



Bearers Of

[Bhāra Sutta]

The Burden



Bhikkhu Revata

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Bearers of The Burden



(Third Edition)

When we know how we are living and what we are living for – that we are slaves to the five aggregates – we will feel ashamed of our lives.

It is impossible to completely make an end of suffering without having made the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths.

With liberation comes profound contentment. Liberation is void of craving. The person who ‘wants this’ and ‘wants that’ is no more.

‘Contentment is the greatest wealth.’ The one who knows the value of contentment and practises it has peace of mind.

Blind is this world because of ignorance, because of not **knowing** the truth. People are wandering around without any clear direction.

Our desire for existence is so strong that even existence in one of the woeful realms is deemed better than not existing again at all.



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BEARERS OF THE BURDEN

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Bhikkhu Revata

*Namo tassa bhagarato arahato
sammā sambuddhassa*

BEARERS OF THE BURDEN

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*Dedicated to all the Saṅgha
who have sustained the
original teachings of the Buddha
and kept them unadulterated
over the centuries.*

ᅀABBADĀNAM DHAMMADĀNAM JINĀTI
The gift of truth excels all other gifts.

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INTRODUCTION

No one takes on burdens if they can be avoided. One's burdens, perceived alternatively as responsibilities or duties, are borne either physically or mentally. They have varying degrees of complexity and weight. Some are difficult to bear while others are easy. Some are onerous while others are light. Some are intolerable while others are tolerable. Whatever they be, everyone has to bear some burden or other in life.

No matter how complex, difficult, or wearisome the duties may be, and no matter how heavy the burdens are, it is possible to be free of them in one's life. There can be a time when one is free from carrying these burdens.

Those who have duties and responsibilities in life are able to let go of them and escape from them at the end of each workday as well as at certain times in the course of a workday. However, there is a very heavy burden that we always carry. We shoulder this burden endlessly in the round of rebirths without knowing any way of escape or relief from it.

It is, therefore, crucial for us to know:

- The nature of the burden,
- who is carrying the burden,
- how to lighten the burden, and
- how to put it down for complete freedom.

And that is precisely why this talk was given. Now I am glad that it is being made available in print.

Bhikkhu Revata

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery

(9th November 2011)

BASED ON THE TALK

Bearers of the Burden

The Burden

The people who work for an organisation or a company are called personnel. In other words, those who carry the burden of an organisation or a company are called personnel. In the Myanmar language, the term *wun-htan* means, literally, ‘burden-bearing’ or ‘burden-bearer’. It refers to people who are in the service of an organisation, a company, or a government. We can also say, in the crudest sense of the word, that such people are ‘servants’. Commonly, those who are employed by the government are often referred to as ‘civil servants’.

We see all around us different types of organisational personnel such as company personnel, hospital personnel, sales personnel, and educational personnel. Company personnel carry the burden of the company, while hospital personnel carry that of the hospital. Sales personnel carry the sales burdens of their enterprises, while educational personnel carry the burdens of their institutes. All personnel need to spend time performing their daily duties. In this way they carry their burden of duties. When the day is

Bearers of the Burden

over, they obtain relief from their burden. They can put their burden down for some time. Such relief is a temporary freedom that all personnel in the world obtain daily. We can say that they have gained temporary freedom.

In less-developed countries, heavy loads are carried by men, whereas in developed countries they are carried by motorised transport and cranes. In daily life, we see porters in harbours, airports, and railway stations moving heavy loads from place to place. When a ship is anchored in the harbour, workers are employed to move the cargo. It is the way they make their living. A strong man might be able to carry a heavy load, but he can bear it on his shoulders for only a short time, in fact for only a matter of minutes. He will not be able to bear a heavy load for hours, let alone for days. Being a porter is tiring work; and having lifted their burdens, porters hurry to put them down in specified areas. By putting down their loads, they enjoy a sense of relief. This sense of relief comes from having let go of the burden.

No matter how difficult and wearisome the duties may be, and no matter how heavy the loads are, it is possible to be free of them. There can be times that one is free from carrying all those responsibilities, or burdens.

All personnel who carry the burdens of different organisations are able to let go of them and escape from them at the end of the workday. They may also escape from them at certain times in the course of a workday. However, there is a very heavy burden that

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people endlessly carry in the round of rebirths without knowing any way of escape or relief from it.

We all need to know what sort of burden that is and who is carrying it. This is the reason I want to give you this profound talk today. It is to make all of you know:

- What the burden is that you carry,
- how to lighten your burden,
- how to relieve yourselves of some of that burden, and
- how to put it down for complete freedom from it.

Let me quote the Buddha. The quote is taken from the Khandhavagga of the Saṃyutta Nikāya. The name of the discourse is ‘The Burden’.¹

The Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, I will teach you about the burden, the carrier of the burden, the taking up of the burden, and the laying down of the burden. Listen to that

The Buddha asked:

And what, bhikkhus, is the burden?

Do you know what the burden is?

¹ SN.III.1.3.1 Bhārasuttaṃ (SN 22.22 The Discourse on the Burden).

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It should be said: the five aggregates subject to clinging.

What five?

The Buddha then answered:

The materiality aggregate subject to clinging, the feeling aggregate subject to clinging, the perception aggregate subject to clinging, the volitional formations aggregate subject to clinging, and the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging: This is called the burden.

Now all of you know what the real burden is. However, do you know why the five aggregates are called 'the burden'? Is it appropriate to label them as a 'burden'? Do you feel that calling these five aggregates a 'burden' is extreme? When you come to know how the five aggregates function, and how they torture us endlessly in the round of rebirths, you will certainly come to agree with the words of the Buddha and His use of the word 'burden' to denote the five aggregates subject to clinging.

Materiality Aggregate

We say that we need food, shelter, clothes, and medicine. But is it really our needs that we strive to fulfil, or are we merely serving the needs of something else? What do you think? Whose needs are we fulfilling? Whose needs are we serving? Ours, or those of something else? What is your answer? Let me ask

Materiality Aggregate

you in a simpler way. Who needs food? Who needs shelter? Who needs clothes? Who needs medicine?

Let me explain in another way, so that you can understand these questions more easily. It is all connected to the core activities of our daily lives, nothing else.

According to the Buddha, there are ultimately no men, no women, no devas, no brahmās, no animals, no hungry ghosts, and no hell beings. There are only the five aggregates subject to clinging. These five aggregates have already been mentioned. Let me quote the Buddha again:

The materiality aggregate subject to clinging, the feeling aggregate subject to clinging, the perception aggregate subject to clinging, the volitional formations aggregate subject to clinging, and the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging: This is called the burden.

We say that we need food, we need shelter, and we need clothes and medicines. I ask you again: Is it really our needs that we strive to fulfil, or are we merely serving the needs of something else?

Almost all of us keep busy our entire lives. What are we always so busy about? We keep busy seeking food, shelter, clothes, and medicine. From morning till night, we are busy striving for them, and think of them as our needs. Actually they are not our needs. We are merely serving the needs of something else.

Bearers of the Burden

Let me ask you a few more questions. Please think carefully. If we do not have this body, do we need food? If we do not have this body, do we need clothes? If we do not have this body, do we need shelter? If we do not have this body, do we need medicine? If we do not have this very body, we need none of them. All these needs are the needs of the body, and therefore not really our needs. As we have this body, we have to fulfil its needs. So we can say that people all over the world are just slaves – slaves of the body. Be aware of this! We are not fulfilling our own needs; rather, we are fulfilling the needs of the body. We are slaves. In short, we are now talking about the materiality aggregate (*rūpakkhandhā*).

The materiality aggregate is a group or a combination of materiality. This materiality aggregate makes heavy demands on us daily. It demands food to eat, a place to live, clothes to wear, and medicine to maintain its health.

The materiality aggregate says, ‘Feed me delicious food. I yearn for it. I relish it very much.’

It says, ‘Give me beautiful clothes. I like wearing them. How beautiful I shall be if I wear very beautiful garments!’

‘Build me a grand house or buy it for me. How happy I shall be if I can live there!’

The materiality aggregate also says, ‘Give me good medicine. I want to be healthy, active, and strong. I want to live long. Let me apply a high quality anti-

Materiality Aggregate

ageing cream to my skin. I want to look young and healthy.’

People all over the world are busy striving to provide themselves and their families with these things, believing that these are their needs. Actually, they are only the needs of the materiality aggregate.

‘Blind is this world because of ignorance,’ said the Buddha.² Almost all people in the world have good eyes to see. However, with the naked eye they see just conventional truths, not ultimate truths. So they can truly be said to be blind – blind to ultimate truths. Conventionally, there are men, women, devas, and brahmās, but ultimately there is only ultimate mentality and materiality. In other words, there are only the five aggregates.

According to the Abhidhamma, this whole world, whether living things or non-living things, is made up of very tiny particles. These very small, sub-atomic particles are arising and perishing very rapidly all the time. They cannot be seen with the naked eye. They can only be seen with a concentrated mind.

² Commentary to Dhp.XIII.7 ‘Pesakāradhītā Vatthu’ (Dhp. 174 ‘The Case of the Weaver Girl’).

That is why the Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated knows and sees things as they really are.³

What will they know and see when they develop concentration? They will know and see suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. That is, they will know and see the Four Noble Truths. Anyone who is unable to see these Four Noble Truths as they really are is blind. That is why the Buddha said, ‘Blind is this world because of ignorance.’ Ignorance veils the truth from us.

What did the Buddha mean by ‘ignorance’ (*avijjā*)? The Buddha wasn’t talking about simply not knowing this or that. He was talking about not knowing the Truth. To presume what is wrong to be right, and what is right to be wrong, is ‘ignorance’. In other words, ignorance is not knowing the Four Noble Truths – not knowing suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This is what the Buddha meant by ‘ignorance’.

Feeling Aggregate

We sometimes say, ‘I am very happy,’ ‘I am very sad,’ or ‘I feel nothing.’ This is how we express our

³ SN.V.12.1.1 Samādhisuttam (SN 56.1 The Discourse on Concentration, also know as the Samādhi Sutta).

Feeling Aggregate

feelings. When we are happy, our feelings are pleasant. When we are sad, our feelings are unpleasant. When we feel neither pleasant nor unpleasant, our feelings are neutral. There are these three kinds of feeling – pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. It is not ‘we’ who feel them. It is the feeling aggregate (*vedanakkhandhā*) that feels them. The feeling aggregate has the function of experiencing the affective quality or ‘taste’ of an object. There is no moment without feeling. When there is no pleasant feeling or unpleasant feeling, there is neutral feeling. We would like to have pleasant feelings all the time. This often seems to be the principal goal of our lives. We should know that it is the feeling aggregate that feels the ‘taste’ of an object, not ‘we’ who feel it.

Perception Aggregate

The perception aggregate (*saññakkhandhā*) also performs its own task. It ‘perceives’ or ‘recognises’ an object, and ‘marks’ it so that the object can be recognised again. Whatever experiences it has, it marks them as black, white, good, bad, beautiful, ugly, right, or wrong. Perception is a cause of ‘remembering’; it connects past experiences with present ones. We remember how to use different objects, like how to eat with a fork, knife, or spoon. We remember how to turn on the water tap, how to write, or how to find our way when we walk out onto the street. We take it for granted that ‘we’ remember all these things. We should know that it is perception which remembers. If good things are remembered, we are happy; we have pleasant feelings. If bad things are

remembered, we are unhappy; we have unpleasant feelings. This is the function of two aggregates. The perception aggregate and the feeling aggregate are working in conjunction.

Because of them, we utter cries such as, ‘He abused me,’ ‘He mistreated me,’ ‘He got the better of me,’ or ‘He stole my belongings.’ We feel very sad, very angry, or very unhappy. Sometimes we shed bitter tears. Sometimes we even think of seeking revenge. Perception is the cause of this suffering. We have good memories and bad memories. Which do we have more of, the bad ones or the good ones? Good memories are good perceptions and bad memories are bad perceptions. There are certainly many more bad perceptions in our lives. They torture us endlessly. The more bad memories we have, the more we suffer. To have good memories, we should choose to live as simple a life as we can.

The Buddha said, ‘*Pāpasmim ramatī mano.*’⁴ What does that mean? The meaning is this: When we are not doing wholesome deeds, the mind will incline towards unhealthy thinking. This explains why we have a lot of bad memories. Furthermore, because of this, unwholesome mental impressions are left in our mind.

I shall tell you of an incident to illustrate how perception works.

Once when I was having lunch in my secluded place at Pa-Auk Forest Meditation Centre, a layman visit-

⁴ Dhp.IX.1 Pāpavagga (Dhp. 116 Chapter on Evil).

ed me. On that day I used a certain type of glass to drink water. The layman kept looking intently at the glass. I didn't know that he was looking intently at the glass until he told me so. When I asked him why he was looking at it, he told me, 'Bhante, seeing that glass, I remembered what I had done with a similar type of glass in the past. I had taken alcohol with it.' Here you can see how perception connected a past experience with the present one. When he saw a glass similar to the one he had used before, he remembered what he had done with it. The layman suffered again for a past unwholesome (*akusala*) deed by remembering it.

Remembering past unwholesome deeds while we do wholesome (*kusala*) deeds – for example, while meditating – can become a hindrance in our practice. The more we remember them, the more we suffer. That is why the Buddha said, 'Perception is dukkha.'⁵ Perception is the cause of remembering. If we think that 'we' remember, we will suffer for it. However, if we do not participate in that perception or memory, and instead understand perception as the cause of remembering, then we will feel a sense of release.

As I have just said, all of us have both good and bad memories. However, bad memories outnumber the good ones. Because of bad memories, many of us often cannot sleep well at night. Instead, we silently take mental revenge on others. We quarrel and argue in our minds, sometimes angrily. A great deal of

⁵ SN.III.1.2.2 Dukkhasuttaṃ (SN 22.13 The Discourse on Suffering).

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our precious time and energy is wasted on remembering again and again how someone did something bad to us. Sometimes we cannot even carry out our daily responsibilities. It is likely that the other person has completely forgotten the deed. This is why the Buddha said, 'Perception is dukkha.' The more bad perceptions we have, the more we suffer. This is the burden – the real burden.

Let me say it another way. If we want to have good perceptions, and hence good memories, we need to improve our way of life. We need to choose to live a simple and healthy lifestyle. We now live in a complex world. This world is, in fact, very complicated and getting even more so. If we want to lead a worthy life, we need a change in our lifestyle. If we want to have a better life, we need to seek improvements in our lifestyle. If we want to be happy, we need to live as simple and as wholesome a life as we can.

The more developed a country is, the more oppressive, complex, and complicated life becomes in that country. What are the implications of living in a developed country? Why is a country considered developed? Among other reasons, a country is considered developed when different sorts of sensuality can be easily obtained in abundance. In a developed country, many complicated things happen, as there are very many kinds of sensuality to grasp at and cling to. If we do not want an abundance of bad memories, we should choose to live in simpler places – in the countryside for lay people, and in the forest for monks. There are no complications in the forest for monks. If we are there alone, we can live a really simple life. Now, for example, I am with many of my

Perception Aggregate

disciples. I have to deal with many issues. What do you think? Which is better – to live alone or with many others? Living alone is better. Think of it like this: If we wear only one bracelet, it will make no sound. If we wear two or more bracelets, they will make the sound ‘*chwing chwing*’. That is noise. That is disturbance. We should appreciate the benefits of living a simple life. We should choose a life of solitude.

From another perspective, those who see ultimate mentality by way of the cognitive process can see the perception that arises in each mind moment. These perceptions are arising and perishing very, very rapidly. The perception aggregate is arising and perishing all the time. This is impermanence. If we can see the arising and perishing of the perception aggregate in each mind moment, we can feel a sense of release from the suffering caused by the perception aggregate.

Consciousness And Volitional Formations Aggregate

Next we shall talk about the consciousness aggregate and the volitional formations aggregate. The consciousness aggregate (*viññāṇakkhandhā*) cognizes the object. It is the leader in knowing the object.

The volitional formations aggregate (*saṅkhāraakkhandhā*) causes us to perform good and bad deeds. There is a Pāli word, *cetanā*, which is often translated as ‘volition’ or ‘intention’. When we are about to do something, whether moral or immoral, it is evident

that there is *cetanā*. *Cetanā* is exceedingly energetic at that time. We should remember that when we perform wholesome or unwholesome deeds, it is actually wholesome or unwholesome volition or intention that motivates the deed. It is this volition which will produce its appropriate result later on. Thus, *kusala kamma* (wholesome kamma) and *akusala kamma* (unwholesome kamma) are actually *kusala cetanā* and *akusala cetanā*. Eating, listening, actively smelling and tasting, willingly touching tangible sensual objects, thinking both good and bad thoughts, walking, running, shouting, quarrelling, killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, telling lies, consuming drugs and alcohol, accusing, complaining, finger-pointing, back-biting, blaming, and helping – all such things are the acts of the volitional formations aggregate. They are all motivated by wholesome or unwholesome volition or intention.

As an example of how *cetanā* determines a deed, let us look at an act of providing help to others. One person provides help to another with a wish to support them. That is altruistic. Another person also provides help, but with a wish to gain favour or praise. That is egocentric. Both are acts of providing help, yet one arises from an altruistic *cetanā*, whereas the other springs from a selfish *cetanā*. Now you can better comprehend the function of the volitional formations aggregate. One type of help provided is wholesome, whereas the other is unwholesome, depending on the *cetanā*. It is thus the volitional formations aggregate which performs wholesome and unwholesome deeds in life, not ‘we’ who do so.

You now understand better how each of the five aggregates performs its individual function.

The materiality aggregate (*rūpakkhandhā*) says, ‘Feed me well. Give me what I like to eat. If not, I shall become ill or weak. Or I shall even die!’ So we have to try to fulfil its demands.

Because we possess a materiality aggregate, we feel hot or cold. When it is hot, we have to make the materiality aggregate cool. When it is cold, we have to make it warm. When it is hungry, we have to give it food. When it is thirsty, we have to give it something to drink. How heavy are the duties we carry because of this materiality aggregate! If we don’t serve its needs, it says, ‘I shall become ill or weak. Or I shall even die!’ Afraid of its threats, we then strive to please it.

When we feed the materiality aggregate with delicious food, pleasant feelings arise. Who feels them? The feeling aggregate feels them. That is its function. It is doing its job. ‘We’ are not feeling them. It is because of the identity view (*sakkāya-dīṭṭhi*) within us that we think ‘we’ feel it.

What is this *sakkāya dīṭṭhi*? The Buddha described many ways in which we may hold the wrong view of a self in regard to the five aggregates. For example, we may imagine that the self is one of the aggregates, or that the self possesses one of the aggregates, or that the aggregates are in the self, or that

the self is in one of the aggregates.⁶ This basic misunderstanding is *sakkāya diṭṭhi*, self-identity view. It lies at the heart of our suffering. *Sakkāya-diṭṭhi* is the wrong view that causes us to regard the five aggregates as ‘mine’, ‘I’, and ‘my self’. Not only does it make us cling to the five aggregates, but it also causes us to grasp onto greed, anger, delusion, pride, jealousy, stinginess, and so forth, by leading us to regard all these defilements as ‘mine’, ‘I’, and ‘my self’. In reality, the aggregates are no more than just the aggregates. The five aggregates are not ‘mine’ or ‘I’ or ‘my self’. It is only *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* that makes us think and feel that way.

Because of identity view, we wrongly understand and say, ‘*I* feel pleasant feelings.’ Because of identity view, the materiality aggregate and ‘I’ become inseparable. Thus, when the materiality aggregate desires something, we take it to be ‘our’ desire.

The same thing happens with the feeling aggregate, the perception aggregate, and so on. Due to this wrong view, due to seeing things as ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘mine’, we have served, are serving, and will go on serving the needs of the five aggregates endlessly in the round of rebirths.

Then the feeling aggregate (*vedanakkhandhā*) says, ‘Give me pleasurable sensations again, otherwise I shall become disappointed, miserable, or regretful, or I shall even cause death!’ Thus we hanker after

⁶ SN.III.1.9.3 Yamakasuttam (SN 22.85 The Discourse Concerning Yamaka).

pleasurable sensations to serve the needs of the feeling aggregate while thinking that they are our own needs.

From the moment of birth until the moment of death, people all over the world are very busy pursuing sensuality. People's goals are almost all the same. They want to feel pleasant feelings and to enjoy sensual pleasures. We live our lives in obedience to the demands of the feeling aggregate. When we feel sorry, worried, guilty, fearful, shameful, proud, jealous, or stingy, the feelings that arise are unpleasant ones. We don't want them. Nevertheless, we cannot complain. As we have the roots of greed, hatred, and delusion in us, unpleasant feelings, however undesirable, will surely occur one after another in our daily lives.

In pursuit of sensual pleasures, people have no contentment. They don't know the value of contentment. The Buddha said, '*Santutṭhi paramam dhanam.*'⁷ What is the meaning here? 'Contentment is the greatest wealth.' Is that true? The one who knows the value of contentment and practises it has peace of mind. The more we want, the more we suffer; the less we want, the less we suffer. If there is no wanting, there will be no suffering. We should all know the value of this truth pointed out by the Buddha. Because of not knowing this, undesirable feelings and actions usually result. One is always wanting something. People are always clamouring, 'I need this.' 'I want that.' 'I don't like their decisions.'

⁷ Dhp.XV.6 Sukhavagga (Dhp. 204 Chapter on Happiness).

‘They are not reasonable.’ ‘Why did they do this?’ ‘Don’t they know they should not do that?’ ‘Don’t come here, I don’t want to see you.’ ‘How bad the government policy is!’ ‘We want the right to perform abortions!’ ‘We need more freedom.’ ‘How bad the education system is!’ ‘Change immediately!’ ‘We want to be paid more.’ ‘You are all so lazy!’ We think such complaints are the emotional feelings of people, but it is actually just the feeling aggregate performing its task. However, we erroneously believe that we ourselves are feeling those feelings. We are actually given a direct command by the feeling aggregate to serve it and give it what it wants to feel. We make ourselves ready. But we are really under the command of the feeling aggregate. How difficult it is to know the truth! Not knowing the truth, we turn ourselves into slaves while thinking that we are masters. How heavy is the burden we carry because of the feeling aggregate! If we don’t serve its needs, it says, ‘I shall become unhappy or depressed, or I shall even cause death!’ Afraid of it, we are forced to try to please it.

Then the consciousness aggregate (*viññāṇakkhandhā*) says, ‘I know pleasant tastes and pleasurable sensations. Give me more. Find them for me. If not, I shall make myself unhappy. Eventually I shall even cause death!’ Due to wrong views, we do its bidding yet think that we are fulfilling our own needs.

The perception aggregate (*saññakkhandhā*) also says, ‘I remember the taste and the pleasant feeling experienced by the materiality aggregate and the feeling aggregate. They were very good. I am thinking about them. I am remembering them.’ This is the

way perception impels the materiality aggregate and the feeling aggregate to experience more of the tastes and the feelings experienced in the past.

Master or Slave?

Obeying the aggregates' demands, we go out to acquire what they want, again and again. To fulfil the needs of the five aggregates, we have done and continue to do many things, both good and bad. These are acts of the volitional formations aggregate. When we get what it wants, we say, 'I am the master of my life.' In truth, we are just fulfilling the needs of the five aggregates. We are just slaves – slaves of the five aggregates.

If we don't yet know this profound truth, there is no way of telling when we will become free from being their slaves. When we know how we are living and what we are living for – that we are slaves to the five aggregates – we will feel ashamed of our lives. Some of us may even feel shocked, upset, or distressed. We will realise that it is impossible to be regarded as the masters of our lives when we are really serving the needs of the five aggregates in the same old familiar way. We are living as slaves all the time.

We see now how the five aggregates work and how they command all of us all the time. Together they are performing their functions. We are always obeying them. Because of identity view, the five aggregates and the 'I' cannot be separated. Wrongly thinking that their demands are our needs, we in fact serve the needs of the five aggregates.

Bearers of the Burden

The five aggregates torture us. They are a heavy, oppressive burden. We carry the burden of our aggregates (*khandhā*) not for just a short time – not for just a minute, an hour, a day, a year, one life, or even just one aeon! Not so! We have been carrying this heavy, oppressive burden since the beginning of *samsāra*, the round of rebirths, which is infinite and has no known beginning. There is also no way of knowing when it will end if we continue spending our lives doing the same old things. For that reason the five aggregates are truly a heavy burden. It is indeed a very heavy burden we are carrying, and will continue to carry unless we can lay it down.

You know now what the burden is.

The Carrier of the Burden

The Buddha then asked:

Who is the carrier of the burden?

It should be said: the person, this venerable one of such a name and clan. This is called the carrier of the burden.

Who are the carriers of the burden?

‘We’ are the carriers of the burden. ‘You’ are the carrier of the burden. Mr. John is the carrier of the burden. Miss Mary is the carrier of the burden.

As I said earlier, we see company personnel, sales personnel, and hospital personnel all around us.

The Carrier of the Burden

Even while they are working for their organisations, they have some time to lay down their burdens in the course of a workday. They have a chance to be relieved of their burdens. No matter how hard and tiring the duties they perform, and no matter how heavy the loads they carry, it is possible to be free of them, even if only temporarily. They have some time to be free from carrying their responsibilities, or burdens.

However, the personnel who are serving the needs of the 'organisation' called the five aggregates have no chance to lay down their burdens, not even for a minute. This is not only so in the present life, but it has always been so, and will always be so throughout innumerable lives in saṃsāra, the round of rebirths.

The Carrier's Goal and Path

How do we carry our burden?

That depends on our goal in life. There is a goal in life and a path leading to that goal. Let us examine who sets the goal and who lays the path. We think it is we ourselves. Actually, it isn't. The five aggregates set the goal and lay down the path. Which aggregates set the goal, and which lay down the path?

1. The materiality aggregate sets its goal, saying, 'I like delicious food. I need fine and beautiful clothes. Let me live in good accommodation. Take care of me. I want to be well and healthy.'

Bearers of the Burden

2. The feeling aggregate also sets its goal, saying, 'I like to feel pleasant feelings through the six sense-doors. Serve them to me.'
3. The perception aggregate also sets its goal, saying, 'I remember that. I want it again.' 'I miss them very much. Let me see them again.' 'They insulted me. They abused me. They mistreated me. They stole my belongings. I cannot forget. I cannot forgive. One day I shall seek revenge.' By remembering what the materiality and the feeling aggregate have experienced, the perception aggregate sets its goal.
4. The consciousness aggregate also sets its goal by knowing such things as pleasant tastes and pleasurable sensations. It says, 'Give me more. Find them for me. If not, I shall make myself unhappy. Eventually I shall even cause death!'
5. It is only the volitional formations aggregate that lays down the path to the goal. With greed or non-greed, anger or non-anger, delusion or non-delusion, pride or humility, jealousy or magnanimity, stinginess or generosity, doubt or confidence, the path is laid down.

The five aggregates are performing their functions together. We act according to what the five aggregates say. We are obedient personnel. We never, ever dare to disobey.

The Carrier's Goal and Path

However, not everyone falls into the category of obedient personnel. While the five aggregates *in themselves* are the same for all beings, there is an important difference between the five aggregates of an unenlightened being and the five aggregates of an enlightened being. Because unenlightened beings possess the defilements, their aggregates function as the five *clinging* aggregates. The aggregates then become the burden taken up and carried by unenlightened beings. Arahants by contrast have eradicated all defilements, so for enlightened beings the five aggregates are just the five aggregates and are no longer characterised by clinging. Free from defilement, craving, and attachment, Arahants cling neither to their own five aggregates nor to any aggregates outside themselves.

Therefore, the materiality, feeling, perception, and consciousness aggregates of Arahants no longer set any goal, and consequently their volitional formation aggregate does not lay any path either. But in the case of beings still tainted by defilement, the clinging aggregates of materiality, feeling, perception, and consciousness set their respective goals only because of the presence and the strong influence of the defilements; similarly, their volitional formation aggregate lays the path, solely because of the strong influence of the defilements. What do you think? Which is more important in life, the path or the goal?

It is the path. However, almost none of us think very much about the path. We think only about the goal. We are less concerned with, and are often heedless about, whether we are treading the right path or the

wrong path. Our concern is overwhelmingly about reaching our goal.

In truth, we need to tread the right path to get to the right goal. If we choose to tread the wrong path, we can expect to find ourselves full of guilt and remorse, perhaps for the rest of our lives. If we believe that money, possessions, and physical comfort are more important than spiritual values in life, we will suffer. We will devalue our lives for the sake of worldly gains such as acceptance, praise, fame, and wealth. We will become materialists.

Fame and wealth are highly regarded by most. They are sought after by people from all walks of life. And often people seek these things regardless of whether or not they take the right path to get them.

If we do something in anger, we will have chosen anger as the path to the goal. If we act with greed, jealousy, stinginess, or conceit, we will have chosen those defilements to be the path leading to our goal. These are inappropriate paths. However, if we act with generosity (*alobha*), loving-kindness (*adosa*), or wisdom (*amoha*), we walk on the right path, a suitable path.

To illustrate this, let us look at a selfish person who cared a lot about his goal but not about the path. He lived in a village not far from the Veḷuvana monastery in Rājagaha. His name was Cunda.⁸ He was a pig-breeder and butcher. He made a living breeding

⁸ Commentary to Dhp.I.10 ‘Cundasūkarika Vatthu’ (Dhp. 15 ‘The Case of Cunda the Pork Butcher’).

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and killing pigs. He bought piglets from the villagers in exchange for rice, but without dealing fairly. He would do this when the villagers were in great need and had no other choice but to agree to his terms. He made it appear as if he was a compassionate person, helping them in times of need. The villagers were even expected to thank him. People may describe him as a smart dealer, but in fact he was crafty and unjust. The way he chose to make his living was improper. Greed was his chosen path. He cheated the villagers.

Furthermore, he fed the piglets well in his backyard. But it was not out of kindness that he did so. He was motivated only by a desire for greater profits. He wanted bigger pigs. When they were fully grown, he slaughtered them to sell the meat. In this way he was actually making his burden heavier and heavier.

Much worse, you cannot imagine his cruelty to the pigs. The way he slaughtered them was extremely cruel, utterly heartless. To kill a pig, he would fasten it firmly to a post and pound the whole body with a square club to make the flesh swell so it looked more plump and tender. The pig would squeal and grunt in agony and excruciating pain. Cunda was indeed very, very brutal.

There are three things that are part and parcel of our lives. They are:

1. Gratification: This is the state of satisfaction when we meet with desirable outcomes.

2. Fault and danger: This is the state of dissatisfaction when we meet with undesirable outcomes.
3. Escape: This is the escape from that fault and danger.

Egocentric and Altruistic People

There are also two types of individuals:

1. The egocentric person: This person has selfish views.
2. The altruistic person: This person has unselfish views.

People who are egocentric are mainly interested in their personal desires and gains. They care very little, or not at all, about others. Such people are considered self-centred or egocentric. On the other hand, people who are altruistic have greater concern for the well-being of others. They are not considered to be self-seeking people. They are altruistic people.

The way selfish people set out to seek gratification, to face fault and danger, and to find the escape from that fault and danger are different from the way unselfish people do those things. The ways in which these two types of people overcome the problems in life are also different from each other.

I shall now tell you a story of how two altruistic people set out to seek gratification, to face fault and danger, and to find the escape from it.

Once long ago, a young man by the name of Pippali Kassapa married Bhaddā Kāpilānī to please his mother.⁹ The young wealthy couple lived happily and in comfort for many years. As long as Pippali's parents lived, the young couple did not have to look after the family estate. However, when his parents died, they had to take charge of the large family estate and farms.

One day, when Pippali Kassapa was inspecting one of the farms, he saw, as if with new eyes, what he had seen so often before. In the past, as the saying goes, 'he had eyes but could not see'. He now noticed that when his workers were ploughing the fields, many birds gathered to eagerly pick the worms from the furrows. This sight, so common to farmers, really startled him. It struck him forcefully that what brought him his wealth, the produce of his fields, was bound up with the suffering and death of many living beings. His livelihood was being secured with the death of so many worms and other little creatures living in the soil. Thinking about this, he asked one of his labourers, 'Who will have to bear the consequences of such actions?' 'You yourself, sir,' was the answer.

Shaken by that insight into kammic retribution, he reflected, 'If I have to carry with me the burden for all that killing, what use is all this wealth to me? It will be better if I give it all to Bhaddā and go forth into the ascetic life.'

⁹ Commentary to SN.II.5.11 Cīvarasuttaṃ (SN 16.11 The Discourse on the Robe).

Meanwhile, back at home, at about the same time, his wife had a similar experience. She, too, saw afresh and with deeper understanding what she had very often seen before. Sesame seeds from their fields had been spread out in the open to dry in the sun. Crows and other birds were eating the insects that had been attracted by the seeds. When Bhaddā asked her servants who would have to account morally for the violent death of so many creatures, she was told that the kammic responsibility was hers. Then she thought, 'If I have to carry with me the burden of causing such death, I won't be able to lift my head above the ocean of rebirths even in a thousand lives. As soon as Pippali returns, I shall hand over everything to him and leave to take up the ascetic life.'

When they met, they spoke their minds, and found themselves of one accord. So they had pale-yellow cloth and clay bowls bought for them from the bazaar, then shaved each other's heads, and set out to become wandering ascetics. They made the declaration, 'To those who are Arahants in the world, we dedicate our going forth!'

Slinging their alms bowls over their shoulders, they left the estate manor unnoticed by their domestic servants. However, when they reached the village that belonged to the estate, the labourers and their families saw them. On hearing of the couple's renunciation, the people fell at the feet of the two ascetics and lamented, crying and exclaiming, 'O dear and noble ones! Why do you want to make us helpless orphans?'

‘It is because we have seen existence in the sensual world (*kāmaloka*), in the fine material brahmā world (*rūpaloka*), and in the formless brahmā world (*arūpaloka*) to be like a house on fire that we go forth into the homeless life,’ they said. To those who were serfs, Pippali Kassapa granted their freedom. He and Bhaddā then continued on their journey, leaving the villagers behind, still weeping and lamenting.

We have now seen the wise and altruistic way in which these two unselfish people set out to seek gratification, to face fault and danger, and to find the escape from that fault and danger. Let us now go back to reflect on how the selfish Cunda set out to seek gratification, to face fault and danger, and to find the escape from it.

Cunda had a very nasty, greedy, and selfish disposition. He cared only about himself and his own desires and gains. The way he tried to escape from the fault and danger he encountered was terrible. He wanted to escape from the disturbing squeals of the pigs as they suffered in the agony of dying. When he slaughtered a pig, he would force open the pig’s jaws and insert a piece of wood into its mouth. He then poured boiling water down the pig’s throat. The hot water would stream down through the animal’s innards, loosening the excrement. The foul excrement would eventually pass out through the anus, causing excruciating pain to the dying pig throughout the cruel process. So long as there was even a little excrement left in the pig’s belly, the water would come out stained and turbid. As soon as the pig’s belly was clean, the water would come out clear. Cunda

would thus continue pouring hot water until the water came out clear.

He would also pour hot water onto the pig's back to make the pig's skin peel off. Finally, he would cut off the pig's head with a long, sharp knife and butcher the carcass for sale as well as for his own consumption.

He made a living that way for fifty-five years. In all that time he did not perform a single meritorious deed. Although the Buddha was often in residence at a nearby monastery, not once did Cunda ever pay Him honour. He never even offered so much as a handful of flowers or a spoonful of rice.

Now you know how the egocentric and self-serving Cunda sought escape from the fault and danger that he encountered in his livelihood. In order to reach the goal laid down by the five aggregates, he chose to walk a selfish path. The self-centered Cunda sought gratification and faced the ensuing fault and danger with utter selfishness. He used his own cruel means to try to escape from the fault and danger he encountered.

One day, Cunda was stricken by illness, and while he was still alive, the fire of the Great Hell arose before him. In great pain, he began to squeal and grunt like a pig and to crawl about on his hands and knees, first to the front of the house and then to the back. The men of his household overpowered and gagged him. But since it is impossible for anyone to prevent a man's past deeds from bearing fruit, he kept crawling back and forth, grunting and squealing continu-

ally for seven whole days. He was agonising in the manner of the pigs he had been slaughtering. Thus, even before he died, he was suffering as if he was in hell. On the seventh day, Cunda died and was re-born in the Great Hell. The path he had chosen was an improper and evil one that steered him straight into the Great Hell.

If the path to the goal is wrong, the goal cannot be reached properly. Cunda's goal was to gain wealth and to eat sumptuous food, including pork. However, the path he chose to reach his goal – namely, killing pigs every day in a cruel and merciless manner – caused him to lose everything. The path chosen by his volitional formations aggregate was governed by greed and fuelled by cruelty. That led him straight to the Great Hell. In this way, Cunda, the bearer of five aggregates, had made his subsequent burden heavier.

With the story of Pippali Kassapa and Bhaddā Kāpilānī on the one hand and the story of Cunda on the other, I believe I have clearly illustrated the divergent ways in which selfish and unselfish people set out to seek gratification, to face fault and danger, and to find escape. The ways in which they strive to overcome their problems in life are different. The selfish care only about themselves rather than about other people, whereas the unselfish give due consideration to other people's needs and wishes as well.

It is all right for one to choose wealth as a goal and then successfully fulfil the desire to reach that goal through honesty, non-cruelty, and other virtues, especially when one also performs acts of charity, gen-

erosity, and loving-kindness and maintains the five precepts well. This is a good path to walk. It brings one happily to the goal. However, having chosen the goal of wealth or even of mere survival, if one then chooses a most improper path to get there, one will lose everything. One may even end up in a place of great suffering as Cunda did.

Which way should you choose?

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Let me give you more stories about other carriers of the burden.

Once, there was a loud, anguished cry of four ghosts near a moat outside the city of Rājagaha.¹⁰ They wailed loudly, ‘We earned money both righteously and unrighteously when we were alive. All the wealth that we accumulated is now being consumed by others. As for us, we are now suffering as hungry ghosts for our unrighteous livelihood.’ Here, we all need to know why they had been reborn in the ghost realm.

At the time of the Buddha, there were four women in Rājagaha who traded in rice, oil, butter, honey, and other groceries. They employed unfair means, using false weights and measures. When they died,

¹⁰ PvA.IV.14 Mahāvaggo, ‘Bhogasamharaṇa Peta Vatthu Vaṇṇanā’ (‘Description of the Case of the Bhogasamharaṇa Ghost’).

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they were reborn as hungry ghosts near a moat outside Rājagaha. To serve the needs of the five aggregates, they had chosen a wrong path, and that wrong path steered them into the ghost realm. Obeying the instructions of the five aggregates, they had enslaved themselves. They suffered for having been nothing but slaves to the five aggregates.

After they had passed away, their husbands found new wives. Maybe some of you face a similar situation. The husbands were now happily consuming what their former wives had earned and accumulated. Seeing this, the four of them felt deep remorse over their past misdeeds. Now they were mourning and weeping loudly over their present fate.

When they were alive, they had very much wanted to enjoy great wealth and material comfort. But they went about achieving their goal wrongly. They traded using false weights and measures. All this happened according to the demands of the five aggregates. Having chosen their path, the four women accumulated much by improper means. Now they had to carry the heavier burdens of the five aggregates of hungry ghosts.

We do not want to be reborn as animals, hell beings, or hungry ghosts. Even though we do not wish for these existences, we have to accept the consequences of our enslavement to the five aggregates. We must take full responsibility for the consequences of the path we have decided to tread.

We can now all see the influences and the effects that the five aggregates have on us. These five aggre-

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gates are really a burden. They are our masters. We are their slaves. Because of identity view, we are always under their control. We have been continually deluded by this identity view throughout the round of rebirths up until the present. Every one of us has been caught in this web of delusion.

We will not be completely free from these five aggregates as long as we do not rid ourselves of this identity view. Even though we cannot totally eliminate this identity view until we become a Noble person (*ariyā*), through right knowledge we can gradually eliminate it. From right knowledge springs right thinking. From right thinking springs right action. With right knowledge, we can row well and steer our boat of life into a delightful harbour. We will be people of high moral standards both in this life and in lives to come. One day we shall reach the other shore, that is, Nibbāna.

We must be careful of the way we carry our burden. Even though we are extremely unlikely to become totally free from bearing our burden, we will at least be able to mould a better way of life for now and for the future if we know how to carry the load in a skilful manner. We will be able to pick up and carry new but lighter burdens.

On the other hand, if we don't know how to carry our burden in a skilful manner, we will be unable to mould a better way of life for now and for the future. Even worse, we will be picking up new and heavier burdens.

Next, let me tell you about the bhikkhu, bhikkhunī, probationary nun (*sikkhamānā*), novice monk, and novice nun who lived in Buddha Kassapa's time and who unwisely chose the worldly goals of fame, gain, and success.¹¹

Once, as Venerable Mahā Moggallāna was coming down from Mount Vulture Peak (the Gijjhakūṭa Hill) with Venerable Lakkhaṇa, he smiled in a certain place. The Venerable Lakkhaṇa asked, 'Venerable Sir, why do you smile?'

Venerable Mahā Moggallāna replied, 'This is not the time for that question. Ask me that question when we are in the presence of the Blessed One.'

When they got back to the monastery in Rājagaha, Venerable Lakkhaṇa again asked him the same question in the presence of the Buddha. Venerable Mahā Moggallāna said:

When I was coming down from Mount Vulture Peak, I saw a bhikkhu going through the air. His robe was in flames, his bowl was in flames, his waistband was in flames, and his body was burning with flames too. All the while he was uttering cries of pain.

He had seen a ghost in the form of a bhikkhu. Seeing this being, he smiled.

¹¹ SN.II.8.2.8-11 Pāpabhikkhunīsuttaṃ, Pāpasikkhamnasuttaṃ, Pāpasāmaṇerasuttaṃ, Pāpasāmaṇerīsuttaṃ (SN 19.18-21 The Discourses on the Evil Bhikkhunī, the Evil Probationary Nun, the Evil Novice Monk, and the Evil Novice Nun).

The Buddha then said:

In the past, I, too, saw that bhikkhu, but I didn't speak about it. If I had spoken about it, others would not have believed me. If they had not believed me, that would have led to their detriment and suffering for a long time.

So, out of compassion for His disciples and devotees, the Buddha had kept silent about that sight. Here I would like all of you to think deeply about what to say, what not to say, when to speak, when not to speak, where to speak, and where not to speak, even when we actually know or see that something is true.

According to the Buddha, even though things may be true both for oneself and for others, if it is not yet the right time nor the right place, we should not speak. We should not speak if speaking will not be beneficial to others, or if it might even be detrimental.¹²

At other times, Venerable Mahā Moggallāna also saw the same type of ghosts in the form of a bhikkhunī, a probationary nun, a novice monk, and a novice nun. But he talked about them only in the presence of the Buddha.

As the Buddha had a witness in Venerable Mahā Moggallāna, He then explained about those ghosts.

¹² MN.II.1.8 Abhayarājakumārasuttam (MN 58 The Discourse Concerning Prince Abhaya).

They had been evil ones in Buddha Kassapa's Dispensation. They were a bhikkhu, a bhikkhunī, a probationary nun, a novice monk, and a novice nun who had not led lives of virtue in Buddha Kassapa's time. They had set out to seek gain, honour, and fame, obeying the demands of the five aggregates. They were slaves of the aggregates. They had set themselves the goal of achieving mundane success in life. They had forfeited their holy lives for the sake of worldly gain. Through immoral deeds and poor conduct, they enjoyed gifts given in faith by lay people and intended for the virtuous. They derived enjoyment from the food received on alms-round given in faith by householders and intended for the virtuous. Due to such misdeeds, they were reborn in hell and suffered for many hundreds of thousands of years. Then, when their time in hell was finally over, as a residual effect of that same kamma, they were reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts.

Here let me ask you a few more questions. What is the goal of lay people? Success or liberation? Surely, it is success, not liberation. And what should the goal of monks be? It should be liberation, not success. If monks choose a goal of gain, honour, and fame, then they have ordained for the wrong purpose. As their goal is wrong, their path, too, becomes wrong.

That is why the Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, dreadful are gain, honour, and fame, bitter, vile, obstructive to achieving the unsurpassed security from bondage. Suppose there was a beetle, a dung-eater. It

is stuffed with dung, full of dung, and in front of her is yet again a large dunghill.¹³

What do you think? Is it very likely that she will despise the other beetles, thinking, ‘I am a dung-eater, stuffed with dung, full of dung, and in front of me there is a large dunghill’? Yes, the Buddha said that she will.

The Buddha then continued:

So, too, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu here whose mind is overcome and obsessed by gain, honour, and fame, dresses in the morning, and taking bowl and robe, enters a village or town for alms. There he eats as much as he wants. He is also invited for the next day’s meal. His alms-food is plentiful. When he goes back to the monastery, he boasts before a group of bhikkhus, ‘I have eaten as much as I wanted. I have also been invited for tomorrow’s meal. My alms-food is plentiful. I am one who gains robes, alms-food, lodgings, and medicinal requisites in abundance. Other bhikkhus have little merit and influence. They do not gain robes, alms-food, lodgings, or medicinal requisites as much as I do.’ Thus, because his mind is overcome and obsessed by gain, honour, and fame, he despises the other well-behaved bhikkhus. That will lead to the harm and suffering of this senseless person

¹³ SN.II.6.1.5 *Milhakasuttam* (SN 17.5 The Discourse on the Dung Beetle).

for a long time. So dreadful are gain, honour, and fame....Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourselves thus, 'We will abandon the arisen gain, honour, and fame, and we will not let the arisen gain, honour, and fame persist obsessing our minds.' Thus should you train yourselves.

On another occasion, the Buddha also said:¹⁴

There was a monk whose mind I knew with my own mind, 'This venerable one would not tell a deliberate lie even for the sake of a golden bowl filled with powdered silver.' Yet, some time later I saw him, his mind overcome and obsessed by gain, honour, and fame, telling a deliberate lie. Bhikkhus, so dreadful are gain, honour, and fame.... Thus should you train yourselves.

Nowadays, in many Buddhist countries, there are bhikkhus who set out to reach the goal of gain, honour, and fame, which to them means success. So, as bhikkhus, they have set the wrong goal. Since their goal is wrong, their path, too, becomes wrong. It will lead these senseless bhikkhus to much harm and suffering for a long, long time.

If we choose a wrong path, then in the forthcoming Buddha's Dispensation, the future Buddha and Chief Disciple may see us in a destination similar to that of the suffering beings whom the Venerable

¹⁴ SN.II.6.2.1 Savaṇṇapātisuttaṃ (SN 17.11 The Discourse on the Golden Bowl).

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Mahā Moggallāna saw as he came down from Mount Vulture Peak. Do you remember his words? He saw the ghosts of a bhikkhu, a bhikkhunī, a probationary nun, a novice monk, and a novice nun going through the air, wearing robes and waistbands in flames, holding bowls in flames, their bodies also burning with flames. All the while they were uttering cries of excruciating pain.

Do be careful not to choose a wrong goal. It will surely lead to much long-term harm and suffering. Be heedful not to succumb to the inappropriate demands of the five aggregates.

Let me tell you about another person who set out seeking gain, honour, and fame, obeying the demands of the five aggregates. He is a bhikkhu well known to all Buddhists, since the Buddha's time, for his ill repute. Do you know whom I am referring to? It is the Venerable Devadatta. He was a very egocentric person who thought only about himself and not about the needs and happiness of others. He was a self-seeking person. He was very selfish. He acted entirely in his own interests. His sense of his own value and importance was very strong due to his ego. Winning gain, honour, and fame boosted his ego and led to much harm and suffering for him in the Great Hell. He is suffering immensely there even now. All egocentric people will have to suffer a torturous destiny. We all truly need to reflect carefully on what it is we seek and which path we follow.

The goal that Devadatta chose was the wrong one. As his goal was wrong, his path, too, became wrong. That steered him into the Great Hell. Devadatta,

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the carrier of the five aggregates, had made his burden heavier by choosing the wrong goal and path.

Which path are you going to take? Is it the path that Cunda chose? Or is it that of the four women from Rājagaha who traded in rice, oil, butter, and honey by unfair means, using false weights and measures? Or is it the path of the bhikkhu, bhikkhunī, probationary nun, novice monk, and novice nun who had been evil ones in Buddha Kassapa's Dispensation? Or is it that of Devadatta's self-seeking nature? Please consider very, very carefully!

The Rudder of Life

Having declared what the burden is and who the carrier of the burden is, the Buddha continued to explain the taking up of the burden:

It is this craving that leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there.

In other words, it is this craving that takes up the burden.

What is this craving the Buddha speaks of?

Before we look into how craving leads to renewed existence, I shall explain very briefly how it is that, even if we have chosen the right path, we should set out on that path properly.

In brief, we need to realise the law of kamma. This is based on the principle of cause and effect. It is one of the primary teachings of the Buddha. How do we realise this law of kamma? In order to realise it fully, we need to practise dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) as taught by the Buddha. This means we need to know and see our past lives. We need to know and see how the ignorance, craving, clinging, volitional formations, and wholesome and unwholesome actions of past lives give their results in new existences. Without such a realisation we will be unable to set out properly on our chosen path.

Let me give you a simile. To row and steer a boat in the right direction, we need to use a rudder. In the same way, to row and steer our 'boat of life', we need our boat to be fixed with a rudder. That rudder is the realisation of the law of kamma. Without such a realisation, we will be rowing our boat of life without an essential navigational aid. But when equipped with this realisation, we will be able to sail without much trouble. We will be able to steer our boat of life into a delightful port. And ultimately, we will be able to reach the far shore, that most delightful port, Nibbāna.

Blind is this world because of ignorance, because of not knowing the truth. People are wandering around without any clear direction. It is as if they are walking in a pitch-dark forest at night. So as not to step on thorns, and not to bruise their feet against rocks and stumps, they need a flaming torch. To navigate through a dark route, a guiding light must be lit. Realising the law of kamma through discerning one's own past existences is that guiding light. It is the

lighting of a flaming torch in the world of darkness. That realisation will help one navigate one's boat of life to a safe abode.

Taking Up of the Burden

By now I believe you understand sufficiently about both the burden and the carrier of the burden. Let us then continue to learn about how craving, the taking up of the burden, leads to new existences. To understand it well, I shall tell you about the experiences of a meditator who practised dependent origination (*paṭīccasamuppāda*) at the Pa-Auk Meditation Centre in Myanmar.

When this yogi was in the process of discerning his past existences, he discovered that he had been a very poverty-stricken village girl in one of his past lives. One day she made an offering of drinking water and wildflowers at a pagoda. At that time she made an aspiration, saying, 'May I be reborn as a rich man due to this offering.'

According to the Buddha, the last object that appears at the near-death moment is responsible for the next new existence. If the object is a wholesome one, it yields its results in a good realm. If the object is an unwholesome one, it yields its results in a bad realm.

Fortunately for the girl, the wholesome object that appeared in her mind at the near-death moment was the vision of the offering and the wish that she had made at the pagoda. Consequently, she was reborn

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as a man who became very wealthy. Owing to her craving for a rich man's life, she had taken up a new burden. She had taken up the burden of a human being, a wealthy man. That is the reason the Buddha said that it is this craving that causes the taking up of a burden, a new set of five aggregates.

He lived a wealthy life, making frequent offerings to the poor. He lived his life in comfort and with much contentment. However, he certainly could not live forever. One day, as he lay on his death bed, he heard his sons and daughters quarrelling about their inheritance. He felt very upset and died in anger (*dosa*).

I think we can safely say that some of you may suffer a similar fate. Parents love their sons and daughters very much. They may consider their children to be treasures. However, uncertain is the mind of people. Children are also people, and people can behave foolishly due to ignorance and craving. We see this in the wealthy man's children.

It was deeply upsetting for him that his sons and daughters were quarrelling about their inheritance at the very time when he, their father, was about to die. It was very shocking. Their inconsiderate behaviour was a great shock and disappointment to him. He died in anger, so afterwards he had to carry the heavier burden of an animal's five aggregates. He was reborn as a snake. The nearest cause for having to carry the burden of a snake was his disappointment with his own sons and daughters. If we die with attachment to our sons and daughters at the

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near-death moment, we will also fall into one of the four woeful states. Attachment is a defilement.

People in the world die in various ways. Some die young, some die old, some die of cancer, some die for their beliefs, some die poor, and some die rich. In whatever way we die, the object at our near-death moment will be what determines our next new existence.

Between birth and death we live mostly in the ‘homes’ of greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy, stinginess, and so on. These are ‘homes’ that are truly bad for us. Even though we live in physical houses that we call home, the real homes which most of us inhabit are these ‘homes’ of greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy, and stinginess. These primal defilements are with us from the moment of our birth. They trouble us throughout our lives. Most of us, unfortunately, are caught in their grip. They become our real homes indeed. The Dhammapada commentary says:

For the heedless, the four woeful states are like their permanent home.¹⁵

As we all know, we don’t usually stay long at places where we are only guests. It is natural for us to return to our homes. In the same way, the human realm and deva realms are places we visit only temporarily. We stay there only when our wholesome kamma is ripe. Sooner or later, because of our de-

¹⁵ Commentary to Dh.p.I.1 ‘Cakkhupālatthera Vatthu’ (Dhp. 1 ‘The Case of Thera Cakkhupāla’).

filements, we have to return to our real homes somewhere in the four woeful planes.

You have just heard about the rich man returning again to his real home, the animal realm. As a snake, she lived in the forest. The prey she liked to eat best were rabbits. She spent most of her life hunting rabbits for her food. The attachment to the flesh of rabbits was so strong that it caused the image of a rabbit to appear in her mind when she was about to end her life as a snake. Consequently, she was reborn in the next existence as a rabbit.

Let me ask you a question: Do you like fried chicken? Do you like chicken soup? I believe that most of you do. Is it possible to be reborn as a chicken simply because of being attached to chicken meat? Yes, it is possible! If you like beef, you may be reborn as a cow, too. Which is usually stronger, your attachment to vegetables or your attachment to meat? Attachment to meat is likely stronger, is it not?

Due to ignorance, we crave existence for its own sake, no matter what that existence may be. It does not matter to most of us whether it is existence in the brahmā realms, the deva realms, the human realm, or even the four woeful realms. Our desire for existence is so strong that even existence in one of the woeful realms is deemed better than not existing again at all.

Let us return to the meditator's past lives. Being now reborn as a rabbit, she also lived in a forest. One day she was caught by a hunter who took her to

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his house. He felt pity for the rabbit. He kept her in his house and fed her well. That was most fortunate for her. She had the opportunity to hear the daily devotional chanting of the hunter's daughter at home. The rabbit took delight in listening to the chanting, although on the whole she was unhappy living in a house. It is natural for forest-dwelling animals to hanker after living in the forest. With growing despondency and depression, the rabbit became sick and grew very thin. Eventually she died.

Just as she was about to pass away, she saw a dark-skinned old man with Indian features walking past the house. Due to ignorance she instantly became attached to him. Fortunately, the object that appeared at the near-death moment was the delightful feeling that arose whenever she heard the devotional chants. That wholesome feeling caused her to be reborn as a human being in the next life. She was reborn as a man with Indian features and complexion.

At the near-death moment, if we remember our children with a sense of grief and worry, we cannot be reborn as a human being or in any good realm. The object at the near-death moment must be wholesome for us to be reborn in the deva realms or the human realm. Although she was attached to the man with Indian features, the rabbit's near-death object was the delightful feeling that arose whenever she heard the devotional chants. It was a wholesome object.

According to the commentaries, an ordinary person in the throes of death is very much like a drowning person. When a person is drowning, he desperately

hopes for someone or something to save him. At that time, he will reach out to grasp anything that floats by. He will not have the presence of mind or the strength to reject it, even if it is a corpse. Under the circumstances, he will doggedly cling to any object for dear life, no matter what it may be. His only objective is to save his life.

In the same way, whether an ordinary person in the process of dying sees a wholesome object or an unwholesome object at the near-death moment, he will firmly grasp it. He will not have the presence of mind or the strength to reject it, even though it may be an unwholesome one. At that moment, he will resolutely grasp whatever object arises. Why does he grasp in this way? Because, due to his craving for existence, on leaving his old life, he wants to receive a new one. Now you see how this craving fuels renewed existence. In this way we are all enslaved by craving.

Seeking Delight Here and There

The Buddha said, ‘This craving seeks delight here and there.’

How does this craving seek delight here and there?

Let me ask you a few more questions. What do you think? Does a dog enjoy its life? Sure, it does. How about monkeys? Sure, they do, too. There is no one, not any creature, who does not. To make this more understandable, I shall explain how this craving takes delight in life here and there.

Long, long ago, King Assaka was ruling in Pāṭali-putta in Kāsi.¹⁶ His chief queen, Uparī, was very dear to him. She was very charming, graceful, and most beautiful. The king loved her immensely. Unfortunately, she died while still young. Upon her death the king was overcome with grief and became depressed. The demise of a king or a queen is traditionally described in our Myanmar language as his or her ‘going to heaven’. In this instance, though, the deceased queen Uparī had failed to get there.

Being separated from those one loves is suffering. The deeper the love, the greater the suffering will be. It was therefore a deeply sad event for the king. His feelings were so overpowering that he had her body embalmed, laid in a glass coffin, and placed under his bed. He refused to eat. He kept on weeping and wailing inconsolably. He even failed to perform his royal duties. Even though his parents and ministers consoled him, reminding him of the laws of mortality and impermanence, he could not be comforted. He went on mourning, continually staring down at the embalmed body of his beloved late queen.

At that time, our bodhisatta was a hermit who possessed supernormal powers. He was dwelling nearby at the foot of the Himalayas. One day he surveyed the world to see whom he could liberate from human miseries by enlightening them with the Dhamma. With his divine eye he saw the king sunk in deep sorrow. Knowing that no one in the world

¹⁶ Commentary to Jā.207 ‘Assaka-jātaka’ (‘The Birth Story of Assaka’).

but he, the hermit, could draw the king out of his melancholy, he visited the king. At the Royal Garden, he met a brahmin attendant. He asked the attendant about the king's condition. When he was told how inconsolable the king was, he responded that if the king came to him, he would show the king the whereabouts of the late queen. The brahmin hurried to the palace and told his king, 'Sire, a powerful hermit who possesses divine power has arrived at the Royal Garden. He can tell you the late queen's present existence and show you where she is. Please pay him a visit.'

The king was overjoyed at the thought of seeing Uparī. He hurried immediately to the Royal Garden in a chariot. On arriving there he paid due respects to the hermit. Then he asked, 'Is it true that you can tell me where my late queen is?'

'Yes,' said the hermit, our bodhisatta. 'Your queen while in this human world was immensely proud of her beauty, spending her days endlessly preening herself. She neglected doing meritorious deeds of alms-giving and of observing the precepts. So when she died, she came back reborn as a lowly dung beetle in this garden.'

According to the Buddha, a man or woman who is conceited and who does not pay obeisance to one to whom obeisance should be paid, who does not stand up for one for whom one should stand up, who does not offer a seat to one to whom one should offer a seat, who does not make way for one for whom one should make way, and who does not honour, respect, revere, and venerate one who should be hon-

oured, respected, revered, and venerated, then he or she, at the breakup of the body, after death, will be reborn in a bad destination, even in hell.¹⁷

But if such a one, at the breakup of the body, after death, is not reborn in a bad destination, or even in hell, one may return as a human being. Wherever one is reborn, one will be low-born. This is the way that leads to a low birth. When one lives in a stubborn and proud manner, it will lead to a low birth.

Who are those to be honoured, respected, revered, and venerated?

They are our elders and seniors. First and foremost they are Fully Enlightened Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas, and Noble Disciples. For lay people, they are one's own elders and seniors, including one's mother and father, ascetics and brahmins, and the heads of the clans.¹⁸

When the king heard from the hermit that the late queen Uparī had been reborn as a dung beetle, he said, 'I don't believe it!' I would say that this is a normal reaction from anyone. We only want to hear that our loved ones have been reborn in good destinations, not in bad ones. So the bodhisatta said, 'Then I shall show her to you and make her speak.'

'Please make her speak,' requested the king eagerly.

¹⁷ MN.III.4.5 Cūlakammavibhaṅgasuttaṃ (MN 135 The Short Discourse on the Analysis of Kamma).

¹⁸ DN.III.3 Cakkavattisīhanādasuttaṃ (DN 26 The Discourse on the Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel).

The bodhisatta commanded, 'Let the two who are busy rolling a lump of cow-dung come forth before the king!' And they came forward. The bodhisatta pointed to one of the beetles and said, 'This is your late queen Uparī, O King! She has just come out of this lump of cow dung, following her husband the dung beetle. Look and see.'

'What! My queen Uparī a dung beetle? I don't believe it!' cried the king.

The king could not yet be convinced. Those who do not believe in the law of kamma and its results are unable to accept that a high-born and beautiful human being can descend so low as to become a dung beetle in the next existence. Even these days, when the teachings of the Buddha are quite prevalent, there are some people who still hold the belief that once one is a human being, one cannot be reborn in a plane of existence inferior to that of the human realm. Outside of the Buddha's Dispensation, there are many more who hold similar wrong views.

According to the Buddha, so long as a being has not attained the state of a Stream-Enterer (*Sotāpanna*), such a being may descend even from a superior plane of existence to the four woeful states. It does not matter whether one is the king of devas. One's state of rebirth after death depends on how mindful one is, and on which object appears at the near-death moment. If one's mind is directed to wholesomeness when dying, one may be reborn as a human being or a deva. If one's mind is directed to unwholesomeness when dying, or if the object that appears at the near-death moment is an unwhole-

some object, then one will be reborn in one of the four woeful states.

What do you think? Is it easy to direct one's mind to wholesomeness when one is dying? Or better to ask: Is it easy to direct one's mind to a wholesome object such as the in and out breath in one's daily practice, let alone when one is dying? Is it easy?

Even now when we are healthy, strong, and have mindfulness, many of us cannot direct our mind to our meditation object. When we die, we have no strength, and we may be seriously ill. We have no mindfulness. How can we then direct our mind towards wholesomeness? Reflect on this carefully!

The Buddha gave the following simile in many discourses:

The Buddha, taking a little bit of soil on his fingernail, asked a question: 'Bhikkhus, which is more, the soil that I have taken on my fingernail or the great earth?'

The bhikkhus gave an answer:

Venerable Sir, the little bit of soil the Blessed One has taken on His fingernail is infinitely minute, in comparison to the soil in the great earth.¹⁹

¹⁹ SN.V.12.11.1-6 Manussacutinirayasuttaṃ (SN 56.102-107 The Discourse on Passing Away as Humans, and the following).

The Buddha goes on to explain that, in the same way, when humans pass away, few are those who will be reborn as human beings or as devas. Many are those who will fall to the four woeful states at the break-up of the body after death.

Human beings enjoy sensual pleasures. The Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, if there were no gratification in form, beings would not become enamoured with it; but because there is gratification in form, beings become enamoured with it.

The Buddha then continued to speak thus:

If there were no fault and danger in form, beings would not experience revulsion towards it; but because there is fault and danger in form, beings experience revulsion towards it.²⁰

No matter how much we may enjoy sensuality, and no matter how long we may enjoy it, it will not be enough. If we enjoy sensuality, we become heedless. Moreover, in the pursuit of sense pleasures, we accumulate many unwholesome deeds along the way. They are the cause of suffering in one of the four woeful realms at the break-up of the body after death. These are the faults and dangers inherent in sensuality.

²⁰ SN.III.1.3.7 Tatiyāssādasuttaṃ (SN 22.28 The Third Discourse on Gratification).

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If we know how to enjoy sensuality, we should know how to enjoy our near-death, too. How can we enjoy our near-death? Without preparation, it is impossible. In our daily life, we need to make and maintain a schedule to train our mind. We should train ourselves to direct our mind to a wholesome object. As an analogy, nobody forgets to wash the face and brush the teeth every day. That is our daily routine. That is a habit. However, almost no one remembers to practise meditation at least once a day. Through continuous training of the mind and the establishing of this habit, we can direct our mind to wholesomeness when dying. We may then be reborn as a human being or as a deva. If our mind is directed to unwholesomeness when dying, we will be reborn in one of the four woeful states.

The king, however, had never heard of this Dhamma and so could not believe what the hermit told him. Therefore, the bodhisatta had to apply his supernormal powers to make the female dung beetle talk about herself.

‘I will make her speak, O King!’ said the bodhisatta.

‘Please, sir!’ the king responded eagerly.

The bodhisatta gave her the ability to speak. ‘Upari!’ he called out.

‘What is it, holy Sir?’ she asked in a human voice.

‘What was your name in your former life?’ the bodhisatta asked her.

‘My name was Uparī, sir, the chief queen of King Assaka,’ she replied.

‘Whom do you love now, King Assaka or your present husband, the dung beetle?’

‘Sir, in my former existence as a human being, I lived with my former husband, the king, enjoying sensual pleasures in this very garden. Now my memory is impaired and confused by rebirth. I now lead a new life in this world of dung beetles. King Assaka has nothing to do with me now.’ She went further: ‘If it were possible, I would even kill King Assaka now and smear the feet of my husband, the dung beetle, with the blood flowing from King Assaka’s throat!’

This she said in the midst of the king’s retinue. She then uttered this verse in a human voice:

Once with the great King Assaka,
who was my husband dear,
Both loving and beloved, I walked
about this garden here.
But now new sorrows and new joys
have made the old ones flee;
Now dearer far than Assaka
my beetle is to me.

When King Assaka heard this, he immediately felt deep shame, guilt, and remorse. Right away, he ordered the queen’s body to be removed from under his bed. The king then paid respects to the bodhisatta and returned to the palace. Soon he got himself

another queen and resumed his reign over the country dutifully and happily.

Craving

The king had deceived himself. So too do all of us deceive ourselves. We have enslaved ourselves to this thirst of craving. To fulfil the demands of craving, the king had clung to the memory of Queen Uparī. When in death she slipped from his grasp, he felt shaken and lost. He could not give up his attachment to her or his craving for her. When there is the slightest hope of getting something from someone, people show traces of craving or attachment. When the hoped-for dream of a long life together is lost through death or other forms of separation, people adjust themselves sooner or later to living alone or living with someone else. We now see how the king re-adjusted his life after the bodhisatta's revelation. When he found out that his late queen had totally forsaken him, he replaced her with a new queen. We see, too, that there is really no true love between man and woman, only attachment. That is why I have just said, 'The king had deceived himself. So too do all of us deceive ourselves. We have enslaved ourselves to this thirst of craving.'

When one dies, conception takes place immediately. There is no interval whatsoever between the death consciousness and the first consciousness moment of the next life. Conception will take place somewhere in the brahmā realm, deva realm, human realm, or in one of the four woeful states. Unlike human beings, devas do not need to go through a nine or ten

month gestation period in a mother's womb. At the moment of their appearance in a deva realm, they are born fully formed with adult bodies.

While rebirth has already taken place immediately after the death consciousness, those left behind are still lamenting, weeping, and wailing. Be aware of this! The departed one has forgotten us and is happy somewhere else, enjoying the sensual pleasures there.

This we have just seen. When Uparī was a queen, she enjoyed the life of a queen. When she was born as a female dung beetle, she enjoyed that life too. If one were to be reborn as a pig, a dog, a cow, a dung beetle, a monkey, a fish, or anything whatsoever, one would also enjoy that particular life. Do you accept this? It is futile, therefore, to keep mourning for someone who has passed away and taken rebirth immediately somewhere else. It is just tormenting oneself. It is a waste of time. The deceased is happy with a new life.

That is why the Buddha said, 'This craving seeks delight here and there.' It is this craving that delights here and there. It can immediately adjust itself to its new abode, and perhaps to a new partner.

So, we now know and see how this craving seeks delight here and there.

The Laying Down of the Burden

Let me come to the last part of this talk. The Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, I will teach you about the burden, the carrier of the burden, the taking up of the burden, and the laying down of the burden. Listen to that....

I have explained the burden, the carrier of the burden, and the taking up of the burden. Now I am going to explain 'the laying down of the burden'. How can we lay down the burden? We need to know how!

The Buddha asked:

What, bhikkhus, is the laying down of the burden? It is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it. This is called the laying down of the burden.

How can we bring about the cessation of craving? Bringing about the cessation of craving is making an end of suffering. In other words, how can we make an end of suffering?

The Dhamma penetrated by the Buddha is immensely profound. To penetrate this profound Dhamma requires a systematic, step-by-step practice. This is the only way to penetrate the Dhamma. This systematic approach is the sure way to Enlightenment. Otherwise, it is impossible to gain Enlight-

enment. When the Buddha attained Enlightenment all by Himself, He, too, had to practise systematically, step by step. After His Enlightenment and over the course of the next forty-five years, He taught extensively. He gave talks in many different places. I shall quote here from one of His talks entitled ‘The Peaked House’.²¹

The Four Noble Truths

On one occasion, the Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, if anyone were to say thus, ‘Without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering as it really is, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering as it really is, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, without having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, I will completely make an end of suffering’ – it would be impossible.

If anyone were to say thus, ‘After having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering as it really is, after hav-

²¹ SN.V.12.5.4 Kūṭāgārasuttaṃ (SN 56.44 The Discourse on the Peaked House).

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ing made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, I will completely make an end of suffering’ – it would be possible.

Just as, bhikkhus, if anyone were to say thus, ‘Having built the lower storey of a peaked house, I will erect the upper storey,’ would it be possible? Yes, it would be possible.

Then the Buddha said:

In the same way, if anyone were to say thus, ‘After having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering as it really is, I will completely make an end of suffering’ – it would be possible.

The Buddha then continued:

Bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand, “This is suffering.” An exertion should be made to understand, “This is the origin of suffering.” An exertion should be

made to understand, “This is the cessation of suffering.” An exertion should be made to understand, “This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.”

We all know that we must penetrate the Four Noble Truths: the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. It is impossible to completely make an end of suffering without having made the breakthrough to the Four Noble Truths. If we want to end suffering, we must know and see the Four Noble Truths. To know and see the Four Noble Truths, we must systematically practise meditation under the guidance of a qualified teacher. Otherwise, it is impossible to penetrate the Four Noble Truths. You might then ask, ‘Who is a qualified teacher?’ The Buddha is a qualified teacher. We are merely disciples of the Buddha. We teach meditation according to His doctrine.

According to the discourse ‘The Peaked House’, only after having made the breakthrough to the Noble Truth of Suffering and the other three Noble Truths is it possible for us to make an end of suffering.

What is the Noble Truth of Suffering? According to another discourse entitled ‘Aggregates’, the Buddha gave an answer:

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And what, bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering? It should be said: The five aggregates subject to clinging.²²

In the discourse ‘The Burden’, the Buddha said:

And what, bhikkhus, is the burden? It should be said: The five aggregates subject to clinging.

If we relate the above discourses, we can see differences in wording but not in meaning. If we classify the five aggregates in another way, we can also call them ultimate materiality and ultimate mentality. The clinging aggregate of materiality is ultimate materiality. The other four clinging aggregates are ultimate mentality.

Thus, to be able to make an end of suffering, we must first break through to the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering. In other words, we must know and see the five aggregates subject to clinging, or the five clinging aggregates. We must know and see the burden. We must know and see ultimate mentality and materiality.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, there is no man, no woman, no deva, and no brahmā. There is only ultimate mentality and materiality. Yet we say, ‘I am a man,’ ‘I am a woman.’ How is it then that there is no man and no woman? In the conventional sense, of course, there is man and woman.

²² SN.V.12.2.3 Khandhasuttam (SN 56.13 The Discourse on the Aggregates).

But ultimately, this is not true. To comprehend the Buddha's meaning and fully understand this, we must break through to the Noble Truth of Suffering. That is to say, we must know and see the five clinging aggregates. This means that we must penetrate ultimate mentality and materiality. But how can we know and see ultimate mentality and materiality?

The Buddha instructed meditators to develop concentration. In the *Mahāvagga* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha said:

Bhikkhus, develop concentration. A bhikkhu who is concentrated knows and sees things as they really are.

And what things does he know and see as they really are? He knows and sees as it really is, 'This is suffering.' He knows and sees as it really is, 'This is the origin of suffering.' He knows and sees as it really is, 'This is the cessation of suffering.' He knows and sees as it really is, 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.'²³

²³ SN.V.12.1.1 *Samādhisuttaṃ* (SN 56.1 The Discourse on Concentration, also known as the *Samādhi Sutta*).

The Three Trainings

To know and see the First, Second, and Third Noble Truths, we must cultivate and practise the Fourth Noble Truth, that is, the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path is comprised of the Three Trainings: The training of morality (*sīla*), the training of concentration (*samādhi*), and the training of insight (*paññā*).

Sīla

Right Speech

Right Action

Right Livelihood

Samādhi

Right Effort

Right Mindfulness

Right Concentration

Paññā

Right View

Right Thought

We take up the training of morality (*sīla*) to cultivate purity of bodily and verbal actions. With the training of concentration (*samādhi*) we acquire purity of mind temporarily. And we undertake the training of insight (*paññā*) to free ourselves from suffering.

In order to develop concentration, we must practise samatha meditation. Do you know how many different samatha meditation objects the Buddha taught? Forty. Of these forty, thirty lead to absorption concentration while the remaining ten lead only to access concentration.²⁴ So, we can say that the Buddha taught forty different samatha meditation objects for the cultivation of two different but relat-

²⁴ Vsm.I.3.47 ‘Cattāḷisa Kamma-ṭhāna Vaṇṇanā’ (Path of Purification p.108 ‘Description of Forty Types of Meditation Subjects’).

ed types of concentration: Access concentration and absorption concentration.

Right Concentration is one of the factors appearing in the Buddha's comprehensive Noble Eightfold Path. What is Right Concentration? The Visud-dhimagga (The Path of Purification) explains that Right Concentration is access concentration and the eight attainments or jhānas.²⁵ These correspond to Right Concentration. Right Concentration is very important. Without Right Concentration, it is impossible to penetrate things as they really are.

When we undertake the training of concentration, we must practise with any one of the forty meditation objects with which we can attain access concentration or absorption concentration. At Pa-Auk Tawya Meditation Centre, we usually teach beginners mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*). When their concentration develops, they attain full absorption concentration, which is very profound and powerful. However, some new meditators are unable to develop concentration through mindfulness of breathing. As an alternative, we teach them four elements meditation. With four elements meditation, meditators can attain access concentration.

We must all try our very best to develop either access or absorption concentration, so that we can

²⁵ Vsm.II.18 'Nāma Rūpa Pariggaha Kathā' (Path of Purification p. 609 'Discussion of the Apprehension of Mentality-Materiality'): '*Cītavissuddhi nāma saupacārā aṭṭha samāpattiyo*' – 'Purification of Consciousness (Right Concentration) is namely, the eight attainments together with access concentration'.

The Three Trainings

penetrate ultimate reality. Without access or absorption concentration, we will not be able to see ultimate mentality and materiality. Simply put, this means that we will not be able to break through to the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering. We will not be capable of knowing and seeing things as they really are.

There are many at Pa-Auk who have already penetrated ultimate mentality and materiality. They understand the importance of developing concentration in order to know and see ultimate reality as it really is. These meditators have seen things as they really are. There are also many meditators at Pa-Auk who have yet to penetrate ultimate mentality and materiality. Nevertheless, they continue to practise conscientiously towards that goal.

According to the Buddha, this whole world is composed of very tiny particles. In order for meditators to know and see these particles directly, the Buddha taught four elements meditation. What are the four elements? They are earth, water, fire, and wind. All living and non-living phenomena are made up of these four elements. When meditators can discern these four elements clearly in their whole body from head to toe and toes to head, again and again, they will experience their body as a block of four elements. When this happens, the perception of 'being' (*sattasaññā*) temporarily disappears. Meditators then no longer see the body as a 'being' but are now able to correctly perceive the body as a group of four elements. As their concentration improves, the body gradually begins to emit a grey light which becomes brighter and brighter. Next, the body turns into a

block of light. If meditators continue to discern the four elements in that block of light, it finally breaks down into very small particles that are rapidly arising and passing away.

It is a profound experience to see these small particles, yet the meditator is still seeing only the most subtle concept of conventional materiality. He or she is still not seeing ultimate materiality. In each particle there are at least eight aspects of materiality. These eight aspects are the derivative elements of colour, odour, flavour, and nutritive essence as well as the primary elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. It is only when meditators can analyse these eight different aspects of materiality, one by one, in each particle, that they can truly start to know and see ultimate materiality. According to the Abhidhamma, there are in total twenty-eight types of ultimate materiality. At Pa-Auk we usually teach meditators to analyse materiality according to the six sense doors and forty-two parts of the body.

Once meditators can discern the four elements internally, in their own bodies, and directly know and see ultimate reality, they then move on to discern the ultimate materiality externally. When they are able to discern the four elements in inanimate things like buildings, they will see only small particles. When they discern four elements in trees, or even in space, they will likewise see only small particles. Everything becomes the same. At this point men, women, trees, and all other conventional forms cease to exist. Everything and everyone is seen as groups of small particles. When they are able to discern the ultimate materiality in these small particles,

The Three Trainings

it will lead to the attainment of true knowledge. It is the knowledge of knowing that there are really no men or women. There is just ultimate materiality.

However, when meditators open their eyes again, what do they see? Once again they see men and women, and they suffer for seeing them. Why do they suffer so? It is because of their defilements. So if you don't want to see men and women, don't open your eyes again. You must keep your eyes closed all the time. Otherwise, attachment, craving, and clinging will arise, and you will take on new kamma. So are you going to keep your eyes closed all the time from now on?

The meditator's next step is to know and see the ultimate mentality which arises based on the heart-base materiality. When they are successful in this practice, they directly know and see the mental process arising in a series of mind moments with consciousness and all the associated mental factors present in each mind moment. There are six types of mental processes, namely, eye-door, ear-door, nose-door, tongue-door, body-door, and mind-door process. We teach meditators to discern the mental formations of these mental processes, both internally and externally. Meditators then see things just as the Buddha described them. They see that men and women truly do not exist. Only ultimate mentality and materiality exist. When meditators are able to analyse the ultimate mentality and materiality from different aspects as instructed by the Buddha, they

know and see the First Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering, or ‘the burden’.²⁶

Once meditators know and see ultimate mentality and materiality, they go on to work with dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) as the object of their practice in order to directly know and see the origins of materiality and mentality, which is suffering. In other words, they practise to know and see cause and effect. Are you not curious to know what you were in your past lives? Where did you come from? And where are you going? Don’t you wish to know where you came from? And don’t you also wish to know where you are going? We have now been born as human beings due to good kamma. This is the least you should know.

The Buddha said, ‘Nothing happens without causes.’²⁷ In this present life, all of us go on accumulating many deeds, both good and bad. These deeds may give their results in a future life. In this way, we continue our journey according to our kamma. The central teaching of the Buddha is the law of kamma. It is fundamental that we understand this law.

We call ourselves Buddhists. What makes someone a Buddhist? Buddhists are those who have faith in the

²⁶ For details regarding the ways to know and see the Four Noble Truths, read the books authored by the Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, such as *The Workings of Kamma* and *Knowing and Seeing*.

²⁷ MN.I.4.8. Mahātaṇhāsankhayasuttaṃ (MN 38.1 The Great Discourse on the Destruction of Craving): ‘*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati*’ – ‘When this is, that is; when this arises, that arises’.

The Three Trainings

Triple Gem and kamma and its results. But almost all other ordinary people have some doubts about kamma and its results. Is it true that there is past, present, and future? Is it really true that good actions bring good results, and bad actions bring bad results? To remove these doubts, all meditators need to know kamma and its results by discerning their past and future existences in the ultimate sense. That is, they need to discern cause and effect in the five clinging aggregates of past and future. This means that they need to discern cause and effect in the past, present and future five clinging-aggregates. When they have discerned cause and effect, they know and see the Second Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering.

According to the discourse ‘The Burden’, knowing and seeing the Second Noble Truth is knowing and seeing craving. This is to know and see cause and effect, to know and see that it is this craving which takes up the burden.

Liberation

Meditators who have practised dependent origination and have directly discerned cause and effect then progress to insight meditation (*vipassanā*). Now they are able to discern the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. That is,

1. Mentality-materiality along with their causes and effects perish as soon as they arise. That is the impermanence characteristic (*anicca lakkhaṇa*).

2. Mentality-materiality along with their causes and effects are subject to constant arising and perishing. That is the suffering characteristic (*dukkha lakkhaṇa*).
3. Mentality-materiality, being characterised by impermanence and suffering, can have no stable or indestructible essence. That is the non-self characteristic (*anatta lakkhaṇa*).

In this way, meditators examine the nature of ultimate mentality and materiality, along with their causes and effects, in past, present, and future, internally and externally, again and again. When their insight matures, Path Knowledge arises. They see Nibbāna! At that point, mentality and materiality cease, and they know and see the Third Noble Truth, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

With the arising of Path Knowledge, their defilements are eradicated step by step. With the achievement of the first Path, they attain the first fruit of Enlightenment and become Stream Enterers (*Sotāpanna*) . As soon as that happens, the three defilements of identity view, doubt, and attachment to wrong practices²⁸ are forever eradicated.²⁹

²⁸ *Sīlabbata-parāmāsa* in Pāli. It is the attachment driven by the wrong view that certain practices are necessary and sufficient for the attainment of purification. In ancient times, there were many ascetics and heretics who adopted the mode of practice of mimicking the habitual behaviour of dogs and cows, misguided by the wrong view that these practices would lead to purification. Nowadays, there are many seemingly Buddhist practices that are not true to the original teaching of the Bud-

However, the set of five aggregates remain a burden. Stream Enterers will still have five aggregates. Therefore they are still carrying the burden. Nevertheless, they have already eradicated the three defilements of identity view, doubt, and attachment to wrong practices. Consequently, they will not be re-born in any of the four woeful states ever again. They have gained complete freedom from having to carry the burdens of new existences as animals, hungry ghosts, or hell beings.

When we compare the burdens of human beings and animals, we see that they are very different. Usually, human beings have higher intelligence than animals. Human beings know how to do wholesome deeds, how to avoid doing unwholesome deeds, and how to take righteous actions. Animals do not know how to do wholesome actions. Human beings' hopes for improvement can be realised, whereas animals' hopes for improvement are rarely realised. Human beings can manage their way of life to create a brighter future for themselves by doing good. They can practise the training of morality, the training of concentration, and the training of insight. Animals

dha, which specifies that the Noble Eightfold Path in its entirety is the only practice that leads to purification. These pseudo-Buddhist practices can be considered as wrong practices (*silabbata*). With the realisation of the first Path Knowledge, the Stream-Enterer knows with absolute certainty that no other practices outside of the Noble Eightfold Path lead to purification. Hence he has removed permanently and without remainder any attachment to wrong practices.

²⁹ Vsm.II.22.830 'Pāhatabba Dhamma Pahāna Kathā' (Path of Purification p. 714 'Discussion on the Abandoning of the Things to Be Abandoned').

do not know how to do so. Animals know only three things – eating, sleeping, and mating. There are also many people in the world who know only these three things. If they know only these three things, are they much different from animals? They can, in fact, be called animal-like human beings. Such people will have to carry new, heavier burdens.

Now we shall continue talking about how to lay down the burden.

Having attained Stream-Entry, meditators may continue to practise insight meditation by contemplating the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. In this way, they contemplate the nature of ultimate mentality and materiality, along with their causes and effects. When their insight matures, they realise Nibbāna by Once-Returner Path Knowledge (*Sakadāgāmi Maggañāna*), which lessens the strength of lust, hatred, and ignorance.

With continued deep contemplation and the maturing of insight again, they realise Nibbāna by Non-Returner Path Knowledge (*Anāgāmi Maggañāna*). This completely destroys hatred and sensual lust.

Next, they realise Nibbāna by Arahant Path Knowledge, which completely destroys the remaining defilements, such as pride, ignorance, restlessness, craving for form realms, and craving for formless realms. Arahants thus eradicate all defilements without remainder. They are completely liberated from craving.

Liberation

With liberation comes profound contentment. Liberation is void of craving. The person who ‘wants this’ and ‘wants that’ is no more. A new person comes into being. For such a person, ‘what had to be done has been done’. For such a person, ‘what had to be laid down has been laid down’. He will not be taking up any new burden. He has successfully accomplished the laying down of his burden.

May you be such a person.

May all beings practise *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, which are the prerequisites for liberation.

May all beings be able to successfully accomplish the laying down of their burden.

May all beings be able to reach the yonder shore of Nibbāna.

May all beings be blessed with the attainment of the perfections and be able to proclaim, ‘What had to be laid down has been laid down.’

Let’s stop here by reciting the stanza recited by the Buddha at the end of His discourse, ‘The Burden’.

*Bhārā have pañcakkhandhā,
Bhārahāro ca puggalo;
Bhārādānaṃ dukkhaṃ loke,
Bhāranikkhepanaṃ sukhaṃ.*

A burden indeed is the five aggregates,
And the carrier of the burden is the person.
Taking up the burden in the world is suffering.
Laying down of the burden is blissful.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Abbreviations

About the Footnote Citations

Footnotes cite the Pāli sources first, from the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka, followed by the most common citation format for the English translations.

Abbreviations for Sources Cited

- Dhp Dhammapada
(The Verses of Dhamma)
- DN Dīgha Nikāya
(Collection of Long Discourses)
- Jā Jātaka
(Birth Stories)
- MN Majjhima Nikāya
(Collection of Middle Length Discourses)
- PvA Peta Vatthu Aṭṭhakathā
(Commentary to the Accounts of the Hungry Ghosts)
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya
(Collection of Connected Discourses)
- Vsm Visuddhimagga
(The Path of Purification)³⁰

³⁰ Page numbers refer to the Path of Purification, translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Buddhist Publication Society, fourth edition, 2010).

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Buddhavandanā

Paying Respect to The Buddha

*Buddho Bodhāya deseti, danto yo damathāya ca;
Samathāya santo dhammaṃ, tiṇṇo’va taraṇaya ca;
Nibbuto nibbānatthāya, taṃ lokasaraṇaṃ name*

The Buddha, the Enlightened One, the refuge of the three worlds, the arahant (Nāga), having known the Four Noble Truths by Himself and wishing to enlighten others that deserve to be enlightened like Himself; having tamed Himself with respect to the six faculties, and wishing to tame others that are fit to be tamed like Himself; having attained peace Himself, and wishing others that are worthy might attain peace like Himself; having crossed over to the other side of the ocean of saṃsāra, and wishing others that are worthy might cross over to the other shore like Himself; having extinguished the fire of defilement at the four stages, and wishing others that are worthy might extinguish the fire of defilement like Himself; out of compassion, he expounded the glorious Dhamma to devas and humans for forty-five years. To Him, The Buddha, the Nāga, the refuge of the three worlds, I pay homage physically, verbally and mentally in all humility with joined palms raised.

May the Noble Wishes of all beings be fulfilled.

May all be well and happy.

*Hitvā kāme pabbajjimsu
Santo gambhiracintakā
Te tumēpya anusikkhāvo
Pabbajitā supesalā*

Good people in the ancient days in both the present and past world cycles, destined to be omniscient Buddhas, private Buddhas, and Noble Ones, had reflected deeply on the true nature of life and unhesitatingly gave up all their living and non-living possessions, which are objects of sensual craving for the vast majority of people and are prone to various harms and dangers. Seeing the inherent faults in those possessions, they chose to renounce the world and to live ordained lives in seclusion in order to undertake the training and practice of morality, concentration, and insight meditation, diligently and ardently.

May good people of the present days who have come into existence and are imbued with the perfection of renunciation, emulate the great people of those ancient days and unhesitatingly renounce the world with hearts founded upon moral purity. May these good people live ordained lives in seclusion and be able to undertake the training and practice of morality, concentration, and insight meditation, diligently and ardently.

May all know and see the Dhamma in this very life.

May all be free from suffering.

About Bhikkhu Revata

Bhikkhu Revata was born in 1971 in Mawlamyine, Myanmar. He received his bachelor's degree from Yangon University in 1994 and independently taught computer technology for five years. He was ordained as a Theravāda bhikkhu at Pa-Auk Tawya in 1999, with the Most Venerable U Āciṇṇa, the Pa-Auk Sayadaw, as his preceptor. He has studied the Pāli scriptures and commentaries and speaks Burmese, English, and Thai.

After practising meditation under the guidance of the Most Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw, Sayadaw U Cittara, and Sayadaw U Sīla, in 2002 he began teaching meditation to local and foreign yogis, both ordained and lay, and is currently an assistant teacher of the Pa-Auk Sayadaw. He is responsible for teaching local and foreign yogis and for training successful practitioners to teach meditation themselves.

A distinguished meditator and teacher, he has taught extensively both in Myanmar and abroad. He has conducted meditation retreats in China, Indonesia, South Korea, Latvia, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

He has written four books in his native language, three of them in collaboration with the Most Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Like the present work, other collections of Bhante's teachings and Dhamma talks have been printed in English under the titles of *Awaken, O World!* (2006), *The Disciple Within* (2008), and *Bearers of the Burden* (2011). His talks have been translated into Korean, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

Other teachings from Bhikkhu Revata in e-book, audio, and video formats can be found on the Internet at www.revata-bhikkhu.org.