body. We must also remember that the five senses themselves are also *rūpa*. So, the eye is *rūpa*, the nose is *rūpa* and so on. For example, if we see some flowers, the flowers are *rūpa*, and the eye that sees them is also considered as *rūpa*. The same applies to the other five senses and whatever is sensed by them.

So to see the true nature of *rūpa* - that of our physical body, or of any other type of *rūpa* - we have to start with *rūpa*. We can even start with the eye. The eye is taken as *rūpa* because habitually we believe that it is a *rūpa*. It is the same with the other faculties.

After starting with any *rūpa*, the next step is to see the causes of that *rūpa* - the causes that make the *rūpa* arise. The causes can be seen either externally or internally. Externally, there are different causes for the arising of the flowers - because they were plucked from a tree, or because they bloomed on a tree with the help of the elements and so on. For our physical body also we can give various causes like this. For example, we can say that because of food we have this body etc. This is just the external way of looking at causes, so it is not correct to say that we can get rid of the body by not taking any food. This is not the path leading to *Nibbāna*. This is why we need to have a proper understanding of Lord Buddha’s teachings.

There is a good story that illustrates this point well. During Lord Buddha’s time, there were people with various wrong beliefs. Once

when one such a person came to see Lord Buddha, he asked him, ‘What does your teacher teach you?’ The visitor explained, ‘My teacher says that we should not see *rūpa* using our eyes, we should not hear sounds using our ears etc.’ Then Lord Buddha said ‘If that were so, a blind person or a deaf person who can do that well can achieve *Nibbāna* easily.’

Therefore we must understand that this is not the path shown by Lord Buddha. We must understand with wisdom how our faculties work and see how we get deluded by them and how we keep going on and on in this *samsāric* journey.

How do we get to know about *rūpa* with our faculties (*āyatana*)? For example, the eye is a *rūpa*. Some causes for the eye as mentioned in the *suttas* are ignorance (*avijjā*), *kamma*, craving (*taṇhā*) and food (*āhara*). It is because of these causes that we have got this eye. So if we want to realise the *Dhamma* or practice *vipassanā*, we should know these things.

At the worldly level, when we think of the *rūpa* called the eye, we generally believe that the eye exists from the day we were born until our death.

Q: That we have our own eye which gets old with us?

A: Yes. If I ask you, ‘Have you seen your own eye? Using the mirror have you seen your eye? Or have you seen a photograph or a video of your eye? In that case you might say, ‘Yes, I have seen my eye.’ But this is where categorisation of *rūpa* is very important. The eye is categorised as an internal *rūpa* (*ajjhatta rūpa*), and whatever you see using your eye is categorised as external *rūpa* (*bahiddha rūpa*). If you have seen your eye, using your own eye, like using a

mirror or a photograph, then what you have seen is only an external *rūpa*. It is not an internal *rūpa*. So the question is, ‘Have you ever seen your own eye?’

No. You have seen something external. Lord Buddha has said that you cannot see your own eye (*cakkum bhikkhave anidassanam*). All the sense faculties are like that. You can never see your ear, nose, tongue or body. It is very difficult for us to understand what Lord Buddha meant by this, especially what he meant when he said that we have never seen our own body!

To help us understand this, we need to refer to the 15th and 16th *ñāṇa* in the *ñāṇakatha* in *Patisambhidamagga* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, where the internal and external faculties are explained. There it is mentioned that the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue and the body cannot be seen (*anidassanam*). We have never seen them in the past and will never see them in the future. This is the reality. In *Malunkyaputta Sutta*¹¹ he questions; ‘will you get attached to such a *rūpa* which you have never experienced? Because in reality (at the supra-mundane level) they do not experience what we crave for now with our deluded minds at the worldly level. One can see this reality only with an undeluded mind. That is the level of *diṭṭhe diṭṭhemattam bhavissati, mute mutamattam bhavissati, viññāte viññātatmattam bhavissati*. (In the seen there will be just the seen; in the heard, just the heard; in the sensed, just the sensed; in the cognized, just the cognized.)

At the worldly level, we believe that we have seen these, but in reality we have never seen them. But we have to understand why Lord Buddha says so. It is for us to see the reality. One way to

¹¹ *Malunkyaputta Sutta SN 35.95 (Salāyatana Vagga, Salāyatana Saṃyutta, Chala Vagga)*

understand this is that the eye is an internal *rūpa*. We cannot use our eye to see our own eye because the eye can see only external *rūpa*. So if we have seen our eye, then it has to be something external. It is not our own eye. So we cannot say that we have seen our eye in a mirror because what we have seen in the mirror is not our own physical eye. So, can you see it now? Have you seen it before in the past? Will you be able to see it in the future? This is something to think about.

***Rūpa* (Part 1)**

Today's discussion will be based on how to realise the true nature of *rūpa upādānakkhandha*. We will discuss the more practical aspect of how to observe physical matter - *rūpa*.

This is a very important topic because we have to realise what suffering (*dukkha*) is according to Lord Buddha's teachings. Lord Buddha summarised suffering in a nutshell as *saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*¹² which means, 'In short, the five clinging aggregates themselves are suffering'. The first of the five clinging aggregates (*panca upādānakkhandha*) is the clinging aggregate of form or physical matter (*rūpa upādānakkhandha*). This is why we have to investigate and see the true nature or the reality of *rūpa*. When going on this *saṃsāric* journey, we do not see the true nature of *rūpa*. This means we do not consider *rūpa* as suffering. When we get attached to *rūpa*, we do not realise that it is suffering that we are grasping.

Q: When you say we don't realise that *rūpa* is suffering, I think sometimes we do know that it is suffering either by listening to the doctrine of Lord Buddha or by listening to these *Dhamma* discussions, but yet we are attached to it. Why is this?

A: That is right. Many Buddhists know that the five clinging aggregates are suffering but it is only knowledge gained from outside either by listening to the *Dhamma* or reading the Suttas etc.

¹² *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta - SN 56.11* ((*Samyutta Nikāya, Mahavagga Pali, Sacca Samyutta*)

It is known as knowledge gained by learning (*suta-maya-ñāṇa*). So although we are familiar with the phrase ‘*Samkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkha*’, it is not true realisation. *Suta-maya-ñāṇa* is only the very basic of the three levels of knowledge mentioned in the *Dhamma*. The other two are knowledge gained by reasoning (*cintā-maya-ñāṇa*) and knowledge gained by contemplation (*bhāvanā-maya-ñāṇa*). *Suta-maya-ñāṇa* or the knowledge we gain from external sources is not our own knowledge. Even at the mundane level, we can explain a theory to someone, but knowing it is different from realising it. Realisation is not what you heard from someone else. It is your own realisation of the truth.

In Buddhism too, knowing and realising are not the same. Of course we have to follow Lord Buddha’s teachings with faith and confidence (*saddhā*) but when we talk about the Perfected Ones (Arahants), they are the ones who have realised the truth. Lord Buddha himself has explained that whether a Buddha appears in this world or not, the true nature of the world is the Four Noble Truths.

Q: I think that is a very important point because sometimes people tend to accuse Lord Buddha as if he has invented suffering. But this is something that inherently exists in the world and the Buddhas merely show it.

A: Lord Buddha has only explained what the reality is. Whether Lord Buddha is present or not, that is the reality - the truth, which is the Four Noble Truths. And we are talking about the first Noble Truth of suffering.

There are five components in the clinging aggregates - form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), thought-formation

(*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Today we will try to identify and learn about the first one which is *rūpa*.

When we talk about *rūpa*, we know that there are many different types of *rūpa*. According to Lord Buddha, there are eleven categories of *rūpa* - near *rūpa* (*ajjhṭṭa rūpa*), far *rūpa* (*bahiddha rūpa*) and so on. Space-wise they can be divided into two categories - those that are part of me (my body) and those that are away from me, that is all other *rūpa*. These are two extremes. If you take either of these two extremes, they cover a whole gamut of *rūpa* in this world or in the whole universe. It is applicable to any sort of *rūpa* that you know. The important thing is we may know all these facts about *rūpa*, but do we know that *rūpa* is the main cause for our suffering? This is where we lack understanding of the reality as it is.

Lord Buddha has explained that the five aggregates of clinging are suffering (*pañca upādānakkhandha dukkhā*), but in our daily lives when we associate with *rūpa*, we do not realise that it is suffering. This is the gap between our realisation and the reality as explained by Lord Buddha.

Rūpa can also be considered as physical matter. They are all considered as *rūpa*, whether they are animate like our own bodies or the bodies of others, or inanimate like chairs, tables etc.

Q: But is *rūpa* only the forms that can be seen through the eye?

A: *Rūpa* can be recognised in different ways. One is through seeing using the eyes. Even when hearing sounds we get to know *rūpa*. Our sense bases help us to recognise *rūpa*. So we get to know *rūpa* through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. This is another way of explaining what *rūpa* is - our five senses and also the sensory

objects that are experienced by each of them. All these together are considered as the *rūpa* world.

Another explanation of *rūpa*, one that is familiar to those who know the *Dhamma*, is that *rūpa* consists of the four elements (*sataramahā dhātu: paṭhavī, āpo, tejo, vāyo*). *Paṭhavī* is the solid nature of matter, or solidity; *āpo* is the liquid nature, or liquidity; *tejo* is heat, that is how hot or cold it is; and *vāyo* is the wind like nature. These are the four elements and when we talk about *rūpa* it is possible to talk about these four elements. This is another explanation of *rūpa*.

Very often we know *rūpa* only at the worldly level. So we need to use Lord Buddha's teachings to understand or realise the true nature of *rūpa*. When I say this, you have to realise that what we know is not the reality or the true nature of *rūpa*. All of us may know about *rūpa* but, is it the true nature of *rūpa*? Even if we realise the true nature of *rūpa*, the point is whether we do see it as suffering. From our perspective, there are certain *rūpa* that give us happiness. When we see flowers or a Buddha statue, generally we get a pleasant feeling but there are certain *rūpa* that give us unpleasant feelings, like an accident or a dead body. We do not like such *rūpa*. So at a worldly level, certain *rūpa* can give us happiness while certain *rūpa* can give us the opposite, that is unpleasant feelings. Also the same *rūpa* can sometimes give us happiness and sometimes unhappiness. For example, take your own body. When your body is beautiful you are very happy but due to a sickness or some other reason if you think you are not beautiful, it will give you a sad feeling.

This is the relative nature of *rūpa* at a worldly level. Sometimes it can give you happiness and sometimes sadness. But this is at a worldly level. This is known as the eight worldly concerns (*atalō*

dahama). At a worldly level we all experience this. But when we talk at a supra-mundane (*lokuttara*) level, *rūpa* is not a relative thing that can give happiness or sadness from time to time. *Rūpa* has only one quality, and as explained by Lord Buddha, in short, it is suffering. So if you cling to *rūpa* you are clinging to suffering. There is absolutely no happiness involved in it - nothing at all. This is what you would realise when you see the true nature of *rūpa*.

Now you will see that there is a gap between our level of wisdom and that of a Perfected One (Arahant). In one sutta it is explained that what is true for us worldlings (*puthujjana*) is untrue for the Arahants; and what is untrue for the worldlings is true for the Arahants¹³. There is a big gap between the two levels of wisdom. So what we know about *rūpa* at the worldly level is not the truth at the supra-mundane level.

So how do we develop our mind from the worldly level to the higher supra-mundane level? That is what we must discuss, investigate and find out from Lord Buddha's teachings. We must investigate the *Dhamma*.

How do we get to know *rūpa*? Whenever one of our faculties is working, like the eye when it sees something. For example, we can see these flowers and it is only then that we get to know that they exist there. So when we come across something, from the knowledge we have gained by listening to the *Dhamma*, we can investigate whether the clinging aggregate of *rūpa* (*rūpa upādānakkhandha*) is present, whether the clinging aggregate of feeling (*vedanā upādānakkhandha*) is present and so on. We strongly believe that those flowers exist out there because we have accepted that *rūpa*.

¹³ *Dvayatānupassanā Sutta - KN. 3.12 (Khuddaka Nikāya, Sutta Nipāta, Mahāvagga)*

Simply speaking, this is the clinging aggregate of *rūpa* and it is tinged with one of the three types of feeling - pleasant or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. For example, flowers usually give us a pleasant feeling. That is the clinging aggregate of feeling. Then there is also the perception (*saññā*) factor. We are able to separate these flowers from other *rūpa*. This is due to perception (*rūpa saññā*). Then we have many ideas and thoughts about that *rūpa* and that is *cetanā*, and that is the clinging aggregate of thought-formation (*saṅkhāra upādānakkhandha*). Then how do we get to know about these things? It is through our consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

Therefore all five aggregates of clinging arise in relation to a single sensory object, i.e. the clinging aggregate of *rūpa*, the clinging aggregate of feeling, the clinging aggregate of perception, the clinging aggregate of thought-formation and the clinging aggregate of consciousness. But what we do not realise is that suffering is present when this happens. When we accept that flowers exist, we get a happy feeling. But according to the *Dhamma* this means that we have generated the five aggregates of clinging. And Lord Buddha has said that the five aggregates of clinging are suffering. At the mundane level of wisdom we do not realise this. We do not see this. We may have gained knowledge through the *Dhamma* that this has to be suffering, but we still cannot feel this. This is the gap between the undeveloped mind of the *worldlings* and the developed mind of the Perfected Ones. This is why we need to do something to develop our wisdom to see the true nature of *rūpa*.

Lord Buddha has said that the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satara Satipaṭṭhāna*) is the only path for the realisation of *Nibbāna* (*ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo*)¹⁴. The first Foundation of

¹⁴ Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta - MN 10 (*Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa Pali, Mūlapariyāya Vagga*)

Mindfulness is *Kāyānupassanā*. *Kāyānupassanā* helps to realise the true nature of *rūpa*. We have to use the techniques explained in the *Kāyānupassanā* section of the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* to realise the true nature of *rūpa*. Why do we need to realise this? Because we do not know the true nature of *rūpa*. *Kāyānupassanā* is mainly explained using the body, i.e. breathing, the thirty two parts of our body and so on. Why do we break our body into thirty two parts? It is to get rid of the perception of a whole body or the perception of a body. If you see this body as a collection of thirty two different parts and if you practice this again and again, you can see the body as a collection of thirty two different parts. For this to happen, you have to analyse it mentally again and again as a collection of head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and so on. It is not a single unit but a collection of thirty two different parts. If you contemplate on this again and again, whenever you see your own body or somebody else's body you do not recognise it as a body but as a collection of parts.

Q: For example you may not recognise it as your child, husband etc., but ultimately as a collection of thirty two parts? To these parts in the collection we put labels like labelling things we have put in a bag?

A: It all depends on how we view it. Because the labels you put on one body may differ from the labels you put on another. For example, the same body can be a father to one person, a husband to another person, a grandfather to a third person and a brother to a fourth. One person's child will be the spouse of another person. The labels are different from person to person although it is the same physical structure, the same body. It is because these are labels we put using our mind which is extraneous to the true nature of the

physical structure. Therefore one way of seeing the true nature of the body is by breaking it into different parts. This is why breaking up the body into thirty two parts is one meditation technique that is explained in the *Kāyānupassanā* section of the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. The purpose of practicing *Kāyānupassanā* is to get rid of or suppress any attachment or aversion we have towards a physical body.

Q: If you have practiced *Kāyānupassanā*, can you suppress the sad feeling you experience at the death of a loved one?

A: Yes, if you practice this you can very easily realise that even your loved one is only a body - a mere collection of thirty two parts, and that is the true nature of the body. So why should one suffer because of that? This is the ultimate truth. But for a person who has not practiced this meditation, it is difficult to come to this realisation at the death of a loved one. That is why you have to practice *Kāyānupassanā* again and again. It helps you reduce the strong attachment or aversion you have towards others.

Q: And I think it helps you remain happy, though people sometimes accuse the doctrine saying that it always points to suffering. But actually knowing the truth makes you feel happy.

A: Happy in the sense we don't have to be unnecessarily worrying about things. It gives a certain kind of happiness. Some might see it differently with misconception, and think how can you be happy when someone is dead etc.

Q: That is very much there, because sometimes people go to funerals and later they comment on how each and every one behaved

at the funeral and sometimes they complain that this man died and nobody cried, that sort of thing.

A: So it is better to put it as - ‘You are not worrying unnecessarily’ rather than ‘Being happy about some event or occasion’. Lord Buddha’s teaching is to get rid of *dukkha*. So when we worry, it is an unnecessary worry because it is due to our not seeing the true nature of things. If we realise the true nature, we don’t have to worry because this is the reality. It happens to everyone and will happen to us too sooner or later. So why do we have to cry over the true nature of things. If it is something unusual that never happened before to anyone, then it is ok to cry. But this happens to everyone including me. So why do I have to suffer? The important thing is to gradually see the true nature. *Kāyānupassanā* meditation helps us reduce our unnecessary worries, attachments (*lobha*) and aversions (*dosa*).

But still there is another factor called delusion (*moha*) and *avijjā*. Due to *avijjā*, which means not knowing the reality as it is, you get deluded. To realise this you have to practice *kāyānupassanā* further at the supra-mundane level. What I explained earlier - that there is a body and that it consists of thirty two parts - is at the worldly level. So if you are practicing *kāyānupassanā* thoroughly at this level, whenever you see a body you will realise that it is just a collection of body parts.

Now if we think about this a bit more deeply, although you may have got rid of the perception of the body (*sharīra saññā*) you still have the perception of its individual parts. That is the perception of the body parts like hair, teeth, nails etc., and also the perception of the knower who knows about those parts. The personality view is still present.

Q: Can you please repeat that.

A: Now when we see an external body, with our meditation practice we are able to analyse it and see that it is a collection of head hair, body hair, nails, teeth etc. But who is doing this? Who is the knower? It is ‘The I’ who knows that it is not a body - so the personality view is still there. You have to realise that this is because delusion is still present. We can reduce attachment and aversion to some extent, but delusion is still remaining. In the practice of meditation this is called the preliminary path (*pūrwā pratipadawā or aadhi brahmachariyaawā*). More effort needs to be exerted to get rid of delusion. Until this happens you are still not on the noble path (*āriya paṭipadā*).

Q: Can you please explain it in English.

A: *Pūrwā pratipadawā* means we are analysing reality still at the worldly level. This is pre-practice for the supra-mundane level. To prepare for the higher level, you have to suppress certain factors which are known as the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*).

Q: Is it only just suppressing and not total eradication?

A: Yes. Why? Because if we practice this meditation whenever we see a body, we can reduce or suppress the hindrances. But what happens if we forget to practice or if we forget to be mindful of the meditation? You must remember that we do not practice meditation all the time. This is where mindfulness (*sati*) is very important. It is only while practising the meditation that we can see that the body is made up of different parts. But at all other times our defilements can come up. For example, if by habit we get angry with someone and if we practice this meditation, whenever we see that person we can

quickly contemplate that it is only a collection of various parts. Then we do not get angry with that person as usual. But what happens if we forget to contemplate? Our anger will come up again.

Q: When we sit, close our eyes and meditate, we are contemplating but at all other times we are not contemplating or we have forgotten to do it. What do you suggest? Should we be meditating while we live our daily lives, should we be in mindfulness at all times?

A: If you can it is better but generally we know we cannot do this. But we can gradually develop this meditation up to that level. This is why we need to practice the meditation separately as an initial step. Then when we get used to it, we can try to do it all the time. We have to remind ourselves again and again, and this is where mindfulness becomes essential to the practice.

Lord Buddha has advised us to maintain our mindfulness all the time, starting from when we wake up in the morning until we go to bed at night. Being constantly mindful like this is practising *Satipaṭṭhāna*. We have to train our mind to do this. But we need to know that in training also there are two levels - one at the worldly level and the other at the supra-mundane level.

What is the difference between the mundane level and the supra-mundane level? I have already explained the mundane level where while practising you can suppress your defilements at that moment, but where later on, the defilements can come up. In contrast, at the supra-mundane level, you cut off causes for all types of defilements so that they will never arise again. This is the difference and this is when you are on the Noble Path. But to get to this stage you have to practice at the worldly level first. So whenever you see a body, you

can practice by trying to break it into the thirty two parts. This is a good practice.

Q: What sort of a body is the easiest? Is it an enemy or a loved one? What do you suggest? Does it depend on the character of the person who is practising? If someone wants to start practising should it be their own body at first?

A: Ultimately you have to do this for everyone. For people with deep attachment, it will be difficult to do it for their loved ones. For example, it will be very difficult to contemplate like this on your mother or your child. This is just my thinking based on my own experience. So a good starting point would be someone who is neutral. Then it is easy to break up that body into parts. But some people find that it is much easier to do it on an enemy.

Q: But will it develop some other defilement?

A: That is true but this is only the starting point. If you take the loving kindness meditation (*mettā* meditation), we start with ourselves. Why? Because it is easy to do it on ourselves and on our loved ones. It is only at the end that we think about our enemies, those who are angry with us. This is because to do this we have to develop our mind gradually. When we are full of loving thoughts, then we are in a position to think about those who are angry with us. *Kāyānupassanā* is also similar to that. If we start at the other end it is easy. But it is not a must. It just makes the meditation easier. Different people have different abilities based on the habits they have formed and how much they have developed their minds during the cycle of births and deaths (*saṃsāra*). But the important thing is that we have to keep doing this meditation on our loved ones as well as our own body, which is what we are mostly attached to.

When we practice *kāyānupassanā* meditation we take our own body and break it into parts. So first we have to develop our mind up to that level. When we do that, we will not see a difference between people, whether it is a loved one or an enemy, because a body will be seen as just a body. Here we are trying to see the true nature of the body - that it is just a collection of thirty two parts. Whether it is of an angry person or of a loved one or whether it is our own body, it has these common qualities or characteristics. So we are trying to see the true nature of the body. But do not forget that at this stage, we still accept that the body exists and we are only analysing the composition of it. This is the worldly level of doing *kāyānupassanā* meditation. It is not the supra-mundane level.

To practice at the worldly level, you can either use the physical body or even a photo, an image or a statue. Why is that? It is because we generate an image of the original person in our mind when we see the photo.

Q: But do we actually need a visual aid? Can't we just visualise someone?

A: It depends on our level of wisdom. Of course you can close your eyes and visualise someone or your own body. Usually in the thirty two body part meditation, we close our eyes and think about our own body. It is a kind of imagination. We visualise our body and then separate it into parts. If we can do it to our own body, we can do it to the other bodies as well, because it is all done in our mind. This is why I mentioned that we do not need the actual physical body in front of us to practice this meditation.

This is why in the instructions given for the contemplation of decaying corpses (*navasivathika*), which is a meditation that comes

under *kāyānupassanā*, we visualise a dead body decaying in nine stages. Of course it is easy if you can see the decaying body physically, but mentally also you can practice the meditation by just imagining what kind of situation it is. In the same way you have to reflect on your own body. ‘My body is also subject to these changes. I have not escaped from any of them’. So it is a kind of realisation, but I emphasise that **this is still at the worldly level of seeing the body**. Why is it at the worldly level - because we still believe in the duality that a body exists out there and the knower exists here. The deception still exists, that ‘I am the knower’ because ‘I am the person who gets this knowledge about the body’ or ‘I am practising this meditation on an external body or my own body’. Why - because this meditation is based on our acceptance that the body exists. However, this meditation helps us to suppress or get rid of the general wrong perception of the body as a single unit whenever we see a body.

Q: Perhaps the attachment to the body arises when it is seen as a single unit?

A: Don’t you get the similar feeling when you see a photograph of someone, a statue or a video, or on the television? When there is a body and you recognise it as a human body, then you put labels on it - this is my relative, friend, the one who is angry with me and so on. But if you get rid of this human body perception, and see the body as only a collection of parts, then can you put those labels like my friend, my mother, my father etc? No, you can’t. We are burdened with all these attachments and aversions only when we believe that there is a human body existing out there. But with *kāyānupassanā* we try to get rid of this perception and see that it is not a body, but only a collection of different parts.

Although we do not see the body as a single unit, still because the different parts exist, we could get attached to those parts. So to go still further, we need to contemplate on the four elements (*dhātu manasikāra*). This is because even when we say this is head hair, still there is a tendency that we may get attached to the head hair. But if we see it as a collection of the four elements – solidity, liquidity, motion and heat, then we are trying to get rid of the perception of hair. Then if we have any attachment or aversion towards the hair, we can see that it is just a collection of these four elements. We could then suppress the attachment or aversion towards that body part. I constantly use the word suppress because we are still at the worldly level. We can talk more about how to practice *kāyānupassanā* at the supra-mundane level in our next discussion.

Lord Buddha has explained fourteen different meditation techniques under *Kāyānupassanā Satipaṭṭhāna* to contemplate on our own body.

***Rūpa* (Part 2)**

We discussed physical matter or form (*rūpa*) in our previous discussion. We also discussed how we get to know *rūpa* using our five senses - eye, nose, ear, tongue and body. We get to know external *rūpa* including our own body from whatever signals the five senses capture or are sensitive to. So Lord Buddha's advice is to practice different kinds of meditations in order to realise the true nature of *rūpa*. Why? Because we do not know, see or realise the true nature of *rūpa*. We have been wandering on this long *saṃsāric* journey because we have not seen the reality or the true nature of *rūpa*, or in short, this world or the universe, including our own body.

Lord Buddha has explained how to gradually develop our wisdom to see the true nature of *rūpa*. So we can start with any *rūpa*, whatever we consider as *rūpa*. It is always better to start with the people closest to us, or with those whom we are angry with. These are our defilements and we have to reduce these defilements.

As explained previously, if you consider the physical body (maybe your own body or another person's body), whenever you see a body you may get attached to it or may get angry with it. These defilements are known as attachment to sensuous pleasure (*kāmacchanda*) and ill-will (*vyāpāda*). To reduce or suppress these two defilements we can use any of the techniques mentioned in the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* under *Kāyānupassanā*.

We have explained a few of them previously, like the contemplation on the thirty two parts of the body or the contemplation on decaying corpses. There are forty different

methods to develop concentration, known as *sama-sathalis kamatahan*. Of these, fourteen main techniques are explained in the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* under *Kāyānupassanā*. So you can see how important it is to see *rūpa* in reality or to realise the true nature of *rūpa*, especially that of our own body. Why? Because this body is what we are most attached to in this world and this is due to our delusion - not knowing the reality. So to reduce our attachment (*taṇhā*), what needs to be done is to see the true nature of *rūpa*. When we see the truth, automatically the unnecessary attachments will be reduced.

There are two methods to see the reality. You have to start at the worldly level and gradually go to the supra-mundane level. Now, I will try to explain how to practice *Kāyānupassanā* in order to gain supra-mundane wisdom. Since we have spoken about the physical body, how do we know that a body exists? Take for example your own mother. How would you know that she exists? You may see her physically, or sometimes you may see a photograph of her in a newspaper or of someone like your own mother. Or you might see her on TV. There are different ways that external matter can remind you of your mother. You can apply this principle to anyone, just like you applied it to your mother.

In each of the above instances, you think about your mother. Then you have to question yourself whether this thinking depends only on the physical body? The answer is 'No'. Different kinds of images captured by your eye can remind you about your mother. And when you are reminded about your mother, it will either make you happy or sad. This is what happens in reality with everyone. If your mother is critically ill, you will get a sad feeling. Or you may think of some happy occasion in the past and feel happy about it.

Perhaps your mother is already dead, but still you can experience the same happy or sad feeling when you are reminded of her.

Being happy or sad like this is what we do at a worldly level. We get happy or sad feelings, just by thinking about a physical body because we do not know the reality behind these feelings. So just thinking about a physical body can change our mental state. When we think about physical matter, whether it is a human-being, an animal or a thing, whatever it is, we get the same experience. We either get a sad or happy feeling. This scenario has to be analysed in depth. If we experience happiness or sadness by getting attached to a physical body, then we need to practice a meditation like the contemplation on the thirty two parts of the body. The purpose is to analyse the human body to see it not as a body but as a collection of different parts and try to understand why we should be happy or sad about a collection of body parts. This will help us to suppress those strong feelings of attachment. It is only suppression, so what happens if we forget to practice the meditation is that the attachment can arise again. Happy and sad feelings are commonly referred to as suffering (*dukkha*) in the *Dhamma* because ultimately they both bring about suffering. Whether it is attachment or aversion, they both come under suffering. So at the worldly level when we do this meditation, we believe that a physical body exists and try to analyse it. We try to think that it is not a body but a collection of thirty two parts. And then we think, why should we worry about it when actually it is only a collection of different parts. But as I have explained before, even though we may get rid of our attachment to the body, still attachment or aversion may remain towards the individual parts.

So to get rid of that we need to practice further by doing the meditation known as the contemplation on the four elements (*dhātu manasikāraya*). This means contemplating on solidity, liquidity, heat and motion (*paṭhavī, āpo, tejo, vāyo*). This meditation helps us to reduce attachment and aversion at a deeper level. We can also think about the changing nature of the body or impermanence (*anicca*) when we do this meditation. We can do this by reflecting that although the body exists now, it is changing all the time, and one day it will die and decay. This is what we do in the contemplation on decaying corpses (*navasivathika*). We contemplate on the nine different stages of a dead, decaying body. We can contemplate in this manner to see the changing nature of the body and to get rid of the strong attachment or aversion towards the body. This meditation is very popular among people today, but it only suppresses the defilements because still the physical matter exists at one end and the 'I' who knows this is present at the other. Although this is an important meditation that has to be done, what we must understand is that if we want to get the true results of Lord Buddha's teachings, we must know very clearly whether our meditation is just at the worldly level or whether it is heading towards the supra-mundane (*lokuttara*) path.

To explain this further, let us go back to the simile that I frequently quote - that of the dog peeping into the water. Here we know that the dog is deluded. This is why it is barking at its own reflection thinking that there is another dog in the water. Let us imagine somehow we are able to teach this dog to practice the meditations that we are using - for example the contemplation on the thirty two parts of the body. Now how do we practice it? Whenever we see or get to know a body, we break it into parts. So let us think the dog is also doing this same meditation, and that whenever it sees

a dog, it analyses it and thinks that it is not a dog but only a collection of different parts like head hair, body hair, nails, teeth etc. Now imagine again the situation where the dog is peeping into the water. It strongly believes that there is another dog and that is why it is barking. So this dog which is practicing the meditation will think ‘It is not a dog, it is only a collection of parts.’ What would happen then? The anger towards the dog in the water might get reduced and it might stop barking. So this practice has helped the dog to reduce its anger. Similarly if it is too attached to the dog in the water, the meditation will help the dog to reduce this attachment.

But what about the delusion (*moha*)? Initially the dog thought that there was another dog in the water, but now after practicing the meditation, it believes that there is no dog, but there is only a collection of parts out there.

Q: The dog thinks that there is a collection of parts and also myself who is analysing it? Isn’t this what the dog thinks?

A: Yes, the dog thinks, ‘I know that it is not a dog’. So the personality view is there in the ‘I’. But compared to the worldly level, it is a higher knowledge, because the dog now does not get angry even though it is deluded. But the important thing to notice is that even though you can suppress your attachment or anger like the dog, still you are very much deluded. This is why I said that this is not the supra-mundane path (*āriya paṭipadā*). You are still practicing at the worldly level and that is called the preliminary practice (*pūruwa paṭipadā*). You are preparing yourself to see the reality but still you are not on the path leading to *Nibbāna* to achieve the stages of awakening (*magga phala*). But the defilements at the worldly level will definitely be suppressed. So this meditation definitely helps to reduce the five hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*). This in turn will help

you to develop concentration (*samādhi*) or even to go up to the level of meditative absorption (*jhāna*), but it will not help you to eliminate the personality view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*).

So this is why we have to try to understand the *Dhamma*. Lord Buddha has said that only those who ‘Know’ and ‘See’ (*jānato passato*) the *Dhamma* can overcome their defilements. So we have to know and see the reality to develop the wisdom to experience the reality as it is (*yathā-bhūtha ñāṇa*). But the worldlings going on this *saṃsāric* journey neither know nor see the reality as it is. So they do not know and do not see the true nature of reality (*ajānaṃ apassaṃ yathā-bhūthaṃ*). It is only those who know and see the reality as it is (*jānaṃ passaṃ yathā-bhūthaṃ*) who are able to practice at the higher level of the supra-mundane path. This is also known as correct view (*sammādiṭṭhi*). This is explained in the *Mahā Salāyatana Sutta*¹⁵ and also in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*¹⁶. One should understand the reality of what is going on.

What happens when we see a live person can also happen when we see the image of that person. Not only when we see the physical body of a person, but even when we see a photograph or a video, we still think about that person and suffer. The same thing happens in the example of the dog. In reality, the dog has not seen a physical, actual dog, but has seen only an image or a reflection in the water. This is similar to our seeing a photograph. When we see a photograph we do not see a live person. Take the photograph of a person who has passed away. We can look at the photograph, think about that person and cry. In this instance we do not see the real physical body, but only an image.

¹⁵ *Mahā Salāyatana Sutta - MN 149 (Majjhima Nikāya, Salāyatana Vagga)*

¹⁶ *Sabbāsava Sutta - MN 2 (Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa Pali, Mūlapariyāya Vagga)*

Now to see the true nature or reality, we have to go down to the level of our faculties. Lord Buddha has advised us to contemplate on the aggregates (*skhandha*), the elements (*dhātu*) and the faculties (*āyatana*). To know the faculties comprehensively, we need to identify which faculty is involved in our experiences - whether it is the eye faculty, ear faculty and so on. In the example of the dog, it is the eye faculty that was involved. When we see a live person or the image of a person, it is again the eye faculty that is involved, and also the mind faculty. The combination of these two give us happiness or sadness. Contemplating on the faculties is known as skillfulness with the faculties (*āyatana kusala*). For this, you need to identify the capability of each faculty. So what is the capability of the eye? To generate visual perception (*rūpa saññā*). It can only give the image of a colour. The eye can only generate colour images on the retina of the eye. The eye cannot do anything more than that.

Then the mind faculty uses the information of the image and generates thoughts about it. It is by this thinking process only that we identify someone as ‘This is my mother, father, child’ etc. This shows that for this thinking process, we really do not need the physical figure of a person in front of us. The image given by the eye faculty is enough to make us happy or sad. Even with our eyes closed we can still think about that person. Just one glimpse is enough to capture the image. The mind then generates thoughts about it, but when this happens we are deluded. We do not see it as an activity of the mind. We strongly believe that we are thinking of some outside physical person or a thing. This is exactly what leads to suffering.

Now if we take the example of the dog again. The eye captured only an image, its own reflection. We know the truth here but the

dog does not know it. The eye does not know what type of image it has generated. The eye is like a camera. The camera does not know what pictures it has captured. The camera only has the capability to take pictures.

Q: Is the image that falls on the retina upside down as well? And we understand it the other way around basically because of the mind?

A: Yes. It is the activity of the mind. These two activities have to be separated - the activities of our physical eye and the activities of our mind. The capability of the eye is only to generate an image. Nothing more than that. We need to realise this. As I said, the eye is like a camera. It can only capture pictures. It does not know the details of the pictures it has captured. In the case of the camera, someone else has to see what pictures have been captured. In our case, the thing that analyses the image is our mind. The mind uses information about the image and also information that has been stored from our previous experiences. The colour signal that is captured by our eye is combined with our previous experiences and more and more thoughts are generated, which are known as thought-formation (*saṅkhāra*). During this process, the deluded thought that ‘I am thinking about something that exists outside’ is also created.

If we think about the example of the dog again - the dog’s eye captures only an image, but it thinks that it is another dog, that the image represents another dog. And the dog thinks, ‘That there is a dog out there. That is why I can see it’. We can see that the dog is deluded. It does not know that these thoughts about another dog are generated within the mind. It firmly believes that it is thinking about a real dog that exists outside. This is due to delusion (*moha*) and not knowing the reality as it is (*avijjā*). Delusion is due to the ignorance

of reality. When the dog analyses the dog that it thinks is outside, it does not see the reality, the true nature of things as they are.

The same thing happens to us as well. When we analyse an outside physical body as a collection of thirty two parts, we do not see the reality as it is. But by doing this we can reduce the defilements of attachment (*lobha*) and aversion (*dosa*), but not delusion. According to Lord Buddha's teachings, there is a different technique to get rid of delusion.

Q: To get to the supra-mundane level?

A: Yes. If you contemplate on the faculties, the true nature of *rūpa* can be realised. The capability of the eye is to capture an image. That is all. All the other things are done by the mind. Since we do not have the wisdom and mindfulness to realise the function of the mind, we believe that we get to know about things that exist outside. We have to develop our mind to enable us to contemplate on the internal process that is going on. This is known as contemplating on the faculties.

For this, you have to listen to the *Dhamma* and understand the function of the faculties and then reflect on it. If we can reflect in this way - 'The eye can capture only an image, the mind can think only about that image and not an object that exists outside. So it is just a creation of our own mind. Whatever we get to know with the help of the other faculties are creations of our own mind'. And whatever knowledge we get is also a creation of our own mind. Since we have not heard the *Dhamma* before, all along our *samsāric* journey we have habitually believed that we think about physical matter that exists outside. This is why Lord Buddha said that if we want to see the reality of the world, we need to do so within this

fathom long body, and not externally. If we try to search externally, it is similar to the dog trying to analyse the dog in the water.

I hope you have got a rough idea of what I am trying to explain. We have to know about each of our faculties. Whenever we get to know about physical matter, physical *rūpa*, what we have to do is to first identify which faculty was involved in that process. Maybe the eye and the mind; or maybe the ear and the mind. For example, when we hear the sound of a bird, we get to know about that bird. In this instance we have to recognise that the ear faculty and the mind faculty are involved. Then we have to go one step further and try to identify the capability of the ear faculty. It can generate only a sound signal. The eye can generate only a colour signal. The nose can generate only a signal about smell. Apply the same principle to the other faculties.

Q: To the brain or to the mind?

A: To the mind. We will keep the brain aside for the moment. To the mind faculty, wherever it arises. The mind faculty will use the information captured by one of the other faculties - the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue or the body. Then the mind will do its thinking. This means it will tell us that there is some kind of object that exists outside. So this is what we believe when we hear a sound. We think of a bird that exists outside. We can see the bird in our mind even without using our eyes. So we can clearly see that it is a creation of the mind. We now have to question how something that we created in our own mind could exist outside.

Q: One good example is when we visited Olande Ananda Thero's temple. There were a lot of bird sounds and we thought there were lots of birds out in the garden. But later the Thero said it

was only a recording and we were surprised. So wasn't that an instance when we actually believed just through hearing that birds existed in the garden, when there were no birds out there?

A: Yes. This shows how easily we get deluded. Why do we get deluded like the dog peeping into the water? It is the same situation. We believe that things exist outside, when in reality they do not. We have to separate these two - what exists outside is one thing, but what we get to know is another thing. All along our *samsāric* journey we have been combining these two and have believed that what we get to know is what actually exists outside. This is the worldly level of thinking.

So whenever we see a body we think that it actually exists outside. This is like the dog that believes that another dog exists out there whenever it sees its own reflection in the water. The dog always thinks 'What I see exists out there.' So we have to understand that there is something wrong in this way of thinking. The reality is much different. What we see is one thing and what exists out there is another thing. These are two separate things.

This is the initial stage of insight meditation (*vipassanā*). These two have to be separated - what we think exists out there and call physical matter (*rūpa*) and what we get to know, which is a creation of our mind. This is the way to separate mentality (*nāma*) and materiality (*rūpa*). We cannot get to know physical matter using our sense doors, because the eye can capture only a colour signal, the ear can capture only a sound signal etc. A signal is not a *rūpa*. Perception or *saññā* is not *rūpa*.

Lord Buddha has given a very good simile comparing perception to a mirage. So now we can see that by using our sense

faculties we get only a mirage or a picture. But by not knowing the reality of this mirage, we recognise things as physical matter. This is why we get attached to this world. If we believe that ‘*Rūpa* exists out there and I know about it’ and try to analyse it, then we are trying to analyse the world from outside and we will never see the reality. This is why Lord Buddha said that to see the true nature of the world we need to see it from our fathom-long body or the six faculties. If we understand this fathom-long body, we can understand the whole world. This is because whatever we have got to know upto now has been through these six faculties and by thinking about it.

Lord Buddha has compared the six faculties to an eggshell. We are inside the shell and the faculties project certain pictures into the shell. Or think of a cinema hall where we can see six movies. So what we experience is nothing but images. In one sutta Lord Buddha says that the world we know consists of pictures or paintings (*tiṭṭhanti citrāni tatheva loke*)¹⁷. *Tiṭṭhanti* means existing, and *citrāni* means pictures or paintings. So in this world what we believe as existing outside are pictures or paintings. It is very difficult for us to understand this, but this is the reality. It is like sitting inside a hall enclosed by six walls with images projected on each wall by one of our faculties. The six faculties show us six movies known as perception. The eye gives colour image signals, the ear gives sound signals and so on. We merely watch six different signals like the six different projections on the six walls. We have never gone out of this hall but we firmly believe that we know the entire external world.

If we analyse our senses one by one, we should realise that none of these senses can tell us exactly what exists outside. Whatever we

¹⁷ *Nibbedhika Sutta - AN 6.63 (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Cakka Nipāta Pali, Mahā Vagga)*

get to know is something generated based on the capability of each sense faculty. For example, if you have a colour blind eye, or if you are born with an eye that can show only black and white images what will happen? Can we talk about other colours like green trees, blue sky etc?

Q: We would not even understand what other colours mean because we have seen the world in black and white only?

A: That is right. We have become slaves of our own senses. Even with limited vision we believe that we know about the outside world.

Q: Most of us realise that we are colour blind only after going through an eye test. Before that most people don't even know this. They think they know but they don't. Isn't that right?

A: Yes. Think of certain animals who can see only a few colours. So that is the world for them. Similarly, in our whole life we have believed in a world which is projected to us according to the capabilities of our faculties. But can it be the reality, the true nature of the world? This is why Lord Buddha has advised us to contemplate on the six faculties (*salāyatana*). To contemplate on the six faculties, we must know each faculty well. We need to know and see the reality of our eye (*cakkum bhikkhave jānaṃ passaṃ yathābhūtham*)¹⁸. We need to know and see the reality of whatever we experience by using our faculties because we are deluded.

With our normal mind we cannot see the reality. This is why we have to practice *vipassanā* using the faculties. This is something different from what we have done before. Previously when using

¹⁸ *Mahā Salāyatana Sutta - MN 149 (Majjhima Nikāya, Salāyatana Vagga)*

our eyes, we strongly believed that physical matter existed outside, like our body or someone else's body. We tried to analyse it by reflecting that the body consists of thirty two parts like head hair, body hair, and so on. It is very similar to what a dog that is taught this contemplation would do when it peeps into the water. It believes that another dog exists in the water and that dog can be broken into parts. But still the dog is deluded. Similarly, we too are deluded because we have not contemplated on the faculties, in this instance the eye. What is the eye doing? If one wants to see the true nature or the reality, we have to meditate on our faculties. In many places in the Thripitaka Lord Buddha has compared our six faculties to a fire. In the *Ādittapariyāya Sutta*¹⁹ Lord Buddha says that the six faculties are burning but we are not aware of that. These faculties bring about such suffering.

Q: Isn't it very powerful to put it that way that the eye is burning?

A: Yes. That is the reality. Not only the eye, but all six faculties are burning. Lord Buddha has clearly said that to realise Nibbana, we must see the reality of the faculties. So in order to enter the supra-mundane path we must have this understanding and then apply this to our meditation. When we have a rough idea about what is going on, then we have to apply it again and again to convince our mind that at the worldly level it is deluded. That is the *vipassanā* that helps us escape from this *saṃsāric* journey. Otherwise what happens is that we remain attached to our eyes, to our ears and so on. So at the moment of death, even if our eyes, ears etc. are not

¹⁹ *Ādittapariyāya Sutta - SN 35.28 (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Salāyatanaṅga Pali, Salāyatana Saṃyutta)*

working, we will still be reborn somewhere because of this attachment, and get attached to another six faculties.

So if we realise what is going on within our faculties at the present moment, then we are not likely to get attached to these burning eyes, burning ears and so on.

Vedanā

Q: “If one who has been ignorant realises this later and treads the path with mindfulness, he will be like the moon that illuminates the world after freeing itself from the dark clouds”. With that little quote from the Dhammapada I would like to start today’s discussion. Today we will discuss feeling (*vedanā*) in detail, the second of the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandha*). The five aggregates are form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), thought-formation (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). As we have talked about *rūpa* extensively, now it is time to talk about the other aggregates like feeling.

A: Feeling is described in a few suttas and one such important sutta is the *Cūlavedalla Sutta* in the *Majjima Nikaya*. It is a famous sutta with questions and answers between *Visāka*, a lay devotee (*Upāsaka*) of Lord Buddha and *Dhammadinnā*, a Buddhist nun who had attained full enlightenment (*Arahat Therani*). They were formerly husband and wife and they had parted to practice the *Dhamma*. When they met again, *Visāka* wanted to know how far *Dhammadinnā* had developed on the path. At this time, *Visāka* had attained the third stage on the path to *Nibbāna*, the stage of Non-Returner (*Anāgāmī*). He did not know that *Dhammadinnā* had already completed the path and so he began to check her level of attainment from the very first stage of the path that is the stage of Stream Winner. However, as *Visāka* was only a Non-Returner, he could ask questions only up to the level of Non-Returner because beyond that point he was not sure of the path.

What makes this discussion very important is that unaware that *Dhammadinnā* had completed the path, *Visāka* begins his questions from the very first stage on the path, the stage of Stream Winner. This sutta is famous because of the questions *Visāka* asks about the existing group of mental and material components (*sakkāya*) which is related to this first stage. *Visāka* asks *Dhammadinnā* - ‘They say *sakkāya*, *sakkāya*. What is *sakkāya*?’ *Dhammadinnā* answers that it is the five aggregates of clinging – form, feeling, perception, thought-formation and consciousness. In another section of the same sutta, he asks her about feeling and it is this section that we are going to focus on today.

Q: Where do you find this conversation between the former husband and wife who later became Noble Ones (*Āryans*)?

A: It's in the *Cūlavedalla Sutta*²⁰ in the *Majjhima Nikāya*. It is a very important sutta. I think it's in the first book of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.

The first question *Visāka* asks is ‘What is feeling?’ *Dhammadinnā* answers by saying that there are three types of feelings. We have previously discussed these three - that is pleasant feeling (*sukha vedanā*), unpleasant feeling (*dukkha vedanā*) and neutral feeling (*adukkhamasukhā*). Neutral feeling is *adukkhamasukhā* in Pali, which means that it is neither *dukkha* nor *sukha*. Sometimes we refer to this as equanimity (*upekkha*), but it is not real equanimity. Neutral feeling is therefore *adukkhamasukhā* which means that it does not belong to either pleasant or unpleasant feeling.

²⁰ *Cūlavedalla Sutta MN 44 (Majjhima Nikāya, Mūlapannāsa Pali, Cūlayamaka Vagga)*

Then *Visāka* asks *Dhammadinnā* a series of questions about feeling beginning with, ‘What is pleasant feeling?’ He also asks, ‘What is pleasant in pleasant feeling?’ and ‘What is unpleasant in pleasant feeling?’ These are two very interesting questions. First he asks what is *sukha vedanā* and the answer was; it is a kind of pleasant feeling. If it is unpleasant it is *dukkha vedanā* and if it is neither *sukha* nor *dukkha* then it is *adukkhamasukhā vedanā*. It is then that *Visāka* asks, ‘What is *sukha* in *sukha vedanā*?’

Q: Which means what is pleasant in pleasant feeling?

A: Yes. And also what is unpleasant or *dukkha* in pleasant feeling.

Q: What is *dukkha* in *sukha vedanā* is what is unpleasant in these so called pleasant feelings?

A: Yes. The next question is about unpleasant feeling. *Visāka* asks, ‘What is unpleasant in unpleasant feeling?’ and ‘What is pleasant in unpleasant feeling?’

This is how *Dhammadinnā* answers. ‘A pleasant feeling is pleasant while it is existing’ (*thiti*). A pleasant feeling is unpleasant when it ceases or goes away. This is understandable. When you have a pleasant feeling and if it lasts for a while, then it is pleasant. When it comes to an end, then you experience an unpleasant feeling or resentment because you lose that pleasant feeling. So both pleasant and unpleasant feeling are there in pleasant feeling. When the pleasant feeling is there you are happy, but when it is not there you become resentful. That is what is pleasant and unpleasant in pleasant feeling.

Next *Visāka* asks, ‘What is unpleasant in unpleasant feeling and what is pleasant in unpleasant feeling?’ When an unpleasant feeling is there, then it is unpleasant, but when it passes away what you experience is a kind of pleasant feeling. For example if you are sick, what you experience is an unpleasant feeling and when you are cured it changes into a pleasant feeling.

Q: Which means what is pleasant in unpleasant feeling is the sickness getting cured?

A: Yes. Because the unpleasant feeling is no longer there.

Q: But isn’t it pleasant feeling itself then?

A: You can’t say that because there are three types of feelings. The fact is, when unpleasant feeling is there, it is always unpleasant. When the unpleasant feeling is no longer there, then what you experience is a kind of pleasant feeling. For example if you are having a severe headache, then it is unpleasant. When the headache is no longer there, then it’s a relief, which is a pleasant feeling. This is because unpleasant feeling that is non-existent actually brings about a kind of pleasant feeling. But now, you or I, we do not have a headache. But do we consider it as a pleasant feeling? No, as we did not have a headache to get rid of. So this is what is unpleasant in unpleasant feeling, and what is pleasant in unpleasant feeling. These two are not difficult to understand.

After that *Visāka* asks, ‘What is pleasant in neutral feeling and what is unpleasant in neutral feeling?’ This is not that easy to understand. I will explain this later after discussing the next few questions which are very important.

Then *Visāka* asks, ‘What is the *anusaya* in pleasant feeling?’ and ‘What is the *anusaya* in unpleasant feeling?’ *Anusaya* can be explained as defilements, but it is in a dormant stage because it has not yet arisen. These dormant defilements can be attachment (*rāga*), anger (*dosa*) or delusion (*moha*). They exist as latent dispositions and do not manifest in the present moment. For example if we take anger, we may not be angry right now but have the possibility of getting angry some other time - that is *anusaya*. In other words, not being angry right now does not mean that we will never be angry. That is because as long as we have not overcome the possibility of getting angry, it remains as a latent disposition towards anger. So *anusaya* is like the sleeping stage of our defilements, lurking underneath, ready to come out any time when the right conditions are present.

Q: Does this mean that the potential is there for defilements to come out?

A: Yes, the potential for defilements is always there unless it has been overcome.

Now, to go back to *Visāka*’s question, ‘What is the dormant defilement in pleasant feeling?’ The answer is attachment (*rāga*). When you have pleasant feelings, there is a possibility of getting attached and that is known as *rāgānusaya*. The next question is ‘What is the dormant defilement in unpleasant feeling?’ The answer is (*paṭigha*). *Paṭigha* can be taken as a feeling of strong dislike. It can arise like anger. It is a feeling of aversion. So this dormant defilement is known as *paṭighānusaya*. The next question is ‘What is the dormant defilement in neutral feeling?’ And the answer is *avijjā* - not knowing what the reality is. *Avijjā* is generally translated as ignorance but more specifically it means ‘Not knowing what the

reality is'. Sometimes it is also explained as not knowing the Four Noble Truths. This dormant defilement is known as *avijjānusaya*. It exists at the level of worldlings (*puthujjana*) who have not yet entered the path to *Nibbāna*. This is why it is not called equanimity, even though it is not at the extreme of pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling. Since it is not at either extreme we might think, 'Well, if I'm neither attached nor angry, then it's ok'. So it is important to know that even when we are at neither extreme, this defilement is still present in a dormant state - not knowing what is going on. Due to this dormant defilement, we are subject to delusion. That is why even when we try to be in the present moment, still we are deluded, unless we know and see Lord Buddha's teachings about the absolute truth.

Q: But what is pleasant in neutral feeling? What is unpleasant? Were these questions raised by *Visāka*?

A: Yes, but to understand the answers to these questions we need a higher level of understanding - the level of meditative absorption (*jhāna*) or the four stages of awakening (*maggapala*).

Q: So is our discussion at a surface level?

A: Yes - initially it is at a surface level but it is directed towards *Nibbāna*. That is why it is so important to understand feeling. In pleasant feeling there is the dormant defilement of attachment, in unpleasant feeling there is the dormant defilement of aversion, and in neutral feeling there is the dormant defilement of not knowing the reality. The other important fact is that these three latent dispositions are also known as the unskillful roots of demerit (*akusalamūla*) or acts of demerit (*akusala kamma*). So pleasant feeling, which has the dormant defilement of attachment generates

the demerit of greed (*lobha*) or attachment (*rāga*); unpleasant feeling, which has the dormant defilement of aversion, generates the demerit of anger because getting angry and reacting in anger is an act of demerit; and neutral feeling, which has the dormant defilement of ignorance generates the demerit of delusion because acting with a deluded mind is an act of demerit.

The danger of indulging in any one of the three types of feeling is that the dormant defilements associated with them have the possibility of bringing about re-birth in a lower realm of existence (*duggati*). This is because in our last moment, just before death, we will experience one of these three types of feeling - pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. What is the normal tendency when we experience one of these feelings? If the feeling is pleasant, the dormant defilement of attachment is likely to arise and generate unwholesome thoughts. If the feeling is unpleasant, (very often we might experience an unpleasant feeling just before death due to physical pain), the dormant defilement of aversion is likely to arise and generate unwholesome thoughts. These dormant defilements lead to re-birth in one of the four lower realms of existence (*sathara apāya*) because to be born in a higher realm (*sugathi*) we need to have a wholesome thought as the last thought. So, if we experience a pleasant feeling at death, the tendency is for the dormant defilement of attachment to become active leading to an unwholesome thought. If we experience an unpleasant feeling at death, the tendency is for the dormant defilement of aversion to become active also leading to an unwholesome thought. Even if we experience a neutral feeling at death, still the tendency is there for an unwholesome thought to arise because the dormant defilement of ignorance leads to a mind rooted in delusion (*mohamūla sith*).

Q: So at the moment of death if you experience a pleasant feeling - supposing you experience happiness about some great meritorious deed that you performed - of course that is attachment and so it does not lead you to *Nibbāna*, but will it be enough at least to be born in a higher realm like the realm of gods (*deva loka*)?

A: That is what we need to find out. What *Dhammadinnā* says about feeling in this sutta is the truth. If we do not listen to the *Dhamma*, understand it and practice it, the normal tendency is to be born in a lower realm. This *Dhamma* helps us realise the truth in what Lord Buddha said when he used the simile of the soil on his thumb nail and the soil on the rest of the earth. Taking a bit of soil onto his thumb nail, Lord Buddha asked the monks what was greater - the soil on his thumb nail or the soil on the rest of the earth. Lord Buddha compared the little bit of soil on his thumb nail to those who will have the good fortune to be born in a higher realm after death. He compared the soil on the rest of the entire earth to those who will be born in a lower realm after death. So, the probability of being born in a higher realm is as low as the small amount of soil Lord Buddha had on his thumb nail. This makes it very clear that except for a very few, all other beings will be born in a lower realm.

This is very bad news, but normally we do not want to believe it because everyone expects to be born in a higher realm in the next life. But we should not disregard what Lord Buddha taught. When we consider that all three feelings have dormant defilements and therefore have the tendency to generate unwholesome thoughts at the moment of death, we can see how true Lord Buddha's teaching is. So, unless we understand the real *Dhamma* and practice it, our chances of being born in a higher realm are very slim.

This is another reason why we should not waste the valuable time we have got in this moment of fortune (*kshana sampatti*). That is; being born as a human and also having the chance of listening to the *Dhamma*. These two incidents occurring together is very rare. That is why it is known as a moment of fortune, but we have been wasting that rare moment all this time. So, this is the time to think back - how much time have I wasted and how much is left of this moment of fortune.

Coming back to our question on feeling, now we can discuss the answers to what is pleasant and what is unpleasant in neutral feeling. What is pleasant in neutral feeling is mentioned as *ñāṇasukhā*, which means knowing what the reality is. What is unpleasant in neutral feeling is mentioned as *aññānadukkhā*, which means not knowing what the reality is. Generally, we all fall into this category of unpleasant feeling generated by ignorance. Lord Buddha said that those who are bound to this cycle of births and deaths (*samsāra*), are all subject to ignorance because they do not have correct understanding or right view about the true nature of existence.

In the neutral feeling, not having this understanding is the unpleasant feeling and having that understanding is the pleasant feeling. Also, ignorance or not knowing what the reality is, causes delusion. So, while having a deluded mind results in unpleasant feeling, having wisdom or (*vijjā*), which is the opposite of *avijjā*, frees you from this unpleasant feeling. This is how *Dhammadinnā* explained what is pleasant and unpleasant in neutral feeling.

To summarize what we have discussed so far, there are dormant defilements in the three types of feeling - attachment which is the dormant defilement in pleasant feeling, aversion which is the

dormant defilement in unpleasant feeling, and not knowing what the reality is, which is the dormant defilement in neutral feeling.

Next *Visāka* asks a series of very interesting questions. These are very thought-provoking questions and this is why you have to keep in mind that the person who is asking the questions is a Non-Returner. He is at a high level of attainment. That is why he can direct such questions. It is frightening to know that at the dying moment if we experience one of the three types of feeling - pleasant, unpleasant or neutral - the tendency is to be re-born in a lower realm of existence. Why? Because of the dormant defilements associated with them - attachment, aversion, and not knowing what the reality is. So *Visāka* perhaps asks the next question to double check that. He asks whether attachment lies dormant in every pleasant feeling. In other words, whether attachment is essentially there in every pleasant feeling? He wants to check if there is any escape. Then *Visāka* asks whether aversion lies dormant in every unpleasant feeling? Similarly, whether not knowing what the reality is lies dormant in every neutral feeling?

Dhammadinnā answers that not all pleasant feeling has attachment; not all unpleasant feeling has aversion and not all neutral feeling has ignorance or not knowing what the reality is. So there is an escape from re-birth in a lower realm after all!

The next set of questions and answers help us understand this escape route. *Dhammadinnā* explains that some types of pleasant feeling do not have attachment as a dormant defilement. An example is the pleasant feeling you experience when you have attained the state of the first *Jhana*, that is the first meditative absorption. There you are free from sensual pleasures (*vivicceva kāmehi*) and demeritorious acts (*akusalehi dhammehi*).

Q: Can you please explain that.

A: *Vivicceva kāmehi* means when you are without sensual desire (*kāma*), that is without attachment to the five senses and the pleasures generated by the five senses - eye/form, ear/sound, nose/smell, tongue/taste and body/feeling. If you are not attached to these, then you have separated yourself from desire. *Vivicca akusalehi* means when you are without demeritorious or unwholesome thoughts (*akusala dhamma*). This means when you enter the first meditative absorption after having freed yourself from the dormant defilement of attachment.

Meditative absorptions are different levels of concentration (*samādhi*). There are eight such levels. When you enter the first level you experience a type of pleasant feeling. In the pleasant feeling you experience in this meditative absorption, the dormant defilement of attachment is not present because you enter the absorption by giving up your sensual pleasures - *vivicceva kāmehi*. That is one example of pleasant feeling where you do not experience the dormant defilement of attachment.

Then there is unpleasant feeling which has no aversion. This is a little bit tricky. Suppose you are on the path leading to *Nibbāna*, for example on the supra-mundane (*lokuttara*) path of a Stream Winner, or a Once-Returner, when seeing or hearing about a Perfected One (Arahant) you might think, ‘I’m trying so hard. When would I become a Perfected One?’ This is a kind of unpleasant feeling that arises due to not having achieved that stage yet. However, this unpleasant feeling does not have the dormant defilement of aversion because you are not angry with those who have already achieved the stage. This is one example of unpleasant feeling where you do not experience aversion. In neutral feeling too, there are situations where

the dormant defilement of ignorance is not present. We will discuss that later.

This is good news because re-birth caused by the dormant defilements present in feeling is not as rigid as it may seem at first. So we have the ability to escape re-birth in a lower realm and be re-born in a higher realm.

Upto now all questions have been at a worldly level. In the next set of questions *Visāka* uses the Pāli term *paṭibhāga* - which means the other half or the opposite half of something. *Bhāga* means half and *pāti* means opposite. First he asks what the opposite half of pleasant feeling is and *Dhammadinnā* answers that it is unpleasant feeling. Then he asks what the opposite half of unpleasant feeling is and she answers that it is pleasant feeling. Next he asks what the opposite half of neutral feeling is and she answers that it is not knowing what the reality is (*avijjā*). This is profound because from now on the questions and answers are directed at the supra-mundane level.

To summarize, the opposite half of pleasant feeling is unpleasant feeling; the opposite half of unpleasant feeling is pleasant feeling; and the opposite half of neutral feeling is the ignorance of not knowing what the reality is.

Then *Visāka* asks what the opposite half of ignorance (*avijjā*) is. Now remember *Visāka* has attained a high level of Awakening on the path, that of Non-Returner. *Dhammadinnā* replies that it is wisdom. Then he asks what the opposite half of wisdom is and she says that it is *vimukthi* - something like freedom or escape. Then he asks what the opposite half of freedom is and she says that it is *Nibbāna*. Finally *Visāka* asks what the opposite half of *Nibbāna* is

and *Dhammadinnā* replies that he has gone too far because that is the end of the questions. Now what happens here is that although *Visāka* is a Non-Returner he asks questions about the final stage of Awakening (*Arahanthood*) or *Nibbāna*.

Q: Is that why *Dhammadinnā* says he has gone too far? At the worldly level people might think she didn't know the answer.

A: Yes. He perhaps asked these questions to find out whether she had attained the final stage of Awakening. If she had not attained that stage, her answers would have revealed this. That is one way of looking at *Visāka's* questions. Or he may have asked the questions just for his own knowledge because he is only a Non-Returner and not a Perfected One. So he was either seeking knowledge or trying to find out whether *Dhammadinnā* had attained the final stage of Awakening.

However, these answers relate to the path leading to *Nibbāna* and that is the important point. The opposite half of pleasant feeling is unpleasant feeling; the opposite half of unpleasant feeling is pleasant feeling; and the opposite half of neutral feeling is the ignorance or not knowing what the reality is. This is what craving (*taṇhā*) actually does at the worldly level. When we experience an unpleasant feeling we try to get rid of it because at the worldly level we think that the opposite of unpleasant feeling is pleasant feeling.

For example, when we are hungry we experience an unpleasant feeling and so we eat something to experience a pleasant feeling. We do not see what is in the middle. Similarly, when we get a headache we see only the opposite half of unpleasant feeling. This is because of craving which we experience at the worldly level. This level has the extremes of pleasant and unpleasant feeling. At this

worldly level, to get rid of unpleasant feeling we seek its opposite half of pleasant feeling. This is why at the worldly level we accumulate money, do jobs, go after all sorts of worldly things. We believe that we experience unpleasant feeling because we do not have these material things. So we constantly focus on the other extreme. At the worldly level, we want to be happy, but we see only one side, one extreme. We think that we can be happy only if we have material things. This is the nature of the worldly level and it is due to craving.

The opposite half of pleasant feeling is unpleasant feeling and the opposite half of unpleasant feeling is pleasant feeling. If you are at any of these extremes you are unable to see the truth or realise the path to *Nibbāna*. You will not even get a glimpse of it. That is why if we have very strong attachment to sensuous pleasure (*kāmacchanda*) and ill-will (*vyāpāda*) first we have to suppress it. This is why it is very important to develop concentration. When your mind is possessed by those hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*) very strongly, you are not able to see the truth and realise the path to *Nibbāna*, because you are jumping from one extreme to the other - from pleasant to unpleasant feeling, and then from unpleasant to pleasant feeling. You do not see that there is a point in the middle. When you develop concentration and suppress the hindrances gradually, then you arrive somewhere in the middle which is neutral feeling. However, as we discussed earlier, neutral feeling has the dormant defilement of ignorance. So even if you develop concentration, still you will not realise *Nibbāna* or any of the other levels of Awakening because of ignorance.

In neutral feeling, even though we are neither too attached nor angry, ignorance lurks underneath and so, this dormant defilement

has delusion. Sometimes you might think, ‘I’m not attached or angry, therefore I’m ok’. However, according to the *Dhamma*, this is not so because of the presence of ignorance. But the good news is that if you are at that level, you have the ability to see that ignorance is present. When you listen to the *Dhamma* and contemplate on the *Dhamma*, there is a possibility of seeing that ignorance is still there. When you are able to see ignorance this way, you begin to see that its opposite half is also there. You have the ability to think, ‘Well, if I’m deluded, then there must be the truth that is still unknown to me’. You see the opposite half of ignorance which is wisdom (*vijjā*). This is how you enter the path to *Nibbāna*.

So first there is Right View (*sammādiṭṭhi*) which leads you to wisdom by removing wrong views. Ignorance is not seeing what the reality is and wisdom is having the ability to see this reality. Then you are on the path to *Nibbāna* and if you progress further, then you attain freedom and *Nibbāna*. This is why I said before that this sutta can be a door-opener to *Nibbāna*.

The sutta explains the three types of feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral); their dormant defilements (attachment present in pleasant feeling, aversion present in unpleasant feeling and ignorance or not knowing the reality present in neutral feeling); their opposite halves (the opposite half of pleasant feeling which is unpleasant feeling, the opposite half of unpleasant feeling which is pleasant feeling and the opposite half of neutral feeling which is ignorance); and finally, the path to *Nibbāna* (which leads from the opposite half of ignorance which is wisdom to the opposite half of wisdom which is freedom, and from there to the opposite half of freedom which is *Nibbāna*).

It is very important to know the *Dhamma* because it helps us understand how to enter the path using feeling. Feeling is a door opener to *Nibbāna*. That is why it is really important to investigate and learn about feeling according to the *Dhamma*. Almost everyone knows that there are three types of feelings - pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feeling. However, we need to investigate the deep *Dhamma* related to feeling, such as the dormant defilements present in the three types of feeling, such as attachment present in pleasant feeling, aversion present in unpleasant feeling and ignorance or not knowing what the reality is that is present in neutral feeling. There is also a wrong belief about impermanence (*anicca*) these days.

Q: It is a popular discussion nowadays whether it is *anicca* or *anitya*.

A: We have discussed this before. They are terms used in Pali and Sanskrit. *Anicca* is used in Pali and *anitya* is used in Sanskrit. *Anicca* is defined by some people these days as the opposite of *icca* which means ‘Liking’. The argument goes that when you experience some unpleasant feeling, when you are sick for example, and when you get better, that change is *anicca*. It is a kind of pleasant feeling because the unpleasant feeling you experienced before is not there anymore.

The response to this argument is in this sutta. The same questions were raised by *Visāka* – ‘What is pleasant in pleasant feeling and what is unpleasant in pleasant feeling?’ The answer was, ‘Pleasant feeling is pleasant only while it remains so (*thiti sukha - sukha vedanā*) and pleasant feeling becomes unpleasant when it changes’. That is when a pleasant feeling ceases, we become resentful which is an unpleasant feeling. So what is pleasant and what is unpleasant are both present in pleasant feeling.

Similarly, what is pleasant and what is unpleasant are both present in unpleasant feeling. Unpleasant feeling is unpleasant only while it lasts and becomes a pleasant feeling when it passes away. As I explained before, what is pleasant and what is unpleasant are also present in neutral feeling. Generally people do not realise this because *ñāṇasukhā sukha* and *aññāṇadukkhā dukkha* is profound. If one investigates the *Dhamma*, answers can be found to wrong arguments and beliefs. Answers can be found if one investigates the *Dhamma* with wisdom.

Saṅkhāra

When we discussed the five aggregates of clinging (*pañca upādānakkhandha*), we discussed form (*rūpa*) and feeling (*vedanā*). I want to go a little bit deeper into this topic and explain how we can use this knowledge to achieve right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) – that is supra-mundane right view (*lokuttara sammā-diṭṭhi*). This should be the main purpose of our listening to and discussing the *Dhamma*.

When discussing feeling, we talked about three types of feeling—pleasant feeling (*sukha vedanā*), unpleasant feeling (*dukkha vedanā*), and neutral feeling (*adukkhamasuka vedanā*). We also talked about the latent dispositions (*anusaya*) associated with each of these, and how one can direct that knowledge to attain *Nibbāna*. The path that leads to *Nibbāna* begins with neutral feeling because the opposite half (*paṭibhāga*) of neutral feeling is ignorance (*avijjā*) ; the opposite half of ignorance is wisdom (*vijjā*) ; the opposite half of wisdom is liberation (*vimutti*), and the opposite half of liberation is *Nibbāna*. By contemplating on this, one has the possibility of achieving right view and entering the path to *Nibbāna*.

Today we will talk about thought-formation (*saṅkhāra*). The term thought-formation is mentioned in different contexts in the *Dhamma*. It is mentioned as the fourth of the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupādānakkhandha*) - form, feeling, perception (*sañña*), thought-formation (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Then in dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), thought-formation is mentioned as the second link in the series, as being conditioned by ignorance (*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*).

Q: Are they the same thing or two different things - what's mentioned in the five aggregates of clinging and what's mentioned in dependent origination?

A: There are many different explanations, but since we are pursuing the supra-mundane (*lokuttara*) path, we should understand what exactly Lord Buddha said about thought-formation. Lord Buddha did not waste his words, so when he used the word '*Saṅkhāra*', he did not refer to different things in different contexts. It is our wrong interpretation of the term, our inability to explain it, or our lack of understanding of the term that has led to a lot of confusion.

If someone says that he knows everything, the validity of that statement cannot be accepted according to Buddhism unless that person is a Perfected One (an Arahant). Even if you are a Stream Winner (*Sotapatti*), a Once-Returner (*Sakadāgāmi*) or a Non-Returner (*Anāgāmi*), still you would not have complete knowledge and understanding of the *Dhamma*, because these are merely different levels of knowledge based on each person's level of wisdom. We must understand that Lord Buddha did not give different meanings to the term '*Saṅkhāra*' in different situations. To say that he did merely shows our own lack of understanding of the *Dhamma*. So this is a good way to start investigating the *Dhamma*.

To get back to our topic, as *saṅkhāra* is explained as thought-formation, sometimes you can take it as *kamma*.

Q: So *kamma* is not just words and deeds, whether good or bad?

A: No, because intention (*cetanā*) is also explained as *kamma*, as Lord Buddha said, ‘Intention, O monks, I call *kamma*’ (*cetanāham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi*). This line explains that *cetanā* itself becomes *kamma*.

Now, there are three types of thought-formation - formation of merit (*puññābhisāṅkhāra*), formation of demerit (*apuññābhisāṅkhāra*) and formation of the imperturbable (*āneñjabhisāṅkhāra*). Formation of merit refers to good deeds or good *kamma*, formation of demerit refers to bad deeds or bad *kamma*, and formation of the imperturbable is a state you attain when you are in the meditative absorptions (*jhānas*), especially in the formless meditative absorptions (*arūpāvacara jhānas*).

Formation of merit results in rebirth in the higher realms (*sugati*), formation of demerit results in rebirth in the lower realms (*duggati*) and formation of the imperturbable results in rebirth in the Brahma realms. So formation of merit will give good results, formation of demerit will give bad results, and with formation of the imperturbable, one has the possibility of going to higher levels of the Brahma worlds. These are the three types of thought-formations. In dependent origination it is said that thought-formation is conditioned by ignorance.

Q: Does this mean that even thought-formation that is wholesome, which can give us re-birth in the higher realms or in the Brahma worlds, is conditioned by ignorance?

A: Yes, there is ignorance involved in all three types of thought-formation.

Thought-formation is also called *cetanā*. *Cetanā* is a thought-forming process because you think about your intentions, ideas and so on. While *vedanā* is the feeling that you experience about an object, *cetanā* is thinking about it. *Cetanā* is a mental factor (*cetasika*) like feeling and perception. Mental factors occur with the mind (*citta*), arising together with the mind and passing away along with the mind. In other words, mental factors cannot exist without the mind. So feeling, perception and intention cannot exist without the mind. This is an important thing to understand.

There are two famous verses that refer to formations starting with ‘All formations are impermanent’ and ‘All formations are suffering’ (*sabbe saṅkhāra annicāti*) and (*sabbe saṅkhāra dukkāti*).

Q: What is meant by all formations?

A: This includes all types of formations. So you cannot talk about any formation that does not belong to this category. When Lord Buddha says ‘All formations’, properties such as impermanence and suffering apply to all of them without exception.

Formations can also be categorised into four types. The first type is *saṅkhata saṅkhāra* which arise due to direct and indirect causes (*hetu-pratyaya*). The second type is *abhisāṅkhata saṅkhāra* which occur as the result of past *kamma* (*vipāka*). For example eye consciousness (*cakkhu viññāna*) which arises in relation to seeing occurs as the result of previous *kamma*. Similarly, ear consciousness (*sotha viññāna*) which arises in relation to hearing occurs as the result of previous *kamma*. The third type is *abhisāṅkharanaka saṅkhāra* which occur as new *kamma*.

Q: What is meant by new *kamma*?

A: New *kamma* is *kamma* that produces further effects or results in the future. If it is good *kamma* you get good results. If it is bad *kamma* you get bad results.

Q: I see. So, what's the fourth type of formation?

A: The fourth type is *payoga sankhara* which occur within the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyamagga*).

Q: What does *payoga* mean?

A: *Payoga* or *prayoga* means using your wisdom or right view to reduce new *kamma*.

To summarise, the four types of formations are formations that occur due to direct and indirect causes, formations that occur as the effects of past *kamma*, formations that occur as new *kamma*, such as formations of merit, formations of demerit and formations of the imperturbable which have the potential to produce effects in the future, and formations that occur on the path to *Nibbāna* which help to reduce new *kamma*. Due to formations that occur as new *kamma*, we are caught in a cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) as they keep producing results in the future. These are the causes and effects which make us travel on this *sansaric* journey.

Q: Is there some way that we can stop this *saṃsaric* journey?

A: We can do this only through the Noble Eightfold Path where only a certain type of thought formation is generated, which helps to reduce new *kamma*. In this instance, wisdom is used to stop the *saṃsaric* journey. This type of thought formation can also be considered as merit which is known as *kusal* because it has the ability to stop demerit which is *akusal*.

Q: Are there two types of merit then - merit which is known as *pin* and merit which is known as *kusal*?

A: Yes, thought-formation that helps to reduce new *kamma* is *kusal* because it helps us progress on the path to *Nibbāna*.

Q: You explained how thought-formation can either make or break the *saṃsāric* journey. So it's important to know how thought-formation occurs.

A: Thought-formation occurs through the six faculties - the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Take the example of seeing something. To perform the act of seeing, we need the eye, form, and eye consciousness. Eye contact - *phassa* occurs only when all three come together (*tinnam saṅgati phasso*). These three are collectively known as contact (*phassa*). How do we get the sense faculties? As Lord Buddha has explained, it is due to the result of previous *kamma*. For example, we have got a human eye because of good *kamma* in our previous life. As a result of a wholesome thought that occurred as the last thought in our previous life, we have got a functioning human eye, a functioning human ear etc. As the faculties occur due to the result of cause and effect, they can be considered as conditioned formation. Even form is conditioned because it is generated by the faculties which are conditioned by direct and indirect causes.

The six-fold consciousnesses occur as the result of previous *kamma*. Therefore they are known as thought-formation conditioned by past *kamma*. This type of thought-formation is harmless because it does not create new *kamma* and so cannot take us on the *saṃsāric* journey. But if we create *kamma* conditioned by ignorance as mentioned in dependent origination, such *kamma* can bind us to

samsāra because they create results in the future. We discussed that this type of thought-formation which takes us on the *samsaric* journey is known as new *kamma*.

We discussed three types of thought-formations earlier on - formation of merit, formation of demerit and formation of the imperturbable. The first is good *kamma*, the second is bad karma and the third is a higher level of thought-formation that is created in the meditative absorptions. The important factor here is that all three types of thought-formation are conditioned by ignorance. However, if you have attained right view and are progressing through the Noble Eightfold Path, then your thought-formation is not conditioned by ignorance. We discussed that this type of thought-formation helps to reduce new *kamma*.

Q: Is there some way we can convert thought formation that is conditioned by ignorance to thought formation that is not conditioned by ignorance?

A: Your question is profound because what you are asking is how we can enter the path to *Nibbāna*. We can recognise these two types of thought-formations when we look at how the faculties work. For example, at the initial eye consciousness level, only a colour image is created but you have not recognised that yet. This means that if you look at some flowers, initially you only get a colour image. The eye can only generate the image and eye consciousness merely becomes aware of it. But to recognise this colour image as a rose, you not only need the signal that you get through the eye, but also information from past experience. So if you have never seen a rose before, you may not be able to recognise the image as a rose. For example, a small child may not be able to identify the colour image as a rose. From this it is clear that when you recognise

something, *cetanā* is also present. This means that by creating new thoughts you create new *kamma* - *cetanā*.

There are two things happening at this point. The first is sensing the signal (colour information) through eye consciousness. The second is recognising the signal through mind consciousness (*mano viññāna*) and thinking about it in terms of other aspects like beauty, smell etc. This is where new *kamma* is created. If you do not know what is going on, then the third type of thought-formation, which produces new *kamma* is created. However, if you know what is going on, then you have the ability to reduce new *kamma* by applying right view.

Q: Is this supra-mundane right view you mentioned at the beginning of our discussion?

A: Yes, because right view is of two types - one is at the worldly (*laukika*) level and the other is at the supra-mundane level (*lokuttara*). The supra-mundane level of right view can be achieved only by listening to the *Dhamma* - the teachings of Lord Buddha. When you listen to the teachings and then think about it wisely, then there is a possibility of achieving supra-mundane right view. To be able to do this, one has to understand the teachings very clearly. The teachings, however, are very profound and deep.

Q: How can one convert the third type of thought formation that creates new *kamma* to the fourth type of thought-formation that reduces new *kamma*? In other words, how do you move from thought-formation conditioned by ignorance to thought-formation that is not conditioned by ignorance?

A: At the worldly level, when we see something, we cannot help generating thoughts about it. We first get information about it through our eyes. The eye consciousness becomes aware of it and then thoughts are generated through mind consciousness. That is thought-formation based on *cetanā* and next, we believe that whatever we thought or created in our mind belongs to that external object. For example, when we see a rose, we believe that the concept of the rose that arises in our mind belongs to the external object made of the four elements (*satara mahāālhātu*). That is the worldly level of understanding. Similarly, when we see someone, we might think of that person as a good person or a bad person. Then we think that the good or bad quality we created in our mind belongs to the external form.

Q: This is very interesting. Can you please explain how this happens?

A: First we see only the figure of the person. We get this information through the eye. Then we combine that information with our past experiences and generate new thoughts. We create our own interpretations and our own story about that person. That is *cetanā*. For example, if we think that the person is bad, we attach that quality to the external figure - that is to the form we see. Where is all this generated? The bad person or the good person is generated within our mind, but we attach that quality to the external person. That is what we do at the worldly level.

But if we observe this process carefully, we may see that there is thought-formation going on within our mind and the series of thoughts generated do not belong to the external object. That is; the thoughts have nothing to do with the external object. For example,

when we see someone, that person does not have any idea about what we are thinking about him or her. This is because the thoughts are generated only in our mind and do not belong to the external object. In other words, the thoughts generated in our mind do not belong to the external world. If we can see this reality, that whatever we think is within us and there is no way that those thoughts can be projected to the external object, then that is seeing things with wisdom. If we separate external form from whatever is generated within our mind, in other words, if we know how to separate mind and matter, that is right view.

Q: What is meant by separating mind and matter?

A: Whatever is created within our mind is not matter. It is known as mentality (*nāma*) because the mind and the mental factors are known as mentality. They do not belong to external form or matter. The ability to distinguish between the two is called the separation of mind and matter (*nāma rūpa paricceda ñāṇa*).

Q: This teaching is profound.

A: Yes, so let me give you another example. Suppose someone abuses us, what is it that you hear? Initially it is only a sound signal. Then we interpret it, giving it a meaning and we assign our own values to it. At this point we make a judgment about what we hear and say that the person is abusing us. This part is generated within our mind. However, we do not know that whatever we created is within our mind and so we come to the conclusion that the person is abusing us.

Q: Do you mean that actually there was no one abusing us - that it was all generated by our mind?

A: Yes. Let me explain this further. When we hear someone talking, we interpret what we hear. Let us say someone talks to us in a totally different language that we cannot understand - in Chinese or Japanese or whatever language that we do not know. Still we hear the sound but we do not know whether that person is saying good or bad about us, whether he is abusing us or praising us. Why? Because we do not understand the language and so we do not have the ability to interpret it and create our own *cetanā*. In this instance, we do not attribute anything to that person because we have not created anything in our minds about that person.

But if this person is talking in a language we understand, then it makes a difference because we are able to interpret what we hear. We might think that the person is abusing us and then attach that thought to what we hear. So if we think that this person is abusing us we get angry, but if we think that he or she is praising us and saying good things about us, then we like that person.

Now compare the two situations - in the first instance there is a person talking in a language that we do not understand and in the second instance there is a person talking in a language that we understand. In both these situations we use the ear faculty - the ear door to get the sound signals. In the first situation, we hear an unknown language, therefore we cannot interpret what we hear. So we cannot use our past experience to generate new thoughts. In the second situation, we have the ability to interpret what we hear using past experience because we understand the language we hear. Generating new thoughts by putting together past experiences is thought-formation. Not only do we engage in thought-formation, but we also attach whatever thoughts are generated to the form we see outside.

Q: Such as ‘He’s a good person’, ‘He’s a bad person’, ‘He’s abusing me for no reason’ etc?

A: Yes, this is the point I want to make. First the signal comes in through one of our sense doors. Next the processing of that signal takes place. Then we think that whatever thoughts are generated belong to the external object or person we see or hear. If it is something bad like someone abusing us, we think that the abuse comes from the external person. And then we get angry with that person. This happens because we collect the sound signals, process them, arrive at our own conclusions and believe that they all belong to the external person. In other words, we assign all our thoughts to the external person. This is due to ignorance and delusion. We do not see that these thoughts are generated in our mind and are all confined to the mind. We do not see that these thoughts do not belong to external form or matter. In other words, we do not see that the mind and the mental factors that arise cannot be attached to external objects or forms.

Q: So does seeing this reality help us remain calm, without reacting to what we experience?

A: Exactly. If you see the reality, can you get angry with an external person? Can anyone praise or abuse us? The only input we get from outside is the sound signal. It is our own interpretation of the signal that creates the praise or abuse within us. As the external person can only give us the sound signals, no one can praise or abuse us other than ourselves.

There is a story about how a Brahmin once abused Lord Buddha. After the Brahmin got tired of abusing Lord Buddha, Lord Buddha asked him a question. Lord Buddha asked if the Brahmin

invited some friends or relatives and offered them food and if they did not accept the food, what the Brahmin would do. The Brahmin replied that he and his family would consume the food. ‘Similarly’, Lord Buddha said, ‘I have not accepted your abuse, so you can share it with your family’.

Q: So in reality, no one can abuse us?

A: That’s right, because we ourselves generate those thoughts and believe that the external person abused us. If we are mindful of our ear door, we can see that what we heard is only a series of sounds and that there is no way the sounds can abuse us. We have created the abuse ourselves. While in reality we abused ourselves, at the worldly level we believe that the external person abused us. That is why at a worldly level, worldly things or people can give us happiness or sadness. This happens as long as we believe that they can abuse us or praise us. But in reality, we get only sound signals through our ear door. Everything else is created within ourselves. They do not belong to the person outside.

If you can see this with wisdom, you can understand what Lord Buddha meant when he said, ‘In the heard will be merely what is heard’ (*sute sutamattam*)²¹.

Q: It’s a popular quote that we often hear today. What does it actually mean?

A: It means ‘Hearing is only hearing’. You can apply the same principle to the other sense doors as well.

Q: Can you please explain this in detail?

²¹ *Bāhiya Sutta - KN. Udana 1.10 (Khuddaka Nikāya, Udana Pali, Bodhi Vagga)*

A: For example, you can apply ‘In the seen will be merely what is seen’ (*diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ*) to the eye; ‘In the sensed will be merely what is sensed’ (*mute mutamattaṃ*) to the nose, tongue and body. That is why the Arahants or the Perfected Ones do not get affected by worldly things, by what is known as the eight worldly concerns (*atalō dahama*).

Q: So what are these eight concerns that do not affect the Arahants?

A: They are gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and disrepute, pleasure and pain. We however get deeply affected by these eight worldly concerns. This happens because we believe that whatever thoughts generated in our minds belong to external objects or external persons we see. Similarly with sound, we make our own interpretations about what we hear and believe that they belong to the external world.

If you see the reality of what is going on, then there is a possibility of converting thought-formation conditioned by ignorance to thought-formation that is not conditioned by ignorance. Otherwise you will always get angry or happy with the external object or person you see or hear and react accordingly. This creates bad *kamma*. If you think that the person you see is a good person then you might generate good *kamma* but all this depends on the initial ignorance and delusion. Ignorance is not knowing that there is mentality on one side, that is the mind and the mental factors, and materiality on the other side, that is form or matter, and that there is no way that they can be connected together because they are two different things.

Q: But don't we usually think that our thoughts are part of external objects or persons?

A: Yes, this is the general tendency. Mentality is the thoughts we create. *Cetanā* is a mental factor which is within us and so belongs to mentality. How can we think that it belongs to external objects or persons which are materiality? You may get angry thoughts but still if you have the ability to see that the angry thoughts are generated within yourself, then you will not attach them to external objects or persons. If you see this, which is only part of the reality, then you are in a position to reduce *kamma* by generating the fourth type of thought-formation which produces merit needed to enter the path leading to *Nibbāna*.

In other words, if you see this reality, that itself is enough to make you realize the rest. That itself is sufficient for you to escape from worldly suffering - the eight worldly concerns that affect worldly people. That is the way to remain un-shattered by the eight worldly concerns. If we allow external objects and people to affect our mind then the eight worldly concerns will always be present to harass us. But it is up to us. We must try to develop our minds so that we are able to realize that whatever thoughts that are created within ourselves do not belong to external form or matter. If we can differentiate mind and matter, that is the first stage of entry to the supra-mundane path.

Q: Which means if we are able to see that whatever thoughts or *cetanā* created within ourselves are within our mind only?

A: Yes, and also if we see that we cannot attach these thoughts to external form. The important thing is to separate mind and matter without linking them together.

At the worldly level, we do not realize this and think that whatever we think belongs to external objects or people and this thinking makes us go after them. This is the nature of our sensuous world (*kāmaloka*) and so we get affected by sensuous pleasure (*kāmacchanda*) and ill-will (*vyāpāda*). We believe that whatever form we experience through our sense doors, and whatever thoughts we create within us about those forms are all connected. But we should realize that we think in such a way and connect them together due to our ignorance and delusion. So when we generate thoughts about external forms, we identify those thoughts with the forms. That is how we link them together.

For example, when we see a flower, as a habit we believe that it is a beautiful flower because we attach our value judgment to the external form. Similarly, when we get the smell of a flower, we think about it as a good smell and believe that the smell belongs to the external object. We are not aware of what the mind is doing and so we get deluded.

So whenever we use the eye and create thoughts about what we see, the first step is to understand and realize that thought-formation belongs to our mind and not to the external object. In the same way, whatever sound we hear is only a sound signal and whatever thoughts we generate through our previous experience about that signal are only thought-formation within us and do not belong to any external object or person. If we do not pursue what we see or hear, then and there it comes to a complete end. We should know that whatever we think is only a thinking process and that we cannot attach it to the external world.

The same theory is applicable to the other sense doors. What I have explained is mainly for the eye and form and the ear and sound,

but the same principle should be applied to the nose and smell, the tongue and taste and the body and touch. You can get the signal of a smell and then generate thoughts about it. At this point stop for a moment to separate the thoughts from the smell and see that they belong to the mind, that they are only a mentality. They do not belong to any external object. If you experience a taste, whatever thoughts you generate about the taste do not belong to any external object. If you can cut off mentality from materiality at this point, you will not go after that object again and again and that is the end of suffering.

This way of thinking is known as reducing new *kamma*. This is the difference between creating new *kamma* and reducing new *kamma*. With wisdom, that is mindfulness (*sati*) and clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) together, then you are able to reduce new *kamma*. Otherwise we remain in the worldly path and keep travelling on this endless *samsaric* journey, just as we have been doing in countless lives through the aeons.

May the Noble Triple Gem bless you.

Glossary

abhisankharanaka sankhāra (අභිසංකරණක සංඛාර) - formation that generates new kamma

abhisankhata sankhāra (අභිසංඛත සංඛාර) - formation conditioned by past kamma

adukkhamasukhā vedanā (අදුක්ඛමඅසුඛ වේදනා) - neutral feeling

akusala kamma (අකුසල කර්ම) - acts of demerit

akusalamūla (කුසල මූල) - unskillful roots of demerit

Anāgāmi (අනාගාමී) - non-returner

āneñjabhisankhāra (ආනෙඤ්ජභිසංඛාර) - formation of the imperturbable

aññānadukkā (අඤ්ඤාණදුක්ඛ) - unpleasant feeling that occurs with ignorance

anusaya (අනුසය) - dormant defilement

apuññābhisankhāra (අපුඤ්ඤාභිසංඛාර) - formation of demerit

Arahant (අරහන්) - Perfected One

Arahanthood - final stage of Awakening

arūpāvacara jhānas (අරූපාවචර ධ්‍යාන) - formless meditative absorptions

Ariyamagga (අරියමග්ග) - Noble Eightfold Path

atalō dahama (අටලෝ දහම) - eight worldly concerns

avijjā (අවිජ්ජා) - ignorance; not knowing what the reality is

avijjānusaya (අවිජ්ජා අනුසය) - dormant defilement of ignorance or not knowing what the reality is

cakkhu viññāna (චක්ඛු විඤ්ඤාණ) - eye consciousness

cetanā (චේතනා) - intention

cetasika (චේතසික) - mental factors

citta (චිත්ත) - mind

deva loka (දේව ලෝක) - realm of gods
 dosa (දෝස) - anger
 duggati (දුගති) - lower realms of existence
 dukkha vedanā (දුක්ඛ වේදනා) - unpleasant feeling
 hetu-pratyaya (හේතුප්‍රත්‍ය) - direct and indirect causes
 icca (ඉච්ඡ) - liking
 jhānas (ධ්‍යාන) - meditative absorptions
 kāma (කාම) - desire for sense pleasures
 kamachchanda (කාමච්ඡන්ද) - sensuous pleasure
 kāmaloka (කාමලෝක) - sensuous world
 kshana sampatti (ක්ෂණ සම්පත්ති) - moment of fortune
 laukika (ලෝකික) - worldly
 lobha (ලෝභ) - greed
 lokuttara (ලෝකෝත්තර) - supra-mundane
 maggapala (මග්ගපල) - four stages of awakening
 mano viññāna (මනෝ විඤ්ඤාණ) - mind consciousness
 moha (මෝහ) - delusion
 mohamula sith (මෝහ මූල සිත්) - mind rooted in delusion
 nāma (නාම) - mentality
 ñāṇasukhā (ඤාණසුඛ) - pleasant feeling that occurs with knowledge or wisdom
 ṭhiti (ඨිති) - existing
 nīvaraṇas (නීවරණ) - hindrances
 pañca upādānakkhandha (පඤ්චපාදාන ඝකන්ධ) - five aggregates of clinging
 paṭibhāga (පටිභාග) - opposite half
 paṭiccasamuppāda (පටිච්චසමුප්පාදය) - dependent origination
 paṭigha (පටිඝ) - aversion

paṭighānusaya (පටිඝානුසය) - dormant defilement of aversion
 payoga saṅkhāra (පයෝග සංඛාර) - formation the reduces new kamma
 phassa (ඵස්ස) - contact
 puññābhisankhāra (පුඤ්ඤාභිසංඛාර) - formation of merit
 puthujjana (පුථුජ්ජන) - worldlings or those who have not yet entered the path to Nibbāna
 rāga (රාග) - attachment
 rāgānusaya (රාගානුසය) - dormant defilement of attachment
 rūpa (රූප) - form
 saññā (සංඤා) - perception
 saṅkhāra (සංඛාර) - thought-formation
 saṅkhata saṅkhāra (සංඛත සංඛාර) - formation conditioned by causes
 Sakadāgāmī (සකදාගාමී) - Once-returner
 sakkāya (සක්කාය) - existing group of mental and material components
 samādhi (සමාධි) - concentration
 sammādiṭṭhi (සම්මාදිට්ඨි) - right view
 sampajañña (සම්පජ්ඤ) - clear comprehension
 saṅkhāra (සංඛාර) - thought-formation
 saññā (සඤ්ඤා) - perception
 satara mahā dhātu (සතර මහා ධාතු) - four elements
 sathara apāya (සතර අපාය) - four lower realms of existence
 sati (සති) - mindfulness
 satipṭṭahāna (සතිපට්ඨාන) - foundations of mindfulness
 saṃsāra (සංසාර) - cycle of birth and death
 Sotāpatthi (සෝතාපත්ති) - Stream Winner
 sotha viññāna (සෝතවිඤ්ඤාණ) - ear consciousness
 sugati (සුගති) - higher realms of existence

sukha vedanā (සුඛ වේදනා) - pleasant feeling

taṇhā (තණ්හා) - craving

upekkha (උපෙක්ඛා) - equanimity

vedanā (වේදනා) - feeling

vijjā (විජ්ජා) - wisdom

vimutti (විමුක්ති) - liberation freedom

viññāna (විඤ්ඤාණ) - consciousness

vipaka (විපාක) - result of past kamma

vivicca akusalehi (විවිච්ච අකුසලෙහි) - without demeritorious or unwholesome thoughts

vivicceva kāmehi (විවිච්චෙව කාමෙහි) - without desire