



Burmese Buddhist Temple *Newsletter*

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This illustration shows a debate session between the ascetic Saccaka and the Buddha on the concept of 'self'. At the end of the debate the Buddha proved to Saccaka that the concept of 'self' is a linguistic convention. There is no permanent entity as 'self' that exists in a person. Having convinced Saccaka of this concept of "no self" (Anatta) the Buddha wanted him to assert the truth verbally in the open. But he kept quiet without making any verbal response. The Buddha told him that if a being refused to answer legitimate questions put forward by the Buddha for three times he would be struck by lightning. At this juncture, the Lightning deva appeared in the air threatening to strike Saccaka if he stubbornly and impudently refused to answer the Buddha's question. Only the Buddha and Saccaka could see the appearance of the Lightning deva but not the Licchavi nobles who were around. Finally, out of fear Saccaka admitted that he was in the wrong in asserting the existence of 'a permanent self' and the Buddha was right in teaching about 'no permanent self'. At the end of the session Saccaka invited the Buddha and the Sangha for an alms meals the next day. The Buddha accepted the invitation by maintaining his silence. (see story on page 10)

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Editorial

The Buddha teaches that everyone in this life has gone through many rebirths in the past and will go through many rebirths in the future. The only way to stop this wheel of rebirths (samsara) is to attain Enlightenment which may happen in this life or in a future life. Those who have taken refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and attain the stage of a Stream Winner will have, at the most, seven more rebirths to undergo before Enlightenment.

Like tourists going from one country to another we go from birth to birth in eternity. Every rebirth is like is a temporary stopping place in a journey. Also each life can be considered as a journey by itself and many things can happen to us in this one life alone. During the journey we experience many types of wind that blow at us. It ranges from a breeze that is cooling and pleasant to a storm that could be dangerous and life-threatening. The Buddha teaches that there are eight types of wind we could experience in life. They are: Gain and Loss, Pain and Happiness, Praise and Blame and Repute and Disrepute. Usually, we feel extremely happy when the winds blow us in a positive direction but we feel sorrowful and suffer when the winds blow in a negative way. Actually, these eight winds are merely other people's opinion directed towards us. The advice is: Neither be too sad about negative opinions nor too happy about positive ones. Stand aside as a third person. Stabilise your feelings. Maintain an equanimity of the mind so that we won't be so worked up when blamed nor get excited when praised. This is Buddhism in practice. This is the meaning of being a practicing Buddhist. Besides attending pujas and doing dana in a temple, know the Dhamma well by learning it from the Sangha and reading Dhamma books then reflect on it and then apply it to problems of daily life.

GUIDE TO MEDITATION PRACTICES

The Meaning and Purpose of Meditation

Meditation is the conscious effort to develop the mind to be more focused. The Pali word for meditation is "*Bhavana*" which means '*to cultivate*' or '*to develop the mind*'. Ultimately, the aim is to attain *Nibbana*.

Types of Meditation: Two

Samatha meditation (*tranquility meditation*) and *Vipassana* meditation (*Insight meditation*). *Samatha* meditation is to calm the mind. The ultimate achievement is the attainment of *Jhanna*. *Vipassana* meditation develops insight which realized the truth of things as they really are: Impermanence (*anicca*), Suffering (*dukkha*) and No-self (*anatta*), the three characteristics of life (*Tilakhana*). By knowing this truth one is liberated and *Nibbana* is attained.

Tranquility Meditation (*Samatha*)

In *Samatha* meditation there are 40 objects of concentration mentioned by the Buddha. They are:

- a. The ten *Kasinas*. *Kasinas* are objects of circular shape representing the four elements- earth, water, fire (light) and air. There are also coloured circles to meditate on: blue, yellow, red and white. One can also meditate on space and light like the morning sun.
- b. Ten kinds of foulness of the body. One can meditate on a dead body for this purpose.

- c. The Ten recollections which include the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, one's liberality, the qualities of a *deva*, the virtue of *Nibannic* peace, mortality, thirty parts of the body and mindfulness of one's own breathing.
- d. The Four Illimitables which include loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity.
- e. One Perception on the loathsomeness of food.
- f. One analysis of the four material phenomena elements of earth, water, fire and air, their characteristics and their material qualities. Meditate on the quality of earth (in the body) as softness and hardness; the quality of water as cohesion and fluidity, the quality of heat as 'heat and cold', the quality of air as motion and movement. This meditation reduces craving, clinging and attachment.
- g. The Four Immaterial States: the infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness and neither perception nor non-perception.

Psychic powers

Those who have attained *Jhanna* can have psychic power like clairvoyance, clairaudience, projection of astral body and other supernormal powers. But these should not be the aim of meditation. The aim of meditation should be the extinction of suffering and release from rebirths through mental purification.



Signs (*Nimita*)

During meditation, three kinds of image may appear in the mind. 1. At the preparatory stage (*Parikammanimita*) the meditator gets the mental image of the meditation object itself. 2. The second sign (*Uggahanimita*) develops when the meditator can visualize the object without looking at it directly. 3. At the upacara-samadhi stage, the sign suddenly changes into bright, clear and steady image, similar to original object but more sharply defined.

Human Temperament (*Carita*)

Not all the forty objects of meditation are considered suitable for everyone. Certain human temperaments are suitable for certain objects of meditation. There are six types of temperaments:

The faithful and the lustful go together as they involve a favorable attitude towards an object; the hateful and the intellectual form another pair. Hate turns away from its object in an unwholesome way, while the intellectual directs itself towards the object with wholesome thoughts. The deluded and the discursive type form the third pair. The deluded person's thoughts drift owing to its superficiality whilst a discursive type of person does so due to its facile speculations.

To counter their dispositions, the lustful should meditate on the kinds of foulness and the thirty-two parts of the body. The hateful temperament should meditate on the four illimitable and the four circled kasinas. The deluded and discursive type should practice the recollection of the Triple Gem and of morality, liberty and virtue. The intellectual should meditate on the recollections of death, the peaceful nature of Nibbana, the perception of the loathsomeness of food and analysis of the four primary material elements. Meditation on the earth, water, fire and air kasina and the four immaterial states is suitable for all types of people.



Hindrances (*Nivarana*)

During meditation, five types of hindrances may arise: sensuous desire (*kamachanda*), ill-will (*byapada*), sloth and torpor (*thina-middha*), restlessness and worry (*uddhaca-kukkuca*) and skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha*). Generally, to overcome all these problems, one could raise awareness that they are temporary states of mind and they are hindrances to one's progress. Then refocus one's attention on the subject of meditation.

Three stages of development in meditation

The development of meditation has three stages according to the progress of concentration.

1. Preparatory stage (*Parikhamma-bhavana*).


By observing the object of meditation one develops concentration. This paves the way for full concentration but short of it. There may be a feeling of ease at this stage but do not stop here.

2. Access meditation (*Upacara Bhavana*).

'Upacara' means 'neighbourhood. It refers to concentration that touches the fringe of full absorption (Jhana). A sign appears at this stage as a luminous dot and is visible whether the eyes are closed or open.

3. Absorption (*Appana Bhavana*).

Here the mind remains fixed on the object without hindrances or discursiveness. Passing beyond the counter stage, it reaches towards the path leading to Nibbana and its fruition. There are five factors of Jhana:

- 
1. **Vitaka** -initial application that directs the mind towards the object.
 2. **Vicara** - sustained application that examines the mind again and again.
 3. **Piti** - joy or pleasurable interest in the object
 4. **Sukha** or **upekkha** - feelings of mentally pleasant or peaceful
 5. **Ekagatta** - one-pointedness of mind or concentration.


Higher Knowledge (**Abhinna**)

At the **Jhana** stage five mundane supernormal types of knowledge are developed.

1. The power to create forms and ability to fly through air, walk on water, dive into the earth and project an astral body (**iddhividha-abhinna**).
2. Clairaudience, the ability to hear subtle or coarse sounds (**dibbasota**).
3. Telepathy, the ability to penetrate states of mind and thoughts of others (**paracitta vijanna**).
4. The ability to remember one's former existence. (**pubbe nivasanussati**).
5. Clairvoyance, the ability to see things far or near, also divine eye seeing the celestial worlds and the lower abodes.

Arahant

Beyond the above five types of knowledge there is the supramundane knowledge of the Arahant



(**Asavakkyaya nana**). This knowledge is only attainable through the practice of Insight meditation when the sense of self or "I" is totally annihilated.

Insight Meditation (**Vipassana**)

Many of the skills learned in tranquility meditation can be applied to Insight meditation. The practice of insight meditation centers on the notion of mindfulness. When one is concentrating, one's centre of focus is on the object of concentration in an almost trance-like manner. It is not only to be mindful of it but to think about it. For example, in breathing it is to realize that the breath arises and passes away and this is impermanence, one of the characteristics of life. The aim of insight meditation is to realize things as they really are, that is, impermanence (**anicca**), suffering (**dukkha**) and "no-self" (**anatta**).

Meditation: Walking and Sitting Meditation

In general, there are two ways of meditation - walking meditation and sitting meditation. The practice of walking meditation is usually done in a monastery or in retreats, in a quiet hall or corridor or in the open space. The focus is on the movements and sensations associated with walking step by step slowly. When the mind strays, take note of it mindfully and then refocus on walking again.

In sitting meditation, the focus is in on the breath while being seated. Remember the 4Ps-place, posture, practice and problem. **Place:** a quiet room. **Posture:** seated on a cushion, on the floor, back straight up, and hands nestled in the lap with eyes closed. Focus on your breath as you breathe in and breathe out or pay attention to the movement of your abdomen as it moves up and down. **Practice** meditation regularly with patience and perseverance. **Problem:** When the thought strays, take note of it



mindfully. Do not get drawn into it. Focus on your breath again.

The skills of mindfulness learned in walking and sitting meditation could be applied to our daily activities like eating and washing. Focus on the present moment and the activity you are doing and try not to be distracted.

How to practise Loving-kindness Meditation (*metta bhavana*).

Loving kindness is the central virtue of Buddhism and meditation on loving kindness is the way of developing this virtue.

Begin your meditation with the thought of loving kindness towards yourself. Think: May I be well, happy and peaceful. May I be protected from dangers, May my mind be free from hatred. May my heart be filled with loving kindness. Then turn your thought of loving-kindness to your religious teachers. The next person is your mother and your father. Continue to focus on your siblings and members of your own family, close relatives and friends, one by one. The next person to think of is someone who is neutral, someone you neither like nor dislike. Finally, if you can feel comfortable, think of someone you used to regard as your enemy, wish him to be well and happy as you have done to the others earlier.

This method of mediation is called specific pervasion. The next method is called directional pervasion. It is to focus the loving kindness to beings in the ten directions, North, South, East, West, North South, North East, South West and South East, the Zenith and the Nadir. The next step is called the non-specific pervasion. It is to wish all sentient beings well and happy.

While meditating on loving-kindness you may use the visualisation method to visualize the one you are thinking of. Imagine him to be in a happy mood. You

can also reflect on his positive qualities and his acts of kindness.

Beside doing meditation on loving-kindness you can recite Metta Sutta regularly and dedicate it to all human beings.

The benefits of practicing Loving-kindness Meditation.

If you do Loving-Kindness Meditation regularly, positive changes could take place within yourself. You will be more accepting and forgiving towards yourself and others. Your feelings towards your loved ones will increase. You will be making friends with people who used to be indifferent and uncaring towards you. Ill will or resentment towards others will become less and less and it will eventually dissolve.

Traditionally, eleven advantages can be derived from practising loving-kindness. The practitioner

1. sleeps in comfort,
2. wakes up in comfort.
3. has no bad dreams,
4. is dear to human beings,
5. is dear to non-human beings,
6. is protected by devas,
7. is safe from fire, poison and swords,
8. can concentrate quickly,
9. is of serene countenance,
10. passes away without confusion and
11. if not enlightened in this world, will be reborn in a brahma world (a divine abode).

(Anguttara Nikaya) 11.16

May all beings be well and happy.

Ven Ujotta



The Sources of Grief and Fear

*From endearment springs grief,
From endearment springs fear.
From him who is wholly free from endearment,
There is no grief, much less fear.*

Dh V 212

*From affection springs grief,
From affection springs fear.
From him who is wholly free from affection,
There is no grief, much less fear.*

Dh 213

*From attachment springs grief,
From attachment springs fear.
From him who is fully free from attachment,
There is no grief, much less fear.*

Dh 214

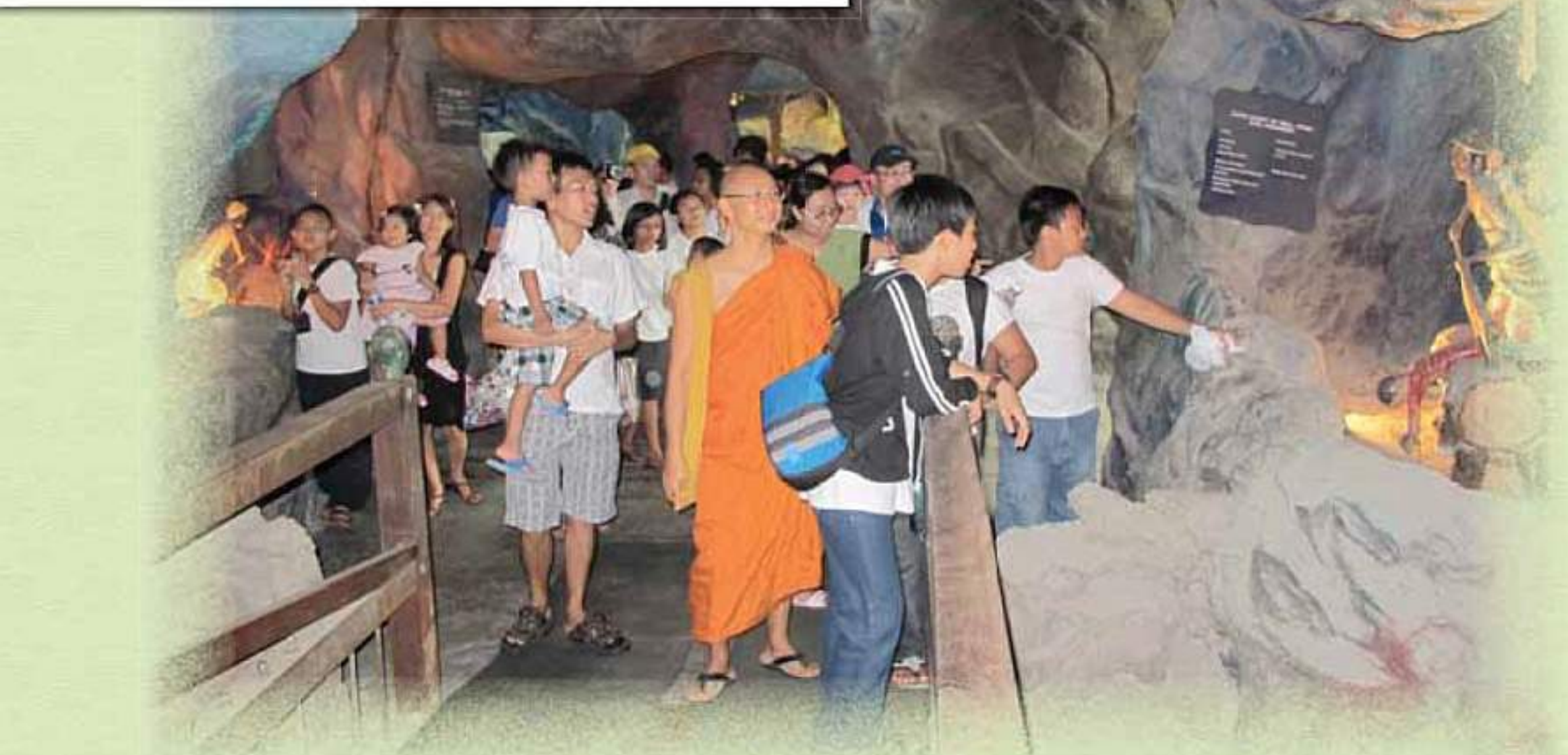


DHAMMA IN ACTION 2013





On Sunday 16th June 2013, led by Ashin Dhammisara, students of Burmese Dhamma classes visited Har Par Villa, together with their parents and teachers.





THE DEBATE BETWEEN THE BUDDHA AND SACCAKA



Like his father, Nigantha, Saccaka was a famous debater during the time of the Buddha. His four sisters also claimed themselves to be good debaters. They challenged Venerable Sariputta to a debate and were defeated. Consequently, according to an earlier agreement, they were ordained as bhikkhunis. Later, they became Arahants.

Saccaka disapproved of his sisters becoming members of the Sangha and harbored a grudge against the Buddhist dispensation. One day, he met with Venerable Assaji. He asked him, "Venerable Assaji, how does the monk Gotama train his disciples? And how are his teachings formulated for the practical instruction of the disciples of the monk Gotama?"

Venerable Assaji answered, "The Buddha taught the monks that matter (*rupa*) is impermanent (*anicca*), feelings (*vedana*) are impermanent, perceptions (*sanna*) are impermanent, mental formations (*sankhara*) are impermanent and consciousness (*vinnana*) is impermanent. Matter, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness are also insubstantial."

Having heard that Saccaka proposed to have a debate with the Buddha on such a teaching.

Then he went to the, Licchavi nobles who had gathered at the town hall for business and succeeded in getting five hundred of them to

follow him to see the Buddha at Mahavanna monastery in Vaishali for a debate.

There he asked the Buddha the same questions he asked Venerable Assaji earlier on. The Buddha confirmed that the monks were taught about the five khandas which are impermanent and insubstantial.

At once Saccaka objected openly to the Buddha's teachings. He said that plants being rooted in earth grow and flourish on account of earth. Earth is the base of life. So human beings are able to do hard physical works because of the earth as the base of life. A person with matter as the self has 'self' because the 'self' is matter-bound, it begets either merit or demerit. So feelings are self, perceptions are self, mental-formations are self, consciousness are self.

Then the Buddha got Saccaka to confirm his own assertion that "matter is my-self, feelings are my-self, mental – formations are my self, consciousness is my self."

The Buddha then asked Sacakka whether a king, in his own country, had the power to put a citizen to death, confiscate his property and banish him from the country. This Sacakka agreed.

Then the Buddha posed to Sacakka a question, When you say, "Matter is my self" do you have complete power over your body, so that when

you wish, 'May my body be thus, or may my body may not be thus', it would be so?

Sacakka remained silent.

The second time the question was put to him and again he kept quiet.

Then the Buddha told Sacakka that when a person refused to answer a legitimate question put forward by a Tathagata for three times he will find his skull split into seven pieces

At that moment, the celestial deva, Vajirapani, (Thunderbolt-bearer) appeared in the air above Sacakka, holding his flashing glowing thunderbolt. Only the Buddha and Sacakka in the gathering could see the deva Vajirapani.

Sacakka, being frightened and greatly agitated with his hair standing on end, sought protection from the Tathagata and said he would answer the question posed to him earlier.

The Buddha repeated the teachings which he said earlier.

Sacakka answered in agreement that the khandas are not self and each has no power to command itself to do what it wills.

Further, the Buddha made the statements that aggregates being impermanent signify suffering and they should not be regarded as 'This is mine', 'This am I' and 'This is self'.

Saccaka answered in agreement.

Finally, the Buddha drew an analogy of a man who having cut down a banana plant and removing the sheaths after sheaths could not find soft wood or even a pith at the core. Nothing was substantial in a banana plant. In the same

way, Saccaka's assertion that a person is self has been proved to be empty and erroneous. Therefore, Sacakka was defeated.

The Buddha also reminded Sacakka that he had made a gallant declaration in the midst of the Vesalian assembly that a person engaged by him in a point of debate would shudder and tremble and sweat would pour from his armpits. Even a mere inanimate pillar engaged in a debate with him would shake and tremble.

At that moment, the Buddha pointed out that Saccaka himself was sweating with drops of sweat flowing to the ground but the Buddha was not.

Then, Sacakka became silent and ashamed, with shoulders dropping and his head cast down brooding and confused.

A Licchavi noble remarked that Sacakka was like a crab being pulled out from a pond and had its claws smashed and crushed by a stick. Saccakka told him off to keep quiet.

Feeling defeated Sacakka asked the Buddha about the method of training a monk. The Buddha responded by giving an account of how a monk is trained until he attained Nibbana.

Satisfied Sacakka admitted he had been haughty and presumptuous in trying to engage Buddha in a debate.

At the end of the session Saccaka invited the Buddha and the Order of monks to accept his alms meal. This invitation the Buddha accepted by indicating in silence.

Tan Geok Koon



CONVERSION OF THE KALAMAS

During the time of the Buddha, there were many religious' teachers, philosophers and ascetics who would go round preaching about their individual religious beliefs which appeared metaphysical, their philosophies of life and their theories on happiness of life. This was what happened in Kesaputta, a market town in Kosala. The people there, the Kalamas, heard these religious teachers, philosophers and ascetics proclaiming and glorifying their own religious beliefs and at the same time, disparaging, despising, condemning and pulling to pieces the doctrine of others. Confused, the Kalamas approached the Buddha and asked the Buddha to decide for them which was the true religion among all the religions.

Instead of answering directly to the motley of the Kalamas the Buddha gave different advices to people of different temperaments:


1. For the gullible: Do not listen to reports and hearsay.
2. For the traditionalists: Do not accept traditions without question.
3. For the bigoted: Do not follow the scripture without questioning.
4. For the believers in metaphysics: Do not give serious thoughts about metaphysics or be logical about it or use much reasoning about it.

5. For the doubtful: Do not look for approval from the others. Do not do judge from human abilities.
6. For the Kalamas, generally: By your own thinking and reasoning, abandon actions that are bad, blamable and censured by the wise also abandon things, which when undertaken and observed, lead to harm.

The Buddha then continued to deal with the problems of morality in life here and now. One should be more concerned about the problems of life like greed, hatred and delusion rather than about religious beliefs. It is harmful out of greed hatred and delusion, to take life, steal, commit adultery, tell lies. These evil deeds are blamable, not praised by the wise and when undertaken and observed lead to harm and ill in life.

The Buddha also shows the Kalamas that the absence of greed hatred and delusion bring benefits and happiness to life.

Instead of talking about happiness in heaven or in future life the Buddha told the Kalalmas the four ways of excellent living which His disciples experience in this life here and now. Devoid of coveting, devoid of ill will, devoid of delusion the Buddha's disciples, having comprehended life, look at the world with contemplation of Metta (loving kindness), of Compassion, of Appreciative Joy and of Equanimity. In this way, they live their life happily, free from hatred and free from trouble.




With a mind free of malice, undefiled and purified the Buddha's disciples find four types of solace in this life, here and now. Firstly, a disciple would think that if there is a hereafter and human actions do have results, good or bad, he will be reborn in the heavenly world. This is the first solace in life. Secondly, he would think that even if there were no hereafter, no consequences of good deeds or bad deeds, since he has lived a life free from hatred, free from trouble, a life safe and sound he would be pleased with himself for having cared of himself. This is the second solace. A disciple would think that even if evil does fall on an evil doer, evil could not affect him as he has never thought of doing evil and has never done evil to anyone. This is the third solace. Fourth, if evil does not befall on an evil doer, then he sees himself purified in both ways. This is the fourth solace.

Having heard the above sermon from the Buddha the Kalamas were converted and sought refuge in the Buddha the Dhamma and the Sangha.

One may ask: why were the Kalamas converted by the Buddha and not by the religious teachers, philosophers and ascetics?

The Buddha was teaching the Kalamas about problems of the life which can be analysed here and now. The focus of Dhamma is about the problem of morality and of life, which is practical and down to earth. Also the Buddha talked about happiness (solace) in this life rather than about happiness in heaven or in after life

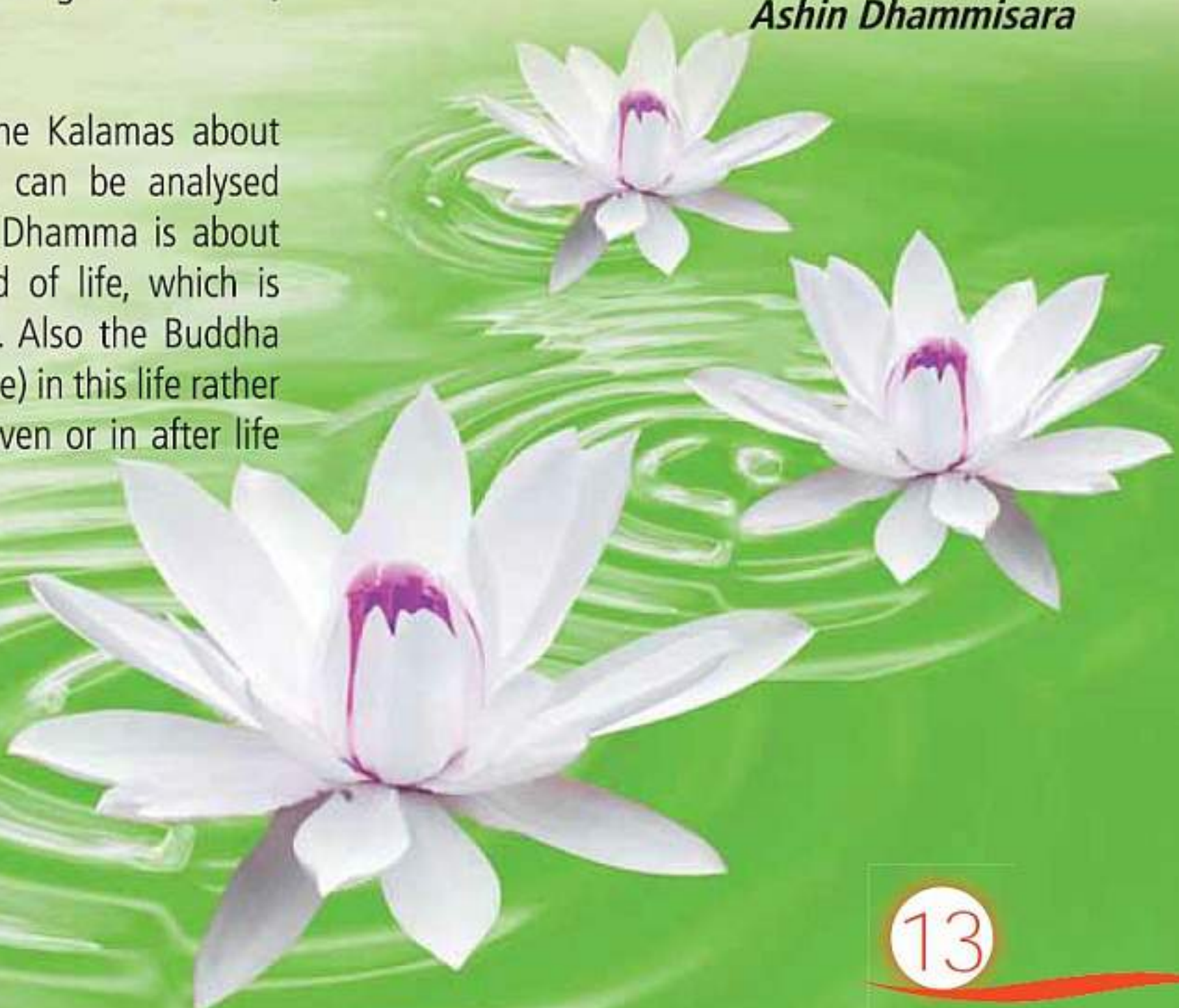


which could appear speculative. As a proof, the Buddha's disciples have really experienced spiritual happiness in life. Anyone can also have the same experience here and now.

Is the Kalama Sutta relevant to the Buddha's teaching in general?

It has been said that the Kalama Sutta is about the Spirit of Free Enquiry in religious believes. This is the spirit of the Dhamma too. In fact, one of the attributes of the Dhamma is "Ehi Passiko" which literally means "come and see". The Buddha would like people to accept the Dhamma not out of blind faith but with understanding. "Sadda" in Buddhism means "faith with understanding". Generally, the followers of the Buddha are expected to study the Dhamma (Pariyati), put it into practice with understanding (Patipatti) and finally realize its wisdom (Pativedha). These are the three stages of attaining Nibbana, to be free from rebirths (samsara). The Dhamma if well understood and put into practice gives one happiness and peace of mind in this very life.

Ashin Dhammisara





Transient are Conditioned Things

All conditioned things are impermanent, (anicca)
Seeing this in wisdom one becomes dispassionate towards the painful.
This is the Path of Purity.

Dh V 277

Sorrowful are all Conditioned Things





All conditioned things are sorrowful. (dukkha)
Seeing this in wisdom one becomes dispassionate towards the painful.
This is the Path of purity.

Dh 278

Everything is Without Self

All states (dhamma) are without self. (anatta)
Seeing this in wisdom one becomes dispassionate towards the painful.
This is Path of Purity.

Dh 279



FEELING ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED I AM ADVISED BY A MONK TO “Let Go”. How to “let go” ?

You are angry and dissatisfied because you cannot get what you want or you cannot do what you want to do. To “let go” is not to let go everything but to “let go” your craving, grasping and clinging in your heart and mind.,

Let go slowly, step by step.

First, stop being angry now. Let go your anger. When you are in anger you cannot think properly. You tend to be more emotional than rational.

How to stop being angry?

Say to yourself, “ I am angry now. I must stop being angry.” This will calm yourself a little.

Then do realize that anger is suffering, frustration is suffering.

Say to yourself, “ I do not want to suffer because frustration and anger are forms of suffering.”

Now that you are in a calm mood, you are more rational. Think what the Dhamma says about material things and life itself.

The Buddha teaches :

“All conditioned things are impermanent.”

“All conditioned things are unsatisfactory (which brings ‘dukkha’)

“All things are without self.”

If you accept the fact that everything is impermanent then you may think: what is the point of craving, grasping and clinging? What is the point of quarrelling and fighting for something that is impermanent? Why suffer for something impermanent. Is it worth suffering for?

Think also that one day when you pass away you have to leave all your things behind.

Implied in letting go craving, grasping and clinging is the “I” concept. The ‘Ego’ I that is in us. The cause of the problems is the thinking: ‘I want this’ ‘ I want that’ ‘My thinking is right.’ ‘The property is mine.’ ‘The idea is mine’. ‘ Everyone must agree with me’. Look at the ‘I’, “My” and ‘Mine’ in your thinking and reasoning. Get rid of them. The Dhamma says: All phenomena are without self. There is ‘no-self’. ‘There is no ego. Do not entertain your ego. When you do that your ego becomes happy and you yourself suffer. ‘Ego’ is the product of your imagination. You can deny it, so to speak. There is really no ego. Though emotionally it is a painful process, face it. Be brave about it. “No pain, no gain’ as the saying goes.

As laymen we have not renounced the world. We are not expected to give up everything. But do not yearn for the things that we cannot get. Count our blessings and be happy about the things we have got, material and spiritual. Materially, we have our family, our career and monthly income, big or small. Spiritually, we possess some values like taking refuge in the Triple Gem that protect us. We also possess some values like faith, generosity, loving-kindness and compassion. Do not work ourselves up to frustration out of things we cannot get.

Finally, peace of mind is valuable in life. Peace of mind is happiness. It is our own creation. People can harass us and cause disturbance to the mind but we can choose not to be disturbed. We can choose to be peaceful in our thinking. Be strong enough to tell off your ego not to crave, to grasp or to cling. Let go!



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