

# Questions and Answers 1

Question 1: Thanks for the handout, ‘an Introduction to Ānāpānasati’ I received yesterday. I read it carefully and tried to understand the method, so today I made rapid progress and obtained stronger mindfulness, concentration and confidence. The other days, during a sitting, I had a moment of forgetting my body and being aware of only the breath passing the touching point. That feeling frightened me because I had never had such an experience before. Sister Dipankara told me it was a good experience. Today I got two similar but longer experiences, which lasted for a few minutes and made me feel very calm. There was golden light in front of me and I concentrated on only the breath passing the touching point. However, I became very easily frightened by noise, such as a cough. Even when I was walking and concentrating on the breath, I was easily frightened by the sight of other meditators when they appeared at the turning of the way. I am not a timid person, but how come I was frightened for several times today? What should I do?

Answer 1: Your sitting experience is good. It is very important for you to continue practising in this same way. Being sensitive to noise is natural when a meditator’s concentration begins to improve, because sound is like a thorn to concentration. You should try as much as you can to neglect noise and any other objects and concentrate only on the breath. When your concentration becomes deep and powerful, you will not be disturbed by all these troubles any more.

Getting frightened easily by sounds or sights is due to unwise attention, *ayoniso-manasikāra*, to these objects. You unknowingly pay attention to them as something dreadful and unwholesome mental states, such as fear, occur. All you have to do is to always keep wise attention, which now means to pay attention to only your meditation object, the breath.

Question 2: I am a beginner and I seldom did sitting meditation before. What posture can make me sit longer and longer, without arousing the desire to get up because of pain, soreness and numbness after only a few days of sitting?

Answer 2: At the beginning of an intensive meditation retreat, pain, soreness and numbness occur to almost every meditator. If you keep patient and practise perseveringly, you will gradually be accustomed to long sittings and many

discomforts will disappear.

Suitable sitting postures differ from person to person. For tall, thin people, sitting in a lotus pose may be very easy. For short, fat people, sitting half-cross-legged or with legs laid side-by-side may be more suitable. You must try and check for yourself what sitting posture is the most comfortable one.

One important thing is to keep the body frame balanced and not to bend to one side all the time. For example, you may sit with right leg before left one in one session, and exchange their positions in the next session.

Question 3: When I really cannot bear sitting any longer, may I get up to walk? If I get up in this way, can I still improve my ability for long sitting?

Answer 3: When you cannot bear sitting any more, you may stand and continue concentrating on the breath. It is not suitable to do walking meditation during sitting sessions. Whether your ability for long sitting will improve or not depends on your diligence and perseverance. If you do sitting meditation often and regularly, usually you will be able to sit for longer and longer time.

## Questions and Answers 2

Question 1: I eat a lot and sleep a lot. But why do I still feel very sleepy while doing sitting meditation and very hungry at night?

Answer 1: Sleepiness occurs because of physical or mental causes. For physical causes, sleepiness may be due to imbalance of four elements in your body. When earth element or water element is too strong, you feel sleepy, because these two elements are heavy in nature. On the contrary, when fire element or wind element is too strong, you have difficulties to fall asleep. Four elements in our bodies are always changing. We cannot expect them to be always in a balanced and harmonious state, especially when we change to a new environment or a new life style. However, the imbalance is usually temporary. The body will adjust itself. To prevent falling asleep during meditation, you may sleep for a while after a meal.

For mental causes, when your mind is not energetic enough, you will be overwhelmed by sloth and torpor and feel sleepy. The way to cope with sloth and torpor is to arouse energy and interest in practicing meditation. You may reflect on the suffering of birth, aging, illness, death, woeful planes, round of rebirths in the past and future to arouse sense of spiritual urgency for meditating. Then you may reflect on the great benefits gained from practicing the Dhamma: such as getting a peaceful dwelling here and now, a happy destination in the future and ultimate liberation from all suffering. By reflecting in this way, you will be able to arouse effort and interest in meditation. You may also apply seven ways we have announced to remove sleepiness, such as rubbing your face, limbs and body, watching light, standing, washing your face and doing walking. Gradually you will succeed in developing deeper and deeper concentration and be able to overcome sleepiness.

Feeling hungry is due to strong digestive fire in your body. Another possibility is because you have not been accustomed to living without a dinner. Gradually you will get accustomed to this kind of living and feel all right.

Question 2: What are the definitions of the five aggregates?

Answer 2: The five aggregates are aggregates of materiality, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness. The aggregate of materiality includes eleven

types of materiality, i.e. past, future and present, internal and external, gross and subtle, inferior and superior, far and near materialities. In the same way, eleven types of feeling are the aggregate of feeling; eleven types of perception are the aggregate of perception; eleven types of formations are the aggregate of formations; eleven types of consciousness are the aggregate of consciousness.

Another type of categorization is thus: Twenty-eight types of materiality, including four primary elements and twenty-four derived materialities, are the aggregate of materiality. Six types of feeling, i.e. feelings of visible objects, sounds, smells, odours, tangible objects and mind objects are the aggregate of feeling. Or pleasant, unpleasant and neutral feelings are the aggregate of feeling. Six types of perception, i.e. perceptions of visible objects, sounds, smells, odours, tangible objects and dhamma objects are the aggregate of perception. Fifty types of mental formations except feeling and perception are aggregate of formations. Six types of consciousness, i.e. eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness and mind consciousness, are aggregate of consciousness.

This is just a brief introduction. To thoroughly understand five aggregates, you have to study the Abhidhamma completely under the guidance of a skillful teacher. And you should practice samatha and vipassanā meditations to really discern them.

Question 3: Does one violate the precept against killing if one pours water with worms onto earth?

Answer 3: If the worms die accordingly, one violates the precept against killing. Actually one should not pour water with worms onto earth, but should pour it into a suitable vessel, a pond or a river.

Question 4: Is telling others that they may go to buy living fish on fishing boats a behavior of assisting in killing?

Answer 4: It depends on the teller's intention. If he intends others to buy living fish and set the fish free, it is a meritorious behavior. However, if he intends others to buy living fish to kill and eat, he is assisting in killing.

Question 5: If a bhikkhu cut bamboo belonging to others in the mountain, does he offend against a precept? What precept does he violate? How to confess that offence?

Answer 5: If the bhikkhu has no intention to steal, for example, he thinks that the bamboo is ownerless, he does not commit a stealing, but commits a pācittiya, expiation, offence for damaging plants. However, after he realizes that the bamboo belongs to others, he must try to compensate the owners for their losses. If he decides not to do so, he commits a stealing.

If he knows that the bamboo belongs to others in the first place and cuts it anyway without permission from the owners, he commits a stealing besides the pācittiya offence. The severity of stealing depends on the value of the bamboo he cuts. If it is worth one māśaka or less, he commits a dukkaṭa, wrongdoing, offence. If its value lies between one māśaka and five māśakas, he commits a thullaccaya, grave offence. If it is worth five māśakas or more, he commits a pārājika, defeated offence.

If he commits a thullaccaya, pācittiya or dukkaṭa offence, he should confess it to another bhikkhu. In addition, he is bound to compensate the owners for the bamboo he has cut. If he commits a pārājika offence, he is no longer a bhikkhu. There is no way to confess a pārājika offence.

Question 6: If a layman violates five precepts, can he be ordained?

Answer 6: Usually he can, except that he has committed a very severe crime, such as killing his own father or mother, killing an arahant, violating a bhikkhunī, etc. Before a qualified layman is ordained as a bhikkhu, he must take ten precepts to become a novice monk first.

Question 7: When a bhikkhu commits a Pārājika offence, he automatically loses his bhikkhuhood. Can he be ordained again?

Answer 7: He cannot be ordained as a bhikkhu again in this life. However, if he admits the offence immediately and takes off his robes, he can be ordained as a novice monk, sāmaṇera. If he conceals the offence and pretends to be a bhikkhu, he cannot even be ordained as a novice monk.

Question 8: What qualifications should one possess to go forth from the household life into homelessness?

Answer 8: To be ordained as a bhikkhu, he should have an aspiration to escape from the round of rebirths. Furthermore, the following factors must be fulfilled:

He must not have killed his father, his mother, an Arahant, wounded the Buddha with evil intention, caused schism in the order of Saṅgha, committed sexual intercourse with a bhikkhunī or sāmaṇerī, must not have fixed wrong view, which means the view of denying kamma and its effect. He must be a free and law-abiding man, not a prisoner, slave, or robber. He must be free from debt, exempt from government service, and without stubborn diseases, i.e. leprosy, boils, eczema, tuberculosis and epilepsy. He must be at least twenty years old and has got his parents' permission for ordination. He must possess an alms bowl and three robes. He must not be a eunuch, a hermaphrodite or one who has pretended to be a novice or a bhikkhu. He should not have committed a pārājika offence in his previous bhikkhuhood. He should not have converted to other religion from a novicehood or bhikkhuhood and then come back for ordination again. He should not be deformed or disfigured. He should not be blind, deaf or mute.

Question 9: How to escape from the suffering of illnesses? How to cope with diseases? Please the Sayadaw instruct me out of compassion.

Answer 9: Once Radha Bhikkhu asked the Buddha: 'Venerable Sir, what are illnesses?' the Buddha replied: 'Five aggregates are illnesses.' So as long as there are still five aggregates, there are still illnesses. For example, when any of the four elements becomes excessive, diseases occur. The imbalance of four elements may be due to previous kamma, mind, fire element or nutriment. Among these four causes, we can try to change mind, fire element and nutriment for the better, but not previous kamma. Since five aggregates are illnesses, in order to escape from illnesses you must escape from five aggregates. To escape from five aggregates, you should practice diligently to attain Nibbāna. In Nibbāna, there are no five aggregates, no illnesses and no suffering.

To cope with diseases, it is advisable that you take suitable food and medicine and live in a quiet environment with suitable weather conditions. One very important thing is that you should try to cultivate higher or powerful consciousnesses, adhicitā, which mean samatha, vipassana, Path and Fruition consciousnesses. Powerful consciousnesses help decrease or remove the suffering of diseases. For example, our Buddha got very severe back pain ten months before his Parinibbāna. He practiced rūpasattaka vipassanā, the material septad, and arūpasattaka vipassanā, the immaterial septad, and then entered arahattaphalasaṃpatti, arahant fruition attainment. Because his vipassanā

meditation was very strong and powerful, his arahattaphalasangāṃhāra was also very strong and powerful. Emerging from that attainment, he made a determination: 'From today until Parinibbāna day, may this affliction not occur.' He had to practice in this way and make the determination every day to prevent that disease. So, to cope with disease, you should also cultivate powerful consciousnesses that are concomitant with concentration, insight knowledge, Noble Path Knowledge and Noble Fruition Knowledge.

## Questions and Answers 3

Question 1: How does the Sayadaw think about donating one's own dead body to a hospital for anatomic studies? Will it affect one's being reborn in a happy plane?

Answer 1: Donating one's own dead body is a weak wholesome action. Although it is a weak one it is still beneficial, because even the intention to certainly perform a wholesome action brings good results. It is mentioned in the Scripture that: "Kusalesu dhammesu cittupādamattampi bahupakāraṃ vadāmi" – "in the case of wholesome dhammas, even only having them appeared in the mind is very beneficial, I say." The intention to certainly donate something is a wholesome prior intention (pubbacetanā). If one keeps such intention even for only five minutes before the donation, many wholesome kammās have been accumulated in one's mind. They can produce good results. There are three kinds of intention: intention before action, during action and after action. All of them produce results when mature.

If one still has attachment to any existence and if the kammic force of this wholesome prior intention of donating one's dead body becomes mature at one's near death moment, the kammic force will produce one's rebirth in a happy plane. However, this kind of opportunity rarely occurs, because that wholesome prior intention is quite weak. Usually it may become mature and produce a result in one of the future lives.

Question 2: Does the effect of being poor and susceptible to diseases in this life have any connection with causes in previous lives? If it does, is this view fatalism or eternalism (sassatadiṭṭhi)?

Answer 2: In this case, you must distinguish the difference between life in human world and that in deva worlds and hells. Deva worlds and hells are called kamma-phalūpa-jīvi-bhūmi, the plane of existence where beings get their livelihood through kamma-results; while human world is called uṭṭhāna-phalūpa-jīvi-bhūmi, the plane of existence where beings get their livelihood through efforts. Beings in deva worlds or hells naturally enjoy or suffer from their pleasant or unpleasant livelihoods due to their previous kammās, without any effort to gain them. However, human beings do not get their livelihoods only due to previous kammās, but also due to their present

effort and wisdom. So kammic force, effort and wisdom all affect the welfare of human life.

Taking being rich as an example, if one has mature good kammic force for being rich and enough effort and wisdom, one will become very rich and enjoy one's wealth.

However, if one has only mature good kammic force but not enough effort and wisdom, even if one has inherited a lot of wealth one will eventually lose all of it and become poor. A good example is Mahādhanasetthīputta who lived in time of our Buddha. He and his wife each inherited eighty koṭi, i.e. eight hundred million dollars. However, they lost all the wealth and became beggars. Besides, although he had enough good kammic force to support him to attain arahantship in that life, he did not put forth effort and apply wisdom to practice the Dhamma. Therefore he died as a poor worldling.

If one has not mature good kammic force for being rich but exerts effort and applies wisdom to earn money, one may not become very rich but may enjoy a certain standard of comfortable living. Therefore effort and wisdom are more important than kammic force.

A story of three fish may give us a clearer understanding: Once a fisherman caught three fish on the Ganges River. One fish believed in effort; one believed in kammic force; the other believed in wisdom. The fish that believed in effort thought that it could escape just by effort, so it tried hard to jump again and again. The fisherman was annoyed and hit it heavily with his oar; it died. The fish that believed in kammic force thought that if it had a kammic force to escape from being killed, that kammic force would produce its effect automatically. So it lay quietly on the deck of the boat, waiting for its good fortune, without any desire to exert effort. The third fish, which believed in wisdom, thought that it could escape by taking wise actions. So it always observed surrounding conditions to see whether the time to take action had come. The fisherman rowed his boat towards the bank. When the boat came near the bank, he strode over to the bank with one leg and kept the other leg on the boat. At that moment, he unknowingly made a small opening in his fishing net. The third fish quickly jumped out of the net through that opening, fell into water and swam back to the Ganges River immediately. From this story, we understand that wisdom is the most important one among these three factors.

As for illness, there are four possible causes, i.e. kammic force, mind, fire element, and food. So not all diseases are caused by kammic force. Buddhism is a religion of reason, vibhajja-vāda, which teaches that when there is a cause, there is an effect; when there is not a cause, there is not an effect. Such a right

view of cause and effect is neither fatalism nor eternalism. If you believe that your fate is already fixed and cannot be changed; you are a fatalist. According to the Buddha's teaching, when a kammic force is mature and ready to produce an effect, that effect is fixed and cannot be changed. But if a kammic force has not matured, its effect is not fixed and can be changed. Ven. Mahāmoggallāna was a good example. His previous bad kammic force of trying to kill his parents in a previous life became matured before his parinibbāna, so he was beaten to the extent that all his bones were broken into pieces. Although he had become an arahant, he could not change that bad resultance. But since he had destroyed all defilements, all the other kammic forces, except those that matured in that life, could no longer produce results. So he escaped from the round of rebirths after parinibbāna.

If you believe that your previous life and present one are the same, i.e. the same person came from previous life to this life, or there is a soul coming from one life to another, you have the wrong view of eternalism. According to the Buddha's teaching, there is not a soul or self. Your previous life was made up of materiality and mentality, which were arising and passing away from moment to moment. Your present life is also made up of ever-changing materiality and mentality. They are not the same things. There is not an unchangeable 'you' or person. However, the kammic force accumulated in previous life produces the present five clinging aggregates. This is the causal relationship between the previous cause and the present effect. Therefore, Buddhism is neither fatalism nor eternalism.

Question 3: After a meditator has completed samatha and vipassanā practices, should he practice other meditation or review samatha and vipassanā? If he should review, what stage should he begin with? Or he may review in his own way? Is there a fixed principle for reviewing?

Answer 3: According to the Buddha's teaching, one completes vipassanā practice only after one attains arahantship. Before you become an arahant, you have to keep on practicing samatha and vipassanā. It is mentioned in the Sattatṭhānakusala Sutta of Saṃyutta Nikāya that every arahant constantly dwells his mind in one of three practices, investigating saṅkhāra dhammas, formations, as impermanent, suffering, or non-self by way of eighteen elements, by way of twelve sense bases and by way of dependent origination. The commentary calls these three practices satata-vihārī, constant abodes. Furthermore, an arahant may practice samatha and vipassanā to have the peaceful dwelling in jhāna and

the bliss of Nibbāna in Fruition Attainment. If he wants to enter the attainment of cessation, nirodhasamāpatti, he has to practice both samatha and vipassana systematically.

Some meditators have practiced all the important courses for vipassanā meditation and therefore claim that they have completed vipassanā practice. However, this is not correct. They have to keep on practicing samatha and vipassanā repeatedly and check their meditation experiences carefully in accordance with the Scripture. It may take them many years to review and check in this way until they are sure of their accomplishment. So it is improper to boast one's meditation accomplishment to others. Generally speaking, there are two ways to review vipassana practice. One is to begin with udayabbayañāṇa stage; the other is to begin with whatever stage where their insight knowledge is not clear enough. A very important principle in reviewing is that you must follow correct ways of samatha and vipassanā practice taught by the Buddha.

## Questions and Answers 4

Question 1: What is meditation cetanā? While meditating, does one need meditation cetanā? Could the Sayadaw please explain with examples?

Answer 1: When a meditator is practicing samatha or vipassanā meditation with joy and associated with wisdom, there are thirty-four mental formations arising in his mental processes. Among these thirty-four mental formations one is cetanā (volition) named samatha or vipassanā cetanā, or as what you have called it meditation cetanā. Meditation cetanā means the volition urging the concomitant mental formations toward samatha or vipassanā object. If this volition is strong, one is able to meditate well. On the other hand, if the volition is weak, one cannot exert much energy in his practice. So strong meditation volition is important.

However five controlling faculties are even more important here. They are sadhā (faith), vīriya (effort), sati (mindfulness), samādhi (concentration), and paññā (wisdom). In the beginning of practice, faith means the confidence of the fact that ānāpānasati practice leads to jhāna. Effort means exerting sufficient energy to know the breath. Mindfulness means non-forgetfulness or keeping the mind on the breath. Concentration means one-pointedness of the mind, which is fixing the mind on the breath. Wisdom means knowing the breath clearly. These five controlling faculties are predominant among these thirty-four mental formations. If they are strong and balanced, the meditator will progress in leaps and bounds. When ānāpāna nimitta appears due to deep concentration, then faith is the confidence believing that concentrating on ānāpāna nimitta leads to jhāna. Effort is putting forth energy toward ānāpāna nimitta. Mindfulness is constantly keeping the mind on the ānāpāna nimitta. Concentration is one-pointedness of the mind in ānāpāna nimitta. Wisdom is penetrating into ānāpāna nimitta.

These five controlling faculties are important in vipassanā as well. In vipassanā meditation, faith means confidence in vipassanā practice that it is the way for realization of Nibbana, the end of all suffering. Effort means to apply energy to penetrate the four noble truths, or putting forth energy to penetrate the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering, which are both objects of vipassanā. They are also called formations (sankhara). Non-forgetfulness or keeping the mind with these formations is called mindfulness. Fixing the mind on these formations without any wavering is called concentration. Penetrating

into these formations and knowing their impermanence, suffering and non-self nature is called wisdom.

These five controlling faculties arise together with volition. Without volition five controlling faculties cannot arise. If volition is strong five controlling faculties will be strong, too. If volition is weak five controlling faculties will be weak, too. So one needs strong meditation cetanā in one's practice. But the most essential factors for success are the balancing of five controlling faculties.

If you have no meditation cetanā or you have doubt in the practice, you will not have any achievement in your meditation.

Question 2: What is mindfulness? When mindfulness is present, is clear comprehension certainly present?

Answer 2: There are four types of mindfulness (sati):

1. mindfulness of body (kāyānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna),
2. mindfulness of feeling (vedanānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna),
3. mindfulness of mind (cittānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna),
4. mindfulness of Dhamma (dhammānupassanā satipaṭṭhāna).

Therefore, mindfulness means keeping the mind on the body, feeling, mind and Dhamma without forgetfulness. It has the characteristic of sinking into the object like a stone thrown into a pond. It does not simply float on top like a gourd on water. So mindfulness makes itself and concomitant mental formations sink into the object of meditation. When you are practicing anapanasati, your mindfulness must be sunk into the breath. Mindfulness has the function of not forgetting the object of meditation. It constantly keeps the mind on the object without any interruption. The manifestation of mindfulness is guarding the mind or guarding the meditation object so that no defilement will creep in. A mental state associated with mindfulness will not succumb to any defilement. Another manifestation of mindfulness is to keep the attention face to face with the object. The proximate cause of mindfulness is strong and firm perception on meditation object or four foundations of mindfulness.

There are four types of clear comprehension:

1. Clear comprehension of purpose (sāttḥaka sampajañña);
2. Clear comprehension of suitability (sappāya sampajañña);
3. Clear comprehension of resort (gocara sampajañña); it refers to any of forty subjects of samatha meditation,

4. Clear comprehension of non-delusion (asammoha sampajañña); it is clear comprehension of ultimate materiality and mentality and their causes. So clear comprehension of non-delusion includes all vipassana meditation.

Here mindfulness is usually concomitant with clear comprehension (sampajañña). Clear comprehension is also known as wisdom or insight knowledge. When a meditator's mindfulness and wisdom are both strong and powerful, he will easily succeed in samatha and vipassana meditations.

When mindfulness is strong, concentration is also strong. When both of them are strong, clear comprehension will also be strong. To the contrary, when mindfulness is weak, concentration is also weak. At that time clear comprehension cannot arise. That is why the Buddha taught in the Samādhi Sutta of Sacca Saṃyutta in this way: 'Bhikkhus, you should cultivate concentration. A bhikkhu with concentrated mind sees dhammas as they really are.' From here we can know that concentration is the proximate cause of clear comprehension. However, without mindfulness concentration cannot occur. This is why clear comprehension is usually absent when mindfulness and concentration are weak.

Question 3: What are the relations and differences among these four: the breath between nostrils and upper lip, feeling of that breath, sensation of that breath, and the touching sensation between that breath and skin? Why should one take only breath as an object?

Answer 3: Breath is a group of materiality. If you practice four elements meditation on your breath systematically, you will see that it is made up of numerous tiny material particles, kalāpas. Feeling and sensation of that breath are the same thing, vedanā, which is a mental factor. Touching sensation is essentially body consciousness, kāyaviññāṇa. Consciousnesses and mental factors are both mentality. So they are different from breath, which is materiality.

The breath between nostrils and upper lip is the object of ānāpānasati kammaṭṭhāna, mindfulness-of-breathing meditation; while feeling, sensation and touching sensation are not. If one concentrates only on the breath, one is able to develop deep concentration and nimitta will appear soon. Concentrating on the nimitta perfectly, one will attain jhāna. However, if one concentrates on feeling, sensation or touching sensation, one cannot develop enough concentration for anapana nimitta to appear and therefore cannot attain jhāna.

This is why one should take only breath as one's object.

Question 4: While one is jogging or climbing a mountain and is using one's mouth to breathe, which breath should one concentrate on?

Answer 4: For mindfulness-of-breathing meditation, a meditator's object is only the breath as it touches the nostrils or upper lip. The commentary does not mention that the breath passing the mouth is also an object of mindfulness-of-breathing meditation. So when one is breathing through one's mouth and cannot perceive the breath touching the nostrils or upper lip, one should keep one's mind at these places and try to be aware of the breath. If one is careful and patient enough in doing so, eventually one will be able to discern very subtle breath there.

Question 5: After one is ordained, if one's parents have difficulties in making a living, should one go back home to take care of them?

Answer 5: The Buddha permits bhikkhus to take care of their parents. A bhikkhu may share his alms food and other requisites with his parents. He takes care of them in this way without the necessity to disrobe.

Question 6: If one gains a profit through evading taxes or helping others to evade taxes, does one commit a stealing? If a layperson breaks five precepts, how should he or she confess and keep five precepts again?

Answer 6: According to Vinaya Piṭaka, evading taxes or helping others to evade taxes is one among twenty-five kinds of stealing. If one does so, one commits a stealing no matter one is a monk or a layperson. If a bhikkhu steals properties worth one pāda (five māsa) or more, he commits a pārājikā offence, and is no longer a bhikkhu.

If a layperson breaks five precepts, he loses them, so it is not necessary for him to confess his offence. However, he should make a resolution not to break five precepts again. He may receive five precepts again in front of a novice monk, a bhikkhu or a Buddha image, and then keep them carefully.

Question 7: What is Dhammacakkhu? What is sotāpanna?

Answer 7: In the Dhammacakkavattana Sutta and some other Suttas,

dhammacakkhu means sotāpattimagga, Path of the Stream-enterer. But in some Suttas, Dhammacakkhu means anāgāmicimaggā, Path of Non-returner. In the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta the Dhammacakkhu of the Venerable Koṇḍañña was sotāpattimagga knowledge. In Brahmāyu Sutta the Dhammacakkhu of Brahmāyu was anāgāmicimaggā knowledge.

Sotāpanna is the first of four kinds of Noble Ones, who realize Nibbāna. ‘Sota’ means stream, the stream of Noble Ones. ‘Āpanna’ means ‘entered upon.’ So a sotāpanna is a stream enterer, i.e. one who has entered the stream of Noble Ones.

Question 8: If one feels that all one’s greed, hatred and delusion have been destroyed, can one claim oneself as an arahant? Or how should one check oneself?

Answer 8: We must know that there are three stages of defilement:

1. Anusaya kilesa: the stage of dormancy where defilements remain as a latent tendency at the base of the material and mental continuum;
2. Pariyuṭṭhāna kilesa: the stage of obsession when defilements come to surface as a factor of active consciousness; and
3. Vītikkama kilesa: the stage of transgression when defilements motivate unwholesome actions of body or speech.

Arahants have completely destroyed all these three stages of defilements. For worldlings, when no defilements arise in their mind, they may feel that all their defilements have been destroyed. However, this may happen just because they have temporarily suppressed defilements of obsession stage (pariyuṭṭhāna kilesa) and transgression stage (vītikkama kilesa) with powerful insight knowledge or jhāna. Actually they have not yet attained any Noble Path Knowledge, so there are still defilements of dormancy stage (Anusaya kilesa) in them. As long as the defilements of dormancy stage have not been uprooted, when they come to contact with some inducing factors, defilements of the other two stages can occur again.

A famous example is the Mahānāga Mahāthera. He was the teacher of Dhammadinna arahant and practised Samatha and Vipassanā meditation for more than sixty years. But he was still a worldling (puthujjana). Although he was still a worldling, no defilements arose in his mind within those sixty years, because of strong and powerful Samatha and Vipassanā practices. And his precepts were exceedingly pure. Due to these, he thought to himself: ‘I have

attained arahantship.’

One day, his disciple Dhammadinna arahant was sitting in his own daytime quarters, and he thought: ‘Has our teacher, the Mahānāga Mahāthera who lives at Uccavalika, brought his work of asceticism to its conclusion, or not?’ He saw that his teacher was still a worldling and that if he did not come to understand this fact, he would also die a worldling. He rose up into the air with supernatural power and alighted near the Mahānāga Mahāthera, who was sitting in his daytime quarters. He paid homage to him, doing his duty, and sat down at one side. The Mahāthera asked: ‘Why have you come unexpectedly, friend Dhammadinna?’ Ven. Dhammadinna replied ‘I have come to ask questions, Venerable Sir’. ‘Ask friend. If we know, we shall say’. Ven. Dhammadinna asked a thousand questions. The Mahānāga Mahāthera replied to each question without hesitation.

‘Your knowledge is very keen, Venerable Sir; when was this state attained by you?’ asked Ven. Dhammadinna. The Mahāthera replied ‘Sixty years ago, friend’. – ‘Do you practise concentration, Venerable Sir?’ – ‘That is not difficult, friend.’ – ‘Then create an elephant, Venerable Sir.’ The Mahānāga Mahāthera created an elephant all white. ‘Now, Venerable Sir, make that elephant come straight at you with his ears outstretched, his tail extended, putting his trunk in his mouth and making a horrible trumpeting.’ The Mahāthera did so. Seeing the frightful aspect of the rapidly approaching elephant, he sprang up and made to run away. Then Ven. Dhammadinna put out a hand, caught him by the hem of his robe, and said ‘Venerable Sir, is there any timidity in one whose cankers are destroyed?’

Then the Mahāthera realized that he was still a worldling. He knelt at the Venerable Dhammadinna’s feet and said: ‘Help me, friend Dhammadinna.’ – ‘Venerable Sir, I will help you; that is why I came. Do not worry.’ Then he expounded a meditation subject to him. The Elder took the meditation subject and went up onto the walk, and with the third footstep he reached arahantship.

Therefore, it is not good to claim one’s attainment, because you may have overestimated yourself like the Mahānāga Mahāthera. You had better check yourself carefully according to the Buddha’s teaching. For example, a sotāpanna has completely destroyed the wrong view of individuality (sakkayaditthi), doubt, jealousy, selfishness and grasping after rites and rituals. He has unshakable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. He will not break precepts intentionally even at the risk of his life and even in a dream. Although he may make mistakes in actions, speeches or thoughts unintentionally, he is unable to conceal them but confesses them to others. He

has completely destroyed the wrong view of a soul or self because he has thoroughly understood the dependent origination and the impermanent nature, suffering nature and non-self nature of formations. There are two types of self: supreme self and living self (parama-atta and jīva-atta). Supreme self means a creator. Living self means a self going from one existence to another or a self which ceases completely after death. So sometimes if you find yourself having an intention to break precepts or you have doubt in triple gems or still hold wrong view that materiality and mentality is I or myself, or believe in a creator, you cannot have become a sotāpanna, let alone an arahant. A sakadāgāmi has lessened the strength of lust, hatred and delusion. An anāgāmi has uprooted all hatred and sensual desire. So he will not get angry, worried or fearful. He has no more attachment to any sensual pleasure. Even as a layman, he gives up all money, gold, silver, jewels, etc. If you still get angry, worried or fearful or if you accept money, gold, etc., you cannot have become an anāgāmi. When you come into contact with any of six desirable sensual objects, i.e. desirable sensual visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects and mental objects, if even the slightest craving arises in you, you cannot have become an anāgāmi. When you come into contact with any of six undesirable sensual objects, if even the slightest irritation arises in you, you cannot have become an anāgāmi. An arahant has destroyed all the remaining defilements, including pride, restlessness, slough, torpor and delusion. He has no longing for any existence. His faculties are serene and impeccable. Confronting vicissitudes of life (gain and loss, fame and defame, praise and condemn, happiness and suffering) his mind remains unmoved, stainless and secure. He always sees the impermanent, suffering or non-self natures of formations. Only when he pays attention to concepts does he know that ‘this is a man, a woman, father, son, etc.’ If you still have attachment to your own life or pride in your achievements, you cannot have become an arahant. If you do not have such a constant powerful mindfulness as to always seeing the impermanent, suffering or non-self natures of formations, you cannot have become an arahant.

These are only a few examples of examining yourself. You should study the Theravada Scripture carefully under a skilled teacher to have a thorough understanding of how to check your meditation experience.

**Question 9: Why should the Buddha go for alms?**

**Answer 9:** Actually, it is not necessary for the Buddha to go for alms. However, the Buddha goes for alms for the benefits of beings. Furthermore, the Buddha

wants to show the example of Noble Ones. Going for alms is one part in the four-fold of the noble family (ariyavaṃsa) of recluses. As a recluse, one must be content with the four requisites, i.e. food, robes, abode and medicine. Going for alms is a good practice to be content with food. You have no expectations of what food to get and have to be content with whatever food you have been given. Going for alms also helps to reduce one's pride. A bhikkhu realizes that he depends on others for four requisites. Therefore there is nothing he is able to be proud of. So going for alms helps a bhikkhu's training of mind.

## Questions and Answers 5

Question 1: What is meditation cetanā? While meditating, does one need meditation cetanā? Could the Sayadaw please explain with examples?

Answer 1: When a meditator is practicing samatha or vipassanā meditation with joy and associated with wisdom, there are thirty-four mental formations arising in his mental processes. Among these thirty-four mental formations one is cetanā (volition) named samatha or vipassanā cetanā, or as what you have called it meditation cetanā. Meditation cetanā means the volition urging the concomitant mental formations toward samatha or vipassanā object. If this volition is strong, one is able to meditate well. On the other hand, if the volition is weak, one cannot exert much energy in his practice. So strong meditation volition is important.

However five controlling faculties are even more important here. They are sadhā (faith), vīriya (effort), sati (mindfulness), samādhi (concentration), and paññā (wisdom). Let us take mindfulness-of-breathing meditation as an example. In the beginning of practice, faith means the confidence of the fact that ānāpānasati practice leads to jhāna. Effort means exerting sufficient energy to know the breath. Mindfulness means non-forgetfulness or keeping the mind on the breath. Concentration means one-pointedness of the mind, which is fixing the mind on the breath. Wisdom means knowing the breath clearly. These five controlling faculties are predominant among these thirty-four mental formations. If they are strong and balanced, the meditator will progress in leaps and bounds.

When ānāpāna nimitta appears due to deep and stable concentration, then faith is the confidence believing that concentrating on ānāpāna nimitta leads to jhāna. Effort is putting forth energy toward ānāpāna nimatta. Mindfulness is constantly keeping the mind on the ānāpāna nimatta. Concentration is one-pointedness of the mind in ānāpāna nimitta. Wisdom is penetrating into ānāpāna nimitta.

Strengthening and balancing these five controlling faculties are important in vipassanā as well. In vipassanā meditation, faith means confidence in vipassanā practice that it is the way for realization of Nibbāna, the end of all suffering. Effort means to apply energy to penetrate the four noble truths, or

putting forth energy to penetrate the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering, which are both objects of vipassanā. They are also called formations (saṅkhāra). Non-forgetfulness or keeping the mind on these formations and their three general characteristics, impermanence, suffering and non-self, is called mindfulness. Fixing the mind on these formations and their three general characteristics without any wavering is called concentration. Penetrating into these formations and knowing their impermanent, suffering and non-self nature is called wisdom.

These five controlling faculties arise together with volition. Without volition five controlling faculties cannot arise. If volition is strong five controlling faculties will be strong, too. If volition is weak five controlling faculties will be weak, too. So one needs strong meditation cetanā in one's practice. But the most essential factors for success are the strengthening balancing of five controlling faculties.

If you have no meditation cetanā or you have doubt in the practice, you will not have any achievement in your meditation.

Question 2: In a previous question-and-answer, the Sayadaw explained that if a bhikkhu stole properties worth five māsakas (or one pāda) or more, he committed a pārājikā offence. Could the Sayadaw explain how many U.S. dollars do five māsakas equal?

Answer 2: Nowadays it is very difficult to point out exactly how many U.S. dollars five māsakas equal? The commentary says that in ancient Indian currency a kahāpaṇa equaled four pādas and a pāda equaled five māsakas. According to subcommentaries, such as the Vajirabuddhi-ṭīkā, a kahāpaṇa or pāda was made up of gold, silver and brass. However we cannot know the exact proportions of these three components in a kahāpaṇa or a pāda.

According to Myanmar traditional way of calculating, we use a kind of seed called 'Rwegīsī' for measuring. Gold shopkeepers also use Rwegīsī seeds to weigh gold. There are two types of Rwegīsī, big one and small one. A small Rwegīsī seed is a little bigger than a rice grain. A big Rwegīsī seed is two times the weight of a small one. The weight of four big Rwegīsī seeds or eight small ones is equal to that of a māsaka. This kind of measuring is believed to have been handed down from ancient India.

Anyway, the best policy is not to commit any stealing. Our ancient Elders

advised us to view others' properties as poisonous snakes. Unless the owner permits us to take up his things to have a look, we do not even touch them. It pays to keep precepts carefully, since it prevents one from the disturbance of remorse.

Question 3: Could the Sayadaw please explain the meaning of the four measureless states, 'mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā'? How should one practice them? And what is mettā bhāvanā?

Answer 3: According to Visuddhimagga, mettā, loving-kindness, means the desire of bringing welfare and good to beings. It is the way to purity for one who has much ill will. Karuṇā, compassion, means the desire of removing suffering from beings. It is the way to purity for one who has much cruelty. Muditā, appreciative-joy, means the gladness at beings' success. It is the way to purity for one who has much aversion (arati), i.e. unhappiness to see others' successes. Upekkhā, equanimity, means the impartial neutrality towards beings. It is the way of purity for one who has much greed.

They are called 'measureless states' because their objects are measureless beings. Instead of being developed only towards a single being or beings in an limited area, they should be pervaded towards beings in the whole universe. This is why they are called measureless states.

Mettā bhāvanā means the meditation subject of developing loving-kindness towards beings. It is the first one of the four measureless states.

One who wants to develop these four should practice loving-kindness first, then compassion, appreciative-joy and equanimity. To begin with, you develop loving-kindness towards yourself with the following four thoughts: May I be free from danger, may I be free from mental pain, may I be free from physical pain, and may I be well and happy. After your mind has become soft and gentle, then proceed to a respectable person of your own gender. First, you recollect his or her smiling face or whole body, then send loving-kindness with one of four thoughts: May this good person be free from danger, may this good person be free from mental pain, may this good person be free from physical pain, and may this good person be well and happy. Develop strong and powerful loving-kindness towards him until you attain the first, second, and third mettā jhānas with that thought, then with each of the other three thoughts. In this way, you develop loving-kindness towards ten respectable people of your own

gender one by one, then ten dear people, ten neutral people and ten disagreeable people.

After you have succeeded in attaining the third mettā jhāna with each of them as an object, you have to break down the barriers between yourself, dear people (including respectable people), neutral people, and disagreeable people. First, develop loving-kindness towards yourself for a short time, then towards a dear person, then a neutral person, and then a disagreeable person, attaining up to the third mettā jhāna with each of the last three. Then for the second round, you practice in the same way but change to another dear, neutral and disagreeable persons. Then for the third round, you change to still another dear, neutral and disagreeable persons ... Practice in this way continuously until you eventually break down barriers between these four types of people. At that time your loving-kindness for them are completely equal, without any distinction.

Having broken down the barriers, you may pervade loving-kindness towards all beings in various ways, beginning from beings in a small area, gradually extending to the whole universe and then in ten directions. After you succeed in loving-kindness meditation, you may develop compassion, appreciative-joy, and equanimity meditations following the same procedures. This is only a brief introduction. For detailed instructions, please refer to the Visuddhimagga, Light of Wisdom and Knowing and Seeing. Or when you reach this stage, I will teach you how to practice them systematically.

Question 4: Some one is endowed with ‘special eye-faculty,’ being able to see beings in the ghost world. He even sees that a dying person has only out-breathing but no in-breathing. Is it because he had practiced meditation in his previous life that he has this ability?

Answer 4: We called this kind of ability ‘kammajiddhi,’ the will power produced by kamma. That kamma may be their meditation practice in previous lives. It is also possible that they have come to be reborn in human world from a deva or brahma world, so they are able to see what ordinary people cannot see.

Question 5: Must every meditator begin with ānāpānasati meditation, but not any other subject of meditation? Can one develop deep and stable concentration by practicing four elements meditation? How many successful cases are there for four elements meditation?

Answer 5: Not every meditator has to begin with ānāpānasati. One may begin with any of the forty samatha meditation subjects mentioned in the Visuddhimagga. The Buddha taught different meditation subjects to suit different temperaments of meditators. For example, the Buddha taught ānāpānasati meditation to suit those who have restless temperament. Four elements meditation is suitable for those who have sharp wisdom. Loving-kindness meditation is suitable for those who have hatred temperament. Asubha meditation is suitable for those who have a lot of lust. However, according to our experience, most meditators succeed by beginning with either ānāpānasati or four elements meditation, because they have practiced either one or both of these two in previous lives.

No doubt, one can develop deep and stable concentration by practicing four elements meditation. It is a samatha meditation subject taught by the Buddha himself. If you have strong faith in the Buddha, you should also have strong faith in four elements meditation. To practice four elements meditation, first you discern twelve characteristics of four elements one-by-one in your body. These twelve are hardness, roughness, heaviness and softness, smoothness, lightness, flowing and cohesion, heat and coldness, supporting and pushing. Having been familiar with the twelve characteristics, you should divide them into four groups i.e. four elements. Keep on focusing on four elements in your body generally and developing concentration. When concentration improves, your body becomes white. You should concentrate on four elements in that white body. Then concentration improves further, the white body turns transparent like an ice block or glass. You should concentrate on four elements in that transparent body. When your concentration becomes deep and stable, brilliant light will emit from that transparent body.

When the brilliant light lasts for about half an hour, you may direct your attention to thirty-two parts of your body. With the assistance of deep and stable concentration of four elements meditation, you will be able to discern thirty-two parts both in your body and in beings in external world. Then you may practice colour kasinas by concentrating on various colours of thirty-two parts. You may develop your concentration up to the fourth jhana with kasina meditation, and up to neither-perception-nor-nonperception jhana step-by-step after removing kasina sign. You may succeed in all other samatha meditation subjects easily, too. Then you may proceed to vipassanā meditation and attain various levels of insight knowledge.

Another way is that you may go directly to discern materiality, which is the beginning stage of vipassanā, under the assistance of the brilliant light of four elements meditation. Therefore, beginning with four elements meditation, one will succeed in both samatha and vipassanā meditations. It is very helpful to understand the benefits of four elements meditation in this way, especially for those who meet with great difficulties in ānāpānasati meditation.

There are numerous successful meditators who begin with four elements meditation. We cannot say exactly which is more, the number of successful cases of ānāpānasati or that of four elements meditation. Anyway, for your own benefits, we suggest you to have strong faith in every meditation subject taught by the Buddha and practice it following correct instructions.

## Questions and Answers 6

Question 1: How does one know that one is concentrating on the breath or on the touching point? Sometimes one confuses these two. How to prevent such confusion?

Answer 1: The touching point is your skin. It is still. Breath is the air touching that skin. It is moving inwards or outwards and appears on top of the touching point. You may differentiate them in this way.

For clearer understanding, I should like to give you a simile. Suppose there is a log placed on the ground and a man saws it with a saw. The cutting place of the log by the saw is like the touching point on your nose tip or upper lip. It is still. The saw's teeth moving forwards and backwards are like the breaths coming in and going out. The saw's teeth that touch the log are like the breaths that touch your nose tip or upper lip. Just as the man watches the saw's teeth where they touch the log, without giving attention to the saw's teeth as they approach or recede, so you concentrate on the breaths where they touch the aforementioned points without following them into the nostrils or outside. You should differentiate the breath and touching point in this way. Whenever you get confused, please remember the implications of this simile.

Question 2: What are the good manners laypeople should have towards monks or nuns?

Answer 2: Laypeople should show respect to monks and nuns, listen to the Dhamma from them, provide them four kinds of requisites and practice the Dhamma taught by them. 'Practicing the Dhamma' means laypeople must keep at least five precepts and practice samatha and vipassanā meditations.

It is mentioned in the Pāthika Sutta of Dīgha Nikāya that a layperson should divide his wealth into four portions: He puts away one portion in case there should be contingencies. He uses another two portions for his business and the other one portion for daily expenses. He takes a part from the last portion to offer four kinds of requisites to monks or nuns.

Question 3: How can one become a good meditator?

Answer 3: To become a good meditator, the most important thing is to set a right goal of practicing meditation. If your goal is right, your attitude towards meditation will also be right. In that case, you will always go on the right way, without being misled astray. What is the right goal of meditation? The Buddha proclaimed it clearly in many places when he granted an ordination to a man. He said: ‘Come, bhikkhu! Well proclaimed is the Dhamma. Live the holy life for the utter destruction of suffering.’ So the utter destruction of suffering is your right goal of meditation. To achieve this goal you must destroy all defilements because they are causes of suffering. There are ten types of defilements, i.e. greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, wrong view, doubt, sloth, restlessness, lack of moral shame, lack of moral dread. You should never forget that your duty is to destroy all of them. However, before your meditation is far advanced, you should at least try to prevent from being overwhelmed by them.

To destroy all defilements you should diligently undertake the three-fold training, the training of morality, the training of concentration and the training of wisdom. However, on the course of meditation there are many traps and wrong ways. If you are not careful you may fall into a trap of defilements and be led astray on account of a partial success in meditation. That is why the Buddha expounded the Cūlasāropama Sutta (in Majjhima Nikāya). He said:

“Here some clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness, considering: ‘I am a victim of birth, aging, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of suffering can be known.’ When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: ‘I have gain, honour, and renown, but these other bhikkhus are unknown, of no account.’ So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than gain, honour, and renown; he hangs back and slackens. I say that this person is like the man needing heartwood, who came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and passing over its heartwood, its sapwood, its inner bark, and its outer bark, cut off its trigs and leaves and took them away thinking they were heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will not have been served.”

This is the first type of meditator mentioned in that Sutta. Being contented

with and proud of gain, honour, and renown, he falls into a trap of defilements and is misled astray. Therefore he cannot attain the real goal of meditation. Then the Buddha explained the second type of meditator thus:

“He acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than gain, honour, and renown; he does not hang back and slacken. He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: ‘I am virtuous, of good character, but these other bhikkhus are immoral, of evil character.’ So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of virtue; he hangs back and slackens.”

The Buddha says that this type of meditator is like one who mistakes outer bark for heartwood. Being contented with and proud of the attainment of virtue, he falls into a trap of defilements and is misled astray. Therefore he cannot attain the real goal of meditation. Then the Buddha explains the third type of meditator thus:

“He acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled ... He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue, but his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of virtue; he does not hang back and slacken. He achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: ‘I am concentrated, my mind is unified, but these other bhikkhus are unconcentrated, with their minds astray.’ So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of concentration; he hangs back and slackens.”

The Buddha says that this type of meditator is like one who mistakes inner bark for heartwood. Being contented with and proud of the attainment of concentration, he falls into a trap of defilements and is misled astray. Therefore he cannot attain the real goal of meditation. Then the Buddha explains the

fourth type of meditator thus:

“He acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled ... He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue, but his intention is not fulfilled ... He achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration, but his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than the attainment of concentration; he does not hang back and slacken. He achieves knowledge and vision. He is pleased with that knowledge and vision and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: ‘I live knowing and seeing, but these other bhikkhus live unknowing and unseeing.’ So he arouses no desire to act, he makes no effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision; he hangs back and slackens.”

The Buddha says that this type of meditator is like one who mistakes sapwood for heartwood. Being contented with and proud of the achievement of knowledge and vision, he falls into a trap of defilements and is misled astray. Therefore he cannot attain the real goal of meditation. The commentary explains that ‘knowledge and vision’ here refers to the divine eye, the ability to see subtle forms invisible to normal vision. Then the Buddha explains the fifth type of meditator thus:

“He acquires gain, honour, and renown. He is not pleased with that gain, honour, and renown, and his intention is not fulfilled ... He achieves the attainment of virtue. He is pleased with that attainment of virtue, but his intention is not fulfilled ... He achieves the attainment of concentration. He is pleased with that attainment of concentration, but his intention is not fulfilled ... he achieves knowledge and vision. He is pleased with that knowledge and vision, but his intention is not fulfilled. He does not, on account of it, laud himself and disparage others. He arouses desire to act and he makes an effort for the realization of those other states that are higher and more sublime than knowledge and vision; he does not hang back and slacken.”

This meditator is neither contented with nor proud of the aforementioned achievements. He does not fall into any trap of defilements and always goes on the right way. He keeps on practicing samatha and vipassanā meditations systematically. Finally he attains the real goal of meditation. So the Sutta says:

“And his taints are destroyed by seeing with wisdom.” ‘Taints’ and ‘defilements’ are synonyms. This passage means that this meditator has destroyed all defilements with his arahant Path Knowledge. The Buddha describes this type of meditator thus:

“I say that this person is like a man needing heartwood, seeking heartwood, wandering in search of heartwood, who came to a great tree standing possessed of heartwood, and cutting off its heartwood, took it away knowing it was heartwood; and so whatever it was he had to make with heartwood, his purpose will have been served.”

Then the Buddha concludes his Dhamma talk thus:

“So this holy life does not have gain, honour, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment of virtue for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit. But it is this unshakeable deliverance of mind that is the goal of this holy life, its heartwood, and its end.”

The commentary explains that ‘unshakeable deliverance of mind’ is the fruit of arahantship, which is the result of the arahant Path Knowledge. Thus, if you sincerely follow the example of the fifth type of meditator here, some day you will also be able to destroy all defilements and obtain the unshakeable deliverance of mind. This is the way you becomes a good meditator.

## Questions & Answers 7

Question 1: What is 'jhāyati'? Does one need 'jhāyati' while meditating? Could the Sayadaw explain with examples?

Answer 1: 'Jhāyati' is a verb. It has two meanings. One is to burn the defilements. The other is to penetrate or fix the mind deeply to the meditation object (to burn the defilements). Its noun is 'jhāna.' If one concentrate on one's meditation object deeply, one may attain jhāna. There are two types of jhāna: mundane jhāna and supramundane jhāna. Mundane jhāna is divided into two types, that is, samatha jhāna and vipassanā jhāna. This is an explanation of jhāna in a broad sense. Supramundane jhānas remove defilements permanently, while mundane jhānas remove defilements only temporarily. Both ways of removing defilements are called burning defilements. Therefore while meditating, you need to apply 'jhāyati' to attain 'jhāna.' I would like to explain with examples.

When one is practicing samatha meditation and entering the first jhāna, five jhāna factors are present in one's mental formations. These jhāna factors are called samatha jhāna. They remove defilements for quick a period of time, such as one hour, two hours, one day, two days, and etc. When one is practicing vipassanā, contemplating formations as impermanent, suffering or non-self, one's insight knowledge is usually accompanied by five jhāna factors. These five jhāna factors are called vipassanā jhāna. They also remove defilements for quick a period of time. A good example is the Mahānāga Mahāthera. His samatha and vipassanā jhānas removed defilements for sixty years.

When one's vipassanā insight knowledge becomes mature, one will realize Nibbāna with Path Knowledge and Fruition Knowledge. If one realizes Nibbāna while contemplating the sensual plane dhammas or the first jhāna dhammas as impermanent, suffering or non-self, five jhāna factors are present in one's Noble Path mental formations. But when one realizes Nibbana while contemplating the second jhāna dhammas as impermanent, suffering or non-self, one's Path Knowledge is concomitant with three jhāna factors. These jhāna factors burn some defilements completely without remainder. If one attains arahantship, the jhāna factors concomitant with arahant Path Knowledge burn all of the remaining defilements completely without remainder. These jhāna factors are supramundane jhānas.

Therefore applying ‘jhāyati’ to fix the mind deeply to the meditation object is necessary for both samatha and vipassanā meditations. Keeping on practicing in this way, in due course, a samatha vehicle meditator may obtain both samatha jhāna and vipassanā jhāna, and a pure vipassanā meditator may obtain vipassanā jhāna. Then, when their five controlling faculties are strong enough and balanced they may attain the supramundane jhāna and become Noble Ones.

Question 2: What is the difference between the mental state in a jhāna and that in sleep?

Answer 2: When one is sleeping soundly without a dream bhavaṅga consciousness, life continuum, occurs successively. For human beings, mental formations in bhavaṅga consciousness moment are sensual plane mental formations. When one is dreaming, weak sensual plane mind-door cognitive-processes occur. In jhāna, fine-material or immaterial plane mental formations occur successively. The mental formations in jhāna are exalted and superior to sensual plane mental formations.

Jhāna consciousness recognizes the jhāna object deeply. Bhavaṅga consciousness recognizes the same object of the near-death impulsion, maraṇāsanna-javana, in the previous life. It cognizes the object not so deeply as jhāna consciousness. The weak sensual plane mind-door cognitive-processes in dreams know sensual objects loosely. These are their differences.

Question 3: Does a ‘vegetable’ still have mind?

Answer 3: Since a ‘vegetable’ depends on machines for maintaining vital signs, it is very difficult to say whether his or her still has mind or not.

Question 4: Can one attain arahantship by practising mere vipassanā?

Answer 4: Yes, if one follows the correct way of practice taught by the Buddha. This type of arahant is called *Suddhavipassanā* arahant, one who attains arahantship through mere vipassanā practice.

Question 5: How does the Sayasaw think about those whose dead bodies do not decay? Is that our goal of meditation?

Answer 5: The Buddha says that one's wishes can be achieved due to one's purification of virtue. These people might have cultivated pure virtue in this life or one of previous lives. Based on that purification of virtue, they made a wish that their bodies should not decay after death. When that wholesome kammic force was mature, their bodies kept intact long after they died without decaying.

There was an example in Myanmar. A woman's corpse was found intact, without trace of decay, long after she died. However she was not a real Buddhist nor did she keep precepts when she was alive. In this case, this result of her unfading body might be due to her pure virtue and wishes in a previous life.

However, in the long run, their bodies will be destroyed, because all formations including materiality are impermanent. Anyway, this is by no means our goal of meditation.

Question 6: How does the Sayadaw think about transferring merits to the departed ones? How well will it work?

Answer 6: It is mentioned in the *Singālovāda Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* that sons and daughters have a duty to perform meritorious deeds and transfer the merits to their departed parents.

In one *Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* it is mentioned that everyone, except an arahant, must reach one of five destinations after death. The five destinations are destination of deva, human, ghost, animal and Hell. Among them only one kind of ghost in ghost destination called *paradattūpajīvika-peta* is able to get benefit from others' sharing of merits, but not others. '*Paradattūpajīvika-peta*' means the ghost that expects its livelihood from the sharing merits of others.

After death, if one reaches the deva or human destination one enjoys sensual pleasures according to one's own mature wholesome kamma. If one reaches the animal or Hell destination or becomes any kind of ghost except *paradattūpajīvika-peta*, one suffers according to one's own mature unwholesome kamma. In these cases, one cannot benefit from the sharing of merits done by relatives or friends of one's previous life. The performers of the merits get benefits themselves.

A *paradattūpajīvika-peta* gets benefits from others' sharing merits in one of two ways: one is to enjoy happiness in the ghost world; the other is to escape from the ghost world. Which type one will get depends on one's own kamma

and the strength of the merits. I should like to explain with two examples.

In ancient time Nandaka was a general of King Piṅgala. He held the wrong view of annihilation. His daughter, Uttara, was a sotapanna. After passing away, he became a paradattūpajīvika-peta. Uttara offered food to an arahant bhikkhu who was going for alms-round. She shared the merit to her departed father, Nandaka. Nandaka, now a paradattūpajīvika-peta, rejoiced over that merit by calling out ‘sādhu.’ Because of this wholesome mental power, he enjoyed sensual pleasures as excellent as those in deva world for six months. After six months, however, he reached Hell due to his annihilation view, after his death in the ghost world.

The other example is King Bimbisāra’s previous relations. In the time of Vipassī Buddha, they were cooks in the royal kitchen. They had a responsibility to prepare food for Vipassī Buddha and one hundred thousand bhikkhus. However they ate the food intended for the Buddha and bhikkhus first before offering it. Because of this unwholesome kamma they all reached Hell after death. After staying in Hell for a long time, they came out from there and became paradattūpajīvika-petas in the ghost world.

When Kakusandha Buddha appeared in the world, they came to ask the Buddha when they would escape from the state of being ghosts. Kakusandha Buddha told them to ask the next Buddha, Konāgama Buddha. They waited for a long time until Konāgama Buddha appeared in the world and asked him the same question. Konāgama Buddha told them to ask the next Buddha, Kassapa Buddha. Again they waited for a long time until Kassapa Buddha appeared in the world and asked that same question. Kassapa Buddha told them that they would escape from the ghost world in Gotama Buddha’s time. So they waited for Gotama Buddha to appear in the world for another long time.

In the time our Buddha, Gotama Buddha, these ghosts’ previous relative, King Bimbisāra, offered Veḷuvana monastery to the Buddha and the Saṅgha. However he did not share the merit to his relations. These ghosts did not get the sharing of merit they had been longing after for such a long time. Out of a strong desire to escape from the great suffering in the ghost world, they cried out loudly and terribly in King Bimbisāra’s palace garden at night. King Bimbisāra was so frightened that he went to see the Buddha the next morning. The Buddha told him the story of these ghosts and the way to help them. Then King Bimbisāra offered requisites to the Buddha and the Saṅgha and shared the merit to these ghosts. The reason why he did a new meritorious deed was that

only sharing the merit done freshly could benefit paradattūpajīvika-petas. The ghosts were very happy when King Bimbisāra shared merit to them and they called out 'sādhu' to rejoice at the merit. Since their unwholesome kammic force was nearly exhausted, they escaped from the ghost world and reached the deva world after their rejoicing.

We must understand these two types of effect sharing merits produce. It is advisable for us to perform wholesome actions, such as giving donations, keeping precepts and practicing samatha and vipassanā, and share the merits with our departed relatives and friends.

## Questions & Answers 8

Question 1: A Sotāpanna will have at most seven times of rebirths in deva and human worlds. If he does not meditate diligently during these births, will he gain the final deliverance?

Answer 1: It is impossible for them not to meditate diligently during these seven births, because they have already understood the Four Noble Truths with Sotāpanna Path Knowledge.

Question 2: Why do some meditators become abnormally dull and inert? Should they continue meditation? What is the beginning symptom of this abnormality? How can one prevent it?

Answer 2: Maybe due to their previous kamma they become dull and inert, especially when wisdom is not present in their paṭisandhi-citta, rebirth-linking consciousness, and bhavaṅga-citta, life-continuum, or even wisdom is present but very weak. They should continue samatha and vipassanā meditations as far as they can, following the right method. Although they may not be able to attain any jhāna or Noble Path in this life, their effort in practice may make them able to meditate well and become Noble Ones in one of future lives.

Another possibility is that they did not practice rightly according to the Buddha's teaching. Since they do not know that they should be always mindful of their meditation objects, they may allow their mind to drift. Because of not guarding their mind, sometimes problems may occur. The way to prevent is that they should follow the right way to meditate. Still better is that they meditate under the guidance of a competent meditation teacher.

Still another possibility is that they are not mentally abnormal. But since they are practicing meditation so diligently and devotedly that people who do not understand meditation, judging from their inert appearances, mistake them as abnormal. To be devoted in meditation and let go all worries is worth encouraging. Even the Buddha praised noble silence and forbade bhikkhus to engage in idle talks. Those who misunderstand such meditators should study theories of meditation and mediate practically themselves. They should not jump to a conclusion only judging by others' appearances.

Question 3: Is raising hens for collecting and selling their eggs a right livelihood and a right action?

Answer 3: If they feed hens just out of compassion, without expecting to collect and sell their eggs, it is good. But if they collect and sell eggs, it is not a right livelihood or a right action. It is because sometimes there are still lives in those eggs, even rarely.

Question 4: Are Arahants those who care about only their own deliverance (without a desire to help others)?

Answer 4: To help others actively or not depends on those Arahants' own desires. Most Arahants actively helped others like Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahāmoggallāna. But some Arahants stayed alone in the forest like Venerable Koṇḍañña without active deeds of helping others. However, even for the latter types of Arahants, they still benefited others a lot, because Arahants are the unsurpassed field of merits to the world. When they went for alms-round, donors got sublime merits from offering food to them. Even the Venerable Koṇḍañña, who did not go out for alms-round while staying in the forest, benefited greatly the elephants and devas who offered food to him.

An Arahant is the highest one among the Buddha's Noble Disciples. One of the Triple Gems that we take refuge in is the Order of the Noble Disciples of the Buddha. It consists of the Four Pairs of Persons, or in another word, the four kinds of Noble disciples who have attained the four Paths and the four Fruits, namely, Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmī, Anāgāmī, and Arahant. The four pairs become eight when the Paths and Fruits are regarded separately. They are unsurpassed fields of merits to the world. An Arahant is the foremost of them. Therefore one obtains great advantages even just by paying respect to or talking in praise of an Arahant. So even if an Arahant did not actively go helping others, he was still benefiting beings in the world, let alone if he did.

I would like to give some examples of how Arahants actively helped others and practiced for the welfare of beings: In Pāḷi Texts many Suttas, such as Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta, were preached by Venerable Sāriputta. Sometimes within one Sermon given by him, hundreds or thousands of people became Noble Ones. He taught the Paṭisambhidāmagga, which is very important for meditation. When he went for alms-round, he stood entering nirodhasamāpatti,

the attainment of cessation of consciousness and mind-produced materiality, in front of laypeople's houses and received alms food only after emerging from that attainment. It was for the donors' great and sublime benefits that he practiced in that way.

Mahāmoggallāna went to the deva world and asked devas about the wholesome kammās that caused them to be reborn there. Then he came back to the human world and preached to people that if they wanted to be reborn in the deva world they had to perform such and such wholesome deeds. Sometimes he went to Hell and asked beings there about the unwholesome kammās that caused their rebirth there. Then he came back to the human world and preached to people that if they did not want to be reborn in Hell they had to prevent such and such unwholesome deeds. In this way he made many people abstain from doing the evil and perform only the good.

Venerable Puṇṇa Mantānīputta is the chief among Dhamma preachers. He preached the Dhamma in numerous occasions. Because of his skilful exposition, many listeners attained Noble stages or got promoted in their faith and meditation. For example, Venerable Ānanda became a Sotāpanna after listening to Venerable Puṇṇa's Dhamma talk.

Mahākaccāna was chief among those who expounded in full the brief saying of the Buddha. He preached constantly in a remote country and numerous people obtained great advantages of the Dhamma. One of his famous teachings is the Nettippakaraṇa, an exegetical work on the Pitakas. It explains some profound Suttas in detail and is very valuable for Buddhists to comprehend the Buddha's teaching.

A very important point we should bear in mind is that Arahants propagated and preserved the Buddha's Dhamma. That is why we are still able to listen to and practice the Dhamma now while more than two thousand five hundred years have passed since the Buddha's Mahāparinibbāna. I would like to explain some more about this:

After the five bhikkhus listened to the Anattalakkhana Sutta and became Arahants, Yasa and his fifty-four friends were ordained and became Arahants in succession. There were sixty-one Arahants, including the Buddha, in the world. At that time the Buddha bade them to go wandering and spread the Dhamma with these words: "Bhikkhus, I released from all traps of devas and humans. You also released from all traps of devas and humans. Go wandering, bhikkhus!

For the benefits of the majority, for the happiness of the majority, out of compassion for the majority, for the benefits, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Do not go on one way two together. Bhikkhus, preach the Dhamma, which is good in the beginning, in the middle and in the end, which is full of meaning and phrases, revealing the holy life that is complete in its entirety and perfect. There are beings whose eyes have only a little bit dust. If they do not have the opportunity to listen to the Dhamma, they will waste away; if they listen to the Dhamma, they will understand it.” Thus those Arahants undertook the missionary task from the Buddha and did their best to distribute the Dhamma wherever they went.

Ever since then, Arahants continued this missionary task generation after generation in the Buddha’s time and after the Buddha’s Mahāparinibbāna. The first Buddhist Council held by five hundred Arahants, the second one by seven hundred Arahants and the third one by a thousand Arahants were famous examples. They even made nothing of hardships to spread the Dhamma to other countries. From time to time their purification of virtue, concentration and wisdom shone forth and moved people to come taking refuge in Buddhism. Without their incessant effort we could not even hear the name of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Their splendid deeds to promote the welfare of beings are beyond descriptions. Their valuable contributions to protect the Buddha’s teaching are beyond praise. Understanding these historical facts, will you still want to say that Arahants are those who care about only their own deliverance?

Actually to criticize a Noble One is an unwholesome kamma. It will hinder one’s meditation progress if one does not apologise. I would like to relate a story about this.

It is mentioned in the Visuddhimagga thus: In time of old, an elder and a young bhikkhu wandered for alms in a certain village. At the first house they got only a spoonful of hot porridge. The elder’s stomach was paining him with wind. He thought ‘This porridge is good for me; I shall drink it before it gets cold’. People brought a wooden stool to the doorstep, and he sat down and drank it. The young bhikkhu was disgusted and said ‘The old man has let his hunger get the better of him and has done what he should be ashamed to do’.

The elder wandered for alms, and on return to the monastery he asked the young bhikkhu ‘Have you any footing in this Dispensation, friend?’ – ‘Yes, Venerable Sir, I am a stream-enterer.’ – ‘Then, friend, do not try for the higher

paths; one whose cankers are destroyed has been reviled by you.’ The young bhikkhu asked for the elder’s forgiveness and was thereby freed from the obstacle to attain the higher attainments caused by his criticism.

If a person has criticised a noble person and does not apologise, he cannot attain any path and fruition, and if a noble person with a lower attainment has criticised a noble person with a higher attainment and does not apologise, he cannot attain any higher path and fruition in that life. From here we can see that it is not good at all to criticise anybody, because you do not know if is he a noble person. It is better to check one’s own defilements than to find fault with others.

When you criticize that Arahants care only about their own deliverance, you not only ignore the historical facts of their great contributions but also do harm for your own deliverance. For your benefits for a long time, I would like to suggest you to give up this wrong idea.

## Questions & Answers 9

Question 1: In meditation, what condition is called falling into bhavaṅga?

Answer 1: Falling into bhavaṅga is clearly felt especially when one reaches access concentration stage (upacāra Samādhi) and fails to maintain one's concentration. At that time one may notice there is a blank of mind or a while when one knows nothing. It is because during that while no cognitive processes occur but only bhavaṅga consciousnesses successively arise and pass away. Bhavaṅga consciousnesses arise between two cognitive processes and take the near-death object in one's previous life instead of present object. One cannot perceive that past object unless one has practiced dependent origination. Since not perceiving the object, one feels that one knows nothing. This phenomenon is called falling into bhavaṅga. It is neither the cessation of mental activity nor Nibbāna.

According to the Buddha's Abhidhamma, after every cognitive process bhavaṅga usually appears. For the Buddha, two bhavaṅgas occur between cognitive processes; for Venerable Sāriputta, sixteen bhavaṅgas. For others there are uncountable bhavaṅgas occurring between two cognitive processes. Although there are so many bhavaṅgas arising and passing away all that time, one usually does not perceive them. Only when one's mind is quite calm and concentrated, especially at the access concentration stage, does one clearly perceive the successive occurrence of bhavaṅgas, the falling into bhavaṅga.

When you experience the falling into bhavaṅga, you are not supposed to be delighted or discouraged, for this is just a natural phenomenon in the course of meditation. All you have to do is continue to keep your mindfulness on your meditation object. When you reach absorption concentration stage, your jhāna factors will be powerful enough to maintain your concentration for a long time, without falling into bhavaṅga.

Question 2: Could the Sayadaw please explain in detail why one cannot discern jhāna factors and practice vipassanā while staying in samādhi? What is vipassanā practiced outside samādhi? Is checking jhāna factors a kind of vipassanā practiced outside samādhi?

Answer 2: There are three types of concentration (samādhi), namely, momentary concentration (khaṇika-samādhi), access concentration (upacāra-samādhi) and absorption concentration (appanā-samādhi or jhāna-samādhi). Absorption concentration is deeper than access concentration, which in turn is deeper than momentary concentration. Only emerging from absorption concentration or access concentration can one check jhāna factors or practice vipassanā. It is because jhāna factors and objects of vipassanā are not objects of access and absorption concentrations.

When one practices samatha meditation, for example ānāpānasati, the object of access and absorption concentrations is the counterpart sign of breathing, ānāpāna-paṭibhāga-nimitta, not jhāna factors. One cannot concentrate on jhāna factors to attain access or absorption concentration. After focusing one's mind on the counterpart sign of breathing for a long time, when one begins to check jhāna factors, one has already emerged from access and absorption concentrations. At that time one's concentration is just momentary concentration. That is why one cannot check jhāna factors while staying in access or absorption concentration.

When one is practicing vipassanā, one's objects are ultimate materiality, mentality and their impermanent, suffering and non-self natures. Concentrating on these objects is just momentary concentration, not access or absorption concentration, because these objects are always arising and passing away. One cannot attain access or absorption concentration by concentrating on the objects of vipassanā. That is why one cannot practice vipassanā while staying in access or absorption concentration.

Practicing vipassanā outside samādhi means that emerging from access or absorption concentration one discerns ultimate materiality and mentality and contemplates them as impermanent, suffering and non-self. This is done outside samatha jhāna. But at that time there is momentary concentration, vipassanā jhāna. That prior access or absorption concentration is a powerful support for one to discern and contemplate vipassanā objects clearly. In this way, samatha jhāna supports vipassanā jhāna.

Vipassanā means contemplating formations as impermanent, suffering and non-self. So if one just checks jhāna factors, one is not practicing vipassanā. To practice vipassanā, one should discern not only jhāna factors but also all the other mental formations in the jhāna according to the cognitive process. For example, one should discern usually thirty-four mental formations in the first

jhāna. This is the beginning stage of the purification of view and the foundation of vipassanā. Then one should contemplate them as impermanent, suffering and non-self.

Question 3: Ever since I came here I slept badly every night and got a lot of dreams. I even became afraid of going to bed, because to sleep made me more tired than not to sleep. While meditating I was troubled by sleepiness. My meditation progress went up and down instead of being stable. My assistant teacher suggested me to practice loving-kindness (mettā bhāvanā). I tried and now I am able to sleep well. How can one who has not attained any jhāna practice loving-kindness?

Answer 3: The Buddha teaches eleven benefits of practising loving-kindness in the Aṅguttara Nikāya thus:

*‘Bhikkhus, when the mind-deliverance of loving-kindness is cultivated, developed, much practised, made the vehicle, made the foundation, established, consolidated, and properly undertaken, eleven benefits can be expected. What are the eleven? He sleeps in comfort; wakes in comfort; and dreams no evil dreams; he is dear to human beings; he is dear to non-human beings; devas guard him; fire, poison and weapons do not affect him; his mind is easily concentrated; his complexion becomes bright; he dies unconfused; and if he penetrates no higher he will be reborn in the Brahmā World.’ (AN. V, 342)*

However, you will experience these benefits fully only after you master the five hundred and twenty-eight ways of pervading loving-kindness mentioned in the Paṭisambhidāmagga. If you have not reached mettā jhāna stage, you may get only partial and limited benefits from practicing loving-kindness. For both types of meditators, those who with jhāna and who without, the procedures for developing loving-kindness are the same, but the extent of practice differs according to their desires. For example, after sending loving-kindness to oneself in four ways for a few minutes, one sends loving-kindness to a respectable person of one’s own gender. If one aims at attaining mettā jhāna, one has to develop loving-kindness towards that person until one attains the third mettā jhāna. Only after that should one change to another respectable one. But if one’s purpose is just to calm the mind, one may change to another respectable person of one’s own gender when one’s mind is calm, gentle and peaceful. In this way

one develop loving-kindness towards ten respectable persons of one's own gender, one by one, then ten dear persons, ten neutral persons, ten disagreeable persons of one's own gender one by one.

Then one should break down the barriers between oneself, dear persons (including respectable persons), neutral persons, disagreeable persons by developing loving-kindness towards each of them continuously. After that, one should pervade loving-kindness towards various kinds of beings in gradually enlarging areas, up to the infinite universe. Then one pervades loving-kindness towards beings in every one of ten directions in the infinite universe. A meditator who has attained mettā jhāna is able to practice all these procedures thoroughly. He sees these objects very clearly and develops such powerful loving-kindness that his concentration is deepened up to the third jhāna. For one who has not attained any jhāna, however, he can only practice by imagination and good wishes. Nevertheless, he still accumulates wholesome kammās in this practice and gets peaceful mind, which will help him to remove agitation and have a good sleep.

Question 4: What is the greatest obstacle for women to meditate?

Answer 4: In meditation, different people have different obstacles. We cannot say what obstacles are specifically for women, but not for men. Like men, some women also have sharp wisdom. So among the Buddha's disciples, not only men became chief disciples, etc., but also women became chief disciples, etc. No matter you are a man or a woman, you have to meditate diligently to overcome the five hindrances (sensual desire, hatred, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, skeptical doubt) to attain meditation achievement.

Question 5: Can the meditation subjects taught in the retreat be practiced in ordinary daily life? Or they can be practiced only in a secluded retreat? If it is possible to practice them in daily life, how can one maintain one's meditation, without letting it fall back?

Answer 5: Yes, the meditation subjects taught in this retreat can be practiced in ordinary daily life. Although practicing them in a secluded retreat is, of course, better, one has to practice them in daily life when such an opportunity is not available.

Being able to maintain one's meditation or not depends on one's devotion and

diligence. While meditating in daily life, some are able to put aside all worries and devote themselves to meditation. Such people are able to maintain their meditation. But some cannot put aside worries and therefore cannot concentrate well. They must try to meditate again and again diligently and perseveringly. Usually after they have practiced every day for several years they gradually become skilful in meditation. At that time they are able to maintain their meditation in daily life.

In the Buddha's time women usually went to listen to the Dhamma and meditate in monasteries in the daytime. Men went to monasteries in the nighttime. Since they listened to the Dhamma and practiced meditation so diligently they were able to maintain their meditation. That was why most of them became Noble Ones. For example, all the people in the Kuru Country became Noble Ones. They meditated even while doing their jobs, such as cooking and weaving.

To maintain one's meditation, one should meditate for at least one or two hours daily. During that one or two hours, one should try to put aside all worries, memories and plans and attend the mind only to one's meditation object. One must also apply correct methods in meditation to prevent a waste of time. Gradually one will be able to remove restlessness, sleepiness and other obstacles, and concentrate on one's meditation object for longer and longer time. Then one is able to maintain one's meditation.

## Questions & Answers 10

Question 1: How to overcome obstacles?

Answer 1: Generally speaking, obstacles are summarized into five, called five hindrances, pañcanivāraṇa. They are sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and skeptical doubt. They are so called because they obstruct one's meditation progress. If a meditator overcomes them he will make steady progress and finally succeed in meditation. To overcome the five hindrances is so important for meditators that I would like to explain some more about it.

The faraway causes of the five hindrances are the numerous defilements accumulated along one's long journey in the round of rebirths. They exist as latent tendencies underlying one's materiality-and-mentality continuity. The proximate cause of the five hindrances is unwise attention, ayonisomanasikāra. Therefore the thorough way to overcome the five hindrances is to completely destroy all defilements including their latent tendencies. The temporary way is to apply wise attention, yonisomanasikāra. Herein, unwise attention is inexpedient attention, attention on the wrong track. Or it is attention that considers the impermanent as permanent, suffering as happiness, non-self as self, and the repulsive as beautiful. Wise attention is just the opposite of unwise attention. It is expedient attention, attention on the right track. Or it is attention that considers the impermanent as impermanent, suffering as suffering, non-self as non-self, and the impure as impure.

For the hindrance of sensual desire, the Buddha teaches in the Eka-Nipata of Aṅguttara Nikāya thus:

*'Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of sensual desire, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its strengthening and increase, as the feature of beauty.'*

*'In him who pays unwise attention to the feature of beauty, sensual desire, if not already arisen, arises, or, if already arisen, is liable to strengthening and increase.'*

*'Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to*

*prevent the arising of sensual desire, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as the feature of repulsiveness.*

*‘In him who gives wise attention to the feature of repulsiveness sensual desire, if not already arisen, arises not, or, if arisen, it is abandoned.’*

So to overcome sensual desire one should stop assuming things as beautiful, but instead ponder over their repulsiveness. Meditation on repulsiveness can be roughly divided into two types: animate and inanimate. Animate type of repulsiveness meditation means to concentrate on the repulsive nature of thirty-two parts of the body, namely, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, and urine. Inanimate repulsiveness meditation means to concentrate on the repulsive nature of different phases of a corpse, namely, the bloated, the livid, the festering, the cut up, the gnawed, the scattered, the hacked and scattered, the bleeding, the worm-infested, a skeleton. These are the ways in which one overcomes the hindrance of sensual desire.

For the hindrance of ill will, the Buddha says thus:

*‘Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of ill will, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its strengthening and increase, as the feature of disgusting.’*

*In him who pays unwise attention to the feature of disgusting, ill will, if not already arisen, arises, or, if already arisen, is liable to strengthening and increase.’*

*‘Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to prevent the arising of ill will, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as the mind’s deliverance through loving-kindness.’*

*In him who gives wise attention to loving-kindness which liberate the mind ill will, if not already arisen, arises not, or, if arisen, it is abandoned.’*

So to overcome the hindrance of ill will one should stop paying attention to the disgusting feature of the object of one’s anger and develop loving-kindness. One should develop selfless loving-kindness towards oneself, dear people, neutral people, and disagreeable people systematically until at last towards all

living beings. One should also learn to forgive others, since the Buddha told us that in the long round of rebirths no beings have never been our parents and relatives. These are the ways in which one overcomes the hindrance of ill will.

For the hindrance of sloth and torpor, the Buddha says thus:

*‘Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of sloth and torpor, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its strengthening and increase, as listlessness, lassitude, lazy stretching of the body, drowsiness after meal and mental sluggishness.*

*In him who is of sluggish mind, sloth and torpor, if not already arisen, arises, or, if already arisen, is liable to strengthening and increase.’*

*‘Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to prevent the arising of sloth and torpor, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as the element of rousing one’s energy, of exertion, and of continuous exertion.*

*In him who energetically strives, sloth and torpor arises not, or, if arisen, it is abandoned.’*

So to overcome the hindrance of sloth and torpor, one should stop paying attention to the lazy or tired state of mind and body, but arouse energy and effort to meditate. It is through incessant effort that our Bodhisatta finally became enlightened. We should emulate his example. One may also reflect on suffering of birth, aging, illness, death, four woeful states, past and future round of rebirths, and etc., to arouse sense of spiritual urgency to meditate. Of course, an appropriate amount of sleep and food and suitable postures for meditation are all important to overcome sloth and torpor. These are the ways in which one overcomes the hindrance of sloth and torpor.

For the hindrance of restlessness and remorse, the Buddha says thus:

*‘Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of restlessness and remorse, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its strengthening and increase, as unrest of mind.*

*In him who is of troubled mind arises restlessness and remorse, if not already arisen, or, if already arisen, is liable to strengthening and increase.’*

*‘Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to*

*prevent the arising of restlessness and remorse, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as tranquillity of mind.*

*In the tranquil-minded restlessness and remorse arises not, or, if arisen, it is abandoned.'*

So to overcome the hindrance of restlessness and remorse, one should ignore all unrest states of mind and focus on one's meditation object with a calm, cool and unwavering mind, a mind of tranquility. If one tries in this way mindfully and perseveringly in every bodily posture, one's concentration will gradually become strong and powerful and be able to overcome restlessness and remorse. This is the way one overcomes the hindrance of restlessness and remorse.

For the hindrance of skeptical doubt, the Buddha says thus:

*'Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to cause the arising of sceptical doubt, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its strengthening and increase, as unwise attention.*

*In him who gives not wise attention arises sceptical doubt, if not already arisen, or, if already arisen, is liable to strengthening and increase.'*

*'Bhikkhus, I know not of any other single thing of such power to prevent the arising of sceptical doubt, if not already arisen, or, if arisen, to cause its abandonment, as wise attention.*

*In him who gives wise attention sceptical doubt arises not, or, if arisen, it is abandoned.'*

So to overcome the hindrance of skeptical doubt one should always apply wise attention, reflecting on the fact that all conditioned things are impermanent, suffering and non-self. One should also often reflect on the sublime qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. One should study the Buddha's teachings carefully under a skilful teacher and practice samatha and vipassanā meditations accordingly. These are the ways in which one overcomes the hindrance of skeptical doubt.

These are only a few examples of the many ways of overcoming the five hindrances taught by the Buddha. For more information please study the Scripture and refer to the Chinese version of 'Removing the Taints.' When one attains jhānas through samatha meditation or insight knowledge through

vipassanā meditation, one temporarily overcomes the five hindrances. When one attains Sotāpanna stage, one permanently overcomes the hindrance of skeptical doubt. When one attains Anāgāmī stage one permanently overcomes the hindrance of sensual desire and ill will. When one attains Arahant stage one permanently overcomes the hindrances of sloth and torpor, and restlessness and remorse. This is the thorough way to overcome obstacles.

Question 2: What are nāma and rūpa? Are they mentality and materiality or the nāma-rūpa in dependent origination? Are these two kinds of rūpa the same?

Answer 2: The knowledge of nāma and rūpa is so broad that to explain them in detail will take very long time. You have to study Abhidhamma thoroughly to clearly understand them. I will answer just in a brief way here. Nāma (mentality) includes consciousness (citta) and mental factors (cetasika). There are eighty-nine types of consciousness, including wholesome, unwholesome, resultant and functional consciousnesses. There are fifty-two mental factors, including (1) general ones: such as contact, volition, attention, and effort, (2) profitable ones: such as faith, mindfulness, non-greed and non-hatred, (3) unprofitable ones: such as delusion, hatred, greed and wrong view. Rūpa (materiality) includes twenty-eight types of materiality, which in turn are composed of four primary elements and twenty-four types of derived materiality such as colour, smell and nutritive essence. They can be divided into four types according to their origins: materiality produced by kammic force, mind, temperature and nutriment.

As for the nāma-rūpa mentioned in dependent origination, according to the Suttanta method, nāma here means resultant consciousnesses and their associated mental factors, not including wholesome, unwholesome and functional consciousnesses and their associated mental factors. Rūpa here is mainly materiality produced by kammic force and materiality produced by resultant mind. But inevitably materiality produced by temperature and materiality produced by nutriment is also included. They are respectively produced by the fire element and the nutritive essence in the abovementioned two types of materiality. All the four types of materiality are included here. So rūpa and the rūpa of nāma-rūpa in dependent origination are the same.

Question 3: It is said that the Buddha usually taught the Dhamma beginning with talks of making offering, keeping precepts, and heaven. Then he observed

the temperaments of the audience and taught the disadvantages of lust and the exalting Dhammas of Buddhas – suffering, the origin (of suffering), the cessation (of suffering) and the path (leading to the cessation of suffering). Please tell me how to make offering to obtain great results and how to keep precepts to prevent the burning suffering in hell and to enjoy great benefits. What is the Talk of Heaven? What are the disadvantages of lust for sensual pleasures?

Answer 3: This kind of teaching is called anupubbi-kathā, a gradual instruction. The Buddha taught in this series only when necessary. For those bhikkhus who had possessed purification of virtue and concentration, the Buddha taught only vipassanā. The group of five bhikkhus is a good example. After their attainment of Sotāpattimagga, the Buddha taught them the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, teaching only vipassanā, not virtue and concentration. For those bhikkhus who had possessed purification of virtue but not enough concentration, the Buddha began his teaching with concentration practice. Cūḷa Suññata Sutta is an example. The Buddha taught eight mundane attainments and nirodhasamāpatti (Attainment of Cessation) in that Sutta. For those whose virtue was not yet purified, the Buddha began his discourse with virtue, like Ākaṅkheya Sutta. For those who needed to listen to the talks of making offering, keeping precepts, etc., especially for lay people, the Buddha gave a gradual instruction, anupubbi-kathā.

As for the way to obtain great results from offering, the Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta provides a lot of information. In that Sutta, the Buddha enumerates fourteen types of personal offerings, counting from offering made to a Buddha down to offering made to an immoral ordinary person and even to an animal. Every type of offering has its benefits, but the higher the receiver's accomplishment the greater benefits the offering produces. Then even for offerings made to the same type of receiver, their benefits differ depending on the giver's intention: for example, when one makes offering with a pure mind, that is, not expecting anything in return, one get higher benefits than with an impure mind, which expects for reward.

Offering is purified by either the giver's purification of virtue or the receiver's or by the purification of virtue of both. Purified offering incurs sublime benefits. Therefore, to obtain great and superior results from offering one should fulfill five factors:

1. One is virtuous;
2. One's offering has been righteously obtained;
3. One's mind is clear and taintless (not expecting for reward);
4. One has strong enough faith in the law of kamma and its result;
5. The receiver is virtuous.

Offering possessing these five factors will produce great results. However, the Buddha did not quite praise this type of offering, because it can still bring rebirth in certain existence. As long as there is still rebirth, there will surely be aging, illness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. The Buddha praised the other type of offering. He teaches in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta* thus:

*'Bhikkhus, I say that when an arahant, with clear and taintless mind, placing faith in that the fruit of kamma is great, offers to an arahant what is righteously obtained, then that offering indeed is the most superior of all worldly offerings.'*

In this case, there are five factors:

1. The giver is an arahant,
2. What is offered is righteously obtained,
3. He has a clear and taintless mind,
4. He has strong enough faith in the Law of Kamma and its results.
5. The receiver is also an arahant.

This type of offering will not produce any rebirth in future existence. Therefore there will no longer aging, illness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. That is why the Buddha praises it as the most superior.

But if the giver is not an arahant, how can he then make this type of offering? In the *Nandamātā Sutta*, the Buddha taught that there are two ways he can do this: when both the receiver and the giver are free from attachment, anger, and delusion, or when they are trying to destroy attachment, anger, and delusion. You can say that the offering is also most superior. In this case the giver at the time of offering practises *Vipassanā*, that is, he contemplates the impermanent (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*) nature of his own mentality-materiality, of the receiver's mentality-materiality and of the ultimate materiality (*paramattha-rūpa*) of the offerings. He must also contemplate the wholesome volitional formations before, while and after offering as impermanent, suffering and non-self. This type of offering usually will not

produce any rebirth in future existence. To escape from the round of rebirths, you are advised to perform this type of offering.

As for keeping precepts, if one is a bhikkhu, one should try to keep bhikkhu's Pāṭimokkha precepts. If one is a layperson, one should at least keep five precepts. It is better to keep precepts well for one's whole life. To occasionally break precepts is not good. If a layperson gets opportunities he or she should try to keep eight precepts or nine portions of observance (navaṅga-uposatha). Nine portions of observance means that when one observes eight precepts one also practices loving-kindness. It is mentioned in the Navaka-Nipāta of Aṅguttara Nikāya. Keeping these precepts can prevent one from the burning suffering in hell. When the precepts are surrounded by concentration such as eight attainments and insight knowledge, they become more sublime and are more powerful to prevent one from falling into hell. If one gets Noble One's precept (ariyakantasīla), which means one becomes a Noble One, one is sure not to go to hell any more.

The Talk of Heaven (sagga-kathā) means talking about the happiness in deva worlds. We cannot measure the happiness in deva worlds. If you want to know it you should try to reach there. For example, their mansions are very wonderful, made of gold, silver, various jewels, etc. according to their previous kammās. Some of their mansions are so big that their size are three yojanas in length and in width; some are even forty yojanas in length and in width. (one yojana is equal to about eleven kilometers)

The Buddha taught the disadvantages of lust for sensual pleasure in many ways. In the Potaliya Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya, he used various similes: A dog cannot get rid of its hunger and weakness by gnawing a skeleton of meatless bones. Sensual pleasures are compared to that skeleton. A vulture that seizes a piece of meat and flies away will be pecked and clawed by other vultures and incur death or deadly suffering because of that. Sensual pleasures are compared to that piece of meat. A man who takes a blazing grass torch and goes against the wind will be burnt by it and incurs death or deadly suffering because of that. Sensual pleasures are compared to that grass torch. A man who falls into a charcoal pit full of glowing coals will incur death or deadly suffering because of that. Sensual pleasures are compared to that charcoal pit. A man who dreams about lovely parks will see nothing of it on waking. Sensual pleasures are compared to a dream. A man who borrows goods on loan will become dejected when the owners take back their things. Sensual pleasures are compared to

borrowed goods. A man who climb a fruit tree seeking fruit will incurs death or deadly suffering when the tree is cut down at its root and falls. Sensual pleasures are compared to that fruit tree. So sensual pleasures provide much suffering and much despair, while the danger in them is great. These are the danger of sensual pleasures and the disadvantages of lust for them.

In the Māgandiya Sutta of Majjhima Nikaya, one simile the Buddha uses is thus:

*“Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit; the more he scratches the scabs and cauterizes his body, the fouler, more evil-smelling and more infected the openings of his wounds would become, yet he would find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in scratching the openings of his wounds. So too, Māgandiya, beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with fever for sensual pleasures, still indulge in sensual pleasures; the more such beings indulges in sensual pleasures, the more their craving for sensual pleasures increases and the more they are burned by their fever for sensual pleasures, yet they find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in dependence on the five cords of sensual pleasure.”*

The Buddha teaches the danger of grasping the sign of sense objects in the Āditta-pariyāya Sutta of Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta thus:

*“It would be better, bhikkhus, for the eye faculty to be lacerated by a red-hot iron pin burning, blazing, and glowing, than for one to grasp the sign through the features in a form cognizable by the eye. For if consciousness should stand tied to gratification in the sign or in the features, and if one should die on that occasion, it is possible that one will go to one of two destinations: hell or the animal realm. Having seen this danger, I speak thus.”*

In the same way the Buddha explains the danger to grasp the sign of a sound, of an odour, etc. The reason for such a person’s being reborn in hell or the animal realm is that near-death impulsion, marañāsanna-javana, is the last impulsion in a life and decides one’s next existence. If an unwholesome near-death impulsion arises, because of lust or any other defilements, one will

reach one of four woeful planes after death. For example, Subrahma Deva's five hundred nymphs died while enjoying sensual pleasures in heaven and were then reborn in hell. Because of lust for sensual pleasures, their near-death impulsion was associated with greed. The mature unwholesome kammic force led them to hell. Subrahma saw their unfortunate results and found that he himself would also be reborn in the same hell seven days later. He was grief-stricken and went to the Buddha for help with his remaining five hundred nymphs. After the Buddha's Dhamma talk, they all became Sotāpannas and escaped from the misfortune of being reborn in four woeful planes forever. From here we should understand the disadvantages of lust for sensual pleasures and the importance of being free from it.

