





*Heedfulness is the path to the deathless,  
carelessness is the path to death.  
The heedful do not die;  
the careless are as if already dead.*



**THE THREE SIGNS:**  
ANICCA, DUKKHA & ANATTĀ  
IN THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

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*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti*  
'The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.'

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## PREFACE

I first met Tahn Chao Khun Payutto\* in 1994, when he came to address the monks at Wat Pah Nanachat† for a series of talks. His reputation had come before him: with the demise of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu he is revered by many as Thailand's foremost scholar monk. Having been reared in the austere Forest Tradition I confess that I still looked upon 'study monks' with scepticism. The title of his first talk – 'Happiness' – sparked my interest, and over the next hour I was deeply inspired by his lucid presentation. More importantly, I was moved by the recognition that he wasn't merely speaking from book knowledge, but equally from experience – he radiated happiness. Seven years later I asked permission to live at his monastery in Nakhon Pathom, near Bangkok. He scrutinized me and asked how I would spend my time; he seemed satisfied with the response that I wished to continue reading the Pali Canon. Not long after, I inquired about the translation by Bruce Evans of Tahn Chao Khun's magnum opus – *Buddhadhamma*, a comprehensive reference book on the Buddha's teachings. The translation project had reached a standstill, and I was asked if I would take a look at it. Before long I was immersed.

Most of the 22 chapters of *Buddhadhamma* can be read independently, although one should realize that they are connected. Many readers will be familiar with Bruce Evans's translations of chapters 4 & 5, on Dependent Origination and Karma respectively. The first half of *Buddhadhamma*, of which this present book (chapter 3) is a part, is theoretical, explaining key Buddhist teachings on the nature of human experience and the world around us. But as the reader will see, the author compliments the

\* Then known as Tahn Chao Khun Dhammapitaka. 'Tahn Chao Khun' is an honorific title.

† The International Forest Monastery in Ubon Rajathani, Thailand.

theory with its relationship to spiritual practice. Although I have worked on four of the first six chapters, I was finally drawn to complete this one because of its contribution to my own understanding of Buddhism, and because I feel there is still much misunderstanding by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike concerning the Three Characteristics, not least on the concept of *dukkha*.

My greatest challenge has been choosing the level of literal precision for the translation. On the one hand I wish to honour the original work, and on the other some ‘simplifying’ of the text, at least to style, seemed necessary to make it more accessible to beginning and intermediate students of Buddhist studies. My kind editors and proofreaders have had opposing views on this matter, and in the end I have struck a compromise. Many people have assisted with this translation, by offering constructive criticism and encouragement; in particular I wish to mention Ajahn Jayasaro, Venerable Cittasamvaro, Max Mackay-James, and Ron Lumsden.

To assist the reader I have added explanatory footnotes; all footnotes are by the translator. The endnotes are all part of the original text. Reference numbers refer to the Pali Text Society (page number of Pali edition) unless otherwise stated. The numbers in brackets in the main text refer to the page number of the Thai original. The reader will see that I have repositioned one section (on the ‘Concealers’), and that Tahn Chao Khun has provided me with some fresh, supplementary material.

As translator I follow on the coattails (or robe-tails, if that is permissible) of Tahn Chao Khun’s exceptional wisdom and great kindness. My job has been as conduit of the truths contained here, even if I have not yet fully incorporated and realized them. May this book help seekers of truth to pierce through the veils of ignorance and to reach perfect peace.

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## CONTENTS

PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
1. Understanding the Terms Dhamma and Saṅkhāra	5
2. Scriptural Definitions	12
A. Impermanence	12
B. Dukkha	14
C. Anattā: The Characteristic of Nonself	25
3. Concealers of the Three Characteristics	42
4. Nonself and No-Self	45
5. Ego and Conceit	52
PRACTICAL VALUE	56
1. The Spiritual Path	58
2. The Heedful Way	60
3. Liberation	70
CONCLUSION	72
THE BUDDHA'S WORDS	81
ENDNOTES	103



## INTRODUCTION

The primary Buddhist tenet that all things can be separated into component parts is not intended to suggest a static world of composite objects. Rather, all things are seen to exist in the form of a stream.\* Each constituent element of that stream comes into being in dependence on other elements in an unbroken flow of appearance and decline. No single element has an independent fixed identity; they are all impermanent and unstable. Indeed, the fluid nature of phenomena is possible owing to the interdependence and insubstantiality of their components.

This stream of interdependent phenomena is constant (*dbammadhātu*) and certain (*dbammaṭṭhiti*), and it is a part of the natural order (*dbamma-niyāma*)<sup>1</sup>. [68] It does not rely for its existence on a god, religion or prophet. In Buddha-Dhamma<sup>†</sup> the role of a Teacher<sup>‡</sup> is that of discovering and explaining this truth to others.

The Buddha presented the teaching of the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*)<sup>§</sup> to describe this natural law of flux.<sup>2</sup> The teaching is outlined in this way:

*Whether a (Buddha) appears or not, these truths (dhātu) are constant and stable ... that is:*

*1. All conditioned phenomena (saṅkhāra) are impermanent ...*

\* The two preceding chapters of *Buddhadhamma* discuss the division of human beings into the five aggregates (of body and mind) and the six sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) respectively. Here the author wishes to give a contrasting, less anatomical perspective. Note the similarity with discoveries in quantum physics.

† The Buddha's teachings.

‡ i.e., the Buddha.

§ Also known as 'Signs' or 'Marks'.

2. *All conditioned phenomena are dukkha\** ...
3. *All things (dhamma) are nonself ...*<sup>3</sup>

Definitions of the three characteristics are as follows:

1. **Aniccatā**: Impermanence, instability, and inconstancy; the condition of arising, deteriorating, and disintegrating.
2. **Dukkhatā**: State of *dukkha*; the condition of oppression by birth and decay; the tension, stress and conflict within an object due to alteration of its determinant factors, preventing it from remaining as it is; the internal imperfection of things, which prevents true satisfaction for someone whose desires are influenced by craving (*taṅhā*), and causes suffering for a person who clings (*upādāna*).
3. **Anattatā**: The condition of *anattā* – nonself; the condition of things being void of a real abiding self.† [69]

The Pali adjectival terms for these characteristics are *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, respectively. The abstract noun forms are *aniccatā*, *dukkhatā*, and *anattatā*. As characteristics they are known as *anicca-lakkhaṇa*, *dukkha-lakkhaṇa*, and *anatta-lakkhaṇa*. The commentaries occasionally refer to the three characteristics as ‘universal characteristics’ (*sāmañña-lakkhaṇa*).

All things exist in a state of flux, made up of interdependent conditioning factors, which arise and pass away in unbroken succession: things are impermanent. Because of their instability and causal dependence, things are subject to stress and friction, revealing an inherent imperfection. And since each component likewise exists as a continuous, causally dependent flow, things do not have a distinct individuality. They do not have a true substance or core.

\* The word *dukkha* is notoriously difficult to translate. The most common translations include: Suffering, unsatisfactoriness, stress, pain, and misery. Many misunderstandings have arisen by translating the second characteristic as: *Everything is suffering* or *Life is suffering*. For the different contexts in which the term *dukkha* is used see below. Please note that when I use the terms ‘stressful’ and ‘under stress’ I am referring to the pressure and tension inherent in all things.

† Note that I have translated *anattā* as ‘nonself’, ‘not-self’, or ‘selfless’, according to the context. The Pali *attā* (Sanskrit *ātman*) is most often translated as ‘self’ or ‘soul’; I have used both, again according to the context. The words ‘selfless’ and ‘selflessness’ here should not be confused with the standard definition of being altruistic.

Human beings too are comprised of constituent elements. The ‘building-blocks’ for human beings are the five aggregates; nothing else exists besides the five aggregates.\* When we examine the five aggregates in turn, we see that each one is impermanent. Being impermanent, they are *dukkha*; they are distressing for one who grasps them. Being *dukkha*, they are selfless. They are selfless because each aggregate arises from causes; they are not independent entities. Furthermore, they are not truly subject to a person’s control or ownership. If one were to truly own the five aggregates, one would be able to control them according to one’s will and prohibit them from change, for example from debility or disease. [70]

Many scholars have tried to prove that the Buddha acknowledged a self existing apart from the five aggregates. They claim that he only repudiated a self within conditioned phenomena, and that he affirmed an ultimate self. Moreover, they explain that *Nibbāna*† is the same as *ātman/attā*: *Nibbāna is the Self*. I will elaborate on this matter in Part IV‡, on *Nibbāna*. Let me start, however, by saying that most people, especially those who have grown up in a culture espousing a soul, tend to seek out and seize some concept of a fixed identity. Acting in this way satisfies a hidden, unconscious need. When their self-identification as one or more of the five aggregates becomes untenable, they create a new concept of self in which to believe. But the aim of Buddha-Dhamma is not to release one thing so as to grasp another, or to be freed from one thing only to then be enslaved by something else. Moreover, as stated earlier, the existence of phenomena is determined by their lack of a distinct static essence. [70/1]

\* The five *khandha*: Physical form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). In the Buddhist teachings these five components are all that make up the mind-body unity of a human being. Indeed, they constitute all worldly things, and as a group they are synonymous with *saṅkhāra* – conditioned phenomena – of the Three Characteristics.

† Sanskrit – *Nirvana*.

‡ Of *Buddhadhamma*; as yet untranslated.

*Bhikkhus, the body is not-self. If the body were self it would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of the body: 'May my body be this way; may it not be that way.' But because the body is not-self, the body leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of the body: 'May my body be this way; may it not be that way.'*

*Feeling is not-self ... Perception is not-self ... Volitional formations are not-self ... Consciousness is not-self. For if consciousness were self it would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of consciousness: 'May my consciousness be this way; may it not be that way.' But because consciousness is not-self, consciousness leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of consciousness: 'May my consciousness be this way; may it not be that way.'*

*'What do you think, monks, is the body permanent or impermanent?'*

*'Impermanent, venerable sir.'*

*'Is that which is impermanent painful or pleasant?'*

*'Painful, venerable sir.'*

*'Is what is impermanent, painful and of the nature to change fit to be regarded thus: This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'*

*'No, venerable sir.'*

*'What do you think, monks, are feelings permanent or impermanent? ... 'is perception permanent or impermanent?' ... 'are volitional formations permanent or impermanent?' ... 'is consciousness permanent or impermanent?' ...*

*'Is what is impermanent, painful and of the nature to change fit to be regarded thus: This is mine, this is I, this is my self?'*

*'No, venerable sir.'*

*'Therefore, monks, you should see any kind of physical form ... feeling ... perception ... volitional formation ... consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: This is not mine, this is not I, this is not my self.'*

(S. III. 66–68)

## 1. Understanding the Terms *Dhamma* and *Saṅkhāra*

### A. ‘All Things’ and ‘All Formations’

In the first and second statements the Buddha says that all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra*)\* are impermanent and *dukkha*, but in the third statement he says that all things (*dhamma*)† are nonself. This indicates a distinction between the first two characteristics and the third characteristic. To understand this distinction one must examine the words *saṅkhāra* and *dhamma*.

The Pali word *dhamma* has an all-encompassing range of meaning, covering all things: everything that exists – past, present and future, both real and imaginary. Material and mental, good and bad, and ordinary and exceptional things are included within this word. For a precise Pali definition, a modifier can be added to the word *dhamma*, or the object to be defined is divided into sub-categories. Alternatively, the word *dhamma* can be used unmodified within a specific context. For example, paired with *adhamma*, and used to describe moral behaviour, it means merit or goodness. When it is used with *attha* it refers to the practical significance of a word or text. When *dhamma* is used in relation to study it means the scriptures, the Buddha’s discourses.

In the third statement of the Three Characteristics pertaining to nonself, the Buddha used the term *dhamma* in the broadest sense, referring to all things, without exception. To understand *dhamma* in this context it is helpful to divide things into categories:

\* When referring to *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics, I use the term ‘conditioned phenomena’ or the simpler ‘formations’.

† Sanskrit – *dharmā*. The word *dhamma* has many definitions; the most common are: Ultimate Truth, teaching, doctrine, nature, law, and ‘thing’.

- Material things (*rūpa-dhamma*) and immaterial things (*nāma-dhamma*).
- Mundane things (*lokiya-dhamma*) and transcendent things (*lokuttara-dhamma*).
- Conditioned things (*saṅkhata-dhamma*) and the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*).
- Wholesome things (*kusala-dhamma*), unwholesome things (*akusala-dhamma*) and neutral things (*abyākata-dhamma*).

Each group above incorporates the entire meaning of *dhamma*, but the group that corresponds with the subject to be studied here is that of conditioned things and the Unconditioned.

All things can be divided into two types<sup>4</sup>:

1. ***Saṅkhata-dhamma***: Constructed things; things that arise from conditioning factors (*paccaya*); things formed by the merging of such factors. These things are also called *saṅkhāra*, which has the same root and translation. [70/2] Both *saṅkhata-dhamma* and *saṅkhāra* refer to every kind of condition, material and mental, mundane and supra-mundane, except Nibbāna.
2. ***Asaṅkhata-dhamma***: That which is not constructed; the state that does not arise by being fashioned from conditioning factors, and is not subject to them. It is also called *visaṅkhāra*, meaning the state free from conditioned phenomena – the Unconditioned, that is, Nibbāna.

*Saṅkhāra* is therefore just one aspect of *dhamma*. *Dhamma* has a range of meaning that embraces both conditioned phenomena and the Unconditioned: *Saṅkhata-dhamma* and *asaṅkhata-dhamma*, or *saṅkhāra* and Nibbāna. Applying this to the Three Characteristics, one sees that the scope of the first two characteristics, *aniccatā* and *dukkhatā*, is narrower than that of the last, *anattatā*. This is summarised as follows:

All conditioned phenomena are impermanent, *dukkha*, and nonself, but the Unconditioned – Nibbāna – is devoid of the first two attributes. All things, however, both the conditioned and the Unconditioned, are without a self.



In the Pali Canon the Buddha characterizes the conditioned and the Unconditioned respectively:<sup>5</sup>

Signs of the conditioned world (*sankhata-lakkhaṇa*):

1. Origination is apparent.
2. Disintegration is apparent.
3. Alteration is apparent.

Signs of the Unconditioned (*asankhata-lakkhaṇa*):

1. Origination is not apparent.
2. Disintegration is not apparent.
3. Alteration is not apparent.

To sum up, the Unconditioned, or Nibbāna, is beyond impermanence and *dukkha*, but is selfless. As for everything else, that is all formations, they are impermanent, *dukkha*, and nonself, as this passage from the Vinaya confirms: [70/3]

*All formations are impermanent, dukkha, and nonself; Nibbāna and designations are nonself.*<sup>6</sup>

## **B. Saṅkhāra of the Five Khandhas and Saṅkhāra of the Three Characteristics**

There are many examples in Thai of a word having several definitions.\* Some definitions vary only slightly while others vary greatly to the point of appearing unrelated. In any case, people who know the diverse meanings of a word are generally able to distinguish a particular connotation when encountering the word in context.

Similarly, in Pali there are many words with the same spelling but different meanings. Such words include: *Nāga*, which can mean a divine serpent, a battle elephant, or an excellent person. *Nimitta* in the Vinaya<sup>†</sup> means a boundary marker, while in relation to meditation it means a mental image. A *nikāya* is a section of the Suttanta Piṭaka‡; in other contexts it means a religious faction. *Paccaya* in the Vinaya is

\* Of course this is also true in English.

† The discipline, particularly the monastic discipline.

‡ Collection of discourses.

a basic requisite, e.g., food, while in Dhamma teachings it refers more generally to a 'cause' or 'support'.

Consider the following words as found in different Buddhist texts:

*A person knows the **rasa** with the tongue; delicious or not, he does not allow desire or annoyance to overwhelm the mind. Such a person guards the **indriya** of the tongue. [70/4]*

*The **indriya** of faith, as **rasa**, causes all accompanying qualities to be radiant, like a water-purifying gem.*

In the first passage *rasa* means 'a taste', and *indriya* refers to the internal sense base. In the latter passage *rasa* means a function, while *indriya* means a spiritual faculty.

*A monk should perform **yoga** to realize the state that is free from **yoga**.*

The first *yoga* means 'spiritual effort': the development of wisdom. The second *yoga* refers to the defilements that bind beings to the suffering in worldly existence.\*

*An ordinary person regards the body, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations (**saṅkhāra**) and consciousness as self, but these five aggregates cannot be self, because all conditioned phenomena (**saṅkhāra**) are impermanent, dukkha and not-self.*

The first *saṅkhāra* refers solely to one of the five aggregates, whereas the second *saṅkhāra* covers all conditioned things in keeping with the Three Characteristics.

The word that needs explaining here is *saṅkhāra*. The list of examples was given simply to demonstrate the important fact that in Pali there are many cases of the same word having two or more meanings, of varying disparity; they can be dissimilar or even contradictory. If one understands this one does not consider it strange to find the word

\* In Hinduism *yoga* (to 'yoke' or 'join') refers to the union of the individual soul with the Supreme Spirit.

*saṅkhāra* being used in the texts in many different senses, and one learns to distinguish the meaning accordingly.

The word *saṅkhāra* has at least four definitions, but there are two in particular that need to be understood. These are *saṅkhāra* as one of the Five Aggregates and *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics. Because these two definitions of *saṅkhāra* overlap, they can cause confusion.

1. The Five Aggregates: *Rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, ***saṅkhāra***, *viññāṇa*.
2. The Three Characteristics: All ***saṅkhāra*** are impermanent, all ***saṅkhāra*** are *dukkha*, all *dhamma* are nonself.

*Saṅkhāra* as the fourth component of the five aggregates refers to mental factors which shape the mind as wholesome, unwholesome or neutral. They are the mental qualities, led by intention (*cetanā*), that mould and influence thoughts and consequent physical action. They are the agents behind action (*kamma*), the ‘fashioners’ of the mind, for example: Faith (*saddhā*), mindfulness (*sati*), moral shame (*biri*), fear of wrongdoing (*ottappa*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*paññā*), delusion (*moha*), greed (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*).<sup>7</sup> They are mental qualities (*nāma-dhamma*), existing in the mind along with feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

*Saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics refers to constructed things: everything that arises from causes and conditioning factors, regardless of material or immaterial, physical or mental, live or inanimate, internal or external. [70/5] They are also called *saṅkhata-dhamma*. *Saṅkhāra* here includes everything except Nibbāna.

*Saṅkhāra* of the Five Aggregates has a more limited meaning than *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics, or more precisely, it refers to one part of *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics. *Saṅkhāra* of the Five Aggregates refers to the agents that determine the quality of the mind, or ‘volitional formations’. As for *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics, it refers to compounded things: things constructed by conditioning factors, or simply ‘formations’. Because volitional formations are themselves constructed things, they are not excluded from the all-inclusive meaning of *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics.

Using the model of the Five Aggregates, one can divide conditioned phenomena into mind and matter, and subdivide the mind into four

sub-groups – feeling, perception, volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness. Here, *saṅkhāra* is solely a mental component and just one element of four. *Saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics, however, covers both mind and matter. Therefore, *saṅkhāra* (of the five aggregates) is one kind of *saṅkhāra* (of the Three Characteristics).

Accordingly, the statements: *Physical form is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, volitional formations (saṅkhāra) are impermanent, and consciousness is impermanent*, and: *All conditioned phenomena (saṅkhāra) are impermanent* are identical in meaning.

The texts occasionally use the term *saṅkhāra-khandha* for *saṅkhāra* of the Five Aggregates, and *saṅkhata-saṅkhāra*, or simply *saṅkhāra*, for *saṅkhāra* of the Three Characteristics. [70/6] The reason these two teachings use the same term, *saṅkhāra*, is that they describe conditions with similar meanings, having to do with ‘formation’.

*Time all beings devours, and consumes itself as well.*

(J. II. 260)

## 2. Scriptural Definitions

The teachings on the five aggregates (*pañca-khandha*) in chapter 1\*, and on the six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) in chapter 2\*, emphasize the internal life of human beings. The teaching of the Three Characteristics expands the scope of investigation to cover both the individual person and external objects. It is a study of human beings and the entire world.

The meaning of each of the three characteristics has already been described in a rudimentary way. At this point they will be analysed in more detail, based on Scriptural teachings.

### 1. Impermanence

The Paṭisambhidāmagga defines *aniccatā* simply as ‘ending’ (*kbayaṭṭhena*)<sup>8</sup>. All things exist momentarily, at a specific time and place, then cease immediately. An object in the past does not exist in the present; an object present now does not exist in the future. Later texts expand on this definition, and offer a range of descriptions. For example, at first glance, one sees that a person’s life begins at birth and ends at death. Upon further inspection, one notices an accelerating rate of birth and decline, of an age period, a year, a season, a month, a day, a few minutes, to the rise and fall of each moment. Modern scientific discoveries, not least in physics, have helped to describe and reveal impermanence.

Of the many commentarial definitions of *aniccatā*, here are some of the most common:

\* Of *Buddhadhamma*.

- Uncertain and unstable (*aniccantikatāya*).
- Having a beginning and an end (*ādi-antavantatāya*)<sup>9</sup>.
- Having existed and then ceasing to exist, or: having appeared and then disappearing (*butvā abbhāvattthena*)<sup>10</sup>. [70/9]
- Arising, passing away, and becoming otherwise; having existed, then ceasing to exist (*uppādavayaññathabbhāvā butvā abbhāvato vā*).<sup>11</sup>

A detailed compilation of definitions is as follows:<sup>12</sup>

1. *Uppādavayappavattito*: Arising and disintegrating, rising and ceasing, existing and then ceasing to exist.
2. *Vipariṇāmato*: Subject to change; continually altered and transformed.
3. *Tāvakālikato*: Temporary; existing momentarily.
4. *Niccapaṭikkhepato*: Inconsistent with permanence; the variability of a conditioned object is inherently in conflict with permanence; when one accurately observes the object no permanence is found; even if someone tries to regard it as permanent, it refuses to accommodate that person's wishes.

## 2. Dukkha

The Paṭisambhidāmagga defines *dukkhatā* simply as ‘subject to danger’ (*bhaya-aṭṭhena*).<sup>13</sup> *Bhaya* can also mean ‘dangerous’ or ‘frightening’. All conditioned phenomena invariably disintegrate and dissolve; they therefore offer no true safety, relief or assurance. Any such phenomenon is threatened by destruction. The object thus creates danger – both fear and a peril – for anyone who attaches to it. The commentaries elaborate the meaning of *dukkhatā*, including these two definitions:

- ‘Under perpetual pressure through arising and disintegration’ (*uppādavaya-paṭipīlanatṭhena*<sup>14</sup> or *uppādavaya-paṭipīlanatāya*<sup>15</sup>). There is pressure on everything that interacts with that object, and the object itself is under stress from its component elements.<sup>16</sup>
- ‘A foundation for suffering’ (*dukkha-vatthutāya*<sup>17</sup> or *dukkha-vatthuto*<sup>18</sup>). [70/10] An object beset by *dukkha* is a basis for suffering, for example by causing pain. Simply speaking, *dukkha* means to cause pain.

The commentaries offer a thorough compilation of definitions for *dukkha*.<sup>19</sup>

1. *Abbiṅha-sampatipīlanato*: Continually oppressed; subject to constant pressure due to arising and dissolution; there is persistent friction amongst component parts, or amongst associated objects.
2. *Dukkhamato*: ‘Hard to endure’; not durable; unable to be sustained in an original state; obliged to change, become otherwise, and lose identity, due to arising and ceasing.<sup>20</sup>



3. *Dukkha-vatthuto*: A foundation for suffering; produces various kinds of affliction, e.g., pain, discomfort and distress.<sup>21</sup>
4. *Sukha-paṭikkhepato*: Opposing and obstructing happiness (*sukha*). Happiness exists only as a feeling. The basic condition is that of *dukkha* – pressure, tension and friction – which is a feature of all formations. This pressure causes feelings of oppression and stress, which we call ‘pain’ (*dukkha-vedanā*). The reduction of pressure, or the freedom from pain, we call ‘happiness’. The greater the discomfort (duress, deprivation, yearning, hunger, etc.), the greater the happiness when one is released from the discomfort. For example, a person who moves from the hot sun into the shade feels refreshed and cool. Likewise, a person experiencing great pleasure (*sukha-vedanā*) will experience a similarly strong discomfort (*dukkha-vedanā*) when the pleasurable circumstances are disturbed. [70/11] Even small amounts of discomfort, which are normally not felt as such, may be a torment. A person leaving a warm room into the cold, for example, may find the temperature extreme, even though those around him are not bothered.

Happiness, or a happy feeling (*sukha-vedanā*), is not an end of *dukkha*. We call an increase or reduction of pressure (*dukkha*) ‘happiness’ because it creates a feeling of pleasure. But an alteration of this pleasurable tension results in a condition that requires endurance or is intolerable, a condition we call ‘suffering’, i.e., we feel pain (*dukkha-vedanā*). In truth only *dukkha* – pressure and stress – exists, which either increases or decreases. A similar subject is that of heat and cold. Cold does not really exist; there exists only a feeling of cold. The basic condition is heat, which increases, decreases, or is absent. When one says that one is pleasantly cool, one is referring only to a feeling; actually, one is experiencing a degree of heat. If more or less warm than that degree, then one is not at ease. In this sense, happiness, or to speak in full ‘a feeling of happiness’, is one level of *dukkha*. Happiness is dependent on pressure and tension, and necessarily changes and vanishes. In other words, *dukkha*, which is the basic condition, prevents happiness from being sustained.

As quoted above, the Paṭisambhidāmagga defines *dukkha* in the

context of the Three Characteristics as ‘subject to danger’. In the section explaining the Four Noble Truths (*ariyasacca*), it defines *dukkha* – the first of the Noble Truths – in four ways. Something is identified as *dukkha* because it is oppressed (*pīlanatṭha*), is constructed (*saṅkhataṭṭha*), burns (*santāpaṭṭha*), and changes (*vipariṇāmatṭha*)<sup>22</sup>. These four definitions of *dukkha* can also be used in the context of the Three Characteristics. Definitions one and four (*pīlanatṭha* and *vipariṇāmatṭha*) have already been described\*; here are the other two:

5. *Saṅkhataṭṭha*: ‘Fashioned’ (*saṅkhata*); constructed by conditioning factors; depending upon such factors; inconstant.
6. *Santāpaṭṭha*: Burning; burning up, ending in decay and destruction; moreover, it burns someone with defilements, who grasps and clings to the object, causing torment and agitation.<sup>23</sup>

### ***A. The Three Characteristics and the Four Noble Truths***

*Dukkha* appears in three key teachings:

1. On feeling/sensation (two versions):
  - a) Three *vedanā*: Painful (***dukkha***), pleasant (*sukha*), and neutral (*adukkham’asukha* or *upekkhā*).
  - b) Five *vedanā*: ***Dukkha***, *sukha*, *domanassa*, *somanassa* and *upekkhā*.<sup>†</sup>

Its complete name in this context is *dukkha-vedanā*. [70/12]
2. In the Three Characteristics: *Anicca*, ***dukkha*** and *anattā*. In this context its complete name is *dukkha-lakkhaṇa*.
3. In the Four Noble Truths: ***Dukkha***, *samudaya*, *nirodha* and *magga*. Its complete name is *dukkha-ariyasacca*.

The definitions of *dukkha* in these three groups overlap; they are different aspects of one truth. The *dukkha* which has the broadest

\* Definition 1 of *dukkha* and definition 2 of impermanence above, respectively.

† This second version distinguishes physical and mental feeling, both painful and pleasant.

meaning and is all-inclusive is *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics, also referred to as *dukkha-lakkhaṇa* or *dukkhatā*. This is the condition of instability, the inability to be sustained in an original shape, due to the pressure, stress and friction from rising and disintegration, as explained above. It is a characteristic of all conditioned phenomena (*sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*), encompassing the same range as impermanence: whatever is impermanent is also *dukkha* (*yad'aniccam tam dukkham*).

The *dukkha* which has the most restricted meaning, and is simply a consequence of the *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics, is *dukkha* as feeling, called *dukkha-vedanā*: a feeling of pain. It is a feeling occurring when the pressure – a common characteristic to all things – reaches a certain level in relation to a person's body and mind.<sup>24</sup> This pain is included in the *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics, as is all other feeling, both pleasant and neutral. All kinds of feeling – painful, pleasurable, and neutral – are *dukkha* as determined by the Three Characteristics.

*Dukkha* in the Four Noble Truths (*dukkha-ariyasacca*) is one aspect of *dukkha* in the Three Characteristics, but it is limited to that which causes problems for human beings. All formations are naturally under pressure, which is the *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics. These formations (not all of them and not always) oppress human beings; this oppression is the *dukkha* of the Four Noble Truths. (These phenomena are oppressive, however, because they themselves are subject to stress.) In brief, *dukkha-ariyasacca* refers specifically to matters concerning the five aggregates of clinging (*upādāna-khandha*).\* Technically, the *dukkha* of the Four Noble Truths refers specifically to the suffering arising on account of the sense bases (*indriyabaddha*). It excludes pressure independent of the sense bases (*anindriyabaddha*), which is classified as *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics but not of the Noble Truths. (Note that *dukkha-ariyasacca* is *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics. *Samudaya* (the cause of suffering<sup>†</sup>) and *magga* (the Eightfold Path) are as well, but they are not *dukkha-ariyasacca*.)

The scope of *dukkha* in the Four Noble Truths is determined as

\* *Upādāna-khandha*, the five groups of clinging, are identical to the five aggregates (*khandha*) mentioned earlier, but this term highlights the aggregates as the objects identified with and clung to by human beings, and which consequently give rise to suffering.

† I.e., *taṇhā* – craving.

follows:

- 1) *Dukkha* as the first Noble Truth is associated with human life and human problems. It arises as a result of the sense faculties (*indriyabaddha*); it does not include *dukkha* independent of the sense faculties (*anindriyabaddha*). It is not the *dukkha* mentioned in the passages ‘all conditioned phenomena are *dukkha*’ (*sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*), and ‘whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*’ (*yad’aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*), which refer to the all-inclusive *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics. [70/13]
- 2) It originates from defiled actions (*kamma-kilesa*). It is a result of *dukkha-samudaya*\*; it is a result of craving – *taṇhā*.
- 3) It is the focus of the duty – *pariññā-kicca* – relating to the first Noble Truth. *Pariññā* is comprehension or accurate knowledge of things. To acquire knowledge of and to fully understand personal dilemmas is our responsibility vis-à-vis *dukkha* of the Noble Truths. *Dukkha* in the Noble Truths is confined to this subject of understanding human suffering.
- 4) It refers specifically to the origin of suffering (*dukkha-vatthutāya*) rather than the pressure, tension and friction of arising and falling (*udayabbaya-paṭipīlanatṭhena*), which is the essential meaning of *dukkha* in the Three Characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

## ***B. Types of Dukkha***

The *dukkha* most often analysed in the scriptures is *dukkha* of the Four Noble Truths, because it concerns human beings directly. We should reflect upon this suffering, to be released from it through Dhamma practice. As for the all-inclusive *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics, it is illustrated just enough for accurate understanding of reality. The chief, most frequently mentioned groups of *dukkha* in the scriptures are listed below:

- 1) **The 3 *Dukkhatā* or 3 *Dukkha*:**<sup>26</sup> This is a key group, which includes the meaning of *dukkha* in the Three Characteristics:
  1. *Dukkha-dukkhatā* or *dukkha-dukkha*: Physical and mental

\* The origin of suffering – the second Noble Truth.

- pain, as generally understood, for example aches, discomfort and fatigue; in other words, 'painful feeling' (*dukkha-vedanā*).
2. *Vipariṇāma-dukkhatā*: *Dukkha* resulting from or inherent in change. This refers to pleasurable feeling (*sukha-vedanā*), which in truth is a degree of *dukkha*. Pleasure is equal to concealed pain, or always has pain furtively in pursuit. Once a feeling of pleasure changes, it transforms into a feeling of pain. In other words, the fundamental inconstancy of pleasure produces pain. (Another explanation is that pleasure *is* pain, of a modified degree.)
  3. *Sanīkhāra-dukkhatā* or *sanīkhāra-dukkha*: *Dukkha* that is inherent in conditioned phenomena, inherent in everything that originates from causes. In other words, the five aggregates are *dukkha*; they are of the nature to be pressured and coerced by the rising and decay of opposing factors, preventing them from remaining in a stable, original state. This third *dukkha* comprises the *dukkha* of the Three Characteristics. [70/14]

**2) The 12 *Dukkha*<sup>27</sup>**: This group elucidates the meaning of *dukkha* in the Four Noble Truths:

1. Birth (*jāti*): Birth is suffering because it is a basis for various kinds of affliction:
  - A. *Gabbhokkantimūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering of confinement in the womb: a foetus dwells in a stifling place, congested with repugnant substances, like a worm in foul water.
  - B. *Gabbhapariharaṇamūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering of carrying the womb. Whenever the mother moves, or eats hot, cold, or spicy food, it affects the child in the womb.
  - C. *Gabbhavipattimūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering from misfortunes of the womb, for example ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth or Caesarean operation.
  - D. *Vijāyanamūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering of childbirth, including the pounding, twisting, squeezing and severe pain while exiting the narrow canal.
  - E. *Babiniḅkhamanamūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering of emergence into the outside world. The newly born infant, whose skin

is sensitive as a wound, feels acute pain when handled and washed.

- F. *Attupakkamamūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering that results from self-inflicted actions, for example suicide, extreme asceticism, refusing to eat due to resentment, or other self-injurious acts.
- G. *Parupakkamamūlaka-dukkha*: The suffering caused by others' deeds, for example being assaulted, murdered or imprisoned.
2. Ageing (*jarā*): Ageing weakens the internal organs. The faculties, for example the eyes and ears, function defectively, vitality wanes, and agility is lost. The skin wrinkles; it is no longer fair and lustrous. Memory becomes incoherent and faulty. A person's control, both internal and external, weakens, causing great physical and mental distress.
  3. Death (*maraṇa*): If one has committed bad deeds during the course of one's life, they appear as images (*nimitta*) at the time of death. One must be separated from cherished people and things. The constituent parts of the body cease to perform their duties, there may be intense physical pain, and one is impotent to remedy the situation.
  4. Grief (*soka*), for example from the loss of a relative.
  5. Lamentation (*parideva*), for example keening at the loss of a relative.
  6. Physical pain (*dukkha*), for example wounds, sprains and sickness.<sup>28</sup>
  7. Distress and anguish (*domanassa*), which cause, for example, crying, beating one's breast, and committing suicide. [70/15]
  8. Frustration and despair (*upāyāsa*), for example the torment of unmitigated grief.
  9. The association with disagreeable people or things (*appiya-sampayoga*), for example the need to engage with a person whom one detests.
  10. The separation from cherished people or objects (*piya-vippayoga*), for example separation from loved ones, or the loss of possessions.
  11. Not obtaining what one wants; disappointment (*icchitālābha*).
  12. The five aggregates, which are the foundation for clinging

(*upādāna-khandhā*). All of the aforementioned suffering stems from the five aggregates as objects of clinging. To sum up, one can say that suffering is the five aggregates of clinging.

**3) The 2 *Dukkha* (A)<sup>29</sup>:**

1. *Paṭicchanna-dukkha*: Concealed, not clearly manifest suffering, for example a latent ear- or tooth-ache, or the mind smouldering with the ‘fires’ of lust and anger.
2. *Appaṭicchanna-dukkha*: Overt suffering, for example being pricked by a thorn, whipped, or cut by a knife.

**4) The 2 *Dukkha* (B)<sup>30</sup>:**

1. *Pariyāya-dukkha*: Indirect or implicit *dukkha*, that is, every form of *dukkha* mentioned above excluding painful feeling (*dukkha-vedanā*).
2. *Nippariyāya-dukkha*: Explicit *dukkha*, which is also called *dukkha-dukkha*: the feeling of pain.

The Mahānidessa and the Cūlanidessa offer many additional definitions of *dukkha*.<sup>31</sup> For matter of simplicity, they can be sorted into the following groups:

- A) Suffering as birth (*jāti-dukkhā*), ageing (*jarā-dukkhā*), illness (*byādhi-dukkhā*), death (*maraṇa-dukkhā*), sorrow, lamentation, pain, anguish and despair (*soka-parideva-dukkhā-domanassa-upāyāsa*).
- B) The suffering of hell-beings (*nerayika-dukkhā*), of animals (*tiracchānayanika-dukkhā*), of ghosts (*pittivisayika-dukkhā*), and of humans (*mānūsaka-dukkhā*).
- C) The suffering experienced from taking birth in a womb (*gabbhokkantimūlaka-dukkhā*), from living in a womb (*gabbhethitimūlaka-dukkhā*), and from exiting a womb (*gabbhavuṭṭhānamūlaka-dukkhā*); the suffering inherent in one who is born (*jātassūpanibandhika-dukkhā*); the suffering of one who is born, due to being dependent on others (*jātasaparādhbeyyaka-dukkhā*); self-inflicted suffering (*attūpakama-dukkhā*); and suffering inflicted by others (*parūpakkama-dukkhā*).

- D) Pain (*dukkha-dukkha*), the *dukkha* of formations (*sankhāra-dukkha*), and *dukkha* inherent in change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*). [70/16]
- E) Various kinds of diseases, for example eye and ear diseases; 35 kinds of diseases are mentioned.
- F) Illness resulting from eight causes, including bile, phlegm and wind, or a combination of these causes; illness resulting from changes in the weather and irregular exercise; afflictions due to other people's actions, for example being murdered or imprisoned, and the effects of personal actions.
- G) Suffering owing to cold, heat, hunger, thirst, defecation, urination, wind, sun, flies, mosquitoes and crawling creatures.
- H) Suffering resulting from the death of one's mother, father, brother, sister, or child.
- I) Suffering due to loss of relatives, loss of possessions, loss through sickness, loss of moral conduct, and loss of cherished views and opinions.

The Buddha, in the Mahādukkhakkhandha and the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha suttas<sup>32</sup>, described many examples of the 'mass of suffering' (*dukkha-khandha*), the plights afflicting humans because of sense desire. They are summarised as follows:

- A) The hardship or even loss of life due to one's occupation.
- B) The disappointment experienced when one's labour is in vain.
- C) The suffering in trying to protect acquired wealth.
- D) The grief that ensues when such protection is unsuccessful and wealth is lost, for example to thieves or fire.
- E) The disputes and violence between rulers, between householders, between parents and children, between siblings, and between friends, leading to death or serious injury.
- F) The slaughter and severe agony of war.
- G) The injury and death resulting from invasion.
- H) The committal of crimes, for example burglary or adultery, followed by arrest and conviction, and ending in torture and execution.
- I) The performance of physical, verbal and mental misdeeds, leading after death to states of deprivation, perdition and hell.



More references to *dukkha* are located throughout the scriptures and commentaries. In some places the descriptions have no specific name (as in the examples of the Mahā- and the Cūḷadukkhakkhandha suttas mentioned above), while in others *dukkha* is identified by special terms such as *samsāra-dukkha*<sup>33</sup>, *apāya-dukkha*, *vaṭṭamūlaka-dukkha* or *āhārapariyeṭṭhi-dukkha*<sup>34</sup>, to list just a few.<sup>35</sup> [70/17] It would be possible to elaborate much more on this subject of suffering, since human beings encounter so many problems, including the afflictions faced by all living creatures, and suffering specific to certain time periods, regions and circumstances, but it is not necessary to offer a drawn-out explanation. More important is to realize that the many scriptural descriptions exist to promote an understanding of the true nature of suffering. With this understanding we can respond correctly to suffering. We acknowledge that we must engage with suffering, rather than resort to evasion, self-deception, or to the denial that either suffering does not exist or that we have escaped it. Such deception only creates more complex problems and more severe affliction. Our responsibility is rather that of facing and understanding suffering (*pariññā-kicca*), to have victory over it, and to be freed from it: this is the practice of walking the path leading to suffering's cessation, a cessation both temporary and permanent.

*Form is like a lump of foam,  
Feeling like a water bubble;  
Perception is like a mirage,  
Volitions resemble a plantain trunk,  
And consciousness an illusion.*

(S III. 142–43)

### 3. Anattā: The Characteristic of Nonself

#### A. Scope

As explained earlier the quality of nonself (*anattatā*) has a broader application than the qualities of impermanence and *dukkha*. One sees the difference immediately in the Buddha's presentation:

1. *Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*: All conditioned phenomena are impermanent.
2. *Sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*: All conditioned phenomena are subject to pressure.
3. *Sabbe dhammā anattā*: All things are nonself.

This teaching indicates that only conditioned phenomena (and all conditioned phenomena) are impermanent and *dukkha*. But something exists apart from such phenomena, which is neither impermanent nor subject to stress. All things without exception, however, are *anattā*: they are nonself. Nothing exists which is a self or possesses a self.

The definition of *dhamma* encompasses all things. As *dhamma* includes all things it can be subdivided without end. One can, however, classify things into groups and categories. The division pertinent to this discussion is into conditioned things (*saṅkhata-dhamma*) and the Unconditioned (*asaṅkhata-dhamma*).

*Saṅkhata-dhamma* refers to things created by conditioning factors (*paccaya*). These things can be simply called *saṅkhāra*, and include all materiality and mentality, constituting the five aggregates. *Asaṅkhata-dhamma*, the Unconditioned, is neither created nor supported by conditioning factors; it is also called *visaṅkhāra*: the state transcending the five aggregates, or Nibbāna.

One can describe this law of nature in more detail as follows:

1. All conditioned things (the five aggregates) are impermanent.
2. All conditioned things are *dukkha*.
3. All things, both conditioned things and the Unconditioned, are nonself.

### **B. Basic Definition**

*Anattā* can be translated as ‘not-self’, ‘selfless’, or ‘nonself’. As *anattā* is a negation of *attā*, to comprehend the characteristic of nonself we must first understand the meaning of *attā*. *Attā* (Sanskrit – *ātman*) refers to an eternal self or substance, which is the purported essence or core of any particular thing, residing permanently in an object. It is both owner and controller, the essential recipient of experience and agent of action. It is that which lies behind all phenomena, including all life, able to direct things in conformity with its needs and desires.

Some religions elaborate by claiming that a superior ‘Self’ or ‘Spirit’ lies behind all worldly phenomena, reigning over the souls or substance of all living beings and inanimate objects. They claim that this supreme Spirit creates and governs all things. In Hinduism, for example, it is called Brahma or Paramatman.

The gist of the teaching on *anattā* is the negation of this fixed abiding self, both mundane and transcendent; it asserts that this self is simply an idea stemming from a misapprehension by unenlightened human beings, who do not perceive the true nature of the world. People create a (concept of) self and superimpose it on reality; this (concept of) self then obstructs them from seeing the truth. A clear understanding of nonself dispels the misapprehension and dissolves the obscuring (idea of) self. The teaching of nonself bids us to discern with wisdom that all things, all components of reality, exist and proceed in conformity with their own nature. No hidden abiding self exists as owner or director; things are not subservient to an internal or external jurisdiction.

A basic definition of selflessness, both in regard to conditioned phenomena and the Unconditioned, is that all things exist in compliance with their nature, and are not subordinate to an external authority. To elaborate on this definition one must examine the distinction between conditioned phenomena and the Unconditioned. The Unconditioned,

or Nibbāna, on the one hand, is an absolute truth (*dhamma-dbātu\**), existing independent of conditioning factors. It is neither a being, nor a consciousness, nor a self (*nissatta-nijjīva*); it cannot be possessed or controlled; nor does it act in any sort of creative role. Compounded phenomena, on the other hand, are dependent on and conform to those factors which act as catalysts or creative agents. These phenomena are void of an inner substance that experiences or controls the formative process.

### **C) Implied Definition**

Before proceeding, one needs to understand that Buddhism refers to a self solely on a conventional level: the self is a relative truth; it is not believed to be absolute. This is made clear by the Buddha's statement that a Perfectly Enlightened Buddha does not establish a self as part of his creed; he does not regard the self as real:

*The teacher who does not declare a self as real or true, either in this world or the next, is called the Perfectly Enlightened Buddha.*<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, Buddhism does not speculate about the existence of self, or engage in a diagnosis of self: it gives no concern to self as an absolute truth. Moreover, the Buddha states:

*It is impossible for a person endowed with right view (i.e., a stream-enterer) to grasp any thing (dhamma) as self.*<sup>37</sup>

With the realization of the supreme state, no reason remains for an arahant† to speculate on a self. This is substantiated by the Buddha's designation of an arahant as one who has 'abandoned the self' or 'discarded the self' (*attañjaho/attañjaho*<sup>38</sup>): an arahant has abandoned the belief in a self, the view of existing as or possessing a self. Some passages describe an arahant as 'having abandoned the self, not clinging to anything' (*attam pahāya anupādiyāno*).<sup>39</sup>

Although a self does not truly exist, most people embrace a notion of a fixed self. The Buddha rejected the validity of such a notion, and

\* Literally 'elemental truth'.

† A fully enlightened human being.

encouraged people to abandon the attachment to self. In Buddhism, a substantial self is of no importance; it is not a matter requiring speculation. Buddhism focuses on the attachment to self, or on the concept of self which is the object of such attachment. Buddhism teaches people to release the attachment. With its release one's responsibility is fulfilled, and a fixed stable self no longer has relevance.

To summarise, once a person understands that conditioned things are selfless, the topic of self versus nonself is over. A person who has realized the Unconditioned no longer identifies with anything as a self. Furthermore, any explanation for the selfless nature of the Unconditioned, Nibbāna, becomes redundant. To elaborate on Nibbāna as *anattā* is unnecessary for the following reasons:

- Lacking direct realization of the Unconditioned the only things which people apprehend and are able to apprehend as self are conditioned phenomena or the five aggregates.
- The duty of a teacher in this context is only to prompt people to know and then abandon their misunderstanding which leads them to grasp conditioned things as self.
- Once people are aware, abandoning erroneous views and ceasing to grasp the five aggregates as self, they do not search for anything else to cling to as a self, because they have clearly realized Nibbāna, which transcends the five aggregates along with all belief in self.

Those who have realized Nibbāna discern by themselves the selfless quality of the Unconditioned; there is no further need to discuss this matter. In other words, transcending the state of an ordinary person results in the end of clinging and doubting; the necessity to discuss the selfless nature of the Unconditioned vanishes automatically.

This being the case the standard scriptural explanations of *anattā* refer to conditioned phenomena, which are of everyday relevance to people. In other words, ordinary unenlightened people are limited to conceptualisations of conditioned things.

#### ***D) Scriptural Explanation***

As stated above, the common scriptural explanations of *anattā* focus on conditioned things because these teachings are presented to ordinary

people and touch upon everyday issues. Furthermore, those things which ordinary unenlightened people are able to conceive of as self are limited to conditioned things (*saṅkhāra*), or limited to the five aggregates. Therefore, the explanations of nonself concentrate exclusively on the five aggregates. This corresponds with the Buddha's words:

*Monks, whichever ascetics and brahmins who regard self in various ways all regard the five aggregates subject to clinging, or a certain one among them. What five?*

*Monks, the uninstructed, ordinary person ... regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form. He regards feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self ... or self as in consciousness. This way of regarding things thus becomes his fixed belief that 'I exist'.<sup>40</sup>*

In other words, (belief in) a self only exists where the five aggregates exist, and exists because of clinging to these aggregates, as explained by the Buddha:

*Monks, when what exists, by relying on what, by adhering to what, does such a view as this arise: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self?'*

...

*When there is form, monks, by relying on form, by adhering to form, such a view as this arises: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self.' When there is feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... consciousness, by relying on consciousness, by adhering to consciousness, such a view as this arises: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self.'<sup>41</sup>*

At this point let us examine some of the numerous scriptural explanations of nonself. The Paṭisambhidāmagga defines *anattā* as 'insubstantial' (*asāraḥ*).<sup>42</sup> Insubstantial means to be without essence, to be without a core, and to possess nothing that is truly stable or enduring.

*Insustantial means the absence of an essential nuclear self (atta-sāra), which is thought of as a self (attā), an abider (nivāsi), an agent (kāraṇa), an experiencer (vedaka), or an autonomous master (sayāṇvasi). [70/18] For whatever is impermanent is unstable*

(dukkha); it is unable to prevent its transience, or its oppression from rising and falling. How then can it exist as a doer, and so on? Hence, the Buddha said: 'Monks, if this physical form, for example, were self, surely it would not be subject to affliction.'<sup>43</sup>

Note that this definition of non-essence, or selflessness, includes the absence of a creative role, or a lack of intrinsic control. If one were to possess a stable enduring self as a core, then one could resist change; one would not be subject to change. Similarly, if one were master over things, one could manipulate possessions according to desire. Reality, however, is not this way. A distinctive feature of the absence of an abiding self is the inability to dominate conditions, and their opposition to desire. (Note that Buddha-Dhamma considers even Brahma, God, or whichever supreme creator deity to exist within the conditioned world, to be confined to the five aggregates, and thus wielding restricted jurisdiction.) In this sense, the commentaries prefer to define *anattā* as 'the inability to control' or 'not subject to control' (*avasavattanattbena* or *avasavattanato*).<sup>44</sup> Likewise, they explain that no one can force formations into subservience, in defiance of cause and effect, by demanding that arisen phenomena not exist, that existent phenomena not age, and that ageing phenomena not perish.<sup>45</sup> They quote the Buddha's words:

*A person cannot in regard to physical form obtain (as wished for): 'May form be this way, may form not be that way.'* [Same with the other aggregates]<sup>46</sup>

When one thoroughly examines the nature of all things, one finds that no fixed and permanent self exists, as is implied by giving things particular names. There is merely a natural process (*dhamma-pavatti*) – a process of conditionality – or a process of materiality and mentality (*khandha-pavatti*), which originates from the confluence of manifold constituents. All of these constituents arise and cease in a continual, inter-causal relationship, both within a single isolated dynamic, and within all creation. This being so, we should take note of four significant points:

- 1) There is no true, enduring self within any phenomenon, existing as an essence or core.



- 2) All conditioned things arise from the convergence of components.
- 3) These components continually arise and disintegrate, and are codependent, constituting a specific dynamic of nature. [70/19]
- 4) If one separates a specific dynamic into subordinate dynamics, one sees that these too are codependent.

The manifestation and transformation of a dynamic is determined by the relationship of its components. The dynamic proceeds without the intervention by a 'self'. No separate self exists, neither an internal enduring self that resists cause and effect, and is able to direct the activity according to its wishes, nor an independent external agent.

Human beings confer names to many of these assemblies and formations, for example 'person', 'horse', 'cat', 'ant', 'car', 'shop', 'house', 'clock', 'pen', 'Mr. Jones', and 'Miss Smith'. These names, however, are simply conventional labels, established for convenience of communication. The entities do not really exist: they do not have a real self, a separate identity distinct from their collective components. Upon analysis of these entities what remains is each unit or part with its own specific name. It is not possible to find a self within such entities, no matter how deeply one searches. By giving names to things one creates a provisional self that is superimposed on the true condition. It is superimposed randomly, without any direct relationship to, control over, or effect on that particular dynamic, except when one clings to the conventional designation (clinging is then one component of the process). If names are just conventional labels, arbitrarily superimposed, then it is self-evident that they are powerless.

The dynamics of nature occur in line with cause and effect; they do not obey desire, and they are not influenced by these randomly established identities. They do not obey desire because, speaking accurately, desire does not serve an autonomous self; desire is one component within a causal dynamic, and it is not the agent that accomplishes a deed. Desire is only able to produce results when it acts as an impetus, affecting subsequent conditions like effort or action, in conformity with cause and effect.

A distinct independent self cannot exist; were it to exist, it would not be subject to causality – it would be fixed. It would impede the causal flow, rendering all other elements dispensable. Any fluent dynamic would be nullified. Such a self could interfere with and modify

conditions, causing a deviation from causality. In truth, however, all conditioned things proceed according to cause and effect. A separate self does not truly exist, either within a dynamic or externally. [70/20]

When elements convene and manifest as particular forms, we assign agreed upon names to these forms. As long as the components are conjoined, they sustain the particular shape which corresponds to a conventional identity. When the components split up, however, or the surrounding conditions are unsupportive, the form disappears. For example, when temperature rises above a certain level, ice melts; the entity called 'ice' vanishes, with water remaining. With a further increase in temperature, water evaporates, turning to steam; that entity of 'water' ceases to be. Likewise, when paper is burned, only ashes remain; the entity called 'paper' is no longer found.

The basic meaning of *anattatā* – that all things arise as a composition of interrelated parts following cause and effect, are void of an enduring self, and are without a fixed creative agent – is confirmed by many references in the scriptures, for example:

*Just as when a space is enclosed by timber, twine, clay and thatch, it comes to be called a 'house', so too, when a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, it comes to be called a 'body' (rūpa).<sup>47</sup>*

Māra asked Vajirā Bhikkhuṇī:

*Who created this being (person)? Where is the creator of beings? Where does a being originate? Where does a being cease?*

Vajirā answered:

*Māra, do you believe in a being? Do you hold (such) a view? This is purely a mass of formations; here, no being can be found. Just as with the combination of various parts, the term 'wagon' ensues, so too, with the five aggregates the conventional term 'being' ensues. Indeed, there is only dukkha that arises, abides and passes away. Nothing but dukkha comes to be, nothing but dukkha ceases.<sup>48</sup>*

Māra asked the same question to Selā Bhikkhuṇī, who answered:

*No one fashioned this shape; no one created this being. Dependent upon causes, it has arisen; with the ending of causes, it ceases. Just as seeds when sown on a field will sprout, owing to both the nutrients in the soil and the moisture within the seeds, so too, these aggregates, elements, and six senses arise dependent upon causes, and cease with the dissolution of those causes.*<sup>49</sup>

Combined, soldiers, vehicles and weapons are called an army. We call a collection of buildings, houses, people and enterprises a city. A hand with fingers placed in a certain position is called a fist. [70/21] Uncurl the fist and only a hand with fingers remains. Similarly, when one separates a hand into ancillary parts, then it too no longer exists. One can continue to subdivide, but one will be unable to find any static units or elements. The suttas contain only teachings of materiality and mentality (*nāma-rūpa*); there is no mention of a fixed ‘being’ or ‘person’.<sup>50</sup>

There are four principal definitions of *anattatā* compiled by the commentators:<sup>51</sup>

1. *Suññato*: Things exist in a state of emptiness; they are without a self as essence or core (*atta-sāra*). They are void of a real identity as ‘person’, ‘I’, ‘him’, or ‘her’. There is no occupant, agent, or experiencer apart from the causal process, or apart from provisional designations. Things exist independently from their assigned identities, for example ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘object A’ or ‘object B’.
2. *Assāmikato*: Things are ownerless; they do not belong to a person or to a self. No separate self exists which possesses phenomena; there is merely a natural causal process.
3. *Avasa-vattanato*: Things are not subject to control; they do not depend on anyone. A related term used is *anissarato*, translated as ‘non-ruler’ or ‘powerless’. We have no absolute power over things; we must concur with causes. In some places one finds the term *akāmakāriyato*, translated as ‘unable to do as one pleases’. Things do not obey desires; the mind of desire cannot dictate things. If one wants things to be a certain way, then one must conform to or bring about the proper causes and conditions. Things depend on causes, not on someone’s power or desire. For example, it is impossible to

order something that has arisen to disappear, or to not change, or to not deteriorate.

4. *Atta-paṭikkhepato*: The nature of things is inconsistent with, or opposes, a self. The causal process of interrelated components is inherently incompatible with a separate, autonomous self, which would dictate or interfere with that process. [70/22] Such an isolated self cannot exist. If it were to exist, a causal dynamic could not occur; the course of events would necessarily follow the dictates of self. Furthermore, the law of causality is intrinsically complete; it does not require a controlling agent to intervene.

There are two additional definitions of *anattā*, which, although included within the four points mentioned above, are particularly important and should thus be distinguished. They highlight the dynamic nature of phenomena:

5. *Suddhasaṅkhabāra-puñjato* or *suddhadhamma-puñjato*: Things exist purely as a mass of formations, or as a mass of phenomena (*dharmā*), that is, materiality (*rūpa-dhammā*) and/or mentality (*nāma-dhammā*). Another term used is *aṅgasambhārato*, meaning that things exist as a composition of subsidiary parts. They arise from the gathering together of such parts. They are not absolute enduring ‘units’ or ‘entities’. There is no real ‘being’, ‘person’ or ‘self’ over and above these components. (This definition is already stressed in point 1 above.)
6. *Yathāpaccaya-pavattito*: Things exist following causes and conditions. They exist as a collection of interrelated and codependent parts. Things do not follow a person’s desires, and no self exists, either as an internal essence or as an external agent, which resists or directs the process. (All four of the above points include this definition, especially points 3 and 4.)

To sum up, all things exist according to specific causes. If the determinant causes exist, a phenomenon originates in conformity with these causes. If these causes cease, the phenomenon ceases (to exist in that way). Things do not obey supplication or desire. They are not ‘entities’ or ‘things’ as commonly identified, and they do not belong to anyone. As explained earlier, these definitions of *anattā* presented here focus on conditioned phenomena.

One of the major misunderstandings for people is the belief that a ‘thinker’ exists apart from thinking, a ‘planner’ exists apart from volition, a ‘feeler’ exists apart from feelings, or an ‘actor’ exists apart from actions. This misunderstanding has trapped even many of the great philosophers, who were therefore unable to realize the truth and be free from the enshrouding influence of self-view. René Descartes, the famous French philosopher, is an example, who after much consideration, postulated, ‘I think, therefore I am.’<sup>52</sup> [70/23] The belief in a distinct self or soul is common to unenlightened beings everywhere. This belief seems true and logical through ordinary awareness, but once one thoroughly investigates the premise of self, contradictions appear.

People often posed questions about the self to the Buddha, for example: *Who makes contact* (who cognises)? *Who feels?* *Who craves?* *Who clings?* The Buddha answered that these are unsuitable questions, which stem from a false assumption; they are not consistent with reality. Appropriate questions are: *What is the condition giving rise to contact?* *What is the condition giving rise to feeling?* *What are the conditions giving rise to craving and clinging?*<sup>53</sup>

Just as thought, intention, desire, and feeling are components of a physical and mental process, so too the experience of a ‘thinker’ or a ‘designer’, for example, is a component of this process. All of these components exist in an intercausal relationship. There is simply thought and an experience of a ‘thinker’ (i.e., a false belief in a thinker – a thinker does not exist) arising within a single dynamic. The experience of a thinker is actually a thought pattern; it is one instant in the thought process. The erroneous belief in a thinker arises due to a person’s inability to distinguish the related parts, and to distinguish each momentary event within the continuum. At the time of thought, there is no experience of a ‘thinker’; and at the instant of experiencing a ‘thinker’ there is no (other) thought. While thinking of a certain subject, one does not reflect upon a ‘thinker’; and while reflecting upon a ‘thinker’, one does not think about that previous subject of consideration. Thinking of a subject and experiencing a ‘thinker’ (thinking of a ‘thinker’) are actually different moments of thought, which exist in the same dynamic. The ‘thinker’ is just a mental fabrication, which then becomes an object for further thought during another instant of time.

The fallacy mentioned above results from a lack of thorough attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*) and is classified as one of the six views mentioned

in the Buddha's teaching:

*When that unenlightened being attends unwisely in this way, one of the six views arises in him: There arises in him the (fixed) view, as true and established, that 'I have a self' ... 'I do not have a self' ... 'I know the self by way of the self' ... 'I know nonself by way of the self' ... 'I know the self by way of nonself'; or else he has some such view as this: 'It is this self of mine that dictates, feels, and experiences here and there the fruit of good and bad actions.'*<sup>54</sup>

It was mentioned earlier how a name assigned to a particular entity is a contrived and arbitrarily superimposed self, which, unless clung to, has no relationship to or effect on the causal dynamic. [70/24] Although such a self does not truly exist, clinging to that idea of self creates problems. This is because the clinging becomes a part of the dynamic, determining other components, and affecting the dynamic as a whole. Clinging is an unwholesome factor since it stems from ignorance; it contaminates other elements of the process, interfering adversely with the causal stream.

One effect of clinging is that it produces a conflict within the dynamic, resulting in a feeling of oppression or suffering. People who hold tightly to the conventional self as real are afflicted by this grasping. Those who fully comprehend conventional labels, on the other hand, do not cling to the idea of a self, seeing merely a causal continuum. These people use whichever term is commonly assigned to a particular object, but they can enhance the dynamic as they please, by acting in harmony with its determining factors. They do not allow craving and clinging to oppress them, thus avoiding the consequent suffering. Such people know how to benefit from conventional labels without suffering the harm of adhering to them.

Another detrimental effect of clinging to a self is the production of unwholesome mind states, known as 'defilements' (*kilesa*). In particular, these include:

*Taṇhā*: Selfishness, craving, and the lust for gratification.

*Māna*: Conceit, self-judgement, and the yearning for personal power.

*Diṭṭhi*: The firm grasping to personal opinions; the stubborn, unyielding belief that one's views represent the truth.

These three defilements intensify both internal and external discord. People who do not see through conventional labels cling to randomly established identities as the truth, and allow these defilements to dictate their behaviour, compounding misery for themselves and others. Those who penetrate the relative truth of conventional labels, however, do not cling to them, and are freed from the influence of these defilements. They are not deceived by such thoughts as ‘this belongs to me’, ‘I am this way’, or ‘this is who I am’. They conduct their life with wisdom. A clear understanding of conventional labels, and action in harmony with causes, is the basis from which individual and social welfare extends.

Another error which tends to entangle people is vacillation from one extreme opinion to another. Some people strictly believe in the self as real and permanent; they think that the self makes up the essence of a human being, and that it is not just a conventional entity. Each person, they say, has a real stable eternal self; even when a person dies the soul/self/spirit (*ātman/attā*) continues unchanged: the self does not disappear or disintegrate. Some believe that this soul reincarnates, while others believe that it awaits judgement from the highest God for eternal salvation or damnation. Such a view is called eternalism (*sassata-dit̥ṭhi* or *sassata-vāda*): the belief that the self or soul is real and everlasting. Another group of people believe that such a self exists, that a person exists as a definite identity, but that this self is temporary: it disintegrates. [70/25] At death, they claim, the self breaks apart and ceases. This view is called annihilationism (*uccheda-dit̥ṭhi* or *uccheda-vāda*): the belief that the self or soul is impermanent; it exists temporarily and then breaks up and vanishes.

Buddhist scholars too may embrace one of these views if they lack clear understanding. Those who study the law of kamma (Sanskrit – *karma*) in connection to the round of rebirth (*samsāra-vat̥ṭa*) are particularly prone to holding an eternalist view, regarding the self as permanent. Those who misapprehend the teachings of *anattā*, on the other hand, may hold an annihilationist view, believing that nothing exists after death. The common point of misunderstanding for proponents of these two extremes is the belief that a being or person exists as a real, fixed entity. One party believes that this entity is constant and eternal, while the other believes that this entity breaks up and vanishes at death.

Besides these two, there is another group with an even more extreme

view, believing that the absence of self means that nothing at all exists. If no one exists, then no one experiences results. Therefore, actions have no consequences, actions are insignificant, and there is no accountability regarding actions. Speaking simply, there is no kamma. One can divide this kind of belief into three categories. One faction believes that actions are meaningless, or that actions bear no fruit. This is called the doctrine of the inefficacy of action (*akiraya-dīṭṭhi* or *akiriya-vāda*). Another faction believes that things occur haphazardly, by chance, without any causes. This is called the doctrine of non-causality or accidentalism (*abetuka-dīṭṭhi* or *abetuka-vāda*). The third faction believes that absolutely nothing exists: nothing exists with any value or meaning. This is called nihilism (*nattika-dīṭṭhi* or *nattika-vāda*).

Since all things exist as a causal continuum, originating from the merging of components, there is no self which either endures or disintegrates. In this very instant no 'person' or 'self' exists; where can one find an enduring or dissolving self? This teaching negates both eternalism and annihilationism. Since the dynamics of nature consist of interrelated, causally dependent components, how can one claim that nothing exists, or that things occur haphazardly and by chance? The teaching negates the doctrines of nihilism and non-causality. As dynamics change according to inherent causal factors, each agent within a dynamic produces an effect; none is void of effect. Moreover, results ensue without a need for a 'receiver' of such results; results are intrinsic to the dynamic. Notionally, one can say that the dynamic itself is the recipient. These results are more certain than if a stable self were to exist as the receiver, since the self could reject unwelcome results. As the law of causality exists, how can one claim that actions are meaningless or have no results? The teaching negates the doctrine of the inefficacy of action. [70/26]

The following passages from the Visuddhi Magga corroborate the explanations presented above:

*In Truth, only mentality and matter exist in the world. One cannot find a being or person within this mentality and matter. This mentality and matter is empty. It is fashioned (by conditioning factors) like a doll. It is a mass of instability (dukkha) like grass and firewood.<sup>55</sup>*

*Suffering exists, but no sufferer can be found. Actions exist, but no*



*agent. Nibbāna exists, but no one who is quenched. The Path exists, but no wayfarer.*<sup>56</sup>

*There is no doer of a deed, or one who reaps the deed's results; phenomena alone flow on. This is right view. While kamma and fruition (vipāka) thus causally maintain their round, as seed and tree succeed in turn, no first beginning can be known. Nor in the future round of births (saṃsāra) can an absence of this cycle of kamma and fruition be discerned. Adherents of other sects, not knowing this, have failed to gain self-mastery [asayaṃvasī – they are dependent on others because of wrong view]. They assume a being (satta-saññā), and see it as eternal or annihilated. They adopt the sixty-two kinds of views, each contradicting the other. The stream of craving bears them on, the mesh of views entangles them. And as the stream thus bears them on, they are not freed from suffering. A monk, disciple of the Buddha, with direct knowledge of this fact, penetrates this deep and subtle void conditionality.*

*There is no kamma in fruition, nor does fruition exist in kamma; though they are empty of one another, no fruit exists without the act. Similarly, fire does not exist inside sunlight, a (magnifying) glass, or in cow dung (used for fuel), nor yet outside them, but is generated by their conjunction. So neither can fruition be found within kamma, nor without; nor does kamma still persist (in the fruit it has produced). Kamma of its fruit is void; no fruit exists yet in an act. And still the fruit is born of kamma, dependent on kamma. For here there is no Creator God, no Creator of the round of births; phenomena alone flow on, dependent on the marriage of conditions.*<sup>57</sup>

*Natural phenomena arise wholly from causes, are subject to pressure, impermanent, unstable and inconstant. All things arise from other things in mutual dependence. There is no personal or external self within this continuum.*

*Phenomena give rise to other phenomena, by the union of causes and conditions. [70/27] The Buddha taught the Dhamma for the cessation of causes. With the cessation of causes, the cycle (vaṭṭa) is broken, and revolves no more. The sublime life (brahmācariya) exists to end all suffering in this way. When no being can be found, there is neither annihilation nor eternity.*<sup>58</sup>

To summarise, the teaching of *anattā* confirms the following points:

- A. It negates both the doctrines of eternalism and annihilationism.
- B. It negates the belief in a supreme God who created the world and governs the destiny of human beings, i.e., theistic determinism (*issaranimmitavāda*).
- C. It is consistent with the teaching of kamma as defined by Buddha-Dhamma, at the same time negating the following doctrines: The claim that actions have no results (doctrine of the inefficacy of action); the doctrine of past-action determinism (*pubbekatavāda*), for example of the Nigaṇṭha Order (Jainism); the doctrine of kamma involving a soul or a caste system (for example of Hinduism); the claim that things occur by chance, without causes (accidentalism); and the doctrine of nihilism.
- D. It reveals the supreme state, the final goal (*parama-dhamma*) of Buddhism, which differs from the goal of religions that profess a soul (*attavāda*).

## Summary

The three characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* are linked; they are three facets of the same truth, as is seen in the Buddha's frequent teaching: *Whatever is impermanent is dukkha; whatever is dukkha is nonself (yad'aniccam taṃ dukkham, yaṃ dukkham tad'anattā)*. This passage is often followed by the statement: *Whatever is nonself should be seen with correct wisdom, as it truly is thus: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.'*<sup>59</sup> The relationship is also evident in the frequent exchange of questions and answers:

*'Is material form, etc., permanent or impermanent?'*

*'Impermanent.'*

*'Is what is impermanent pleasant or painful?'*

*'Painful.'*

*'Of that which is impermanent, painful and of the nature to change, is it proper to consider thus: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self?''*<sup>60</sup>

A brief explanation of the relationship between the three characteristics, and of the fact that they are three aspects of the same truth, can be

formulated thus: All things originate by the union of component parts. Each of these parts arises, is sustained and disintegrates, acting in turn as a condition for the other parts, in perpetual transformation. [70/28] One can refer to this composite as a 'causal continuum', which has the following characteristics:

- 1) The arising and disintegration of components; the instability of the components or of the entire process: *aniccatā*.
- 2) The pressure on the components or on the entire dynamic by rise and decline, their being subject to alteration, and their inability to remain in an original state: *dukkhatā*.
- 3) The absence of a fixed 'core' which governs the collection of components, and the requirement for the components to accord with causes and conditions; the characteristic of nonself: *anattatā*.

By observing these three characteristics simultaneously, any object conventionally referred to as a single entity is seen as a composite of myriad clustering constituents. These constituents are unstable, continually rising and ceasing. They split up and disperse subject to reciprocal stress and friction, resulting in transformation. They depend upon the relationship of causes, which control and give form to the particular continuum. None of the components exists as a self; they proceed in line with causality, not in compliance with desire.

Although that which is impermanent is *dukkha*, and that which is *dukkha* is nonself, the converse is not always true, that whatever is nonself must be impermanent and *dukkha*. All conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra*) are impermanent, subject to pressure, and selfless, yet all things (*dhamma*), both conditioned things and the Unconditioned (*visaṅkhāra*), although nonself, need not invariably be impermanent and *dukkha*. Something exists which is permanent and free of *dukkha*. The Unconditioned (Nibbāna), although selfless, is beyond both impermanence and *dukkha*. In this sense, the definitions of the three characteristics as facets of one truth apply to conditioned phenomena, following the explanation of nonself mentioned earlier. Similarly, the selfless quality of the Unconditioned should be understood in conformity with the implied definition described above.

### 3. Concealers of the Three Characteristics

Although impermanence, *dukkha* and selflessness are common characteristics to all things, and reveal themselves constantly, people generally do not notice them. They are obscured. If one does not pay attention and investigate correctly, one does not recognise the obscuring factors. These factors include:<sup>61</sup>

1. Continuity (*Santati*): Conceals impermanence.
2. Movement (*Iriyāpatha*): Conceals *dukkha*.
3. Solidity (*Ghana*): Conceals nonself.

By failing to pay close attention to arising and ceasing, to birth and decay, one allows continuity (*santati*) to obscure the characteristic of impermanence. All things that we experience perpetually rise and pass, but such rising and ceasing occurs in a continuous and rapid way. This rapid succession deceives people into viewing things as stable and unchanging. For instance, the image of oneself or of a friend appears the same as it did shortly before, but as time passes one realizes that change has occurred. In truth, however, transmutation happens incessantly, without any visible gap. An example of this deception is when one perceives a spinning propeller as a single motionless disk. When the speed of rotation slows one sees a propeller with several moving blades. Similarly, when a person quickly waves a torch in a circular motion it appears as a circle of light. Another example is the light of a lightbulb, which is seen as a still, bright sphere, but in reality results from a rapidly fluctuating electric current. When one applies the proper means, paying careful attention to the rising and ceasing of things, then impermanence – *aniccatā* – becomes clear.

Likewise, with a lack of attention to perpetual pressure, movement (*iriyāpatha*) obscures the characteristic of *dukkha*. People normally require a span of time to notice instability, an object's inability to maintain or be sustained in an original shape due to stress and friction within its component parts. [70/7] If in the meantime the object is moved or modified, or the observer is separated from it, the pressure and tension is not conspicuous. Our experience of things usually occurs in the context of such movement, and so *dukkha* is not recognized. Take for example the human body. One need not wait until the body perishes; even in daily life stress always exists within the body, preventing a person from remaining still in one particular position. If one must remain in a single posture for long, whether standing, sitting, walking or lying, the physical strain steadily increases to the point of pain and exhaustion, until it is unbearable. One must then move, or change posture.\* Once the pressure (a consequence of the mark of *dukkha*) in the body ceases, the feeling of pain (*dukkha-vedanā*) also ceases. (When a feeling of pain vanishes, there usually arises a feeling of ease in its place, which we call 'happiness'. But this is simply a feeling. In reality there is just an attenuation and absence of *dukkha* – pressure.) In daily life, remaining for long in a single posture hurts, and one hastens to shift position. Normally, people continually move to avoid a feeling of discomfort. By evading discomfort, the *dukkha*, a truth inherent to all conditions, is consequently overlooked.

Similarly, with a failure to separate an object into various elements, the characteristic of nonself is obscured by solidity (*ghana*): something existing as a lump, a mass, or an amalgamated unit. All conditioned things are created by a merging of component elements. Once the elements are separated, that integrated unit called by a specific name no longer exists. Generally, human beings do not discern this truth, it being obscured by the perception of solidity (*ghana-saññā*): the recognition or denotation of something as a consolidated entity. This is consistent with the Thai folk saying: 'One sees the coat, but not the cloth; one sees the doll, but not the plastic.' People may be deceived by the image of a coat, failing to notice the fabric with which it has been tailored. In truth, there is no coat; there are only numerous threads woven into a pattern.

\* *Iriyāpatha* also means posture, literally 'mode of movement'.

If the threads are unravelled the cloth no longer exists. Likewise, a child who only sees a doll is deluded by its image; the plastic, which is the real substance of the doll, is not recognized. If one discerns the truth then there is only plastic; no doll can be found. Even the plastic originates from the successive formation of component elements. The perception of solidity obscures the characteristic of nonself in the manner shown by these simple examples. If one separates and analyses the components the nature of nonself becomes clear. One sees things as *anattā*. [70/8]

#### 4. Nonself and No-Self

Many statements by the Buddha in the Sutta-Nipāta describe arahants – those who have realized the goal of the holy life – as being without *attā* and *nirattā* (or *attaṃ* and *nirattaṃ*).<sup>62</sup> Arahants have neither a ‘self’ nor an ‘absence of self’. The Mahāniddeśa defines the word *attā* as ‘a belief in self’ (*attadiṭṭhi*), or ‘a belief in an enduring eternal self’ (i.e., an eternalist view). [70/29] It defines *nirattā* as an adherence to the annihilationist view. Another definition of *attā* is ‘something grasped’, and another definition for *nirattā* is ‘something to be relinquished’. Therefore an arahant does not believe in a self or in an absence of self (an annihilation of self). An arahant neither clings to anything nor needs to get rid of anything. The Mahāniddeśa explains further that whoever clings must have something to relinquish, and whoever has something to relinquish must be clinging. An arahant has transcended both clinging and relinquishing.<sup>63</sup> These explanations by the Buddha and the commentators elucidate the meaning of *anattā*.

Generally, people firmly believe in a self. At a coarse level they view the body as the self, but upon deeper inspection, perceiving that the body cannot be the self since physical change is so obvious, they identify with the mind, or mental qualities, for example feelings, memory, intelligence and awareness. Indeed, they cling to one of the five aggregates as self, or to a unity of body and mind, that is, to all the five aggregates. Some people are more subtle, reckoning that the body and mind cannot be the self, but that a distinct self – a real substantial governing self or soul – abides within or beyond the body and mind.

Some theologians and philosophers include a concept of self in their pursuit of the ultimate reality. Some profess to have attained or realized this truth – the Supreme Being – called by various names, for example

Paramātman, Brahma, Holy Spirit or God. Many of these theologians and philosophers are highly intelligent and skilled, referred to in the scriptures as ‘excellent ascetics and brahmins’ or ‘divine philosophers’, and the conditions they describe are extremely profound. But as long as these conditions still possess a fixed identity, or still pertain to a self, they are not yet the supreme, ultimate Truth, as they are still tainted by attachment.

Ultimate Truth does exist; Buddha-Dhamma is not a nihilistic doctrine. One cannot realize this truth, however, with knowledge obscured and distorted by false perceptions, and with a mind confined by grasping to these perceptions. The reason that many philosophers and religious seekers are unable to realize Ultimate Truth, although they clearly know that the self of the body-mind (five aggregates) formerly adhered to is not real, is because they still maintain two kinds of self-deception. These two deceptions, characteristic of unenlightened beings, are: [70/30]

1. *Self-identification*: The cherishing of a residual self-image maintained since the body is clung to as self. However refined this image becomes, it remains essentially the same or of the same lineage, and is a result of misunderstanding. When such philosophers and seekers encounter and identify with an aspect of reality, they fix this image or concept on that condition, distorting the truth. Whatever is known by them is therefore not the pure, unadulterated Truth.
2. *Clinging* (upādāna): Ever since believing in a rudimentary idea of self, these people have a tendency towards attachment. Besides sustaining a misguided self-view, they relate to phenomena with attachment, which prevents them from realizing the true nature of things.

In brief, these religious seekers and philosophers are not yet liberated. They are neither liberated from misconceptions nor from clinging. These two deceptions are in fact inseparable: combining them, one can say that these individuals mistakenly take an idea of self, lingering from an original attachment, and overlay it onto reality or nature. As a consequence they remain bound. Liberation is possible only when one stops investing things with a fixed identity; phenomena then cease to exist as substantial entities, and one realizes the Ultimate Truth. Buddha-Dhamma teaches that the self is a supposition, a conventional reality.



Ultimate Truth is diametrically opposed to conventional truth. The self applies to conventions; when one transcends conventions, one attains the Ultimate Truth, which cannot be self. Stated simply, the Truth is not self; if there is still a self, it is not the Truth.

The prime factors for delusion are attachment and fixed notions of self. As the self does not truly exist except on a conventional level, it is simply a belief. *Attā* in the above quotation from the Sutta-Nipāta can therefore be defined in two ways, firstly as ‘self’ or ‘belief in self’, and secondly as ‘something grasped’. The self is just an idea; it is not a true unchanging entity. In addition, the passage mentions the pair of *attā* and *nirattā*, and explains that an arahant has neither *attā* nor *nirattā*. *Nirattā* can also be defined in two ways, firstly as ‘(clinging to) no-self’, i.e., an annihilationist view, and secondly as ‘something to be relinquished’. When one no longer believes in a self, abandoning erroneous adherence to conventions, the matter is finished: to cling to a notion of no-self becomes redundant. Otherwise, a person who is liberated and at ease would be misled by further clinging. [70/31] The abandonment of clinging is the end: nothing else is seized. With nothing seized there is nothing to be relinquished, as confirmed by the Buddha’s words:

*Nothing is clung to; where then is there anything to relinquish?  
(Natthi attā kuto nirattam vā)*<sup>64</sup>

Even the expression ‘clinging to a self’ is strictly incorrect. Since the self is only a conventional reality, the proper expression is ‘clinging to an idea of self’; a self does not truly exist. Our task is to cease grasping the belief in or concept of self. The self does not need to be relinquished, because there is no self that can be possessed; how then can it be relinquished? To believe in a self is to form a concept and superimpose it on reality. The teaching enjoins us to abandon forming such a fixed image. If one fails to do this, then although one has let go of certain conditions, one will fasten a concept or ‘deposit’ of self onto something else, obscuring or distorting its true nature. Therefore, the necessary tasks are to eliminate the attachment to previous notions of self, to refrain from attaching to anything else as self, and to avoid clinging to no-self (*nirattā*). Then only the Truth remains, which is neither concerned with nor dependent on personal beliefs and attachments.

Since the self is an idea and a conventional entity established for facilitating communication, if one fully comprehends the self, and makes use of it without clinging, then it is not destructive. Likewise, if one formerly attached to an image of self, the teachings insist on abandoning it. Without attachment, the matter is finished; it is unnecessary to identify with anything else. It is unnecessary to seize anything as self, or to seek a self elsewhere. Therefore, the Buddha taught to cease clinging only to the self that has already been attached to, which means to cease clinging to the five aggregates. Once the self is no longer attached to, the question of self ends. Thereafter, it is a matter of attaining the Truth, which does exist. A self, however, has no bearing on Truth, and therefore Truth is described as *anattā*: nonself. Those who have realized the Truth are free from any belief in self; they no longer need to believe in self or no-self. Knowing what is non-existent as non-existent, the matter is finished; thenceforth, there is arrival at the Truth, the Unconditioned, for which a self no longer has any significance.

One harmful consequence of clinging to a self, or believing in an image of self, is that one concludes that the self is the agent, with power to control events. When the notion of self becomes most subtle, a sovereign universal Self is envisaged, as the Creator of all things. This Creator is imagined as intervening in the causal process, despite such intervention being unnecessary. It is unnecessary because nature exists autonomously; interrelated conditioned dynamics function independently, without requiring a Creator. Therefore, rather than say that a Creator, a God, must exist as a prerequisite for the genesis of all things, it should be granted that natural phenomena themselves are the primordial reality (since natural phenomena are reciprocally created in line with causality; simply speaking, they create each other.) [70/32] One need not then be troubled with questions of the past such as, ‘What existed before God?’ ‘Who created God?’ or ‘From where does God come?’

It is neither necessary nor true to say that natural phenomena, or causal dynamics, require a creator God to exist. If a God were truly the creator, the result would be two overlapping systems: God and nature. The course of nature would need to wait for the creative act of God. Natural dynamics subject to divine designs would be unwieldy, however, since things must proceed in accord with causes and conditions within their own system. Acts of God would interfere and obstruct the

continual causal flow of phenomena. Moreover, as God's temperament can vacillate, things would be affected accordingly; at one moment God would have them be one way, and in the next moment another. As a consequence, nature would have even less opportunity to follow causality, ending in great confusion and chaos. This is not, however, the way things actually are; natural dynamics occur in conformity with their conditionality.

Some people may say that nature follows laws, and that God created or established these laws. In that case the laws must be uncertain, liable to change at any time, and untrustworthy, because the ordainer of the laws would abide beyond the laws; such a Being could modify the laws as desired. These laws, however, have invariably remained constant. The existence of a Creator of the laws is unnecessary and improbable, because nature must proceed in a specific fashion. Natural conditions accord with causes, and are 'just so' (*tathataṅ*): they are not and could not be otherwise (*avithataṅ*). The laws themselves are only descriptions which we form by observing specific natural occurrences. Furthermore, the absence of a creator God and the autonomy of causal dynamics also resolves another question: Ultimate Reality, or the Unconditioned, is absolute; it does not meddle as the Creator of phenomena or interfere with conditioned processes. (From this perspective, Nibbāna cannot be God, no matter how much some people try to equate them, unless one is willing to redefine the meaning of 'God').<sup>65</sup> [70/33]

Under ordinary circumstances, it is natural for people to believe in a self and in a Creator of the world, because things ostensibly require an agent or creator to come into being. Seeing through this false belief to underlying causality is difficult. Therefore, in former times people believed that gods were the sole causes behind lightning, winds, floods and earthquakes. It is not strange then that religious seekers and philosophers have believed in a soul and a Creator. Clever individuals have created more refined, all-embracing concepts, but essentially they have been stuck at the same point.

The Buddha's release from self-identification (despite the probability that he would get ensnared in more refined notions of self), his revelation that the world functions without a Creator, and his discovery of the nonself and non-creative Unconditioned count as enormous advancements in human wisdom. This realization is the escape from the massive pitfall which has trapped human beings. Despite understanding

the characteristics of impermanence and *dukkha*, the great philosophers before the Buddha were hampered by the belief in a self or soul. The characteristic of nonself is therefore extremely difficult to see. The Buddha tended to use the characteristics of impermanence and *dukkha* to signal and explain *anattā*. The commentators recognised the need to explain selflessness by way of impermanence and *dukkha*, and valued this major advance in wisdom as a revelation not found before or outside Buddhism, as is illustrated by the following passages:<sup>66</sup>

*The Sammāsambuddha explained the characteristic of not-self by way of impermanence, by way of dukkha, or by way of both. In this sutta, the Buddha explains the characteristic of not-self by way of impermanence thus: 'Bhikkhus, if someone were to say, 'the eye [ear, etc.] is self, this would be unsuitable (because) the rise and decline of the eye is apparent; seeing such rise and decline that person would conclude: 'My self arises and deteriorates.' For this reason saying, 'the eye is self' is unsuitable. Thus the eye is not-self.'*<sup>67</sup>

*The Perfectly Enlightened Buddha explained the characteristic of nonself in this sutta by referring to dukkha thus: 'Bhikkhus, the body is not-self. If this body were self, then it would not be subject to disease [i.e., oppression – dukkha], and it would be possible to have it of the body: 'May my body be this way, may my body not be that way.' [70/34] But because the body is not-self, therefore the body is subject to disease, and it is not possible to have it of the body: 'May my body be this way, may my body not be that way.'*<sup>68</sup>

*The Perfectly Enlightened Buddha explained the characteristic of nonself in the suttas by referring to both impermanence and dukkha, for example: 'Bhikkhus, material form is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent is dukkha. Whatever is dukkha is nonself. Whatever is nonself should be seen with perfect wisdom, as it really is, thus: 'This is not mine', 'I am not this', 'this is not my self.'*<sup>69</sup>

*Why did the Buddha explain in this way? Because impermanence and dukkha are manifest [they are easily observed]. Indeed, when a cup, bowl or other object slips from the hand and shatters, people exclaim, 'Oh, how fleeting!' Impermanence is therefore described as apparent. When a boil or blister forms on the body, or a thorn pricks a person, he exclaims, 'Oh, how painful!' Dukkha is thus described as apparent. Anattā, however, is not apparent, it is not conspicuous;*

*it is difficult to comprehend, difficult to explain, and difficult to describe.*

*Whether Tathāgatas arise or not, the characteristics of impermanence and dukkha are apparent, but the characteristic of nonself remains hidden unless a Buddha arises; it is evident only during the time of a Buddha. Truly, the religious ascetics and wanderers with great psychic powers, like the teacher Sarabhaṅga, were able to describe impermanence and dukkha, but were unable to describe nonself. If Sarabhaṅga, for example, had been able to describe nonself to his gathered community, that assembly would have been able to realize Path and Fruit. Indeed, revealing the characteristic of selflessness is not within the capability of anyone other than the Omniscient Buddhas. In this sense, the characteristic of nonself is not apparent.*

## 5. Ego and Conceit

Confusion exists about certain terms pertaining to the self, so it seems appropriate to add a brief explanation at this point. The terms that pose a difficulty are *attā* and *māna*.

*Attā* in Pali, or *ātman* in Sanskrit, translates as ‘self’ or ‘soul’. Buddha-Dhamma teaches that this self does not truly exist, but that it is assumed by people for convenient communication and mutual recognition with respect to composite forms. The self becomes a problem when people mistakenly believe that they really possess a self or truly exist as a self, which is a result of not fully comprehending the truth, or being deceived by conventional reality. To resolve this question of self, one should be aware that the self is not a defilement; it is not something that must be relinquished. As a self does not truly exist, there is thus no self that one can abandon. [70/35] The self exists only as a belief. Our responsibility is to fully understand the truth that no self exists, which is to fully comprehend conventional truth. In other words, the practice concerning the purported self consists only of abandoning the belief in and identification with self, or eliminating delusions and false notions of self.

In the previous reference to the Sutta-Nipāta, the Buddha used the words *attā* and *nirattā*. The commentaries developed the meaning of *attā* in this case as ‘attachment to a self’ or ‘belief in a self’, with another connotation as ‘something grasped’. This was paired with *nirattā*, defined as ‘belief in no-self’ or ‘belief in the annihilation of self’, with an additional connotation as ‘something to be relinquished’. The definition of *attā* in this case goes beyond its ordinary perimeter; it stresses a person’s view (*diṭṭhi*), namely, harbouring a view of a self, which is called *attadiṭṭhi* or *attānudiṭṭhi*. This is the eternalist view of having a

permanent self as core or essence. Therefore, the explanatory passages from the Mahāniddeśa and Cūlaniddeśa mentioned above define *attā* as ‘belief in self’ (*attadit̐thi*) or eternalism (*sassatadit̐thi*). As *attā* in this case refers to ‘wrong view’, which is a defilement to be abandoned, there are Pali verses in the Sutta-Nipāta describing the relinquishment of self, for example: *One who has relinquished the self (attañjaho)*<sup>70</sup>, and *having relinquished the self (attam pahāya)*<sup>71</sup>.

There exists another form of belief concerning self, which differs from the holding to a view (*dit̐thi*). *Dit̐thi* here is the belief that one possesses or exists as a self, for example identifying with something or viewing the self as permanent. The other form of belief relating to self is an appraisal; it is belief in the comparisons of oneself to others, the self-evaluations, and self-judgements, for example: ‘I am this way,’ ‘this is just who I am,’ ‘I am better,’ ‘I am worse,’ ‘we are inferior,’ or ‘we are equal’. The specific term *māna*<sup>72</sup> is used for such belief, which translates as conceit, pride, arrogance, and the self-appraisal as better, worse or equal in comparison to others. *Māna*, like *dit̐thi*, is a defilement, something which should be relinquished or removed. In Thailand, some people currently use the word *attā* in the meaning of *māna*, for example: ‘She has much *attā*’ and ‘his *attā* is big’.\* One should be aware that using *attā* in this way is simply a current custom, but is technically incorrect. The proper word to use in this context is *māna*, which is the principal defilement causing defiance, disagreement, boasting, competition, all the way to persecution. Note also that even the belief in being equal to others is conceit and a defilement, just like considering oneself better or worse. [70/36] For as long as such assumptions exist, the mind is still subject to prejudice, condescension, overconfidence, and inflation. These assumptions may be inaccurate or based upon the truth, but the mind is not yet free and clear. The end of conceit occurs with knowledge of the truth; despite being aware of superiority, inferiority or equality, if the knowledge is unadulterated by clinging, then it is not conceit or defilement.

To sum up, *attā* and *anattā* are matters to be understood with wisdom. Our responsibility is to understand in accord with the truth that all things are void of self; they are of no fixed substance. Our task is then complete. *Māna* must be uprooted; our job is to remove it. These two

\* In English the word ‘ego’ is used in this way, for example: ‘He has a big ego’.

tasks, however, are essentially connected. Knowing the characteristic of nonself, one abandons conceit. This knowledge leads to the end of self-importance and self-comparisons. To quote the Buddha:

*One who perceives all things as nonself arrives at the removal of pride that says 'I am' (asmimāna), and attains Nibbāna here and now.<sup>73</sup>*



*Be vigilant, mindful and of pure virtue;  
compose your thoughts, and guard your mind.  
In this Doctrine and Discipline, a person who abides diligently  
escapes the round of rebirth and makes an end of misery.*

(D. II. 120-1)

## PRACTICAL VALUE

From a practical point of view, the teachings touch on impermanence more than the other characteristics, because impermanence is more apparent. The state of pressure, stress and friction – *dukkhatā* – is moderately difficult to observe, and is therefore referred to less. The characteristic of nonself is the most subtle and difficult to see, and is referred to the least. The more obvious sign of impermanence is used as a foundation to explain the characteristics of *dukkha* and nonself.

The following two verses of the Buddha represent the value of the Three Characteristics for Dhamma practice:

*Indeed, all conditioned things are impermanent, prone to arise and pass away. Having arisen, they cease; their coming to rest is truest bliss.*<sup>74</sup>

*Monks, all conditioned things are of a nature to decay; strive to attain the goal by diligence.*<sup>75</sup>

The first verse\* advocates a proper relationship to the world and to life in general: the value of thoroughly comprehending that all things are compounded, unstable, and subject to change; they cannot be commanded at will, they accord with causes, and they exist ‘just so’. With this knowledge, a person maintains an appropriate attitude towards life, and clinging ceases. Despite alteration, decay and disappearance of cherished objects, the mind is not overwhelmed and disturbed; it remains clear, radiant and joyful on account of its innate wisdom. This

\* This verse is known as ‘the maxim of the arahants’ (S. I. 6). The ‘coming to rest’, and equally the ‘bliss’, is Nibbāna. The verse is commonly chanted at funerals: *Anicca vata sankhāra ...*

verse emphasizes liberation of the heart – transcendence, which is a spiritual benefit.

The second verse calls attention to virtuous conduct, which is conducive to the realization of the supreme state. [70/37] This realization stems from the knowledge that all things are ephemeral and subject to pressure. Flux is perpetual, timeless and inexorable. Human life especially is fleeting, uncertain and unreliable. Knowing this, one makes effort in that which should be done, and refrains from that which should be avoided. One does not procrastinate or waste opportunities. One strives to rectify harmful situations, takes heed to protect oneself from further damage, and cultivates virtue by reflecting with wisdom, which accords with conditions. As a result, one fulfils one's responsibilities and attains one's goals. This verse emphasizes diligence and careful attention, which are mundane and practical qualities.

One should apply this second practical course to all levels of human affairs, from personal to social issues, from secular matters to the sublime, and from earning a living to seeking the enlightened truth of the Buddha. The following teachings of the Buddha highlight this quality:

*Monks, considering personal welfare, you should accomplish it with care. Considering others' welfare, you should accomplish it with care. Considering the welfare for both, you should accomplish it with care.*<sup>76</sup>

*There is one quality, Great King, which secures dual welfare, both present (visible) welfare, and future (subtle) welfare ... This quality is heedfulness (appamāda) ... A wise person who is heedful secures dual welfare, both present and future. The steadfast one, by securing (these two) benefits, is called a sage.*<sup>77</sup>

*Monks, a person of good moral conduct, perfect in moral conduct, through careful attention to his affairs, gains much wealth.*<sup>78</sup>

*By earnest endeavour (appamāda), monks, I attained enlightenment. [70/38] And you too, monks, if you put forth undeterred effort ... in no long time you shall realize the goal of the holy life by way of superior wisdom in this very life.*<sup>79</sup>

The two principles, spiritual and practical, are mutually supportive. By their consummation through right training a person obtains supreme well-being.

## 1. The Spiritual Path

Spiritual benefit, and the practice for its fulfilment, relates directly to the highest goal of Buddha-Dhamma. It is of utmost importance, concerning the entire spectrum of Buddhist teachings. Because many details of its development require special understanding, the texts refer to it frequently and at length. Some texts, for example the *Visuddhi Magga*, outline this development as an ordered system. Rather than describe specifics here, I will only offer a broad summary.

Those people who discern the three characteristics grow in wisdom and acquire a clearer understanding of life. In addition, they normally undergo two important transformative mental stages:

**Stage 1:** Once a person understands conditionality more clearly, and has gained an intermediate insight into impermanence, *dukkha* and nonself, a reaction occurs. A feeling arises unlike any feeling previously experienced. Whereas formerly the person was captivated by and delighted in sense objects, having now discerned the three characteristics sentiment changes into discontentment and aversion, and sometimes into disgust. At this stage emotions are predominant over wisdom. Despite the deficiency of wisdom and the remainder of mental bias, this stage is nonetheless important and occasionally even crucial for escaping from the power of attachment and for attaining the perfection in stage 2. Conversely, by stopping at this point a person's prejudice can be harmful.

**Stage 2:** At this stage a person has cultivated a thorough understanding of reality: wisdom is complete. All feelings of repulsion disappear, replaced by a feeling of equanimity. There exists neither infatuation nor disgust, neither attachment nor aversion. There remains only a lucid understanding of things as they truly are, in addition to a feeling of spaciousness. A person is able to act appropriately and judiciously. This level of mental development, included in the

practice of insight meditation (*vipassanā*), is called ‘equanimous knowledge’ (*sañkhārupekkhāñāṇa*). [70/39] It is a necessary component of direct realization of truth, and of the complete freedom of the heart.

There are two important fruits of liberation, especially when liberation is complete (in stage 2):

**1) Freedom from suffering:** Liberated individuals are relieved of all oppression that results from clinging. Happiness exists independent of alluring material objects. The mind is unhampered, joyous, fearless, and sorrowless. It is not stricken by the vacillations of worldly conditions (*lokadhamma*).\* This feature affects ethics as well since these people do not create problems by venting unhappiness on others, which is a significant cause for social conflict. They develop virtues, notably loving-kindness and compassion, which act for the welfare of all.

**2) Absence of defilement:** Liberated persons are free from the power of defilements, for example greed, anger, covetousness, prejudice, confusion, jealousy, and conceit. Their minds are clear, unfettered, calm and pure. This feature has direct influence on behaviour, both individual and social. Personally, they apply wisdom in an unadulterated way; they are not biased, for example, by aversion or selfish ambition. Externally, they do not commit offences prompted by the dictates of defilement. They perform wholesome actions righteously and unflinchingly since no defilements like laziness or self-centredness impede and disturb.

Nevertheless, when still not fully developed and existing in isolation, mental release can still be harmful since the good can be a cause for vice.<sup>80</sup> Having attained some spiritual gain, and found peace and happiness, people are likely to revel in this happiness. They are likely to rest on their laurels, abandon effort, or neglect unfinished responsibilities. In short, they fall into heedlessness, as confirmed by the Buddha’s words:

\* The Eight ‘Worldly Winds’: Gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, fame and obscurity.

*And how, Nandiya, is a noble disciple one who dwells negligently? Here, Nandiya, a noble disciple possesses firm confidence in the Buddha ... the Dhamma ... and the Sangha ... He possesses the virtues dear to the Noble Ones ... Content with this firm confidence ... with these virtues, he does not make further effort ... In this way, Nandiya, a noble disciple dwells negligently.<sup>81</sup>*

The way to avoid such harm is to integrate the second principle.  
[70/40]

## 2. The Heedful Way

While conducting their affairs, people generally possess two tendencies. When oppressed by suffering or in crisis, people hasten to amend the situation. Sometimes they are able to solve the problem, while at other times they cannot and must face loss or ruin. Even if they succeed, they experience much distress and struggle to find a lasting solution; they may even find defeat amidst their success: ‘win the battle but lose the war.’ While at ease in everyday life, having attended to immediate concerns, people become complacent, allowing the days to pass by searching for pleasure or indulging in gratification. They do not occupy themselves with avoiding future harm. Unless cornered, they postpone their responsibilities. Assaulted by affliction or danger, they hasten to find relief; having escaped, they are content to partake in their delights. This cycle continues until one day they are powerless to alter the course of events, or are destroyed in their attempt to escape.

The conduct described above is *pamāda*, which can be variously translated as negligence, heedlessness, laxness, disregard, lack of effort, and lethargy. It tends to go hand in hand with laziness.

The opposite quality is diligence (*appamāda*)\*, which is roused and guided by mindfulness. Diligent persons are continually aware of what must be avoided and what must be pursued, and commit themselves to these tasks. They recognise the importance of time, of work, and of the slightest responsibility. They are not intoxicated or overly

\* Other common translations include heedfulness, earnestness, perseverance, carefulness, and vigilance.

enthralled by life. They make every effort to avoid transgression, and miss no opportunity to grow in virtue. They hasten towards their goal or towards the good without interruption, and take great care in their preparations. [70/41]

An understanding of the Three Characteristics directly promotes diligence, because when one knows that all things are impermanent, unstable, fleeting, non-compliant, and subject to causes, then only one way of practice remains, which is to act in conformity with these causes. This means that one makes effort to protect oneself from unwholesome influences, to repair damage, to preserve beneficial qualities, and to act meritoriously for further progress. This practice involves investigating causality and acting accordingly. For example, aware that all things are subject to change, one strives to act in such a way that desired salutary conditions exist as long as possible, and that they give the maximum benefit to others.

Upon closer examination, one sees that the real cause (or force) inducing this diligence is suffering. People's relationship to suffering, however, affects their reaction to it, resulting in either heedlessness or care. And even careful responses vary in quality. An analysis of this dynamic will show the value of *appamāda*. Suffering can be the grounds prompting people to act, in three ways:

1. *Conduct Due To Stress of Suffering*: Some people indulge in comfort and pleasure, neglect their responsibilities, do not consider potential danger, but rather wait until danger confronts them. Faced with trouble and necessity, they hasten to remedy the situation, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.
2. *Conduct Due To Fear of Suffering*: Some people fear suffering and difficulty, and so strive to prevent these. Although their attempts to establish more security are usually successful, their minds are burdened by anxiety. Besides fearing suffering, they suffer from fear, and they act prompted by this secondary source of distress.
3. *Conduct Due To Knowledge of Suffering*: Some people reflect with wisdom on how to manage with potential suffering. They are not intimidated by fear since they understand the nature of the three characteristics; they recognise potential danger. They investigate the dynamics of change, relying on the awareness of impermanence

and the liberty and flexibility afforded by the characteristic of nonself, to choose the best way forward. [70/42] In addition, they use past experience as a lesson to prevent suffering, and to steer towards the greatest possible good. They are relieved of as much suffering as is in their power, to the point of being free from all suffering and anxiety.

The first type of behaviour is heedless; types two and three are performed with care, but type two is a caution fed by defilement and thus bound up with suffering. Type three, on the other hand, springs from wisdom, and is therefore trouble-free: no mental suffering arises. This is full and proper heedfulness, which only an arahant practises perfectly. The quality of vigilance for unenlightened persons depends on their ability to apply wisdom (in line with type three), and on the reduction of stress caused by fear and anxiety (of type two).

As described above, ordinary people are not the only ones susceptible to heedlessness; persons in the initial stages of enlightenment can be careless as well. The reason for this carelessness is contentment, satiety, or complacency concerning exceptional qualities that they have attained. They delight in happiness and ease, and abandon their spiritual work. Another reason is that they have perceived the three characteristics; they have a profound understanding of change, they are reconciled to conditionality, and they are not troubled by decay and separation. Because of this ease and reconciliation, they stop; they show no further interest and make no effort to deal with unresolved issues. They neglect the necessary tasks for prevention or improvement, allowing problems to simply remain or even worsen. In this case, the attainment of spiritual benefit, or of (initial) liberation, is the grounds for carelessness. These individuals act incorrectly; their practice is one-sided and incomplete, lacking the effort required to achieve the full value of heedfulness. To rectify this situation, they must be aware of both benefits, the spiritual and the practical, and bring them to completion.

An additional cause for heedless behaviour is attaching to non-attachment. Thorough knowledge of things based on an understanding of the three characteristics loosens or releases clinging to things. This non-clinging is at the heart of liberation and freedom from suffering, leading to the ultimate goal of Buddhism. In proper practice letting go occurs by itself; it is a consequence of clearly seeing things according



to the truth of the Three Characteristics. Some people, however, do not yet have this lucid discernment; they have simply heard about this truth and rationalise about it. [70/43] Furthermore, they hold on to the idea that by grasping nothing whatsoever they will be released from suffering. Thinking in this way, they try to prove to themselves and others that they do not attach to anything, or are free of defilement, to the extent of taking nothing seriously.<sup>82</sup> The result is functional imbalance, inattentiveness and negligence. This is attachment to non-attachment: it is a counterfeit non-attachment.

Comparing activities prompted by different motivations will help to explain the activity induced by heedfulness. Compare the four kinds of activity and inactivity:

- 1) Some people do not act if they receive no personal advantage, or if they will lose an advantage. They act to gain or to protect an advantage.
- 2) Some people do not act because they attach to non-attachment: they abstain from acting to show that they are free of defilement.
- 3) Some people do not act due to carelessness, delighting in contentment and ease. Unafflicted by suffering, or resigned to conditionality, they are complacent.
- 4) Some people act or refrain from acting dependent on wise consideration of the circumstances. Knowing that something should be done, they act even if they gain no advantage. Knowing that something should not be done, they refrain even if by acting they would gain an advantage. When action is called for, they act immediately, without hesitation or delay.

The fourth kind is proper action performed with pure mindfulness and wisdom.

The Buddha's guidelines for heedful action are twofold, concerning both internal and external activities. The former are the exhortations to spiritual development, to make effort towards higher states of consciousness, which is equal to attaining the spiritual benefit from the Three Characteristics, or the liberation of the heart. In brief, this activity is 'personal improvement'. The latter are the teachings for daily life and interaction with the world: the urging for diligence in work, the fulfilment of responsibilities, the solution and prevention of difficulties,

the development of virtue, and the fostering of social welfare. In brief, this is 'social improvement'. [70/44]

The teachings of heedfulness encourage contemplation on three periods of time: The past, in order to draw lessons from past events and experiences, and to use these lessons as incentives for further effort; the present, for greater urgency in one's activities, for not postponing, and for making the most of each moment; and the future, to reflect on potential change, both beneficial and destructive, by using wisdom to examine causality, followed by plans to prevent harm and advance the good.

Compared with the Buddha's spiritual teachings, the practical teachings are fewer and of less detail; they are found scattered throughout the scriptures and tend to be concise. The reason for this is that human activities vary greatly according to time and place; they cannot be described with any uniformity. Therefore, the Buddha merely presented principles or examples. In contrast, the transformation of the heart pertains to all human beings: the nature of the human mind is identical for all. Furthermore, this transformation is profound and difficult to realize, and is the unique aspect of the Buddha's teaching. He thus explained it thoroughly.

### ***Relationship of Spiritual & Practical Principles***

Liberation enhances the practical value of heedfulness by purifying action. Liberated persons act with a pure heart, unentangled by defilement. Liberation is also conducive to joyful work. It releases people from disruption caused by the badgering of unwholesome mind states, for example actions done out of fear or competitiveness. Instead, people act with a serene and radiant mind. [70/45] In addition, when people see the value of deliverance and mental well-being, they perform external activities to promote a just and peaceful life. In brief, material progress will go hand in hand with spiritual development.

Heedfulness similarly complements liberation. Generally, when people are at ease they become heedless, by becoming idle and slack in their effort. People who profit materially or who solve external problems are not the only ones who become careless when they are prosperous and comfortable. Those who have reconciled themselves to impermanence, *dukkha* and nonself, whose hearts are at ease, also

tend to become attached to happiness and cease making effort. They no longer attend to unresolved matters, and do not urge themselves to improve either personal or social circumstances. The practical value of the Three Characteristics prevents this stagnation, and it motivates these individuals to persevere.

In short, these two principles must be united for Dhamma practice to be correct. Spiritual progress then inspires virtuous and joyful action. Conversely, people's deeds will nurture further spiritual development. Proper practice avoids both anguished action and complacent non-action. The ease people derive from practice does not become an obstacle for subsequent effort. Spiritual realization then safeguards action, and action enhances spiritual realization. In unison, perfection is reached.

Spiritual and practical qualities both depend on wisdom, which discerns the three characteristics and leads to non-attachment, surrender, relinquishment and liberation. The deeper the understanding, the greater is the freedom and higher the realization. For example, by accessing *jhāna*\* or gaining an insight, a person is able to perceive the impermanence, *dukkha*, and nonself in the bliss of these conditions, and they neither cling to the bliss nor to the attainments.

In practical affairs, wisdom rouses people to act diligently and to make the most of each opportunity. An understanding of the law of causality prompts a person to investigate causes to solve problems at their root, or to act in harmony with this law. This knowledge includes analysing causes of past events so that one learns from them, and recognising the necessary conditions for preventing harm and promoting well-being.

The two principles reveal the supreme importance of the teaching on the Three Characteristics. The first principle highlights wisdom, which penetrates reality by comprehending the Three Characteristics [70/46]. The second points to diligent practice, which springs from an understanding of the Three Characteristics. Wisdom's task is to realize the truth of the Three Characteristics; with this realization the heart is freed. At the same time, the Three Characteristics motivate a person who has some level of insight to take heed, to make further effort, and to avoid transgression.

An understanding of the Three Characteristics is the source of righteous

\* Meditative absorption.

action, from incipient stages to the end. Awareness of the Three Characteristics is the motivation for heedfulness, abstention from evil, ingenuity, and righteous conduct on all levels. Ultimately, a complete understanding of the Three Characteristics enables perfect mental freedom, which is the highest achievement of human endeavour.

The worldly and the transcendent converge at the Three Characteristics. Liberation of the heart is a transcendent quality; heedfulness is mundane. The mutually supportive nature of these two principles demonstrates that in an honourable life the worldly and the transcendent abide in unison. One sees the evidence of this clearly in the Buddha and the arahants. Perfectly free, they represent the human ideal, and they attain this freedom by way of heedfulness. Arahants alone are described by the epithet 'those who have perfected heedfulness'<sup>83</sup>; they are exemplars of persons who have finished their business by way of careful attention. Having attained arahantship they continue to persevere for the welfare of the Buddhist community (*saṅgha*) and of all beings. One should follow the example of these enlightened ones, by realizing mental freedom and acting diligently.<sup>84</sup>

The values disclosed by the Three Characteristics ensure perfect moral conduct, with definite consequences. There are two things which guarantee infallible moral conduct: [70/47]

- 1) *A desireless mind*, which does not experience clinging, craving, lust for material objects, or perverse thoughts, being free from defilement; an end of selfishness.
- 2) *Sublime happiness*, which is independent of materiality, and is accessible without moral infringement.

Indeed the first quality is enough to guarantee moral impeccability. The second is merely additional confirmation.

Liberation grants these two moral guarantees. A thorough understanding of the world and an insight into the Three Characteristics leads to freedom of the heart. Coveting and loathing, both grounds for wrongdoing, cease. In other words, moral conduct arises automatically since no impulse exists to act immorally. Furthermore, liberation generates a profound happiness which arises independent of any misdeeds. Enlightened beings experience expansiveness and joy, and some of them experience exalted states of bliss in *jhāna*.<sup>85</sup> Experiencing

such bliss, it is natural that they are of no mind to act dishonourably for another sort of happiness. In any case, one must understand that the second guarantee of refined happiness alone is not yet fully dependable if it is a mundane form of happiness, for example that of *jhāna*, since a person who accesses these mundane states can still revert to indulgence in gross forms of happiness. To be truly secure, a person must obtain the first guarantee of non-craving; otherwise, the happiness must be transcendent, which automatically arises with the first guarantee.

Stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*) possess these two moral guarantees; they are impeccable in moral conduct and are incapable of moral transgression. The scriptures refer to enlightened beings (*ariyapuggala*), from stream-enterers upwards, as 'perfect in moral conduct'.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, if we wish for ethical standards to be firmly established in society, we must promote the realization of stream-entry; we will thereby meet with true success.

If one is unable to establish these two guarantees, one's chances for a secure ethical society will be slim, because members of the society will be infected by defilement and thus be predisposed to violate boundaries. In this event, systems of control and coercion need to be created, or even excessive force be applied, which does not offer true safety or resolution. [70/48] We see the lack of success of such measures everywhere. For example, people in this day and age receive advanced education, and have learned what is good and bad, what is beneficial and harmful. But because they fall prey to greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), they act immorally; they injure themselves (for example, by intoxication) and damage society (for example, by deforestation). Reasoned arguments and law enforcement end up having minimal effect.

When people are unable to establish the two aforementioned guarantees, they generally use the following methods to protect or promote ethical standards, with varying degrees of success:

- Intimidation by establishing rules, laws and punishments. Due to evasion of these laws, new systems must be created for reinforcement. In addition, the system itself may be flawed, for example with corruption. As a result, the attempts to maintain ethical standards meet with ever diminishing success.

- Intimidation with threats of occult power, for example of gods and supernatural forces. This is successful during times when people believe in these forces, but is less effective when people have the sort of scientific understanding present today. This form of intimidation includes instilling the fear of going to hell.
- Intimidation with threats against a person's honour and popularity, for example applying social pressure of blame and disrepute. This works for some but not for others, and is indecisive at best.
- Catering to desire by using a reward or compensation, either from people, gods, or occult powers, including the promise of heaven. This method is variously effective, according to time and place, and its results are uncertain.
- An appeal to virtue and righteousness, by encouraging a sense of shame, self-respect and mindfulness. Few people possess these qualities in strength; people usually submit to desire, for example, and therefore their moral conduct is inconsistent. The protection bestowed by this motivation is especially weak in an age abounding in temptation and base values.
- An appeal to faith, by fixing the mind with strong conviction on an ideal. This is difficult to accomplish, and even when successful it is unreliable, because faith is dependent on something external. Faith is not direct knowledge and sole reliance on faith is still tainted by defilement. Occasionally, this defilement intensifies and then enshrouds faith, or faith wanes and disappears on its own. (This method includes the concentrative power in preliminary stages of mind deliverance – *cetovimutti*.)
- Applying the power of enthusiasm (*chanda*), by encouraging an interest in the development of virtue. [70/49] This force is the adversary of craving, which is the agent behind immoral behaviour. If one cannot yet cultivate the heart's liberation, one should emphasize the rousing of such enthusiasm, as it is a wholesome force, is conjoined with wisdom, and supports liberation more directly than any of the other methods mentioned above.

Regardless of which impetus one uses, Dhamma practice must rely on self-restraint (*saññāma*) to achieve rectitude. Therefore, to foster ethical conduct people should be trained to have strict self-discipline. The quality of success depends also upon the impetus. Of all the

motivations listed above, the summoning of virtuous qualities, faith, and enthusiasm are best, but one must remember that these forces are unable to provide definite results. A truly stable ethical society only exists when people establish the two moral guarantees: A free heart and sublime happiness, which beget moral integrity automatically.

One can use heedfulness as a measuring stick for Dhamma practice by comparing oneself to the arahants, who combine consummate liberation with perfect diligence. They integrate knowledge of the truth with pure conduct, non-attachment with earnest effort, and transcendent realization with responsible action in the world. They reveal how two apparently discordant elements can exist in harmony, and even be mutually supportive. Heedfulness is the nucleus of all righteous conduct, and is the incentive behind all virtuous acts from beginning to end. As the Buddha said, heedfulness is like an elephant's footprint, which covers the footprints of all other animals; it dictates the function of all other virtues. All virtues depend on heedfulness; regardless of all the virtues described in the scriptures, carelessness alone suppresses and invalidates them as if they did not exist. Virtues are truly effective when heedfulness is established. For ordinary people, however, diligence tends to be attenuated or arrested, and turns into carelessness due to their preoccupation with alluring sense objects. Craving, for example, causes laziness, worry and dilatoriness. People's conduct is thus continually wanting or fruitless. Conversely, the greater the heart's liberation, the less a person indulges in delusory sense objects, and the more assiduous that person is, unimpaired by defilement. [70/50] Freedom and earnest effort support one another in this way.

In addition, the principle of heedfulness is a reminder that all persons, including Noble Ones in initial stages of awakening, are still vulnerable as long as they have not realized arahantship. They may become heedless by grasping the ease and contentment stemming from their attainments: their virtues induce them to err. Therefore, we must constantly remind ourselves to take care, and to promote a sense of urgency (*samvega*).

In a society of which most members have the proclivity to be heedless, acting in friendship and encouraging people to be prudent is one complement of a diligent person. The presence of a 'beautiful friend' (*kalyānamitta*) is a key factor which is paired with caution as an antidote when all other virtues are defunct during a period of foolhardiness,

and as an answer to the question: Having been careless, what are the alternatives to simply waiting to incur the painful consequences?

To sum up, people should take care and make earnest effort for their own and others' benefit and development. For example:

- Leaders of a country should make effort to establish peace and welfare, promote a healthy just environment, and nurture people's spiritual qualities.
- Religious elders should propagate the Dhamma for the welfare of the many, act in consideration of later generations, and do everything in their ability to preserve the True Teaching (*Saddhamma*) for all beings everywhere.
- Monks should perform their duties and inspire people with care; they should create a feeling of peace and safety by not undertaking practices of self-mortification, and by teaching the way to a virtuous life.
- All persons should strive for personal well-being by developing self-reliance, and for others' welfare by helping them gain self-reliance. One should cultivate wisdom to reach the highest benefit, which leads to deliverance and a life of integrity. [70/51]

Finally, because human beings who are momentarily untroubled, live in comfort, or have reconciled themselves to an aspect of the truth ordinarily become careless, skilled teachers customarily offer friendly admonishment. They constantly seek means to encourage their followers by advising, inspiring and even frustrating, to establish people in heedfulness.

### 3. Liberation

Although liberation is a component of the spiritual path it has several distinctive features. The scriptures define the spiritual path and its companion practical teachings by referring to impermanence, since impermanence is easily noticed. Even beginning Dhamma practitioners benefit from the Three Characteristics by integrating the spiritual and practical teachings, as befits their level of understanding. This third quality, however, accompanies the meditation on nonself (*anattā*),<sup>87</sup> for example:



*A person sees any kind of material form ... feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... and consciousness, whether past, present or future ... as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' When a person knows and sees in this way, there exists no 'I'-making (ahañkāra), 'my'-making (mamañkāra), or underlying tendency to conceit (mānānusaya) regarding this body with its consciousness and all external signs.<sup>88</sup>*

The defilements of *ahañkāra*, *mamañkāra* and *mānānusaya* are also called *diṭṭhi*, *tañhā* and *māna* respectively. As a group they are usually arranged as *tañhā*, *māna* and *diṭṭhi*. This quote's significance is that a person who clearly sees the nature of nonself eliminates the three defilements that are tied up in a sense of self, or that create egocentricity, namely:

- *Tañhā*: Selfishness; the search for self-gratification and personal gain.
- *Māna*: Conceit, pride and self-judgement; the desire for prominence and control over others; the pursuit of power.
- *Diṭṭhi*: Attachment to personal opinions; rigid conviction, credulity, and infatuation concerning theories, creeds and ideals.

These three defilements are collectively called *papañca* or *papañca-dhamma*, which can be translated as 'encumbrances'. [70/52] Another translation is 'agitators': *papañca* produce mental proliferation and turmoil. They cause mental disquiet, excess, retardation and confusion. They lead a person to deviate from simple obvious truth. They breed new problems, and interfere in the reasoned solution to existent problems; instead, they generate more complication and disorder. They dictate human behaviour, inducing unrest, disagreement, conquest and war. Such vices are not the only fruits; even if a person acts virtuously, a hidden catch hampers behaviour when these vexing defilements act as the catalyst, leading people astray.

Depending on the extent of wisdom, an understanding of the Three Characteristics, especially of selflessness, weakens or destroys these self-obsessed defilements. Once these disturbing, confining, and misleading agents are absent, the path to virtuous conduct is wide open and limitless. A person can then wholeheartedly cultivate virtues, for example goodwill, compassion, benefaction (*atthacariyā*), and generosity.

## CONCLUSION

Insight into the Three Characteristics leads to goodness, growth and happiness: The goodness of great virtue, the growth of diligence, and the happiness of wisdom, which brings about the heart's release.

Happiness is a basis on which righteous conduct rests. The happiness meant here is primarily the happiness independent of material objects (*nirāmisā-sukhā*); it is a happiness which does not stagnate, sour or degenerate.

People who have penetrated the truth of the three characteristics and whose happiness is independent of material things do not become infatuated with sensual pleasures. They do not commit ill deeds in pursuit of such pleasure. When pleasure subsides, grief does not overwhelm them; they are able to sustain mindfulness with minimal disturbance. Untroubled by anxiety, they are able to partake of all degrees of happiness fully and fluently, including enjoying the most refined forms of bliss without attachment. [71]

So far the practical benefits of the Three Characteristics have been explained as a whole. At this point, the benefits of each individual characteristic are outlined:

The teaching on impermanence describes the arising, subsisting and ending of all things, extending to the smallest molecule, and embracing both mind and matter. Although people acknowledge impermanence when witnessing the alteration of an object, even this change may reinforce their belief in substantiality: they believe that an object's essence was formerly of one composition, now it is of another. This misunderstanding leads people to further self-deception and entanglement. People who have gained true insight into impermanence, on the other hand, are no longer led astray.

Impermanence is essentially neutral, neither good nor bad, but with human beings one can designate some forms of change as growth and some as decline. Regardless of which direction it goes, change depends on causes: whatever declines can improve, and whatever improves can decline or blossom further. Humans themselves are a primary factor in this growth or decline, and are able to engender many supporting conditions. Therefore, growth and decline do not occur at random but are subject to human participation according to people's deeds (*yathākamma*). Growth and decline are subject to human actions without requiring the interference by a supernatural agent. Impermanence thus offers people hope: if one wishes for something one must foster the proper conditions. Improvement is possible, both material and spiritual; an ignorant person can become wise, and an ordinary person can be enlightened. Self-improvement depends on our understanding the causes for such change and then generating these causes.

As just mentioned, growth is susceptible to decline. [72] One must take care to prevent the conditions for decline, and foster the conditions for growth. A person who has fallen into decline can rectify the situation by abandoning the detrimental factors, and nurturing the beneficial ones. Moreover, spiritual growth can be enhanced to the point that one realizes the complete end of spiritual regression. Here we come to the supreme quality which links the truth with human conduct: wisdom. One requires wisdom to differentiate between decline and true growth, to know which factors are necessary for desired change, and to develop the skills for supporting these factors. The teaching on impermanence is thus of great import for human conduct, offering the potential for improvement, confirming the law of kamma – that human actions bear fruit, and emphasising the deepening of wisdom.

Besides helping people to prosper in their worldly engagements, the teaching on impermanence prevents one from becoming a slave to the vicissitudes of life. One can live with change without being battered by the worldly currents until one is powerless to help oneself, let alone help others.

People who are no longer driven by clinging to desirable aspects of life can clearly see what is truly valuable. They do not maintain false ideas of what is beneficial by justifying the kind of gain which only leads to restriction and ruin. They take the fullest advantage of prosperity, both material and spiritual, and are a refuge to others.

On a basic level the understanding of impermanence helps alleviate suffering when one is faced with misfortune, and prevents indulgence in times of success. At an advanced level it leads to a gradual realization of truth up to an understanding of nonself, resulting in the heart's deliverance – the absence of suffering, or perfect mental health.

People tend to use the teaching of impermanence to comfort themselves in times of anguish or loss, with varying degrees of success. Such use of impermanence is effective when used appropriately, especially to alert someone to this truth who has never considered it. [73] Habitual application of such self-solace is detrimental, however, equivalent to submitting oneself to worldly tides, or to not taking full advantage of the teaching on impermanence. Such action is incorrect in the light of the law of kamma; it contradicts the self-improvement necessary for reaching the goal of Buddha-Dhamma.

In brief, the advantages of the teaching on impermanence are comprised of two stages. First, people who comprehend this natural law are able to diminish or eliminate grief when confronted with undesirable change, and do not get carried away by desired change. Second, they diligently attend to necessary tasks, knowing that all alterations are due to causes; these changes do not occur in isolation or haphazardly. Conversely, people who observe that all things are unstable and transitory and therefore see no point in getting involved, carelessly letting life drift along, betray a misapprehension and act incorrectly in relation to impermanence. Such a stance conflicts with the Buddha's final teaching:

*All conditioned things are of a nature to decay; strive diligently to reach the goal.<sup>89</sup>*

To understand the benefits of the teachings on *dukkha* one must examine this characteristic in relation to two key teachings: The Three Characteristics and the Four Noble Truths:

1. Given that all conditioned things exist as an aggregate of fleeting components, and are subject to birth, transmutation and demise conforming to the law of impermanence, things are a venue for change and conflict; they are thoroughly instilled with impending rupture and decay. To sustain a desired object, or to steer the flow

of change in a desired direction, requires energy and guidance. The more complex and numerous the components the greater the effort and more meticulous the means required to engage with them. To influence something one must act at its underlying causes, and know the relative importance of these causes. Such wise action leads to an end of suffering. In contrast, action prompted by misguided attachment leads to oppression.

2. According to the teaching on the Four Noble Truths, our sole responsibility (*kicca*) in the face of *dukkha* is accurate knowledge (*pariññā*). This correct response to suffering is essential and yet it tends to get overlooked. [74] Buddha-Dhamma teaches not to increase our suffering but to know suffering, to deal with it skilfully, and to be free of it: to realize true happiness. In other words, the teaching on the Noble Truths instructs us to investigate and accurately understand personal problems before trying to solve them. Investigation of problems does not imply creating or inflicting ourselves with more; on the contrary, it is a method for eliminating problems. People who are not aware of the responsibility enjoined by the Noble Truths may react to suffering inappropriately and aimlessly, and may increase their suffering by viewing the world negatively.

These two dimensions of *dukkha*, the universal and the personal, and the skilful response enjoined by the teachings mentioned above determine the practical value of this characteristic.

The rise and disintegration of things reveals an inherent frailty and imperfection. Passage of time amplifies this deficiency, as alterations occur within and surrounding an object. Consequentially, things must continually struggle to sustain their form or to improve. For human beings, maintaining a higher quality of life and reaching fulfilment requires constant revision and refinement.

Our impulsive resistance to the conflicts arising from change generally leads to more harm than good, irrespective of the matter involved: a material object, another person, or a community. An appreciation of proper adaptation and improvement is essential, and points again to the importance of wisdom, which engages with all things in harmony with cause and effect.

Ordinary happiness falls within the domain of the characteristic of *dukkha*. Such happiness is inherently flawed in the sense that it is subject to change, and therefore it is not fully satisfying. People who place their hope in this form of happiness essentially align themselves with the imperfection, or fall into the stream of change; they are thus swept in whichever direction the currents go. When disappointed, the anguish is equal to the expectation for joy. Searching for happiness in this way is tantamount to enslavement or gambling with life. It is incumbent on us to apply mindfulness and clear comprehension whilst deriving pleasure from these transient forms of happiness. Despite the vacillation of worldly joys one should minimise the harmful repercussions with the resolve: ‘Whatever happens, may I protect freedom of the heart.’

[75] Happiness is of two kinds: Happiness which caters to sensual desire, and happiness of a spacious heart, a heart free from mental obstructions.

The first kind of happiness is dependent on external conditions to gratify desire. The disposition of the mind enthralled with this form of happiness is prevailing agitation, possessiveness, and self-obsession. When not restrained these selfish qualities cause problems. It is natural that this form of happiness dependent on external things leads to some degree of addiction and disturbance. This happiness dependent on material objects (*sāmisā-sukha*) results from an attempt to compensate for a feeling of lack or loss.

The second kind of happiness is independent of external sense objects; it is a self-reliant and unconditional state of mind. Its distinguishing features are:

- *Purity*: uncontaminated by defilement.
- *Luminosity*: accompanied by profound, immeasurable wisdom, prepared for investigation.
- *Peace*: an absence of anxiety or agitation; relaxed and tranquil.
- *Freedom*: free of mental obstruction; spacious, non-attached and buoyant; full of loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy.
- *Fulfilment*: no feelings of inadequacy or loneliness; satisfied; inherently complete; if compared to the body, akin to having good health.

The two most significant qualities of this state of mind are freedom and wisdom. Together they manifest in the mind as equanimity (*upekkhā*): an evenness of mind, which engages with things in an unbiased way. This profound happiness (*nirāmisā-sukkhā*) is of supreme benefit to human conduct. It is untroubled and is instrumental in solving problems. One can say that it is beyond happiness, and is thus referred to as freedom from suffering. It signals the end of defect and insecurity.

Human beings normally seek the first form of happiness, but they cannot always obtain or keep desired objects at will because these things are subject to external influences and are transient. [76] One must therefore try to establish the second kind of happiness, at least enough to live at ease in the world and minimise suffering; one will then know how to relate to sensual happiness without causing distress for oneself and others. Understanding the universal characteristics engenders this exalted happiness and leads to non-attachment.

Happiness dependent on external conditions requires the interaction between two parties, for example between two persons, or a person and an object. Both parties, however, possess the characteristic of *dukkhā*: they are impaired by inherent conflict. The friction between two such entities increases in proportion to the misguided behaviour of the persons involved. An example is of two people, one who seeks pleasure and the other who is the object of desire. Both persons possess inherent deficiency: the former is not always equipped to partake of pleasure, and the latter is not always in a state to be enjoyed. It is impossible that either always gains. If they do not realize or accept this fact, they will hold their gratification as the criterion for happiness, causing strife and irritation.

Furthermore, a person's fixation on an object includes possessiveness and a wish to sustain the affiliation forever. This behaviour sets a person in opposition to the natural causal process. Such lack of wisdom, applying gratification as the measure for behaviour, is just foolhardy defiance, leading to the numerous variations of suffering.

Apart from two parties interacting, additional elements often play a special participatory role, for example when two people desire the same object. Frustrated desire tends to create contention, for example competition, arguments and theft, all of which are symptoms of suffering. The more people attend to their problems with attachment

the more intense is the ensuing anguish. But the greater the application of wisdom the less that problems remain.

Ignorance (*moha*) leads to selfishness and greed (*lobha*); unable to acquire a desired object, a person may become angry (*dosa*). [77] Many other vices spring from these three root defilements, for example stinginess, jealousy, mistrust, restlessness, anxiety, ill-will, and laziness, generating ever increasing internal discord. These impurities divorce people from nature's harmony. The repercussion of such denial is a feeling of oppression and stress: nature's penalty system. Hence, the *dukkha* of nature is compounded, creating more intense pain for human beings, for example:

- Feelings of tension, dullness, embarrassment, agitation, insecurity and depression.
- Psychological disturbances and related physical illnesses.
- Ordinary physical pain, for example the pain experienced during sickness, which is unduly exacerbated because of craving and clinging.
- Escalating misery brought about by causing distress and discomfort for others.
- Increased social conflicts ensuing from individuals inflaming their defilements. The consequence is social degeneracy and turmoil.

The *dukkha* of formations (*saṅkhāra-dukkha*) erupts as pain (*dukkha-dukkha*) due to a person engaging with things ignorantly and succumbing to them. In short, due to attachment.

The alternative is to engage with things wisely based on an accurate understanding of truth. People with such understanding know that the *dukkha* which is a property of formations is simply an attribute of nature; they do not struggle and create surplus conflict. Knowing that to grasp these formations would lead to suffering, they abstain from such grasping. By accepting this truth, they do not breed oppressive defilements. They know how to live in harmony with nature by exercising virtues, which promote inner spaciousness and peace. Such virtues include: Loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), social concord (*sāmaggī*), co-operation, self-sacrifice, self-restraint, patience, humility, and circumspection. [78] These virtues counter the many vices, for example: Hatred, hostility,



jealousy, dissension, greed, self-indulgence, obstinacy, arrogance, fear, mistrust, indolence, infatuation, absentmindedness, and credulity.

This harmonious and wise way of conducting our lives, of taking best advantage of nature's laws, not forfeiting our freedom, and not clinging is the most excellent way to live, as extolled in the Buddha's words:

*Life with wisdom is the supreme life (paññājīviṃ jīvitamābu seṭṭham).*<sup>90</sup>

An understanding of nonself benefits conduct in these significant ways:

1. It reduces selfishness and prevents one from applying personal gain as a basis for action. Instead, not limited by a sense of self, one discerns the wider benefit of one's actions.

According to the selfless nature of things, an object is dependent on its causes, which steer and shape the course the object takes. For this reason this teaching again emphasizes that a person should wisely relate to things in conformity with their causes and conditions, which is the most effective way to succeed in one's aspirations and to avoid suffering.

2. Concerning 'view' (*diṭṭhi*)\*, this understanding broadens the mind, enabling it to manage problems without the interference from selfish desires and attachments. Instead, the mind engages with an object in accord with its true nature and potential. The mind is equanimous, and complies with the 'sovereignty of truth' (*dharmādbipateyya*), rather than pursue 'sovereignty of self' (*attādbipateyya*).

3. On a higher level an understanding of selflessness is equivalent to knowing all things as they truly are; it is an ultimate understanding of truth. Such complete understanding brings about the utter removal of clinging and the realization of perfect freedom, which is the goal of Buddha-Dhamma. A lucid understanding of nonself,

\* *Diṭṭhi* is here used in a neutral sense, referring to a person's perspective or comprehension of the world.

however, relies on an understanding of Dependent Origination, and on a practice consistent with the Eightfold Path, as will be discussed later.\*

4. The Three Characteristics corroborate other Buddhist teachings, in particular the teachings on kamma and the path to deliverance. For example, because all things are void of a fixed self, an interconnected causal dynamic is possible, and therefore our actions can bear fruit. And because the self is not fixed, liberation is possible. These statements, however, must be viewed in the context of Dependent Origination, which is explained in the following chapter.

\* The simplest formulation of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is: *When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.* (S. II. 28, 65) See Bruce Evans's translation of Chapter 4 of *Buddhadhamma*: 'Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality'. The Eightfold Path is discussed in the latter half of *Buddhadhamma*.

## THE BUDDHA'S WORDS [78/1]

### ***A. Direct Knowledge Of The Three Characteristics***

Monks, physical form is impermanent. Whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*; whatever is *dukkha* is nonself. Whatever is nonself should be seen as it truly is with correct wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.'<sup>91</sup> [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness.]

Monks, physical form is impermanent ... painful (*dukkha*) ... and nonself. So too, the causes for the arising of physical form are impermanent ... painful ... and nonself. As physical form has originated from causes that are impermanent ... painful ... and nonself, how could it be permanent, pleasurable or self?<sup>92</sup> [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness.]

But Friend, a learned, noble disciple, who has seen the Noble Ones and is skilled and well-trained in their teaching, who has seen the Worthy Ones and is skilled and well-trained in their teaching, does not regard physical form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form. He does not regard feeling as self ... perception as self ... volitional formations as self ... consciousness as self, or self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in self, or self as in consciousness. He understands as it truly is impermanent form as 'impermanent form' ... impermanent consciousness as 'impermanent consciousness'. He understands as it truly is stressful (*dukkha*) form as 'stressful form' ... stressful consciousness as 'stressful consciousness'. He understands as it truly is selfless form as 'selfless form' ... selfless

consciousness as 'selfless consciousness'. He understands as it truly is conditioned form as 'conditioned form' ... conditioned consciousness as 'conditioned consciousness'. He understands as it truly is murderous form as 'murderous form' ... murderous consciousness as 'murderous consciousness'. He does not assume, grasp or determine form as 'my self'. He does not assume feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... consciousness; he does not grasp or determine it as 'my self'. Not grasped or attached to, these five aggregates of clinging lead to his long-lasting welfare and happiness.<sup>93</sup>

How, householder, is one afflicted in body and afflicted in mind? Here, an untaught ordinary person, who has not seen the Noble Ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their teaching ... regards physical form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness as self, regards self as possessing form ... regards form in self ... regards self in form ... regards self in consciousness. He lives obsessed by the notions: 'I am form', 'my form', 'I am feeling', 'my feeling', 'I am perception', 'my perception', 'I am volitional formations', 'my volitional formations', 'I am consciousness', 'my consciousness'. [78/2] As he lives obsessed by these notions, that form ... consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness, there arises in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.

And how, householder, is one afflicted in body but not afflicted in mind? Here, the instructed noble disciple ... does not regard physical form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness as self, regard self as possessing form ... regard form in self ... regard self in form ... regard self in consciousness. He does not live obsessed by the notions: 'I am form', 'my form', 'I am feeling', 'my feeling', 'I am perception', 'my perception', 'I am volitional formations', 'my volitional formations', 'I am consciousness', 'my consciousness'. As he lives unobsessed by these notions, that form ... consciousness of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness, there do not arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair.<sup>94</sup>

How, monks, is there non-agitation through non-clinging? Here, an instructed noble disciple ... does not regard physical form as self, self as possessing form, self in form, or form in self. That form of his changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of form, his consciousness is not preoccupied with this physical change. No agitation and constellation of mental states (*dbamma-samuppāda*) arising from preoccupation with physical change remain overpowering his mind. Because his mind is not overpowered, he is not frightened, distressed or anxious, and through non-clinging he does not become agitated.<sup>95</sup> [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness.]

Monks, when one has understood the impermanence, alteration, fading away and cessation of physical form, and when one sees as it truly is with correct wisdom thus: 'Form, both past and present, is impermanent, *dukkha* and subject to change', then one abandons sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. By abandoning sorrow ... despair, one is not agitated. Unagitated one dwells happily. A monk who dwells happily is said to be quenched in that respect (*tadaṅga-nibbuta*).<sup>96</sup> [The same for feeling, perception, volitional formations and consciousness.] [78/3]

An untaught ordinary person reflects unwisely (*ayonisomanasikāra*) thus: 'In the far-reaching past did I exist? ... did I not exist? ... what was I? ... how was I? ... having been what, what did I become? In the far-reaching future will I exist? ... will I not exist? ... what will I be? ... how will I be? ... having been what, what will I become?' Or else he doubts about the present thus: 'Do I exist or do I not exist? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?'

When he reflects unwisely in this way, one of the six views arises in him. There arises the view (belief) as true and real: 'I have a self', 'I do not have a self', 'I perceive the self by way of the self', 'I perceive nonself by way of the self', 'I perceive the self by way of nonself'. Or else he has some such view as this: 'It is this self of mine that directs, feels and experiences here and there the fruits of good and bad actions; it is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure like this forever.' Monks,

this speculative view is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the disturbance of views, the wriggling of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say.

Monks, a well-taught noble disciple ... understands what things are fit for reflection and what things are unfit for reflection. He does not reflect on those things unfit for reflection, and he reflects on those things fit for reflection.

What are the things unfit for reflection that he does not reflect on? They are the things such that when he reflects on them, the unarisen taints of sensual lust, becoming, and ignorance arise in him, and arisen taints increase. These are the things unfit for reflection that a noble disciple does not reflect on.

And what are the things fit for reflection that a noble disciple reflects on? They are the things such that when he reflects on them, the unarisen taints of sensual lust, becoming and ignorance do not arise, and arisen taints are abandoned. These are the things fit for reflection that he reflects on. By not reflecting on things unfit for reflection and by reflecting on things fit for reflection, unarisen taints do not arise in him and arisen taints are abandoned.

That noble disciple reflects wisely (*yonisomanasikāra*) thus: 'This is suffering ... this is the cause of suffering ... this is the cessation of suffering ... this is the way to the cessation of suffering.' When he reflects wisely in this way, three fetters are abandoned in him: Personality-view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and adherence to rules and observances (*śīlabbataparāmāsa*).<sup>97</sup>

## ***B. Practical Benefits Of The Three Characteristics***

- The Ephemeral Nature of Life & Recognising the Value of Time  
[78/4]

Form is like a lump of foam,  
Feeling like a water bubble;  
Perception is like a mirage,

Volitions like a plantain trunk,  
And consciousness like an illusion,  
So explained the Kinsman of the Sun\*.

However one may consider (these five aggregates),  
And carefully investigate,  
They are but void and empty  
When one discerns them thoroughly.  
With reference to this body  
The One of Broad Wisdom\* has taught  
The abandonment of three things.<sup>98</sup>

Behold the body thrown aside;  
When vitality, heat and consciousness  
Depart from this physical body,  
Then it lies there cast away:  
A senseless thing, mere food for others.

Such is this continuum (of life),  
This illusion, beguiler of fools.  
These five aggregates are known as a murderer;  
Here no substance can be found.

A monk with energy aroused  
Should look upon the aggregates thus,  
Whether by day or by night,  
Comprehending, ever mindful.

He should discard all the fetters  
And make a refuge for himself;  
Let him fare as with head ablaze,  
Yearning for the imperishable state<sup>†</sup>.<sup>99</sup>

\* The Buddha.

† Author: Nibbāna.

Monks, this life span of human beings is short; one must pass on to the future life. You should reflect wisely, do good, and live a pure life (*brahmacariya*). One born cannot avoid death; one who lives long lives a hundred years or a fraction more.

‘Short is the life span of human beings,  
The good man should disdain it.  
You should live like one with head aflame:  
No one can avoid Death’s arrival.

Days and nights pass by;  
Life is brought to a halt.  
The life of mortals is exhausted  
Like the water of small streams.’<sup>100</sup>

Life in this world is unpredictable and uncertain.  
Life here is difficult, short and bound up with suffering.  
There are no means whereby those born do not die.  
Even for one reaching old age, death prevails; such is the nature of  
living creatures.

As ripe fruit is in constant danger of falling, so too living beings are  
in constant danger of death.  
As clay pots made by the potter end up shattered, so it is with the  
life of mortals.  
The young and the old, the foolish and the wise, all are trapped by  
death, all have death as their end.

When they are overcome by death, going from here to the next  
world, even a father cannot save his son, or a family its  
relatives.  
Look: while relatives are watching, tearful and wailing, humans are  
carried off one by one, like cattle being led to slaughter.

The world is smitten by death and old age;  
The wise do not grieve, knowing the nature of the world.



You cannot know a person's path, neither his origin nor his destination.

Not seeing these ends, to grieve for him is futile.

If a deluded person should gain any good by lament and self-torment, a wise person would act so too. [78/5]

Grief does not lead to peace of mind.

On the contrary, it leads to more misery and harm.

Tormenting himself, a mourner grows thin and pale.

He cannot thereby aid the departed; lamentation is of no avail.

Without abandoning grief a person suffers further anguish;

Mourning the departed makes him a slave to sorrow.

Look at people set to depart in conformity with their actions;

All beings are terrified when trapped by Death.

What people expect is always different from what actually happens;  
Such is the nature of separation.

See the way of the world: a person may live for a hundred years or more,

But in the end he is parted from his relatives, and he too forsakes life here.

Having listened to the Worthy Ones, dispel your grief.

Seeing someone who has passed away say: 'I cannot bring him back again.'

A wise, skilled and learned person eliminates sorrow as soon as it arises,

Like dousing a fire, or the wind blowing away a tuft of cotton.

A person searching for happiness should allay bereavement, pining, and distress; he should pull out this piercing arrow.

Having pulled out the arrow he is free and gains peace of mind.

He passes beyond all grief, sorrowless and quenched.<sup>101</sup>

Once conceived in the womb at day or night, human beings go onwards without return.

Despite the endowment of vigour, their battles against ageing and

death are futile;  
Ageing and death overrun all beings; for this reason I resolve to  
practice the Dhamma.

Kings may defeat a fearsome fourfold army [of elephants, horses,  
chariots and infantry], but they are unable to defeat the Lord  
of Death ...

Surrounded by a fourfold army, kings may escape an enemy's clutches,  
but they are unable to escape from Death ...

With elephants, horses, chariots, and infantry a hero may assail and  
destroy an enemy, but he is unable to destroy Death ...

People can propitiate furious demons, spirits and ghosts, but they are  
unable to placate Death ...

A criminal, felon or rogue may still receive the king's clemency, but  
Death will never show mercy ... [78/6]

Not royalty or nobility, not the rich, the powerful or the strong;  
Death pities no one.

For this reason I resolve to practice the Dhamma ...

Indeed righteousness protects the righteous; Truth when well-  
observed brings the reward of joy.

Those who observe the Truth to a woeful state do not go.

For righteousness and unrighteousness have not equal ends;

Unrighteousness leads to hell; righteousness leads to a happy  
abode.<sup>102</sup>

Just as mountains of solid rock,  
Massive, reaching to the sky,  
Might draw together from all sides,  
Crushing all in the four quarters –  
So ageing and death come  
Overwhelming living beings.  
Kings, brahmins, peasants, servants,  
Outcastes and scavengers:  
Ageing and death spare none along the way,  
Crushing everything.

No battlefield exists there for elephants,  
For chariots and infantry.  
One cannot defeat them by incantations  
Or bribe them with wealth.

Therefore let a wise person, out of regard for his own welfare,  
Establish faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

When one conducts oneself righteously with body, speech and mind,  
one is praised here in the present life, and after death one rejoices in  
heaven.<sup>103</sup>

The world is smitten by Death and besieged by old age; the world is  
pierced by the arrow of craving, constantly seething with  
desire.

The world is mauled by Death and engulfed by old age; it is  
defenseless and relentlessly beaten like a thief receiving  
punishment.

Death, disease and old age pursue us like three huge fires; no  
power exists to withstand them, no speed to run away.  
Do not let the days pass in vain – accomplish something, great or  
little.

With the passing of each day and night, life's opportunities dwindle.  
Your last moment approaches: whether walking, standing, sitting or  
lying, there is no time for you to be negligent.<sup>104</sup>

I see your young sons crying 'Mommy, Daddy'; they are adorable and  
hard to come by.

Alas, even before reaching old age they succumb to death.

I see your young daughters, maidens lovely to behold; but their life  
ends like an uprooted tender bamboo.

Truly both men and women though of youthful age can die; who is  
assured of life, saying, 'I am still young'?

The days and nights pass by; life's duration constantly shrinks, like  
the time remaining for a school of fish in an evaporating  
pond.

What reassurance is youth?

The world is smitten by Death and besieged by old age; the days do  
not pass in vain ...

Just as thread is used up by weavers, so too is the life of human  
beings.

Just as a brimming river does not return to the heights, so too human  
beings do not return to youth.

Just as a swollen river sweeps away the trees along its banks, so too  
old age and death sweep away all living beings ... [78/7]

Just as ripe fruit is in constant danger of falling, so too living beings  
are in constant danger of death.

In the morning we see many people; by evening some are no  
longer in sight.

In the evening we see many people; by morning some are no  
longer in sight.

We should hasten to make effort today; who knows if we shall die  
tomorrow?

For there is no postponing Death and his hordes.<sup>105</sup>

My son discarded his body as a snake casts off old skin; no use for  
his body, he passed away ...

From another world he came unsummoned; departing this world I  
gave not my leave.

As he came so he went; what good is there in grieving his  
departure?

If I keen my body will waste away; what benefit is there in this?  
My friends and relatives would anguish even more ...

As children cry in vain to grasp the moon above, so people idly  
mourn the loss of those they love.

Those dead and cremated feel not their relatives' lament.  
Therefore, I do not grieve; he fares the way he had to tread.<sup>106</sup>

Rather than mourn the deceased we should mourn for ourselves,  
who are constantly under Death's dominion.  
As people stand, sit, lie or walk, life's constituents are not remiss;  
our years wear away in each blinking of the eye.  
Alas, as our lives expire so, we must face separation.  
We should have pity on those beings remaining rather than mourn  
for those who have passed away.<sup>107</sup>

Monks, there are these five states not obtainable by ascetic, brahmin, god, Māra or Brahmā, nor by anyone in the world. What five? The fulfilment of these requests: 'May what is subject to ageing not age,' 'may what is subject to sickness not sicken,' 'may the mortal not die,' 'may the transient not end,' and 'may the destructible not be destroyed.'

For an untaught ordinary person, something subject to ageing ages, something subject to sickness sickens, something mortal dies, something transient ends, and something destructible is destroyed. (When this happens) that ordinary person ... does not reflect thus: 'Not to me only ... (does this happen), but as long as beings come and go, arise and pass away, to all, that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is destructible is destroyed. [78/8] When that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is destructible is destroyed, if I grieve, pine, lament, beat my breast, wail and anguish, food will have no appeal, the body will languish, affairs will be neglected, enemies will rejoice, while friends will be distraught' ... (When those conditions come about) he grieves, pines, laments and wails. This person is called an untaught ordinary person; pierced by the poisoned dart of sorrow, he torments himself.

To the learned, noble disciple also, that which is prone to ageing ages ... that which is destructible is destroyed. (When this happens) that noble disciple ... reflects thus: 'Not to me only ... (does this happen), but as long as beings come and go, arise and pass away, to all, that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is destructible is destroyed. When that which is subject to ageing ages ... that which is

destructible is destroyed, if I grieve, pine, lament, beat my breast, wail and anguish, food will have no appeal, the body will languish, affairs will be neglected, enemies will rejoice, while friends will be distraught' ... (When those conditions come about) he does not grieve, pine, lament or wail. This person is called a learned, noble disciple; drawn out is the poisoned dart of sorrow with which the untaught ordinary person torments himself. This noble disciple, having extinguished the fires of anguish, is sorrowless, dart-free and quenched.

Neither grief nor lamentation offers any gain;  
And enemies rejoice to see our grief and pain.  
But the sage, skilled in discrimination,  
Does not tremble in the face of misfortune.  
Seeing the sage's face unchanged and as before,  
Rather his enemies are pained.  
Wherever and however one gains the good,  
By discourse, consultation, or well-worded speech,  
By gifts or by customs rightly kept,  
Make effort here with these means.  
And if one knows that a desired end is out of reach,  
Both for oneself and for others,  
One should not grieve, but rather halt  
And with firm resolve inquire:  
'How shall I now proceed.'<sup>108</sup>

Dying we go alone; born we arrive alone; associations amongst  
beings are mere encounters.  
Therefore a sage, erudite, perceiving both this world and the next,  
and fully comprehending Truth, is not anguished even by the  
severest woe.  
I will bestow honour and wealth to the worthy, and support spouse,  
relatives and fellow citizens;  
This is the duty of a wise person.<sup>109</sup>

'Here I will live in the autumn, here in the winter and the summer':  
unaware of danger, so muses the fool. [78/9]

Preoccupied with children and livestock, attached to possessions,  
Death carries him away as a great flood sweeps away a  
slumbering village.

When one is overcome by Death, neither children, nor parents, nor  
friends can offer protection; family provides no refuge.  
Realizing the significance of this, let the wise and virtuous person  
swiftly clear the path leading to Nibbāna.<sup>110</sup>

Short indeed is this life; a person dies within a hundred years, and  
even if one exceeds that one surely perishes from old age.

People grieve for things they attach to as 'mine', but no cherished  
possession lasts forever.

A person seeing this inevitable separation should live the homeless  
life.

Whatever one conceives of as 'mine' one must relinquish at death.  
Knowing this let a wise person devoted to the Buddha shy away  
from possessiveness.

Just as a waking person does not see what he met in a dream,  
likewise one does not meet loved ones when they are dead  
and gone.

One sees and hears of specific people, but when they have passed  
away one is left only reciting their names.

A person greedy for possessions cannot renounce grief, lamentation  
and stinginess.

Hence the sage discerning true safety abandons guarded  
possessions and wanders forth.

The wise declare that he who escapes the cycle of births\* is a  
suitable companion for a monk cultivating seclusion and  
dwelling in solitude†.

Free from attachment, a sage creates no objects of love or loathing.

\* Author: An arahant.

† Author: A monk who is still in training: a *sekha* or *puthujjana-kalyāṇaka*.

Sorrow and selfishness do not stain the sage, as water does not stain  
a lotus leaf.

Just as water does not adhere to a lotus leaf, as a lotus is not tainted  
by water, a sage does not cling to what is seen, heard or  
perceived.

A wise person does not give undue import to what is seen, heard or  
perceived, nor does he wish for purity by other means.\*

He is neither impassioned‡ nor disaffected‡.<sup>111</sup>

At times wealth parts from its owner; at other times, a person  
departs from his wealth.

See here, you pursuer of pleasure: mortals do not live forever.

Therefore, I do not grieve whilst others are grieving.

The full moon rises and then wanes; the sun illumines the earth and  
sets.

I see through the worldly vicissitudes; therefore, I do not grieve  
whilst others are grieving.<sup>112</sup> [78/10]

Pleasure and pain, fame and disrepute,  
Gain and loss, praise and blame –  
For human beings these things are transient,  
Inconstant and bound to change.

One mindful and wise discerns them well,  
Observant of their alterations.

Pleasant things do not stir his mind  
And those unpleasant do not annoy.

All partiality and enmity is dispelled,  
Eliminated and abolished.

Aware now of the stainless, griefless state,  
He fully knows, having gone beyond.<sup>113</sup>

\* \* \*

\* Author: E.g., other than the Eightfold Path or the Four Foundations Of Mindfulness.

† Author: Like a misguided person.

‡ Author: Like a *sekha* or a virtuous unenlightened person.



The physical form of mortals decays,  
Their name and ancestry do not decay.<sup>114</sup>

Time all beings devours, and consumes itself as well.<sup>115</sup>

Life undergoes destruction night and day.<sup>116</sup>

Time flies by, the days swiftly pass; the stages of life successively  
end.  
Seeing clearly this danger in death, a seeker of peace should release  
the world's bait.<sup>117</sup>  
Nowhere have I committed any evil;  
Therefore, I fear not impending death.<sup>118</sup>

Firmly grounded in the Dhamma,  
One need not fear the other world.<sup>119</sup>

Now, Ānanda ... at that time I was King Mahāsudassana. Those eighty-four thousand cities of which Kusāvati was the chief were mine, those eighty-four thousand palaces of which the Truth-Palace was the chief were mine ... those eighty-four thousand carriages adorned with gold ornaments, gold banners and spread with gold nets of which Vejayanta was the chief were mine ... And of those eighty-four thousand cities I dwelt in just one, Kusāvati; of those eighty-four thousand palaces I dwelt in just one, the Truth-Palace ... and of those eighty-four thousand carriages I rode in only one, Vejayanta ... See, Ānanda, how all those conditions are past; they have vanished and changed. Thus, Ānanda, conditioned states are impermanent; they are unstable and can bring us no comfort. This alone is enough for us to grow weary of conditioned states, to detach from them, and to be liberated from them ...

‘Indeed, all conditioned things are impermanent, prone to arise and

pass away. Having arisen, they cease; their coming to rest is truest bliss.<sup>120</sup> [78/11]

My city is Kapilavatthu; my father is King Suddhodana; my mother who bore me is called Māyādevī. I was a householder for twenty-nine years; I had three magnificent palaces: Sucanda, Kokanuda and Koñca, with eighty-four thousand beautifully adorned royal concubines. My wife's name is Yasodharā and my son's name is Rāhula. Having seen the four signs, I left the household life behind; for six years I strove and undertook austerities. I proclaimed the Wheel of Dhamma in the deer-park of Isipatana at Bārāṇasī. I am the enlightened Buddha named Gotama, the refuge for all beings ... My life-span in this era is a mere one hundred years. Despite living so briefly, I have aided many people in crossing beyond suffering, and have set up the Torch of Righteousness to awaken future generations. Soon, I along with my disciples will attain Parinibbāna, like a fire is extinguished for lack of fuel. This body possessed of superior qualities, graced with the thirty-two characteristics and peerless splendour, along with the Perfections, the Ten Powers, and the six-hued aura illuminating as the sun the ten directions, all this will completely disappear. Indeed, all conditioned things are without essence, they are empty.<sup>121</sup>

The young and the old, the foolish and the wise, the wealthy and the poor, all are destined for death.

As a potter's vessels, both small and large, both fired and unfired, end up shattered, so too the lives of all beings end in death.

Ripe I am in years. Only a little of my life remains.

Now I depart from you; I have made myself my own refuge.

Monks, be vigilant, mindful and of pure virtue; compose your thoughts, and guard your mind.

In this Doctrine and Discipline, a person who abides diligently escapes the round of rebirth and makes an end of misery.<sup>122</sup>

Nowadays, O monks, speaking truthfully one should say: 'Short is the life of human beings, limited and brief; it is fraught with pain

and tribulation. Reflect wisely, do good, and lead the sublime life (*brahmacariya*); for none who is born is immortal.' Today one who lives long lives for a hundred years or a little more. And when living for a hundred years, it is just for three hundred seasons ... When living for three hundred seasons, it is just for twelve hundred months ... When living for twelve hundred months, it is just for twenty-four hundred fortnights ... And when living for twenty-four hundred fortnights, it is just for 36,000 days ... And when living for 36,000 days, a person eats just 72,000 meals: 24,000 meals in winter, 24,000 in summer and 24,000 in the rains. And this includes the drinking of mother's milk and the times without food. These are the times without food: When resentful, troubled or ill, when observing a fast, and when not finding anything to eat. [78/12] Thus, O monks, I have reckoned the life of a centenarian: The limit of his lifespan, the number of seasons, of years, months and fortnights, of days and nights, of his meals and foodless times. Whatever should be done by a compassionate teacher, who out of goodwill seeks the welfare of his disciples, that I have done for you. These are the roots of trees, O monks, these are empty huts. Meditate, monks, do not be negligent, lest you regret it later. This is my instruction to you.<sup>123</sup>

Monks, considering personal welfare, you should accomplish it with care. Considering others' welfare, you should accomplish it with care. Considering the welfare for both, you should accomplish it with care.<sup>124</sup>

- Developing a Sense of Urgency & Preparing for the Future

Heedfulness is the path to the deathless, heedlessness is the path to death.

The heedful do not die; the heedless are as if already dead ...

An earnest attentive person obtains abundant bliss.<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, with the remainder of your lives,

Carefully attend to your duties.<sup>126</sup>

\* \* \*

One who has gone forth should reflect repeatedly so: 'The days and nights are relentlessly passing, how am I spending my time?'<sup>127</sup>

Do not let the opportunity pass you by ...  
With perseverance and knowledge remove the piercing arrow.<sup>128</sup>

You should promptly do the deed you know leads to your own welfare.<sup>129</sup>

The lazy, lethargic slacker who, although still young and strong,  
Does not devote himself to timely tasks and wallows in heedless fantasies does not find the path to wisdom.<sup>130</sup>

A person of little learning grows old like an ox;  
His muscles develop but his wisdom does not.<sup>131</sup>

They who have not led the pure life, who in youth have not acquired wealth,  
Sit dejected like old herons at a pond void of fish. [78/13]

They who have not led the pure life, who in youth have not acquired wealth,  
Lie bemoaning the past like spent wasted arrows.<sup>132</sup>

All profit is founded on two things:  
Obtaining the unacquired and protecting the acquired.<sup>133</sup>

Whatsoever families, Monks, attain great wealth and last a long time, all of them do so because of these four reasons or one or other of them, namely, they seek for what is lost, repair the worn, consume in moderation, and put in authority a virtuous woman or man.<sup>134</sup>

\* \* \*

Heedfulness is the path to the deathless, heedlessness is the path to death.

The heedful do not die; the heedless are as if already dead.

Indulgence leads to heedlessness, heedlessness to degeneracy, and degeneracy to calamity.

You with the responsibility to rule the nation, do not be heedless!

Many reckless rulers have lost both their welfare and their state.

Likewise, reckless householders lose their homes, and reckless homeless ones their renunciant life.

When a nation's ruler throws caution to the wind, the nation's wealth is utterly destroyed; such is a king's misfortune.

Carelessness is the enemy of Truth.

Through a ruler's excessive negligence, thieves destroy a rich prosperous country;

Descendants, gold and treasure are all lost; once plundered, a country's wealth is no more.

Despite being king, when all wealth is lost, friends and relatives do not respect your judgement;

Your dependants – mahouts, cavaliers, charioteers, and foot-soldiers – do not respect your judgement.

The glory of a witless, misguided leader wanes, like a worn-out snake-skin.

But a diligent industrious leader, who manages affairs well and seasonably, grows in riches, as a bull enhances the fortunes of his herd.

Therefore, O King, journey and inspect the countryside, and having completed your inspection perform your royal duties.<sup>135</sup>

Let a wise person in hope stand fast and not be discouraged.

Myself, I see clearly the fulfilment of all my desires.<sup>136</sup>

I have realized, Monks, (the value of) two things: Not to be content with wholesome states of mind so far achieved, and to be unremitting in the struggle for the goal ... [78/14] Through diligence have I won enlightenment, through diligence have I won the unsurpassed security from bondage.<sup>137</sup>

\* \* \*

Do not rest content merely by keeping precepts and observances,  
nor by great learning; nor by deep concentration,  
Nor by a secluded life; nor even by thinking: 'I enjoy the bliss of  
renunciation not experienced by the ordinary person.'  
O Monks, you should not rest content until reaching the utter  
destruction of the taints.<sup>138</sup>

Carry out your responsibilities in preparation for the future;  
Let not those tasks oppress you when they no longer can be  
postponed.<sup>139</sup>

Fear that which ought to be feared; protect yourself from potential  
danger.  
A wise person inspects this world and the next considering future  
danger.<sup>140</sup>

Monks, recognising these five future dangers (i.e., the possibility of  
old age, illness, famine, social unrest, and a schism in the Sangha), you  
should be earnest, ardent and resolute to attain the unattained, master  
the unmastered, and realize the unrealized.<sup>141</sup>

Monks, these five future dangers (i.e., there will be monks untrained  
in body, virtue, mind, and wisdom, who will act as preceptors for higher  
ordination, act as mentors, recite discourses on the Abhidhamma and  
Catechism, who will not listen attentively to the Buddha's sermons, and  
who will be Elders living laxly and luxuriously), which have not yet  
arisen, will arise in the future. Be aware of these dangers; being aware,  
endeavour to prevent them.<sup>142</sup>

Monks, these five future dangers (i.e., there will be monks who long  
for fine robes, rich food, and pleasant lodgings and will seek these  
by violating the discipline; there will be monks who overly associate

with nuns and female novices, and who will overly associate with lay stewards and male novices), which have not yet arisen, will arise in the future. Be aware of these dangers; being aware, endeavour to prevent them.<sup>143</sup>

Here Sāriputta, the Lords Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa were diligent in teaching the Dhamma in detail to their disciples, and they had many discourses in prose, in prose and verse ... and catechetical discourses. They prescribed the training rules for their disciples, and laid down the Pāṭimokkha. When these Buddhas, these Blessed Ones, and their enlightened disciples passed away, disciples of later generations of various names, families and clans went forth and preserved the teaching for a very long time. [78/15] It is as if various flowers, loose on a plank of wood, well tied together by a thread, are not scattered and dispersed by a gust of wind. This is because they are well tied together by the thread ... It is for this reason that the teaching of the Lords Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa lasted long.<sup>144</sup>

And then the Venerable Sāriputta addressed the monks and said: 'Friends, this Dhamma has been well-proclaimed and well-imparted by our Lord the Perfectly Enlightened One; it leads to salvation and is conducive to peace. All of us should therefore convene and recite this teaching without disagreement, so that this religion (*brahmacariya*) may be enduring and established for a long time, thus to be for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare and happiness of gods and humans.'<sup>145</sup>

Then the Venerable Kassapa the Great addressed the monks, saying: 'Come your reverences, let us recite the Dhamma and Discipline before what is not Dhamma shines out and the Dhamma is eclipsed, before what is not Discipline shines out and Discipline is eclipsed, before those who speak what is not Dhamma become strong and those who speak Dhamma weaken, before those who speak what is not Discipline become strong and those who speak Discipline weaken.'<sup>146</sup>

\* \* \*

Ānanda, as long as the Vajjians hold regular and frequent assemblies ... as long as the Vajjians meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline ...

Monks, as long as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies ... as long as they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony, they may be expected to prosper and not decline ...

Monks, as long as the monks continue with faith, with modesty, with fear of wrongdoing, with much learning (*babussuta*), with energetic resolve, with established mindfulness, and with wisdom, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.<sup>147</sup>



## NOTES

(Volume and page numbers in square brackets refer to Mahamakut Thai edition.)

1. The Abhidhamma commentaries divide *niyāma*, natural laws, into five kinds:
  - A. *Utu-niyāma*: Laws concerning temperature, weather and seasons: human beings' external environment.
  - B. *Bija-niyāma*: Laws concerning reproduction, including heredity.
  - C. *Kamma-niyāma*: Laws concerning human behaviour, i.e., the law of actions (*kamma*) and their results.
  - D. *Dhamma-niyāma*: Laws concerning the interrelationship of all things.
  - E. *Citta-niyāma*: Laws concerning mental activities.  
(DA. II. 432; DhsA. 272).
2. Another key teaching by the Buddha is on Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). This teaching describes the law of flux from a different angle, and illustrates the same truth. The Three Characteristics shows the properties of all things, properties that comply with the relationship outlined in Dependent Origination. Dependent Origination describes the conditioned flow of phenomena, revealing the three characteristics.
3. A. I. 286.
4. See Dhs 2; 193; 244; [DhA. 5/112]; etc. One manner of defining *sarikkata-dhamma* in the Abhidhamma as in this reference is: Wholesomeness in the 4 planes (*bbūmi*), unwholesomeness, results (*vipāka*) in the 4 planes, neutral actions (*kiriya-abyākata*) in the 3 planes, and all materiality.
5. A. I. 152.
6. Vin. VI. (Parivāra) 86; Substantiating passages from the commentaries include: *The Deathless is void of self* (*attasuññamatapadaṃ*, Vism. 513) and: *Indeed, Nibbāna is empty of self because it is without self* (*nibbānadhammo attasseva abbāvato attasuñño*, PsA. III. 638–39). The Vimativimodanī Ṭikā (Samuṭṭhānasāvapaṇṇanā) explains the above verse as follows: *Since designations* (paññatti), *for example the label 'person', are conventional truths – they are contrived and ultimately do not exist – they are not characterized by impermanence and dukkha, as such characteristics imply rise and decay. They should, however, be characterized as nonself, because they are void of any substance that exists, for example as agent or recipient. Therefore, designations are explained as nonself, along with Nibbāna,*

which does exist, because they are both unconditioned (asaṅkhata)... they do not arise from conditioning factors. Nibbāna is unconditioned and does exist; designations are unconditioned and do not exist. Hence, there exists the one, true Unconditioned – Nibbāna – but both Nibbāna and designations are selfless.

7. The Abhidhamma divides *saṅkhāra* into fifty kinds, comprising fifty of the fifty-two mental concomitants – *cetasika*.
8. Ps. I. 37; referred to in Vism. 610.
9. Vism. 611.
10. E.g.: Vism. 628.
11. Vism. 640.
12. Vism. 618; [MA. 2/150]; VbhA. 48; The VismṬ. Maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhiniddesavaṇṇanā – *Rūpasattakasammasanakathāvaṇṇanā* states that these four definitions refer only to material phenomena, but the Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā shows that they can be used in regard to all conditioned phenomena. See also VinṬ. Mahākhandhakaṃ *Anattalakkhaṇasuttavaṇṇanā*.
13. Ps. I. 37; referred to at Vism. 610.
14. Vism. 628.
15. Vism. 611.
16. VismṬ. Maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhiniddesavaṇṇanā – *Cattārisākāra-anupassanakathāvaṇṇanā*.
17. Vism. 611.
18. E.g. Vism. 502.
19. Vism. 618; [MA. 2/151 (the first definition is *santāpa*)]; VbhA. 48.
20. The literal translation 'hard to endure' appears to refer to feelings (*dukkha-vedanā*), for example pain or suffering, which can be defined as 'something that is hard for humans to endure'. Actually, this Pali idiom meaning non-durable or unsustainable is a characteristic of all formations, as explained above.
21. The commentaries and sub-commentaries describe an object marked by *dukkha* as a basis for the 3 *dukkhatā* (see below) and for *saṃsāra-dukkha*; e.g., [VinṬ. 3/81]; VismṬ. Maggāmaggañāṇadassanavisuddhiniddesavaṇṇanā (*Cattārisākāra-anupassanakathāvaṇṇanā* & *Rūpasattakasammasanakathāvaṇṇanā*).
22. Ps. I. 19; Ps. II. 104; referred to in Vism. 494; VbhA. 83; [MA. 2/151 classifies *santāpa* as the first of the four meanings above].
23. This is the author's definition; for the commentarial and sub-commentarial explanation see: [PsA. 119, 123]; VismṬ. Indriyasaccaniddesavaṇṇanā – *Saccavittā-rakathāvaṇṇanā*.
24. See item four above: *sukhapatikkhepato*.
25. The important sources for research in this matter are: Yam. I. 174–5; Pañcappakarana-aṭṭhakathā p.167; Vism. 510–13; VismṬ. Indriyasaccaniddesavaṇṇanā – *Magganid-desakathāvaṇṇanā*.
26. D. III. 216; S. IV. 259; S. V. 56; Vism. 499; VbhA. 93; VinṬ. Dhammacakkappavattanasuttavaṇṇanā; VismṬ. Indriyasaccaniddesavaṇṇanā – *Dukkhaniddesakathāvaṇṇanā*.
27. E.g.: D. II. 305; S. V. 421; Vism. 498–501; VismṬ – Indriyasaccaniddesavaṇṇanā (from *Saccavittā-rakathāvaṇṇanā* to *Pañcupādānakkhanda-niddesavaṇṇanā*).

- (The divisions of birth's afflictions, 1 a–g, are from the commentaries.)
28. Note that this group of *dukkha* does not include illness (*byādbhī*), which normally would follow ageing. The commentaries explain that illness is not an inevitable form of suffering: many people have illness, but some may not. Also, illness is included in this item (6) of physical suffering (VismṬ. Indriyasaccaniddesavaṇṇanā – *Saccavittbārakathāvaṇṇanā*). In some places of the Canon, however, illness is listed separately in this group of *dukkha*; for such cases see the explanation at VinṬ. Dhammacakkappavattanasuttavaṇṇanā.
  29. Vism. 499; VbhA. 93; [Pañcappakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā 336]; VinṬ. Dhammacakkappavattanasuttavaṇṇanā; VismṬ. Indriyasaccaniddesavaṇṇanā – *Dukkhaniddesakathāvaṇṇanā*.
  30. *ibid.*
  31. Nd. I. 17–18; 45–47; Nd. II. 7; 14; 54.
  32. M. I. 83–90; 91–95.
  33. E.g., Vism. 531; [VbhA. 188, 193]; In some places of the Cūḷaniddesa printed in Thai script, e.g., Nd. II. 7, one finds *samsāra-dukkha*, but these are misprints; it should read *sankhāra-dukkha*.
  34. These last three kinds of suffering are mentioned frequently in the eight subjects that prompt a sense of urgency (*saṃvega-vatṭbu*), e.g., at Vism. 135; DA. III. 795; MA. I. 298; SA. III. 163; etc.); *ābārapariyeṭṭhi-dukkha* (suffering resulting from the search for food) corresponds to item (A) above. The other two terms are included in the descriptions above, if not directly then indirectly.
  35. Somdet Phra Mahāsamaṇa Chao Krom Phraya Vajirañāṇavarorasa, in the *Dhammavicāraṇa* (Mahāmakuta University Press, 1958), pp 14–19, lists various kinds of *dukkha*, from different sources, into ten groups. Some of the groups are given new names by the author. They are as follows: 1) *sabbāva-dukkha*: *dukkha* inherent in conditioned phenomena, i.e., birth, ageing and death; 2) *pakiraṇaka-dukkha* or *dukkha-cara*: sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair (including association with the disagreeable, separation from the loved, and the non-acquisition of the desired); 3) *nibaddha-dukkha*: continual or resident suffering, i.e., cold, heat, hunger, thirst, and the need to defecate and urinate; 4) *byādbi-dukkha* (illness) or *dukkha-vedanā* (pain); 5) *santāpa-dukkha*: the burning and agitation of the heart due to the ‘fires’ of defilement; 6) *vipāka-dukkha*: the fruits of actions, i.e., remorse, punishment and the fall into states of perdition; 7) *sabagata-dukkha*: concomitant suffering; the suffering accompanying mundane, agreeable conditions, e.g., the suffering of needing to protect material possessions; 8) *ābārapariyeṭṭhi-dukkha*: the suffering of seeking food; the same as *ājīva-dukkha* – the suffering resulting from making a living; 9) *vivādamūlaka-dukkha*: suffering caused by disputes, e.g., fear of losing an argument or lawsuit; and 10) *dukkha-khandha*: the entirety of suffering, i.e., the five aggregates as objects of clinging are suffering.
  36. Kvu. 68; Pug. 38.
  37. A. III. 438.
  38. Sn. 155.
  39. Sn. 157.

40. S. III. 46.
41. S. III. 203–4.
42. Ps. I. 37; 53; Ps. II. 200; referred to at Vism. 610.
43. Vism. 610.
44. Vism. 628, 640; occasionally one finds *avasavattito*.
45. Vism. 618; VinṬ. Mahākhandhakaṃ *Anattalakkhaṇasuttavaṇṇanā*.
46. VbhA. 49; VinṬ. Mahākhandhakaṃ *Anattalakkhaṇasuttavaṇṇanā* refers to the Buddha's sermon in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (S. III. 66).
47. M. I. 190.
48. S. I. 135.
49. S. I. 134.
50. See Vism. 593–5.
51. Vism. 618; [MA. 2/151]; VbhA. 48; See also VinṬ. Mahākhandhakaṃ *Anattalakkhaṇasuttavaṇṇanā*; VismṬ. Maggāmaggañāḍadassanavisuddhiniddesavaṇṇanā – *Rūpasattakasammasanakatbāvaṇṇanā*.
52. *Cogito, ergo sum* (R. Descartes, 1596–1650).
53. S. II. 13–14.
54. M. I. 8.
55. Vism. 595.
56. Vism. 513.
57. Vism. 602–3; based on Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's translation.
58. VismṬ. Paññābhūminiddesavaṇṇanā – *Bhavacakkakatbāvaṇṇanā*.
59. E.g., S. IV. 1.
60. E.g., S. III. 68.
61. Vism. 640; VbhA. 50; VismṬ. Paṭipadāñāḍadassanavisuddhiniddesavaṇṇanā.
62. The Siam Raṭṭha edition of the Tripiṭika in Thai script has *attā* and *nirattam* in some places, *attam* and *nirattam* in others (see Sn. 154; 168; 180, and related passages at Sn. 157; 213.) In other editions, however, I have found only *attā* and *nirattā*.
63. Nd.1. 82; 247; 352–53, and see related passages at Nd.1. 90–91; 107–8; Nd2. 35.
64. Sn. 180; explained at Nd.1. 352–53.
65. The meanings of the words *Pbra Jao* (Thai for 'God,' literally 'Excellent Lord') and the English 'God' are vague. *Pbra Jao* was originally a word used by Buddhists as an epithet for the Buddha (*Pbra Phu Pen Jao* – 'Venerable Lord' – is still a form of address to monks). Once Christians adopted this term to refer to their God, Buddhists abandoned it until they forgot the original meaning. As for the word 'God', Christians use this term to denote the Supreme Divinity, who they believe created the world and is characterized as a Being. Some philosophers, however, broaden the meaning of God to be an abstract quality, not necessarily involved with the world's creation. Some contemporary Christian theologians define God in a similar way, not as a Being, but Christian establishments reject these definitions (or outright condemn them). When Hans Küng (in 'Does God Exist? An Answer for Today', trans. Edward Quinn. London: Collins, 1980, pp. 594–602) tried to compare God with Nibbāna, he realized the difference, as Nibbāna is not involved in the creation of the world.

66. VbhA. 48–49; and in some sections of MA. [2/151–2]; VinṬ. Mahākhandhakaṃ *Anat-talakkhaṇasuttavaṇṇanā*.
67. In reference to M. III. 282.
68. In reference to S. III. 66.
69. In reference to, e.g.: S. III. 22.
70. Sn. 155 (see related passages at Nd. 1. 90–91).
71. Sn. 157 (see related passages at Nd. 1. 107–8).
72. The current meaning of *māna* in the Thai language, which has deviated far from the original – now denoting effort/diligence – will not be discussed here, as that would branch out too far into the area of linguistics.
73. A. IV. 353; 358; Ud. 37.
74. D. II. 199; S. II. 193; spoken by others at D. II. 157; S. I. 6; 158; Ap. 385.
75. Alternative second clause: *bring heedfulness to perfection*. This verse is the Buddha's final utterance and is considered to be of great import. It is found at D. II. 120; 156; S. I. 157–8; Revata and Sāriputta spoke similar verses at Thag. 67; 91.
76. S. II. 29; A. IV. 134–5.
77. S. I. 86–87; and see S. I. 89; A. III. 48–49; It. 16–17.
78. A. III. 253; and see D. II. 86; D. III. 236; Ud. 87; in addition, see the beginning (not quoted) of the passage cited in the previous footnote.
79. A. I. 50.
80. *Kusalo dhammo akusalassa dhammassa ārammaṇapaccayena paccayo* (Paṭ. 154); *adbipatipaccena* (Paṭ. 158); *upamissayapaccena* (Paṭ. 166).
81. S. V. 398.
82. Not desiring anything is good, but one must be very careful of indifference. Altruism is praiseworthy, as it demonstrates that one is not enslaved by craving; but indifference can easily turn into neglect, indicating heedlessness, misjudgement, and craving, which leads one to indulge in ease and comfort. At the very least it indicates the lack of wholesome enthusiasm (*kusala-chanda*), which is the first step to all virtue.
83. The Buddha sometimes characterized an arahant as 'incapable of negligence' (M. II. 478; S. IV. 125). He explained that arahants have completed all tasks which must be accomplished through diligence.
84. The Abhidhamma states that arahants, those who have attained the ultimate transcendent state, act with 'an eminent operative mind' (*mahākiriya-citta*), which is mundane and belongs to the sense sphere.
85. In contrast, being confronted with the three characteristics but not truly understanding them is a cause for suffering. (E.g., S. III. 3; 16; 42–43.)
86. E.g., A. IV. 380–81; Pug. 37.
87. The results of inquiries into impermanence, *dukkha*, and selflessness are linked, so examining each of the three characteristics aids in liberation. The chief determining factor for liberation, however, is the understanding of nonself, as confirmed by the Buddha's teaching: *The perception of impermanence should be cultivated for the removal of the conceit 'I am' (asmimāna). For when one perceives impermanence, Meghiya, the perception of nonself is established. A person who perceives nonself (in all things) accomplishes the eradication of the conceit 'I am,' and (realizes)*

*Nibbāna*. (Ud. 37; and see A. IV. 353; 358).

88. M. III. 18–19.
89. D. II. 156; An alternate translation is: ... *fulfil your own and others' benefit by way of heedfulness*.
90. Sn. 32.
91. E.g., S. III. 22.
92. S. III. 23–24.
93. S. III 114–15 (a verse by Sāriputta; an abbreviated translation.) The section, *Does not regard physical form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in self, or self as in form*, is encapsulated in the Visuddhi Magga's definition: *Na attā* (not self), *na attano* (not of self), *na attani* (not in self), *na attavatī* (not possessing self); see Vism. 578. The Visuddhi Magga uses numerous illustrations for perceiving selflessness, for example regarding physical form as not a being, a spirit, a person, a youth, a woman, a man, a self or of self, us or ours, or belonging to anyone (Vism. 653–6).
94. S. III. 3–5 (A verse by Sāriputta; an abbreviated translation.)
95. S. III. 17–18.
96. S. III. 43.
97. M. I. 7–9; a similar but slightly more detailed passage, especially concerning the six views, is found at Vbh. 382.
98. *Lobba, dosa & moha, or taṇhā, māna & ditṭhi*.
99. S. III. 142–43.
100. Nd 1. 44; 119–20 (Some verses at D. II. 246; S. I. 108–9; Thag. 20).
101. Sn. 112–114. (Some verses are repeated at J. IV. 127; Nd 1. 120–21).
102. J. IV. 494–96; a selection of verses are translated.
103. S. I. 102.
104. Thag. verses 447–52 (of Sirimaṇḍa Thera).
105. J. VI. 25–28; a selection of verses are translated.
106. J. III. 164–66.
107. J. III. 95.
108. A. III. 54–56; 60–62; the final verses are also found at J. III. 204.
109. J. IV. 127.
110. Dh. verses 286–89.
111. Sn. 158–160.
112. J. III. 154; Nd 1. 124.
113. A. IV. 157.
114. S. I. 43.
115. J. II. 260.
116. S. I. 38; 43.
117. S. I. 63.
118. J. VI. 312.
119. S. I. 43.
120. D. II. 196–99.
121. Bv. 97–8.
122. D. II. 120–1.

123. A. IV. 138–40.
124. S. II. 29; A. IV. 134–5 (quoted previously).
125. Dh. verses 21 & 27.
126. Sn. 131.
127. A. V. 88.
128. Sn. 58.
129. S. I. 57.
130. Dh. verse 280.
131. Dh. verse 152.
132. Dh. verses 155–6.
133. J. V. 116. (The two aspects of heedfulness are establishment and protection.)
134. A. II. 249–50.
135. J. V. 99–100. (Also in part at J. V. 112–13.)
136. E.g.: J. I. 267; IV. 269; VI. 43.
137. A. I. 50.
138. Dh. verses 271–72. (The commentaries define the bliss of renunciation, *nekkhamma-sukha*, as the happiness of an *anāgāmi*.)
139. J. IV. 166.
140. J. III. 35; 399.
141. A. III. 102–5.
142. A. III. 105–8.
143. A. III. 108–10.
144. Vin. III. 8.
145. D. III. 210–11.
146. Vin. II. 283–4.
147. D. II. 73–79; For spiritual development the Buddha urged his disciples to reflect that all things are impermanent and subject to decay; this passage, however, instructs that careful attendance to one's (proper) duties results exclusively in prosperity, not decline. One should study these two injunctions well for a correct understanding and to avoid misguided Dhamma practice. Furthermore, one should be aware that heedfulness for self-improvement and self-development, which is a personal matter, must go hand in hand with heedfulness in respect to social responsibility.

