

# ANATTĀ IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

*Wit Wisadavet*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Significance of the Problem of Anattā

If we consider all major religions in the world, we will find that they have one thing in common, that is, they propose the way of life to man. Each religion judges that her way of life is the best and the most valuable for everyone. What is the most valuable thing in life, however, they do not agree with each other. Their differences may result from various reasons. One of the important reasons should be their different views on one basic problem, that is, what is the nature of man? Or what is man? Because if two religions differ in their views on what the essence of man is, they should not agree to each other about what is the most valuable thing in life. To give an answer how man should live his life, we must answer first the question of the nature of man. If we do not know what a thing *is*, how could we know what it *should* be?

What is man? How should he live? The answers to these two problems are the core of religion. All major religions propose the answers, though different. Buddhism gives the detailed teachings on these. As regards the former problem, Buddhism looks closely at the real nature of man. What is it? What does it consist of? What kind of state is it in? Why is it in that state? As for the second one, Buddhism offers a way to attain the better state of life. In the Buddhist scriptures these two issues run together.

There are many ways to explain Buddhist teaching on human nature. However, if we start with one problem, it will finally be related to others. The researcher believes that the basic concept which helps to understand life in Buddhism best is the concept of anattā. According to Buddhism, anattā is not merely the common property of all men, but of all things, as the Buddha says: “*sabbe dhammā anattā*”. The problem of attā-anattā is the core problem of Buddhism. It is the most important characteristic of life. If we understand and agree on this issue, agreements in others would follow. When the philosophical or religious scholars, in the East or West, explain Buddhist teachings, most of them hold that the concept of anattā is the essence of Buddhism. It distinguishes Buddhism from other religions. A Thai Buddhist scholar, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, says that “the teaching of anattā is the fundamental teaching of Buddhism .... It is unique and separates it from other religions.”<sup>1</sup> He also says that “if we know the truth of anattā, we shall completely know all.”<sup>2</sup>

Since anattā is the most fundamental characteristic of human life, it therefore becomes the cornerstone of the other concepts. Scholars, however, disagree on the real nature of anattā. This leads them to disagree on other issues, for example, kamma and nibbāna. A Thai scholar, Phrasrivisuddhimolī, says “the concept of anattā, together with the concepts of impermanence (aniccatā) and suffering (dukkhatā) support the truth of other moral teachings, especially Buddhist principles and the pathway to salvation.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *The Problems of God, Karma and Anattā*, Suvichanont, 1956, p.163.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.170.

<sup>3</sup> Phrasrivisuddhimolī, *Buddhadhamma*, Thai Wattana Panich, 1971, p.32.

### 1.2 The Purpose of Research

As anattā is the heart of Buddhism, it should be closely examined. What really is anattā? How is it related to other problems? In this study the researcher attempts to answer the following questions:

1. The word 'anattā' literally means no-attā. We should, therefore, first try to understand what the meaning of 'attā' is in philosophy, so that we could understand what 'no-attā' means.

2. It is well known that Buddhism rejects attā. How does it reject? What are the reasons for rejecting it?

3. Why does Buddhism reject attā? How does the rejection help to the understanding of life? How are the Four Noble Truths related to the concept of anattā?

4. How does the concept of anattā help to understand other main problems of Buddhism such as nibbāna and kamma?

We shall study the concept of anattā with all these questions in mind. By raising these questions we assume that anattā is the essence of Buddhism, that is, it is the cornerstone which can clarify all the rest of Buddhist teachings.

### 1.3 The Research Method

This is not an empirical research. It is not intended to find out what the Buddhists actually believe about the concept of anattā. It is rather to analyse, synthesize and interpret the concept of anattā as found in Buddhist scriptures. The method is reading these scriptures (which consist of many, many thousands pages) keeping in mind the questions mentioned in 1.2, and considering whether the answers drawn from different parts of the scriptures have the same meaning, agree to, support, or oppose one another. When some concept or problem relating to the problem of anattā is not discussed directly, an interpretation will be offered. These interpretations will be synthesized into a system.

### 1.4 Limits of Research

(1) This research is confined to the teaching of Theravāda Buddhism. This is not because it is higher or lower than that of Mahāyāna at all. Most scholars on Buddhism, however, believe that Theravāda is closer to the original teaching of the Buddha than Mahāyāna. Besides, the Buddhists in Thailand are mostly Theravāda.

(2) This research is confined to Suttanta Pitaka, to be known as Sutta. Theravāda Buddhism regards Tipitaka as the basic teaching of the Buddha. It is divided into three baskets: Rules of the Order (Vinaya Pitaka), Dialogues between the Buddha and the Disciples (Suttanta Pitaka), and Scholastic Discussion (Abhidhamma Pitaka). Our study deals only with Sutta. It is generally accepted to be the real teaching of the Buddha. As regards Abhidhamma, there is a doubt whether it is really taught by the Buddha himself.<sup>4</sup> Vinaya Pitaka is particularly the rules for the monks. Another reason is that in Sutta there are discussions about human nature, the end which is of highest value for man, and the path to this end. It could be said that the second pitaka explains all the essential Buddhist teachings completely. When one examines the problem of life in Buddhism, Sutta is mostly referred to.

<sup>4</sup> See Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *Untraditional Dhamma*, Aksornsamai, Bangkok, 1973, p.53-92.

(3) This study involves an interpretation. An interpretation is an explanation of what someone's sayings should mean by reasoning. Reasons used in the interpretation sometimes cannot be separated from a personal opinion of an interpreter. This means that the ground of education, the way of upbringing, values, philosophical thinking; in short, the interpreter's worldview partly have an influence on his interpretation. These cause two persons give different interpretations to the same issue. They may or may not be conscious of it. The researcher tries to avoid this prejudice. But it would be confessed that a small amount of it may still remain.

### 1.5 Previous Studies on This Issue

Works in Buddhism usually deal more or less with the problem of attā-anattā. But the works which discuss the concept of anattā in particular are rare. There is almost no analytical study of the concept of anattā as the basis for understanding other Buddhist concepts. Anattā is studied only as an indispensable concept of Buddhism. Followings are some interesting works on the problem of anattā:

*The Problems of God – Kamma – Anattā* (in Thai) by Buddhadhāsa Bhikkhu. This book contains two chapters. The first is the answer to the questions asked by a catholic priest about God, the Creation, the world suffering and man's ideal of life. The second is about the problem of anattā particularly. The author says that the concept of anattā is taught not only in Buddhism alone. Those who have the wrong concept of anattā hold that there is neither good (puñña) nor evil (pāpa). Even killing, for example, does not produce any fruit. Some say that everything goes on its own way. Nothing can be improved since there is no attā. Some say that there is nothing real in this world. Attā does not exist. These are not Buddhist, though they do not believe in attā. Another view on anattā, though not wrong view, is not Buddhist teaching, neither. It is taught that when mind is completely purified, it will experience the state of salvation which is freed from dukkha. To attain this salvation one needs to meditate step by step. This is similar to Buddhism. The difference is that it still believes in atman (attā), who supposes to experience this state. This view is close to the teaching of Vedānta.

The importance of the second chapter is an analysis of the concept of anattā in Buddhism. The author examines in particular *Pottapāda Sutta* in the *Dialogues of the Buddha*, because he thinks this Sutta explains the issue best. He discusses the problem when the Buddha was asked whether attā and saññā (means sati) is one and the same thing. And he concludes in accord with this Sutta that those who believe in attā believe it because they think that after death attā would only be happy. No one, however, has seen this. Attā exists only when we cling to it. Only when we grasp that I am this, this is our attā. In reality it does not exist. It should be abandoned. Attā is a name calling some one thing according to our convention, something that we grasp as I. When the grasping ceases, it also ceases. The author gives a very thoroughly discussion on this Sutta. It is another aspect of the view on the concept of anattā, which contribute much to the better understanding of this concept.

*Hinduism and Buddhism* by Kumāri Swāmi. This author holds that Buddhism and Brahmanism belong to the same group of religion. Essentially Buddhism is not different from Brahmanism, but only developed from the latter. For him, as regards the problem of attā-anattā, Buddhism does not reject the existence of attā. It merely says, "that is not my attā". He believes that both Buddhism and Brahmanism believe that there is 'attā' in the transcendental state. In Brahmanism this is Brahman. In Buddhism this transcen-

dental attā is mentioned negatively in terms of: this is not my attā; that is not my attā, either.

According to Kumār Swāmi, when Buddhism denies that each of five khandhas is not attā, it does not mean that there really is no attā. It only means that each khandha is not 'my attā'. My real attā is in a higher state. Ordinary people usually believe that an empirical self is a real self. In reality this self or attā is only accidental, not essential.

An empirical self comes into being, decays, and passes away depending on the condition. But a real self is immortal. Those who mistake the empirical self for the real self have a false idea. It then causes them to live in the world of the circle of death and rebirth, i.e. saṃsāra. The author holds that the Buddha teaches that man should liberate himself from this world to the world of immortality. This could be done by giving up the idea that the empirical self is the real one. If man comes back to his real self, he will be free from the circle of rebirth. It is because the real self is, in fact, immortal.

Kumār Swāmi believes that nibbāna and Brahman is the same thing. It is man's ideal of life. It could be reached when he does not mistake phenomena for substance. Nibbanā and Brahman are ineffable. They are the state of cessation, that is, the cessation of the individuality. This will happen when impurities and craving are gone. These are like the fuel which supports fire (an empirical self) to burn. One who is free from these knows what the real essence of man is.

*Buddhadhamma* (in Thai) by Phrasrivisuddhimoli is another interesting book. Though it does not directly discuss the problem of attā-anattā, it talks about the problem which will help to understand the concept of anattā better, for example, the dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda). As regards anattā, the author explains that anattā means having no real being of its own. Things are in an endless stream of continual coming and going. This means that it is not its own self, and cannot have the real attā.

In addition to the analysis of the concept of anattā, the author also points out the important ethical values of this concept. For example, without attā, one would lessen one's selfishness, become broad-minded, discuss problems with reason, and be neutral. Moreover, the concept of anattā helps us to see things as they really are, rid ourselves of clinging to attain freedom completely.

## II. WHAT IS ATTĀ?

The word anattā means no attā<sup>5</sup>. The word 'attā' in Thai is vague. Before we discuss whether Buddhism accepts or rejects 'attā', how it rejects, and for what reason, we should first clarify the meaning of this term. We will then discuss how Buddhism teaches about attā.

Sometimes 'attā' means 'concrete', something we can see and touch. This is opposite to 'abstract', which means unable to be touched. Sometimes we say a material thing like this table or that dish of rice are concrete and have attā. But ideas, feeling, desire, love are abstract and do not have attā. Here the word 'attā' merely means having a 'physical' property that is, being material, visible, and touchable. We can say that it is here or there. According to this meaning, a table has attā, but love does not. Man has a body so he has attā. Freedom, which is an idea, however, does not have attā.

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<sup>5</sup> The word 'attā' is widely translated into Thai as 'tuaton'.

In the world of philosophy and Western philosophy, this meaning of attā does not create much problem. In Indian and Buddhist philosophies, attā does not have this meaning. When a school of philosophy accepts or rejects attā, what is accepted or rejected is not physical. Because we could accept the existence of physical things but they exist without attā.

The branch of philosophy that deals with the problem of attā is metaphysics. Followings are different meanings of 'attā' discussed in metaphysics:

Firstly, attā means the center of change or transformation. It also means the principle of sameness. For example, two days ago we picked up a mango from the mango tree to ripen it. It was still green, hard, and had a fresh fragrance. Today when we open the jar, the mango changes: the color of its skin becomes yellow, and we feel it is softer than it was when we first picked it from the tree. It gives a nice smell of a ripened fruit, not of a fresh one like two days ago. The problem is: is the mango we hold in our hand now the same with or different from the one we picked from the mango tree two days ago? If it is the same, why its qualities such as, color, smell, touch, are not the same. If it is different, it would mean that the mango we picked from the tree perishes, and the one we have now suddenly comes into being. That should not be the case.

For the convenience in discussing the problem, let us suppose that:

m = the mango picked from the tree two days ago

M = the ripened mango in our hand now

Common sense tells us that m and M is the same thing. m merely transforms into M which has different qualities. But M is still the same mango as m. In other words, common sense tells us that m and M are both the same and different at the same time. This gives rise to a problem: how could two things be both the same and different? Some metaphysician answers that in a sense, M is different from m because it has qualities that m does not have. But in another sense, they are the same. This is possible because even though the two have different qualities altogether, there is 'something' that resides in both m and M. Suppose that this something is x. According to this view, then, x exists both in m and M. The existence of x in both leads us to the belief that m and M is the same thing, in spite of their differences. Both m and M are x. m is in fact x, merely in one form. M is also x, merely it now left that form and comes into another form.

The 'something', or 'x', in this example is attā. It is the real attā of the mango. It explains why the mango still remains the same though some of its qualities change. We can say therefore that 'x' or the attā of this mango is the ground of sameness. It makes the meaning of transformation understandable. 'Transformation' means that something changes from one form to another, but still remains the same. It does not mean that something perishes from the world and a new thing suddenly comes up out of nothing.

Let us now consider the concept of attā that is applied to man. Suppose you left home for more than ten years. Today you come back and met a man. It seems that you know him. Soon you recall that he is Dang, your old friend. You did not see him for a long time since you were a child. So he changes a lot. After recalling the memory, you and Dang greet each other and talk about the old time when he and you were young walking to school together, swimming in the river nearby the temple together on Sundays, etc. And it was Dang who helped you once when you were fighting with a group of bad boys.

The problem arises in the similar way: is the man whom you talk to at the present the same as the one who walked to school with you everyday and who helped you from a bad fight more than ten years ago? If he is the same, why does he change so much that you

almost could not recognize him? He is much taller, darker. He lost one of his arms in war. Some of his characters also change. He was joyful but now he is solemn. He changes so much that almost nothing left. He does not look like the same man. If, however, he is different from the one you know more than ten years ago, who is Dang you are talking with now? Is he not the same one with whom you walked to school? Is he not the same one who helped you in the fight? He should be the same. Because you yourself remember so well that he is the one with whom you played in the earlier time.

There are, then, some who believe that there must be 'something' which is Dang's real attā. This attā does not change but remains always the same. This attā resided in Dang more than ten years ago and still resides in Dang now. This attā helps to explain that though Dang changes, he still remains the same person. This attā is called ātman, self, soul. They however refer to the same thing.

Secondly, when philosophers talk about attā, they may think of the center of all properties of a certain thing. For example, five years ago we had a table in our house. It was white, five feet high, and rectangular. We laid it on the lawn. When long time passed, its color became grey, and we had to cut its legs by one foot. We also cut some part of it out so that it became circular. We saw that some phenomena or changes happened. What did these changes happen to? Where? The answer is to this table. What changed? Some properties of this table: from rectangular to circular, from five feet to four feet, and from white into grey.

The problem is: are the properties of this table the same with or different from this table? In other words, does this table exist separately from all its properties? Or is it merely a combination of all properties that stick together.

Let us for convenience suppose that:

w = white	g = grey
r = rectangular	c = circular
f = five feet high	fo = four feet high

W, r, and f are the properties of one thing. G, c and fo are the properties of one thing, which 'is' the same as the former one. The problem is: what is this thing? Is it w, or r, or f, or the combination of these three? Or is it 'something' existing separately from w, r, and f; the substance which w, r, and f attach to?

Some metaphysicians believe that this something exists separately from w, from r and from f, and from a gathering of w, r, and f. Let us call this "T". T is 'something' that exists apart from w, r, and f. It is the center to which these properties adhere. If there were no T, what do these properties: whiteness (w), rectangularity (r), five feet height (f) and four feet height (fo) belong to? A property must be the property of something. In our case, w, r, and f are properties of one and the same thing. In fact, "T" is the real attā of this table. It is 'the owner' of these properties. It owns w, r, f at one time; and g, c, fo at another. We can say that T is the substance which stands under w, r, f at one time; and g, c, fo at another. T, however, does not change. We can say that this table changes, but it remains the same table because T is the real attā. It is the center to which different properties adhere, and is the cornerstone supporting these properties, which may change in the course of time.

Now we will consider the concept of attā in regard to a person. Suppose I was sitting in the garden. I heard something fall behind. I walk to where the noise came, seeing a yellow mango under the mango tree. I pick it up, feeling its softness, smelling the fragrance of a ripe fruit. I eat it and it tastes sweet. If we ask who is it that has all five

consciousnesses at five different moments: noise, color, touch, odour, taste? Is this knower the same with these various knowing, or is he different?

Some metaphysicians believe that the knower in this case is my 'attā' or 'self'. It is I who heard, who saw, who touched, who smelled, and who tasted. Consciousness of knowing at those five moments occurred to me. I was the 'owner' of them. I was the one who stands fast there, making those five moments of consciousness be consciousness of one and the same person. Later this same I may have an infinite number of consciousnesses, but I am the centre or the core of those consciousnesses, making them connected to one another.

Or we could look farer off in the past. Suppose that ten years ago I was joyful, kind-hearted, and liked music. Now I become solemn, cold-hearted, and like boxing. Changes in emotion, habit, taste occurred, and occurred to one and the same man, that is I. It is this I who owned joy ten years ago and solemnity at present. It is I to whom the kind-heartedness ten years ago belonged, and the cold-heartedness belong now. It is this self, the supporting ground for the pleasure of music in the past and the pleasure of boxing now. My self which is the center or the owner of these characters and tastes must be something different from them.

To conclude, 'attā', according to this second meaning, is 'something' that is the owner, the center, or the substance, to which some properties (in the case of a material thing), and some perception, thinking, emotion, character, (in the case of a person) adhere. This something exists in and by itself. It is different from the properties, perception, emotion, etc. This something is what we call ātman, or attā, or self, or soul.

Thirdly, in metaphysics the word 'attā' means a thing in itself, originated from nothing. It is and has been by itself. Here attā means something that does not change or transform. A thing that changes depends for its existence upon some external condition. When its condition is changing, it must also change. But attā exists without depending on the external condition. Its existence is not up to another thing. Therefore it will not change even though other things do. It is absolute and exists without condition.

Some metaphysicians believe that attā like this really exists. Its being is the root or the origin of all things. That is, it does not depend on anything, but other existing things must depend on it. It is eternal, not comes into being, nor passes away. It never changes. It is really its own attā.

If we examine the three meanings of 'attā', we will see that all these meanings are consistent. That is, attā is something that really exists by itself without change. It is the center of change. A change must be change of something. And this something itself must be static. If it is not, a change would mean that something is annihilated and something comes up from nothing. According to the view of those who believe in attā, a change is significant only when there must be something standing behind the change as the center or the owner of those changing properties. This thing must be absolute. So we can say that this thing, which formerly had a property 'a' and has now a property 'b', still remains the same. We can, then, conclude that attā is the principle of sameness, because it is the center or the owner of some properties or qualities. This is so because it is static, permanent and eternal.

### III. LIFE AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF<sup>6</sup>

#### 3.1 Life and Five Khandhas

We have seen that the idea of attā can arise when we examine both objects and persons. As regards objects, the mango and the table as discussed are the examples. There are those who believe that in both cases there are the real attā lying permanently behind changes happening to them. We could take any other things as examples, and consider them in the same way. We could analyse not only an existing object individually to see whether it has attā, but also the world as a whole. About this problem, Buddhism is well known that it views everything as anattā, that is, without attā. Everything here includes material objects and the world of objects. Buddhism does not accept that there is 'something' that is the real essence of all things, and subsists permanently without change. Things arise because they are conditioned. They change and cease because their conditions change or cease.

However Buddhism focuses the study not on the problem of the reality of the world, but on the nature of human beings. Material objects are analyzed only when they have direct bearings on the understanding of man. Thus, in Suttanta Pitaka, though there is discussion on the external world or the world of objects, it is not in detail. The central issue that is examined in detail is the direct problem of man, for example, what is man? What is he constituted of? Does he have attā or self? How should he live? These would help to understand the problem of dukkha rightly.

What is man? Does he have attā or self? According to Buddhist philosophy, there are many ways to answer these questions. The most popular way, the Sutta-based answer is through five khandas (aggregates). According to this explanation, man is composed of five parts. The researcher will follow this way in discussing the nature of man and his problems.

Buddhism teaches that man is constituted of five parts called five khandhas: body (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), perception (saññā), mental activities (savkhāra) and consciousness (viññāna). (The last four are also called 'nāma'; so man is also called 'nāma-rūpa').

#### *Rūpa*

Rūpa is the bodily part of man's life. It includes all bodily organs.

#### *Viññāna*

In Buddhism viññāna is not a soul or self as meant in chapter two. It means 'consciousness' which arises when ārammaṇa<sup>7</sup>, i.e. body, sound, smell, taste, tangible objects and ideas, which come into contact with āyatana, i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. It is an awareness that one is seeing a body (means a visible object), or having a taste, or smelling an odour, etc. Viññāna is not something eternal, but arises when objects come into contact with senses. It arises and ceases depending on the conditions. For example, when we put some salt into our mouth, āyatana (our tongue) comes into contact with ārammaṇa (the taste of salt), viññāna arises. There arises consciousness that 'this is salty'. But some moments later, the salt is dissolved and then consciousness ceases. This consciousness is called tongue-consciousness. So viññāna according to this meaning is not attā or self that exists before there is a contact between a tongue and a salty taste,

<sup>6</sup> The word 'tuaton' in Thai is translated into 'self' in English when talking about a person.

<sup>7</sup> Ārammaṇa does not mean emotion such as love, hatred, etc., but it means the properties of the outer world which man perceives through his sense organs.



or exists after the salt is dissolved. Viññāna is a phenomenon that occurs and ceases when an appropriate time comes. And it may occur again. Therefore viññāna in Buddhism is not a 'soul' which is an eternal self capable of knowing.

Viññāna is the most important component of man. If man had no viññāna, he would not be different from a wooden stick. He would not be able to be conscious of anything. Viññāna is not self that resides in the body. Human body is different from a wooden stick not because it has a body in which a soul inhabits and is conscious of external objects, but a stick does not. The difference is that human body is so complex that it is potential to be conscious. A potentiality means the possibility for something to become actuality when the proper factors are present, and to cease when these factors disappear. When a tongue comes into contact with salt, taste-consciousness arises. When salt is dissolved, consciousness disappears. This consciousness is viññāna. It arises and passes away according to conditions.

#### *Vedanā*

When the outside objects come to contact with our sense organs, consciousnesses arise. We perceive that this is red; this is salty; this is fragrant, etc. That is, consciousness begins. But at the same time with these consciousnesses there occurs another phenomenon, i.e., some kind of feeling. It is not the feeling in the sense of knowing oneself to be this or that. It is the feeling in terms of like, dislike, or neutral. This feeling is called 'vedanā'. One of these three vedanā always comes together with consciousness. This is another faculty of man which the stick or non-living things do not have.

#### *Saññā*

This is another faculty of life. Beside an ability to know and an ability to feel, i.e. pleased or displeased, man has an ability to recognize what he has known and felt. That is, he is able to know a specific quality of ārammaṇa so that he can remember qualities of a thing. For example, yesterday I saw a 'yellow' thing. This is eye-consciousness. I put that thing in my mouth and knew that it was 'sweet'. This is tongue-consciousness. I 'like' it. This is vedanā. Today I saw a thing. Saññā, a faculty of life, connects 'yellow', 'sweet', 'like', together. I come to have an idea that this yellow thing is sweet and delicious. I may connect these three qualities with the word 'khanom foythong' (a kind of sweet). This is the work of saññā. It is a potentiality of human life, that is, to remember and connect different phenomena into one thing. If man does not have saññā, all different phenomena he has experienced at each time will have no relation with one another. The world he experiences at each moment will be completely new for him. There will be no past experience. Things will have no meaning. Human knowledge and understanding will not be possible. Therefore this faculty is truly important for human life.

#### *Saṅkhāra*

Man has body (rūpa). When an outside object comes into contact with it, consciousness (viññāna) begins. We then have a feeling: like or dislike (vedanā). What we have experienced is stored in our memory (saññā) and ready to show themselves when a right time comes. All these three: perception, feeling, and memory, are combined together by some force which is a tendency arising in man and inclines him to do or not to do something. This force is called saṅkhāra. It is a power to form or to produce. What does it produce? It produces a tendency in man to do or not to do something.

For example, there is now an object in front of us. When we cast our eye over it, consciousness (viññāna) arises. We know that it is 'yellow'. Our memory (saññā) makes us know that this yellow comes together with 'sweet' and 'delicious'. We then have a

tendency to pick it and put it into our mouth. This tendency is the product of saṅkhāra. It makes us desire, want, love, hate, etc. things. What we experience from sight, taste, like, together with saṅkhāra produce us. Or saṅkhāra creates us a new person. Before we see or taste a piece of *khanom foythong*, we might be indifferent to it. After eating it several times we have been created a different person, that is, some one who is not neutral to it, but someone who wants to do something with it. What creates us a new person, or creates our new personality, is nothing but another faculty of man, i.e., saṅkhāra. Without saṅkhāra, there would be no *personality*. Personality means the sum of all tendencies inside a person which move him to do or not to do, to say or not to say, to think or not to think something in a certain situation. These tendencies are produced by saṅkhāra, out of man's experiences through the other four components: body, consciousness, feeling, and recognition.

### 3.2 Five Khandas and Self

#### 3.2.1 *A Cluster of Five Khandas and Self*

Man is composed of five components as said before. In our daily life, when we think, speak, or do something; all the five work together closely as one thing. They are so closely related that it seems to be the work of one thing. This gives rise to the idea of this self or that self. It seems that there is something beyond these five components, and it is the owner of these five. If we look at it closely, however, we shall find that there is nothing which can be called our 'self' beside these five components. They arise and cease, and then arise again and cease again in a continual stream. These happenings are so fast that we are misled to think there are no becoming and passing away, only permanence and subsistence. They make us believe falsely that there is some substance standing there. That is self. But in fact if we separate all those five parts there will be no self or something substantial left at all. Buddhism gives this analogy: "*For just as, when the parts are rightly set, the word 'chariot' ariseth (in our minds), so doth our usage convenient to say: 'a being' when the aggregates are there,*"<sup>8</sup> which means that when we say 'a chariot' we think of something that we can ride. When we think of it, we usually think of the whole chariot. We do not think of each part separately because it is not necessary to do that. When we drive a car, we are driving 'some certain thing'. We do not think of riding a composition of its different parts, but riding 'a thing'. If we spend time to think closely we find that 'this thing' does not really exist. There is only a cluster of different parts together. In the same way we are misled to think that there is 'some certain thing' beyond those five khandas. In Buddhism, therefore, if self means something enduring beyond five khandas, this self does not really exist. We are, however, led to believe that it does.

#### 3.2.2 *Each of Five Khandhas and Self*

The idea that we have self occurs when all five khandas occur together. This occurring and composing are under some conditions. The cluster of five khandhas does not produce self, as we have said. The problem then is: does each khandha have self? Does each khandha exist in and by itself without change? We shall consider each of them.

*Rūpa*. Rūpa is matter and phenomena of matter, including all material objects around us and all organs which compose a human body. All material objects are made of the combination and the separation of the four basic elements which is called 'Four Great

<sup>8</sup> Davids, Rhys, Mrs., *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part I, Oxford, The Pāli Text Society, 1993, p.170.

Elements'. They are earth (extension), water (fluidity), air (motion), and fire (heat). Speaking generally, rūpa is not real, it has no self :

“If anyone should say, ‘Material shapes are self’, that is not fitting. For the arising of the material shape is to be seen and its decaying. Since its arising and decaying are to be seen one would thus be brought to the stage of saying : ‘Self arises in me and passes away.’ Therefore if anyone should say, ‘Material shapes are self,’ that is not fitting; in this way material shapes are not-self.”<sup>9</sup>

This means that rūpa is something that comes into being and passes away. Therefore it does not have attā. You can say, however, that rūpa has attā if you admit that it comes and goes all the time. But this is the same thing as having no attā. All material things are made of the four great elements. Is each element attā? In Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta, the four primary elements are explained in detail. They are divided into the internal and the external organs. The internal organs are our bodily organs, and the external are material objects around us. Both organs are always in the state of change and are impermanent:

“And what, your reverences, is the element of extension?”

“The element of extension may be internal, it may be external.”

“And what is the internal element of extension?”

“Whatever is hard, solid, is internal, referable to an individual and derived therefrom, that is to say: the hair of the head, the hair of the body, nails, heart, liver ... Whatever is an internal element of extension and whatever is an external element of extension, just these are the element of extension. There comes to be a time when the element of extension that is external is agitated; at that time the external element of extension disappears. The impermanence of this ancient external element of extension can be shown, its liability to destruction can be shown, its liability to decay can be shown, its liability to change can be shown. So what of this short-lived body derived from craving?”<sup>10</sup>

This means that even though the external element of extension --- material objects--- is strong, hard and solid, it, nevertheless, is liable to destruction. So why must the internal element of extension---our organs---not be liable to destruction also? After this the other three elements are explained in the same way. The externals could be destroyed, so could these three internals.

Therefore Buddhism rejects the absoluteness of all things, both the internal organs of man's body and the components of the external objects. An absolute thing is perfect in itself. It does not depend on anything for its existence. It is independent, not related to anything. It does not change though other things change. If there were this absolute thing, it would exist eternally, that is, it has attā or self. Buddhism does not accept this. All things are related. Things arise and continue to exist under conditions, nothing is perfect in itself. If their conditions change, they will also change. If their conditions cease, they will also cease. Man's body (rūpa) is the same as this.

*Viññāna*. It is not difficult to see that all matters, both our bodies and the external objects are not absolute. Common sense tells us that things change, nothing stands against time. But if we examine another component of life, that is, mind and mental phenomena such as consciousness, feeling, passion, desire, etc., we find that it is not easy to reject the absoluteness or selfhood. A little thought will convince us that our physical

<sup>9</sup> Horner, I.B., *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III, Oxford, The Pāli Text Society, 1993, p.333.

<sup>10</sup> Horner, I.B., *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. I, Oxford, The Pāli Text Society, 1995, p.231-236.

parts or body changes all the time, without unchanging attā. Though our body changes every moment we still believe that we are the same person. There should, therefore, be something in us that acts as the base for our sameness. This makes philosophers and common people believe that there is the other part of our component that always exists, and is absolute and is attā. This thing must not be matter (or rūpa). If it were matter, it would change. This is what we call 'soul' or spirit. It is self or attā in Buddhist terminology. This self is the one that perceives, thinks, feels, and performs other mental activities all the time; though it itself stands permanently without change.

Let us go back to our example in chapter two. Suppose we were sitting in the garden. We heard a noise of something fall behind. We stood up and walked to where the noise came from. We saw a yellow mango under the tree. We touched it and felt that it was soft. We smelled it, and it was fragrant, we ate it and it was sweet. These are consciousness that occurred in five different successive moments. In the first moment we heard a noise; in the second, saw a mango; in the third, felt a bodily contact; in the fourth, smelled an odor; in the fifth, tasted it. According to this view, the self that perceived in these five different moments is regarded to be the same self. It never changes all these times (and is still the same even in the thousandth or the millionth different moments of consciousness.)

According to this view, my real self is this something that stands unchanging there. Perceiving, thinking, passion, and other mental states are the activities of this something or phenomena that happen to this thing. But Buddhism views this differently, that is, regards mind, or spirit, or self, or soul, not as some real thing that is permanent, or something that is absolute existing apart from conditions. There is nothing lie behind consciousness at each moment, nothing that is the owner of these activities. Mental phenomena happen under appropriate circumstances and conditions. There is no one and the same spirit running and acting through different moments of time:

"Is it true that a pernicious view like this has accrued to you, Sāti : 'In so far as I understand dhamma taught by the Lord it is that this consciousness itself runs on, fares on, not another."

"Even so do I, Lord, understand dhamma taught by the Lord: it is this consciousness itself that runs on, fares on, not another."

"What is this consciousness, Sāti?"

"It is this, Lord, that speaks, that feels, that experiences now here, now there, the fruition of deeds that are lovely and that deproved."

"Foolish man, do you understand that dhamma was taught by me thus? Has not consciousness generated by conditions been spoken of in many a figure by me, saying : Apart from condition there is no origination of consciousness."<sup>11</sup>

This means that consciousness is not self that remains the same through all the moments of experiencing the outside world. But it is a phenomenon that is caused to happen when conditions come together and disappear when conditions part. Consciousness comes and goes, then comes again and goes again depending upon the existing conditions. In the same Sutta the Buddha says:

"It is because, monks, an appropriate condition arises that consciousness is known by this or that name: if consciousness arises because of eye and material shapes, it is known as visual consciousness; if consciousness arises because of ear and sounds, it is known as auditory consciousness; if consciousness arises because of nose and smells, it is known as

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.313-314.

olfactory consciousness; if consciousness arises because of tongue and tastes, it is known as gustatory consciousness; if consciousness arises because of body and touches, it is known as tactile consciousness; if consciousness arises because of mind and mental objects, it is known as mental consciousness. As a fire burns because of this or that appropriate condition, by that it is known: if a fire burns because of sticks, it is known as a stick-fire; and if a fire burns because of chips, it is known as a chip-fire; and if a fire burns because of grass, it is known as a grass-fire..."<sup>12</sup>

The analogy of fire helps to clarify consciousness better. Is fire real? Is it attā? The answer is fire is not real like attā, but it comes into being under proper conditions, and ceases when these conditions disappear. Fire is not attā which resides in the wood. But it has potential to occur. This is the same with consciousness. It is not attā which resides in the human body. But it has potential, with proper conditions, to cause some phenomena like perceiving, feeling, desire, like, hate etc. These phenomena we call mental phenomena, to be distinct from physical ones. They are phenomena of living things. These phenomena are not activities of something eternal like attā.

Let us go back again to our example. Suppose we were sitting in the garden and heard something falling behind. We turned around and saw a yellow mango. Picking it up, we felt its softness. We smelled it, it was fragrant; we bit it and it was sweet. In these five consecutive moments, five phenomena happened. According to Buddhism, these five phenomena mean that consciousnesses occur five times. Each time there is no one and the same 'self' standing perpetually through all these five moments. See below:

t<sub>1</sub> ----- t<sub>1</sub> = consciousness (ear) at the first moment  
 t<sub>2</sub> ----- t<sub>2</sub> = consciousness (eye) at the second moment  
 t<sub>3</sub> ----- t<sub>3</sub> = consciousness (body) at the third moment  
 t<sub>4</sub> ----- t<sub>4</sub> = consciousness (nose) at the fourth moment  
 t<sub>5</sub> ----- t<sub>5</sub> = consciousness (tongue) at the fifth moment

T<sub>1</sub> occurs and ceases, t<sub>2</sub> occurs and ceases, and so on. But t<sub>1</sub>, t<sub>2</sub>, t<sub>3</sub>, t<sub>4</sub>, t<sub>5</sub> are not activities of 'something' that stands permanently through five moments. There is no one and the same 'self' that 'runs on' through the five moments. In the first moment 'self' is the ear-consciousness that occurs in the first moment. In the second moment next, 'self' is not the same as the one in the first moment, but it is the eye-consciousness that occurs in the second moment. The series go on. We may say that 'self' is merely a stream or a cluster of consciousness which comes and goes and comes again successively and rapidly. The rapidity of the consecutive process seems as though there is self standing permanently, giving an order to act in those different moments. In other words, there seem to be 'self' coming in and out at each moment. But in reality consciousness cannot exist independently by itself, or is not imperishable like soul.

*Vedanā, Saññā, Saṅkhāra.* We have, then, shown that the two khandhas, namely, rūpa and viññāna, have no attā. The other three components of life, namely, vedanā, saññā and saṅkhāra, make no problem when consciousness is lack of self. These three khandhas are mind concomitants (cetasika), that is, relating to mind. This means that they always arise together with consciousness, are qualities that follow consciousness. They may be called qualities of consciousness. They cannot arise in non-sensible things or things without consciousness. So we can say that if viññāna is anattā, these three must also be anattā.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.314-315.

Here we can conclude that life consists of five components, i.e. five khandhas. Each of them is anattā. When they are combined together, nothing new occurs besides a cluster of these five components. There is no self, whose existence is in itself, independent of and separated from the group of these five khandhas. It is like when we say 'chariot', we do not mean 'attā' or some certain thing that exists separately from the combination of its parts: wheel, hub, axle etc. We only mean the conglomerate of these components. When we use the word 'chariot', which is only one word, to call this combination, and use the same word every time, it makes us misconceive that there is one and the same thing to which 'chariot' refers. It is the same thing when we call a person, Dang, for example. In fact Dang is a name used to call a whole group of five khandhas (which changes all the time). But when we use the same name everyday call this combination, it makes us believe falsely that there is one and the same 'self' which 'Dang' signifies. In fact, such thing does not exist.

If man has no self standing eternally and separately from each khandha, and if each khandha is not permanent, how then he who is merely a cluster of five khandhas, can exist permanently:

"If anyone were to speak thus: 'The oil for lighting this oil-lamp is impermanent and liable to alteration, and the wick is impermanent and liable to alteration, and the flame is impermanent and liable to alteration, but that which is the light --- that is permanent, lasting, eternal, not liable to alteration,' speaking thus, would he be speaking rightly?

No, revered sir."<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3 Self and the Absolute

A very important characteristic of the thing that is attā or self is the state of being its own, i.e. an absolute or a self-sufficiency. If there is something that is really attā, that thing must be able to exist by itself, and also be able to do its own peculiar function. The school of philosophy that believes in attā or soul, which exists separately from body, must also believe that this attā or soul must live continually and perpetually without destruction, even though body is destroyed. Secondly, this thing must be able to do its peculiar function. What is the soul's peculiar function, which makes it fundamentally different from other things, for example, matter (rūpa)? A wooden stick is a material thing. It is not able to be conscious, to feel, or to have emotions. These mental activities then are not characteristics of material things. If they are, a wooden stick would be able to feel or to think, like us. But we who also have body, that is matter, can perform the mental activities. A wooden stick, which has no soul, could not perform them. This means that the mental activities must be characteristics peculiar to soul, which is the other component of man apart from his body. If being conscious of something is not an activity of matter, it must then be the activity of soul. Soul is different from matter or body because the former is able to be conscious of something.

This means that mental activities are the essence of soul. They are what make soul a soul and differentiate soul from matter. These activities are, for example, perception, feeling, etc. The next question is: can soul perform these activities *by itself*? Can it perceive colour, light, taste, smell, etc., by itself? According to Buddhism the answer is no. As we have said that consciousness occurs when its appropriate conditions occur:

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<sup>13</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III, p.325.

“If, your reverences, the eye that is internal is intact but external material shapes do not come within its range and there is no appropriate impact, then there is no appearance of the appropriate section of consciousness. If the eye that is internal is intact but external shapes come within its range but without an appropriate impact, then there is no appearance of the appropriate section of consciousness. But when the eye that is internal is intact and shapes come within its range and there is the appropriate impact, then there is thus an appearance of the appropriate section of consciousness.”<sup>14</sup>

Other organs, namely, ear; nose; tongue; body; and mind, are then explained in the same way. What we have here is this: there is no soul which is absolute. If there were, it should be able to perform by itself the mental activities, like being conscious, which is the essence of its being, without depending on any other things. If consciousness could not occur unless there are all appropriate conditions, it is meaningless to say that consciousness is the peculiar function of soul. Because when appropriate conditions come, an appropriate consciousness appears, and when appropriate conditions are lacking, there is no appearance of an appropriate consciousness. To accept ‘something’ which is the owner of these consciousnesses is of no use. If there were soul, it should be able to perform its essential activities independently. A person who is deaf will not be able to hear. A person who is blind will not be able to see light or colour. And if there is someone whose sense-organs are all completely damaged, he then will not be able to have any sensations. That means soul is not able to be conscious of anything if sense-organs are not intact. But being conscious of something is soul’s essential nature. Then what is soul for, if it is conscious when proper conditions come and is not conscious when proper conditions do not come? Having soul does not make this person see, hear, smell, love, hate, pleased, etc. In short, he cannot perform the mental activities. If there were soul and if performing the mental activities is its characteristic, it should be able to perform these by itself. If it is not able, its existence is superfluous. To have or not to have soul does not make any difference.

Besides, if there were soul it should be absolute or self-sufficient. To be absolute means to be a master of one’s own. An absolute country is the country that is capable to pursue a policy or any activities in accord with its aim. A colony is not its own master. What it acts is up to others. In other words, its activities depend on conditions. If there were soul or attā, it must be absolute. It should be able to do anything it wishes. External circumstances should not have influence over its intention. For example, one should be able to taste sweet even though one is taking a lemon. But this could not happen. When an external object, i.e., lemon, comes into contact with a tongue, the tongue-consciousness arises, and one tastes sourness. Soul could not taste sweetness. Soul has no power to do that. What a taste should be depends on the conditions. They control what taste one has. If one’s tongue is in one state, what one takes gives a certain taste; if it is in another state the same thing gives another taste. One is pleased with one taste, but displeased with another. In *Pañcavaggiya Sutta* the Buddha says:

“Body, brethren, is not the Self. If body were the Self, then body would not be involved in sickness, and one could say of body: ‘Thus let my body be. Thus let my body not be.’ But in as much as body is not the Self, that is why body is involved in sickness, and one cannot say of body: ‘thus let my body be; thus let my body not be.’ ... Feeling is not the Self. That is why feeling is involved in sickness and one cannot say of feeling: ‘thus let my feeling be; thus let my feeling not be.’ ... likewise perception, the activities and consciousness are not

<sup>14</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol.I, p.236.

the Self, that is why consciousness is involved in sickness: that is why one cannot say of consciousness: 'thus let my consciousness be; thus let my consciousness not be.'"<sup>15</sup>

These passages show two ideas. Firstly, if five khandhas are self, they should never get ill; that is, never die, whatever external circumstances may be. But from experience each of these five khandhas always changes. Therefore, self is impossible.

Secondly, if five khandhas are self, we should be able to make ourselves be anything. Since having self means being absolute as said above, we should be able to have any sensations we wish. We should be able to force ourselves feel anything. We should be able to recall anything or to forget anything we want. We can create any kind of personality anytime we wish, and can destroy it immediately if we are not pleased with it. But these are not the cases. If we are eating a piece of delicious cake, when we eat it out the delicious taste will be gone. We could not force the pleasant feeling, i.e. delicious taste, to continue. If we forgot something for a long time, we cannot recall it whenever we wish. Because saññā is not self, we cannot control it as we wish. If we have taken rice as our main food since we were a child, we could not change to take potato right away. Saṅkhāra has made us to have that tendency. If saṅkhāra belongs to us, we would be able to force it to do anything any time we please. If our tongue is insensible from sickness, we could not force it to have any taste we wish. This is because rūpa and viññāna are not self. In *Culasaccata Sutta* the Buddha gives an analogy. The king who is the most powerful in a country, who owns everything in the empire, can do anything in it as he wishes. If five khandhas are our self, we should be able to control them or do anything to them as we wish. But we are not able to, because we have no power over them at all.

We may conclude this chapter as follows: man is composed of five components called five khandhas. When these five khandhas are combined together, this cluster is called a person; and a name is given to it as, Dang, Dam, etc. Each khandha changes all the time. So the whole combination must also changes. When we always use one and the same name call this cluster, we are tended to think that there is something besides those components. And this something is always the same. It is his self. This is a misunderstanding. If there were such self, it should be absolute, and be able to cause anything happen as it wishes. That is not the fact. And if there were self, it should be able to perform its essential function. This is not the case. Therefore, there should be no such self.

#### IV. ATTĀ AND THE PROBLEM OF DUKKHA

##### 4.1 What is the World?

The problem discussed in the last chapter whether there is attā is called a metaphysical problem. In general Buddhism is not interested in solving the metaphysical problem because such problem is not directly or immediately involved in the problems of life, i.e. human's suffering or dukkha. But the problem of attā-anattā has a peculiar nature from other metaphysical problems (for example, the problem of the world: where does it come from? Does it have a purpose? What is its first element? etc. That is, anattā is an essential characteristic of human life. If we make ourselves clear with this problem, it will make us understand clearer about the problem of dukkha also. The problem of attā is very closely related with the problem of dukkha. It is well known that the problem of

<sup>15</sup> Woodward, F.L., *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part III, Oxford, The Pāli Text Society, 1992, p.59.



dukkha is the main problem of Buddhism. A problem not involved directly with this main problem would be regarded not important in Buddhism. In this chapter we will show how the problem of dukkha is fastened to the problem of attā.

Dukkha happened to each and every man. It happens when man has a relation with the external things, whether they are other human beings or objects. To understand well the problem of human dukkha, one must understand the nature of the external world. To misunderstand the nature of our own and the nature of the world causes a misconception in the relationship between man and the world. It is here the root of dukkha. So the problem we will analyse next is: what is the world?

Having said that all material things, both human body and objects in the world are composed of four fundamental things, that is, the four great elements: patavī or earth, āpo or water, vāyo or air, tejo or fire. These four fundamental elements, sometimes gather together and sometimes are separated from each other, cause all material things and material phenomena to happen. Science now tells us that all material things are composed of some small units called 'atoms', which can be analysed into electron, proton, and neutron. A problem then arises whether this conflicts with the Buddhist teaching. It depends on the interpretation of a person who answers this question. But the true thing is how many small parts scientists or whoever will analyze the world into, whether they are earth; water; air; fire; or electron; proton; or a; b; c;... , their analysis will never conflict with the basic teaching of Buddhism. The belief of those four elements was the belief of people in the Buddha's time, both western and eastern. The Buddha is not interested in confirming or refusing this analysis at all. The essential purpose of Buddhism is not to examine the real element of all those material things. What the Buddha wants is only to examine the real inner part of man in order to help him understand the fundamental problem of human, that is, dukkha.

Why do we say that how many small parts we analyse all objects into, or whatever the real part of the world is, it will not be opposed to the analysis of the problem of human dukkha. Let us examine the Buddhist sayings:

"Brethren, I will teach you all. What is the all? It is eye and object, ear and sound, nose and scent, tongue and savor, body and things tangible, mind and mind-states. That is called the all"<sup>16</sup>

It means that if we look from the Buddhist view, the importance of all things does not depend on what the real composition of all is; whether it is earth, water, air, fire, or electron, proton; but it depends upon the relation it causes to human beings. Man has six organs to be conscious of and to have a relation with the external things, that is; eye, tongue, nose, ear, body, mind. Therefore, whatever the smallest part of all things is, it will appear to man to be either of the followings: material shape, taste, smell, sound, touch, and thought. All objects might have other qualities beyond the above six, but man is not able to know that. Those other qualities are beyond man's world. Whatever the real world is in itself, if there is no way that it can be related to man, its existence has nothing to do with him. It cannot cause man happiness or suffering. Therefore whether the world is composed of, electron or proton or any other things, the world is only what man is conscious through his six sense organs:

"Pray, lord, to what extent is there the World or the symptoms of the World?"

<sup>16</sup> Woodward, F.L., *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part IV, Oxford, The Pāli Text Society, 1993, p.8.

“Where there is eye, Samiddhi, objects, eye-consciousness, and things cognizable by the eye, there is the World and its symptoms. Where there is ear..., nose..., tongue..., body..., mind..., there is the World and the symptoms of the World.”

“But where there is no eye, no objects, no eye-consciousness or things cognizable by the eye-consciousness, there is no World or symptoms of the World. Where there is no ear..., no nose..., no tongue..., no body..., no mind..., there is no World or symptoms of the World.”<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.2 Man and the Meaning of the World

We will see from this explanation that the world has a special different meaning from what is generally understood. Because from this perspective the existence of the world is inseparable from being known by a thing which has a faculty of knowing, that is, a thing that has a potential for consciousness, for example, man. Therefore, if we speak particularly about a man, it may be said that the world and man are never separable. Where there is a man there is the world. And where there is no man there is no world. Speaking like this may lead to a misunderstanding. It does not literally mean that if there is no human (or other animals which have a faculty of knowing potentially), all material things will disappear. To say that where there is no man there is no world, the world here means the world that man forms, creates, or makes up. Man makes up the world out of his grasping which is called ‘upādāna’.

An example may help to understand clearer. Three persons: A, B, C; they all see a certain thing in front of them. This thing is white, long, narrow, and it is moving slowly. If they touch it, it would be soft. If they put it into their mouths, it would have some taste, etc. This is its physical properties. These properties arise from its inner parts which are composed into this thing, that is, its chemical elements. This same thing may be viewed as three different things for A, B, C. For example, when A sees it, he may say ‘ah! a worm’, then gets closer to pick it up and put it into his mouth. When B sees it, he shouts loudly ‘oh! a worm’ and runs away. Whereas C sees it, he feels indifferently. He might not say any word, only thinks that ‘it is a worm’. He does not come nearer or walk away. If he has something to do there he may stay longer, if he has to go somewhere else he may leave. But this thing is not a cause of his staying or leaving there.

What idea do we get from this example? Three men see the same thing but this same thing does appear to be three different things *for* each:

For A, this is ‘a palatable worm’.

For B, this is ‘a disgusting worm’.

For C, this is ‘a worm’.

These three men’s calling of this thing by a name ‘worm’ or anything else is our inventing some voice to signify some one thing. Whether we call it a worm or a wurm or others will not make any difference. It will not cause anything happen. So the uttered word, ‘worm’ that all the three pronounce has no meaning in itself. The important thing is that this animal *means* differently for these three persons. Therefore,

For A, this is ‘a palatable thing’.

For B, this is ‘a disgusting thing’.

For C, this is ‘a thing’.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.19-20.

The palatable and the disgust are not the meanings that reside in this animal. This animal itself is only a thing which has some physical and chemical qualities. The palatable is the meaning A gives to it, and the disgust, B. In itself this animal is neither palatable nor disgusting. It is A and B who make up it this or that. To be precise, it is A's mind and B's mind that give or invent those meanings to it. The *Dhammapada* therefore begins with these words: "*All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts.*"<sup>18</sup>

We have just said that where there is a man there is the world, where there is no man there is no world. Now we have to say anew that where there is mind there is the world, and where there is no mind there is no world. It is because mind creates the world or things in the world. This merely means that mind gives meaning to the external things. From our example, suppose A, B, and C came across a worm at the same time on January 1, 1975 at sharp noon. At that very moment we may say that for C, seeing the worm did not cause any feeling or reaction to him, because he neither liked nor disliked it. Seeing or not seeing it made no difference to him. To speak more precise, on the first of January in 1975 at noon, there was no 'worm' in C's world. Of course there was a small creature moving outside in the physical world, but in the world of C the existence or non-existence of it had the same meaning at that very moment.

In A's world and B's world, however, they are opposite. In their worlds there was a worm, though with different meanings. The difference in A's mind and B's mind cause them to give different meanings to the one and same thing. In the particular time of that day there existed a worm in the world of both of them, though it meant differently for them. That is, though both of them, including C saw the same thing, but it appeared to each of them differently. It was dependent upon what each person 'made up' that thing. All three persons live in the same world (i.e. the physical world), but in another aspect, in the different worlds, i.e. the worlds of their own creation.

### 4.3 Meaning and Dukkha

Man invents and makes up the world. What he does, however, return to him to cause him dukkha and disappointment. It is because when we make up or give meaning to something, we usually want to achieve some aim. So we make up the world according with this aim. If the world does not become as we wish, we have dukkha.

Suppose a man has fallen in love with a woman, Duangkamol. In reality she is just a human being like other girls. By herself, she is nothing. Whatever she will become depends on the strong opinions other people have on her and consequently 'make up' her to be this or that. Some may take her as a friend; some, a sister. This man, however, sees her as his beloved girlfriend. In fact, being a friend, a sister, or a beloved, is not a characteristic inherent in her. By herself she is nothing. This man, however, gives her the meaning of 'beloved-ness'. He 'makes' her into something, that is, a 'beloved girl'. Here making does not mean creating her flesh and body. It only means causing her to become 'my beloved Duangkamol', in the same way as an artist makes a bird by carving a piece of stone. The artist has created a bird. It does not mean that he has created the material part of this piece of stone. It merely means that he has created the form of bird, or has given some meaning, that is, 'bird-ness', to the stone; or making a stone-bird.

<sup>18</sup> Müller, F. Max (tr.), *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. X, Part I, in Hamilton, Clarence H. (ed.), *Buddhism: A Religion of Infinite Compassion*, New York, The Liberal Arts Press, 1952, p.64.

Before this man met Duangkamol, or having met her but he has not been in love with her yet, she meant nothing to him. To be precise we have to say that her existence or non-existence affected him nothing. *For him*, there was no Duangkamol. She might have got a big fortune or a bad fate or made sweet eyes at any man. This did not affect him. He felt neither pleased nor sorry, neither happy nor unhappy, for whatever happened to her. This was because she did not exist in his world. As soon as he began to be attracted to her, she then became a part of the 'world' *for him*. He thus created the world by giving her some meaning, by making up her as 'beloved Duangkamol'. After this creating, whatever would happen to her or whatever she would do would affect him, because she had already been attached to his world.

Before this man was in love with her, whatever happened to her or whatever behaviors she acted, whether good or bad, would never affect him. He would look at them as ordinary happenings which could happen to anybody. He saw things as they really were, without taking as his possession. As soon as he began to be attracted to her, she then was not the old Duangkamol. He created her his 'beloved', and at the same time aimed at something, that is, expecting her to be or to do one thing or another. For example, he might expect her good fortune, good health, and real care for him. These expectations occurred at the same moment he gave her the meaning of 'his beloved'. As soon as he created 'beloved-ness' to her, he set a purpose together with all the means to achieve it for her. He separated her from others by giving her the 'beloved-ness' in the similar way that he set the specific purpose for her, and not for others. This means that other people had not come into his world. But Duangkamol did. The grasping has already happened in him.

Before giving her the meaning and expecting something for or from her, he would not be happy or unhappy for whatever occurred to her. Once giving the meaning to her and expecting her to have a certain way of life, he would suffer if she did not become as he expected. This is plainly natural. One is unhappy when things go in the opposite direction from his expectation. When Duangkamol was made up his 'beloved', the relationship between she and he was of twofold. In one sense, she had become a part of his world. In another sense, she was still the old person, belonging to the real world, the world that existed and was moving according to the law of nature. In the former aspect, coming to be a part of his world, what would happen to her could cause him happy or unhappy. In the latter, he could not control what would happen to her as he wished. It, however, affected him directly. This is to say, therefore, that his happiness and unhappiness depended upon what would happen to her, which was beyond his control. Here is the genuine root of dukkha. Dukkha arises from giving meaning to things or making up things. Without these, dukkha would never be possible. The possibility or impossibility of dukkha is under our control. To create the world is to create the possibility of dukkha. Of course, giving meaning to things sometimes brings happiness, since sometimes things go along with our expectation. But while one is waiting one always feels anxious, and dukkha will arise undoubtedly. Therefore, giving meanings to things must always be followed with dukkha, one kind or another. The Buddha gives an analogy:

"Monks, it is like a man, passionately in love with a woman, his desire acute, his longing acute. He might see that woman standing and talking, joking and laughing with another man... Would it not be that grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair did not rise

up in that man when he saw that woman standing and talking, joking and laughing with another man?"

"Yes, revered sir."

"What is the reason for this?"

"It is that that man is passionately in love with that woman, his desire acute... Therefore, grief... rise up in him."

"But then, monks, that man might think thus: 'I am passionately in love with this woman, my desire acute,... grief,... lamentation... rise up in me when I see this woman standing and talking, joking and laughing with another man. Suppose I were to get rid of my desire and attachment for that woman?' So he may get rid of his desire and attachment for that woman. After a time he may see that woman standing and ... laughing with another man. What do you think about this? Would it not be that grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair did not rise up in that man on seeing that woman standing and talking, joking and laughing with that other man?"

"No, revered sir."<sup>19</sup>

This is to say that it is uncertain what she would do. She might show her feeling of liking or disliking this man or that man. Whether this uncertainty would affect him or not was up to him. If he made up some meaning to her, thereby creating his commitment to her. Then whatever she did or whatever happened to her would have to bind him also. This tie might cause dukkha. We can therefore say that dukkha is originated from man himself, from his creating 'the world'. And man gets the result of his own creation.

#### 4.4 The Meaning of the World and Being 'Mine'

The meanings which man gives to things are not, in fact, intrinsic. Properties of things may be different, for example, ice is cold; fire is hot; sugar is sweet; lemon is sour; etc. But inherently everything has one common property, that is, impermanence. Things always change, nothing is permanent. This impermanence is the important cause of dukkha. It could not affect us if we do not create 'the world'. As a matter of fact, our creation would not expose us to dukkha if we do not create it as 'mine'.

Suppose we walk into a room and see something. We say to ourselves 'yes, a table'. If at that moment you do not want to write a book, or to find some place to put your things on, or to find something on which you can sit to have a meal, etc. That is even though you call it 'a table', it is just a calling. You do not intend to use it for doing something. So it makes no difference whether a name is given or not. If, however, you want at that time to put down some heavy thing you carry, the given name 'table' immediately gets its meaning. It becomes the thing that I may put something on. You have made it 'my table'. You may not utter that word, but in your mind that is its meaning. That is you have grasped it as 'mine', at least at the moment when you want to put something on. Suppose you do not carry anything, your legs, however, are being tired. There is no chair around. When you see something in the room, you may say 'yes, a table'; but in fact what is in your mind is 'yes, a chair' (with or without your awareness). And not only that, there is another meaning, more important, follows: 'for me'.

This applies also to our example, a man and a girl named Duangkamol. When he calls her 'beloved', he may perhaps just call her so but in his heart he does not really feel so. This calling causes nothing to happen. He may even say sweet words to her. But if they are not from his real feeling, she is of equal worth with other girls, or other existing

<sup>19</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III, p.11-12.

things. On the contrary, if he does not call her 'beloved', but she is his real heart's desire, it may be said that he already creates her 'my' beloved completely.

Therefore dukkha does not arise just because we create the world or give meaning to the world, but because we create it as 'mine'. If we only see trees, mountains, houses, women, clothes, etc. without taking them as ours or for us, it could be said that we see things as they really are. That is, seeing that they come to be, decay, and perish according to their natures. Whenever we see them as 'mine', we do not see them as they really are. We see and fasten on something that does not exist in those things, namely, 'being mine'. The Buddha says:

"Rahula, ... just these are the element of extension. By means of perfect intuitive wisdom it should be seen of this as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self... the liquid element. By means of perfect intuitive wisdom it should be seen of this as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self... the element of heat. By means of perfect intuitive wisdom it should be seen of this as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self... the element of motion. By means of perfect intuitive wisdom it should be seen of this as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self." <sup>20</sup>

A contradiction arises when we take something as mine. Because after creating the meaning to it as mine, that thing has two opposite characteristics. In reality it does not belong to me, but by our making it does. As it belongs to me, what happens to it always affects me. But as it does not belong to me, I cannot control it as I wish. Yet I expect it to be as I wish. This contradiction causes dukkha. Therefore we

"should have no conceit of being the all or in the all or by way of the all. He should not think 'The all is mine.' Thus having no such conceits, he grasps not at anything at all in the world. Being free from grasping he is not troubled. Being untroubled, he himself is by himself set free. Thus he realizes: 'Destroyed is rebirth. Lived is the righteous life. Done is the task....'" <sup>21</sup>

#### 4.5 'Mine' and 'I'

When we give meaning to things, they become 'my world'. The problems are: what is the origin of this giving meaning? How do 'my beloved', 'my house', and 'my whisky', etc., arise?

"If, monks, there were Self, could it be said: 'It belongs to my self?'"

"Yes, Lord."

"Or, monks, if there were what belongs to Self, could it be said: 'It is my self?'"

"Yes, Lord." <sup>22</sup>

This means that my self and what belongs to my self are inseparable. There cannot be 'my beloved', or 'my house'; if self never comes up. Moreover, 'I' could not arise alone. Whenever there is I, there must be 'this is mine', whether this may be a house, a beloved, or anything else. It does not mean that 'I' comes up at the first moment and then grasp something to be 'my table' in the second moment. The case is rather that when a thing is created as 'my table', 'I' arises at the same time. Similarly, when 'I' occurs, the idea 'this is mine' immediately arises at the same moment. Nothing happens before or after something.

<sup>20</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. II, p.92-93.

<sup>21</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part IV, p.38.

<sup>22</sup> *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. I, p.177.

Suppose we are watching a television, we just follow a program continuously. The feelings that this is 'I' and that is 'my television' may not occur. Suppose children who are playing with each other in the house accidentally throw a piece of brick at the television set and it breaks the glass screen. Our TV watching is suddenly interrupted. The idea that 'the television is broken' comes. If this idea is all that really happens, we would feel nothing unless what really rises up in my mind is 'my television is broken'. Usually these are the feelings that happen: 'this is my television' and 'I am this'. Both arise simultaneously and inseparably. Whenever there is 'my thing', there must usually be 'I'. And 'I' occurs only when there occurs the grasping of something as mine.

In other words, we can say that in the real sense 'my world' and 'I' is the same thing viewed only from the different perspectives. The newer and the more expensive the television is, the stronger the feelings 'my television' and 'I am this' are. If the television could feel, it would suffer as much as 'I' do. If it was old and almost of no value, the feelings of 'my television' and also 'I' would not be so strong. The intensity of giving the meaning is in proportion with the intensity of the arising of 'I'. Whenever there is the world, there is self. Whenever there is no world, there is no self. Ānanda once asked the Buddha what is the meaning of the void of the world, how it happens. The Buddha says:

"Because it is void of self or of what belongs to self therefore 'the world is void' is said, Ānanda. And what is it that is void of self or of what belongs to self? Eye... Ear... Nose... Tongue... Body... Mind is void of self or of what belongs to self... visible objects... sounds... odours... flavours... tangible objects... ideas are void of self or of what belongs to self. Eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, mind consciousness is void of self or of what belongs to self. Eye contact... mind contact is void of self or of what belongs to self... any feeling that arises born of eye contact... mind contact, whether pleasant or painful... is also void of self or of what belongs to self. Therefore 'the world is void' is said."<sup>23</sup>

The word 'world' in the passage above does not mean all material objects in the universe. The world here means the world which each person creates as his, i.e., the world he gives meaning and value. In short, it means 'my world'. The world in this sense is the world that causes human suffering. It is the world created by man and can be destroyed by man. Since it arises from the idea of self, it therefore ceases when this thought ceases. When self is born of eye, or ear, or nose, or tongue, or body, or mind contact with external objects, the world also is born. If self perishes, the world perishes. In other words, whenever 'I' comes to exist, the world comes to exist. When 'I' ceases, the world ceases. Here the world means 'my world'.

#### 4.6 The Origination of the Idea of 'I'

We shall discuss next how 'I' which is the cause of the world is originated. To ask exactly, how does a misconception of self arise? Because according to Buddhism, there is in reality no self, but it is created and then grasped by man.

We have said that man is composed of five components, called five khandhas. Man has a body, and when his body comes into contact with external things, consciousness called viññāna begins. When he is conscious of something, he has at the same time a feeling called vedanā. Then there is a recognition called saññā, and finally a gathering and an accumulation of all past experiences in order to form mental activities called saṅkhāra. Each of these five khandhas comes and goes under external conditions without having its

<sup>23</sup> Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (trans.), *The Path of Discrimination*, Oxford, The Pāli Text Society, 1991, p.356.

own being. When they are all combined, they harmonize and cause the experience of life. Looking from outside, this experience is a normal phenomenon like others in the universe, which comes and goes according to the law of nature. But looking from inside, it is a feeling, i.e. pleased, displeased or indifferent. Suppose we are a scientist or a psychologist watching a man's behaviors. We saw him take some sweet in his mouth and ate it, and said 'delicious' with a smile. If we have a proper instrument, we might see the mechanical process that worked within his physiological body while he was eating. Everything that happened to him, viewed from an outsider like us, is merely a sequence of phenomena according to a conditioned arising like other things around us. But suppose that we were the one who was eating that sweet. If our body was in the same physiological state as he was, phenomena which happened to us would be the same as those happening to him. The difference was that the meaning of the phenomena changed. When we watched others, we ourselves and the phenomena were two detached things. We were the watcher. The phenomena were something that was watched. If we were, however, the one who was eating, it was quite difficult to detach ourselves from the phenomena, though they were similar to those happenings to others. We are now the one who 'experiences' these phenomena. Those phenomena which happened to other people were neutral for us. When they happened to us, however, they made us pleased or displeased, happy or unhappy; depending on the circumstances at that time. Because these experiences had several times made us happy, we were sometimes misled to believe that happiness is permanent. Grasping then arises.

"If the body were thus entirely painful, fallen upon pain, beset with pain, untouched by pleasure, beings would not thus take delight in the body. But whereas the body is pleasant, fallen upon pleasure, untouched by pain, therefore beings take delight in the body. ...If feeling...perception...the activities... consciousness were thus entirely painful,...beings would not thus take delight in feeling...perception...the activities...consciousness..."<sup>24</sup>

Having experienced happiness frequently, we are accustomed to it. We are then misled to assume that what we will experience in the future will continue the same. This supposition causes a misunderstanding that things which make us happy and we who experience happiness will also be the same. In other words, we believe in the state of permanence and think that all outer things are unchanging. To guarantee the everlasting happiness, we also believe that the components which make us up are lasting too. This is ignorance. When asked what ignorance is and how it happens, the Buddha answers:

"Herein, brother, the untaught manyfolk know not as it really is that 'the nature of body is to come to pass! The nature of body is to come to pass!' "They know not as it really is that 'the nature of body is to pass away! The nature of body is to pass away!"

So with feeling, perception, the activities, and consciousness --- they know not as it really is that "...is to come to pass and to pass away!"<sup>25</sup>

Ignorance is a false belief. It is the belief that five khandhas are permanent. This view leads to grasp five khandhas as real. This grasping is the base for the future happiness, and also the base on which misconception in self arises. So we can say that when we have ignorance that both external objects and five khandhas, which are the components of life, are permanent, this leads us to create some idea in our mind. This idea is created in order to be the center or the owner of experiences. It is called 'ahāṅkāra' or 'mamaṅkāra', which means 'I' and 'mine'. This idea is not caused from nothing but from

<sup>24</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part III, p.61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p.146.



man's habit of obtaining happiness and pleasure from external things. It is created to be the foundation of our future experiences. Nevertheless, it is in fact an empty idea void of real content.

The feelings that 'I am this' and 'this is mine' are the causes of this idea. Life is different from non-living things in this respect. Rocks and stones also have relations with outer things, i.e. something happens to them. However, they do not perceive, feel, and neither are pleased nor displeased. Therefore, the idea 'I' is not created in them. But living things, though they have bodies which are composed of the same elements as external objects, have a special property: perceptible, or they are 'saviññānaka', that is conscious bodies, called 'saviññānaka kaya'. The idea 'I' or 'mine' could occur in this body. When the Buddha was asked how there would be no ahankāra' or 'mamankāra, he said:

"The well-taught Ariyan disciple does regard body, feeling, perception, the activities, consciousness thus: 'this is not mine, this am not I, this is not the Self of me.' Thus with right insight he beholds things as they really are. Thus should one know, thus should one see, so that in this body, together with its inner consciousness, and likewise in all outward objects, there be no idea of 'I' or 'mine,' no leanings to conceit therein." <sup>26</sup>

#### 4.7 'I' and Five Grasping Khandhas

The view that there is 'I' separated from others is called Sakkāyadiṭṭhi. In Rhys Davids' Pāli-English Dictionary this word is analysed into 'sat' (real) and 'kāya' (body). Human body is a distinctive source in separating this man and that man. Each man has a particular shape different from others. Therefore, human body misleads us to think that each man has his own being (sat). This gives rise to the idea of individuality. Individuality means a unique state, that is, each man is distinct, differentiated from others. In short, it is the state of being 'I'.

Sakkāyadiṭṭhi arises from grasping, that is, grasping to things in the external world. This grasping arises simultaneously with grasping to our self, i.e., grasping to five khandhas:

"What, brethren, is the separate called sakkāya (the person-pack)? It is the five groups based on grasping. What five? The group based on body-grasping, that based on feeling-grasping, on perception-grasping, on the activities-grasping, on consciousness-grasping. This is called the separate of sakkāya." <sup>27</sup>

Grasping results from the misunderstanding about the truth of life. The enlightened one sees that five khandhas which compose our life are impermanent and not self. Each khandha is not self and when combined together does not produce anything which can be called self either. People, however, still believe it does. In reality it is merely an empty idea. This idea is sakkāyadiṭṭhi. It will not occur if man lives with truth. But since man frequently experiences pleasure, it makes him grasp that it is permanent. In the combination of five khandhas, if there is no grasping there will be no sakkāyadiṭṭhi or the belief that 'I am this'. If grasping comes, the feeling that 'I am this' or sakkāyadiṭṭhi would arise at the same time. It could therefore be said that sakkāya or my individual 'I' is the same as five grasping khandhas or five khandhas that man clings to.

Therefore five khandhas and five grasping khandhas are different. This difference is significant. Phrasrivisuddhimolī compares five khandhas to lives, and five grasping

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.134.

khandhas, lives with problems.<sup>28</sup> Here problems mean dukkha. Where there is life there is five khandhas. Each man must have a body, feeling, and can perceive. If he does not grasp these as his self, or sakkāyaditṭhi does not occur, his life will be without dukkha. An arahant still eats, drinks, wears clothes, sits and acts like ordinary people. He, because of not having a false belief, does not have grasping, and consequently is free from dukkha. It means that five khandhas which compose his life are without grasping. Most common people's lives, however, are not so 'pure'. They are still craving and then have clinging. Dukkha therefore becomes their problem. The five khandhas of these lives are not 'pure' but mixed with grasping. The Buddha teaches the differentiation between five khandhas and five grasping khandhas as follow:

"I will teach you, brethren, the five factors and the five factors that have to do with grasping. And what are the five factors? All body, be it past, future or present, inward or outward, ... that is called the body-factor. Every feeling, every perception, all the activities ... every consciousness, be it past, future or present ... these five are called the five factors.

And what, brethren, are the five factors that have to do with grasping? Every body, be it past, future or present, inward or outward, ... is a co-āsava, and has to do with grasping. That is called the body-factor. Every feeling, every perception, all the activities.... Whatsoever consciousness, be it past, future or present ... inward or outward... is a co-āsava, and has to do with grasping. These are called the fivefold mass of factors that have to do with grasping."<sup>29</sup>

The question now is: how do the grasping khandhas arise? The answer says that it arises from craving (desire and lust):

"... These five grasping-groups, in what are they rooted?"

"These five grasping-groups have their root in desire."

"This same grasping, --- is it those five grasping-groups, or is grasping something apart from those five groups?"

"No indeed, brother, this same grasping is not those five grasping-groups, nor yet is it something apart from those five groups. But where there is desire and lust, there also is grasping."<sup>30</sup>

Five grasping khandhas is the root of the idea 'I am this'. In other words, where there is five grasping khandhas there is 'I'. Where there is only five khandhas, though each khandha does its activities but it does without grasping; without taking that this is the world; this is mine, there is only a peaceful life with no 'I'. 'I' and grasping cannot be separated:

"As to this, 'I am,' friend Khemaka, of which you speak, what do you mean by this 'I am'? Do you speak of 'I am' as body, or as distinct from body? As feeling, or as distinct from feeling? As perception... as the activities... as consciousness, or as distinct from consciousness?..."

"No, friends, I do not say 'I am body' or feeling, or perception or the activities or consciousness, or as distinct from these and from consciousness. Though I see that I have got the idea of 'I am' in the five grasping-groups, ... just as in the case of the scent of a blue lotus or a white lotus, --- if one should say : 'the scent belongs to the petals or the colour or the fibres of it,' would he be rightly describing the scent?"

"Surely not."

"Then how would he be right in describing it?"

"Surely by speaking of the scent of the flower."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Phrasrivisuddhimōlī, *Buddhadhamma*, Thai Wattana Panich, 1971, p.16.

<sup>29</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part III, p.41-42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibids.*, p.85.

This means that grasping is fundamental for the arising of attā or I. Five khandhas without grasping is not self. Grasping and self is the same thing. Grasping, however, cannot stand by itself. It must be based on five khandhas: “*Body, feeling, perception, the activities, consciousness is a thing that makes for grasping. The desire and lust therein are grasping.*”<sup>32</sup> The conglomerate of five khandhas is then the foundation of grasping. My self, therefore, is the same with five grasping khandhas. Each khandha cannot give rise to grasping. The gathering of five khandhas can. For example, if there is only shape or body, there would be no perception. Where there is no perception there cannot be grasping. Even there is perception but no feeling, grasping cannot arise, either. It is like the fragrance of a flower. It could arise only when all conditions or parts of the flower come together to form a whole flower. In other words, the base on which the fragrance of the flower stands is not each of these parts, but the whole flower. Similarly, the base on which grasping stands must be the conglomerate of all five khandhas.

#### 4.8 ‘I’ and ‘Three Unwholesome Roots’

Grasping which is founded on five khandhas means taking things not just taking without meaning, but taking as mine. If man does not believe that there is self standing behind perception, grasping would not arise. In fact, grasping to the external world and grasping to the internal self occur simultaneously. We can even say that they are the same phenomenon. As said earlier, where there is I, there is my world. Where there is my world there is I. The next question is what else besides grasping can be the originating cause of ‘I’, which in fact does not exist. The Buddha says:

“Monks, there are these three originating causes of action. What three? Lust, malice and delusion. An act performed in lust, born of lust, originating in lust, arising from lust, has its fruit wherever one’s personal self is reborn. Wherever that act comes to fruition, there one experiences the fruit thereof, whether it come into bearing in this very life or in some other phase of existence. An act performed in malice ... an act performed under delusion, born of delusion, originating under delusion, arising from delusion, has its fruit wherever one’s personal self is reborn. Wherever that act comes to fruition, there one experiences the fruit thereof, whether it come into bearing in this very life or in some other phase of existence. Just as seeds that are unbroken, unspoiled by wind and heat, capable of sprouting, and well embedded in a good field, planted in properly prepared soil, --- if the sky rain down steadily those seeds come to growth, increase, abundance; ...

Monks, there are these three originating causes of action. What three? Freedom from lust, malice and delusion. An act not performed in lust, not born of lust, not originating in lust, not arising from lust, --- since lust has vanished, that act is abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, made unable to come again, of a nature not to arise again in future time. An act not performed in malice ... not performed under delusion, that act is abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, made unable to come again, of a nature not to arise again in future time. Suppose seeds that are unbroken, unspoiled by wind and heat, capable of sprouting, well embedded, and a man burns them with fire, and having done so reduces them to ashes. Having done that he winnows the ashes in a strong wind or lets them be carried off by a swiftly flowing stream, --- those seeds would be cut off at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, made unable to come again, of a nature not to arise again in future time....”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.109-110.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.142-143.

<sup>33</sup> Woodward, F.L, (trans.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I, The Pāli Text Society, 1989, p.117-118.

There are two sources of human action. An action may originate from unwholesome roots (lust, malice and delusion), or from wholesome roots (no lust, non-malice, non-delusion). If from the former, the idea of self arises. If from the latter, the idea of self does not arise. The idea of self as mine comes from different originating causes. Here is an explanation of the arising of self from one aspect, that is, from three unwholesome roots: lust, malice, delusion. Lust means desire, wish, greedy. Lust cannot be separated from being self. Whatever we desire, in what form, more or less, is all directed to 'I'. Acts done from lust are acts that base on self, and at the same time give birth to another self in endless series. Malice means anger or hatred. It is also obvious that anger and hatred could not occur without 'I' supporting behind. In daily life our egoistic feeling which arises together with anger is usually stronger than one with lust. It is *I* who is despised, *I* who is reprimanded, *I* who is insulted. So *I* will fight back. Whatever source of my anger or hatred comes from, there must always be 'I' as the center. Delusion means ignorance, illusion, misconception. It also occurs only when there is the feeling 'I' lying behind. Delusion or craziness about anything is only for me. Delusion and being self therefore cannot be separated.

We can consequently say that wherever there is lust, or malice, or delusion, there must always be 'I'. These three are only three different manifestations of 'I'. Where there is without lust, malice, and delusion; there still are acts and five khandhas, though they are without grasping and without the idea 'I'.

Here we can conclude that the existence of 'I' originates from lust, malice and delusion. We can, however, say that grasping is the originating cause of the existence of 'I'. In fact both 'I' and lust-malice-delusion are the same ignorance viewed from different perspectives. This phenomenon happens when man involves himself with the external world, creates the world, gives meaning to it and makes up it *my* world. This is to get himself much involved in what he creates, or speaking plainly, he unites himself with what he gives meaning to. So what happens to it would affect him directly, both positively and negatively; i.e. satisfaction or dissatisfaction, fulfillment or disappointment, happiness or dukkha. In giving meaning to something, we set some aim and expect it to achieve that aim. It however may or may not be as our expectation. If it is, we will be satisfied; if it not, disappointed. In any case, while waiting for the coming result; we should be worried, anxious, that is, dukkha must arise in us. Dukkha, therefore, is inseparable from the existence of 'I'.

#### 4.9 I and Attā

The false belief that there is 'I' is consequently the center and the root of dukkha. The ignorance about 'I' is originated from the ignorance that there is attā. The Buddhist rejection of self or attā is not only rejection or without purpose, but aimed at understanding human life and problems. Some western philosophers also denied self. David Hume, a British philosopher, is the most interesting one. His argument for this rejection is simple. He said that whenever we want to catch a self, we grasp only some perception, or some feeling, or some mental phenomenon. We never find 'something' that stands behind each of them. Self or soul is nothing but these phenomena. It is merely an idea without the original in the world to stand for. It is merely a collection of sense perception and other mental phenomena. Basically, his argument used in refusing self is not much different from the Buddha's. Hume's rejection is the result of his view on the source of knowledge. If Hume's theory of knowledge is accepted, the existence of self

must be inevitably denied. His refusal of self is entailed from his analysis of the nature of human knowledge. It is the final point of the analysis, nothing more.

But Buddhism rejects self in order to suggest some view. The rejection of self is the starting point to understand man's problem of dukkha. Buddhism then does not refuse self merely for the sake of pure knowledge. The problem of self is itself a metaphysical problem, which seems to be almost unrelated to the daily problems of life that are facing human being. Though the Buddha tries to avoid discussing this kind of problems, since they do not concern with the main problems of life, he finds sometimes that it is necessary to do in order to be the ground for a clearer understanding on the connected problems of life. In the *Suttanta Pitaka*, therefore, the non-self is also explained.

In chapter three, the argument for rejecting self might be called a metaphysical reasoning. In metaphysics we use reason for searching an ultimate truth. The metaphysical refusal of self is needed in order to understand that in reality there is no such thing as self. This is about knowledge and understanding. Those who believe in self must also believe in 'I'. Because when one believes in something essential, permanent and eternal, it is natural that one must believe that this self is 'mine'. What the Buddha really wants to deny is rather 'I' or 'mine' than just 'self'. Hume denies self only for the sake of knowledge, but Buddhism refuses self in order to reject 'I', which is the originating cause of dukkha.

Those who read the *Suttanta Pitaka* carefully will find a statement which appears almost everywhere. Usually it appears in the final part of a topic discussed. The statement says "that is not mine, that am I not, that is not my self". No matter what is being explained, such as five khandhas, four great elements, or any other. This statement always appears as the final conclusion. In the researcher's view, this is the heart of Buddhism.

In order to reach the truth: "that is not mine, that am I not, that is not my self", what is needed is the right understanding of the fact that 'self' is merely an illusion, created by man. It is explained in the *Pothapāda Sutta* how this illusion arises. Those who look for self, when asked, do not know what it looks like. It is like someone who leans a ladder against the wall to climb up to a castle, but does not know where the castle is or how it looks like. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu gives a detailed analysis of this rejection.<sup>34</sup>

To believe that 'I am this' is the origin of dukkha. This supposition arises from the illusion of self. 'Self' is a metaphysical concept but 'I' is an ethical one. Metaphysics tries to understand the ultimate reality, which sometimes has nothing related to the daily problems of life. Ethics tries to find what man's good life is. In order to get this we have to understand the nature of life. What is life in reality? Buddhism answers that life is anattā, non-self. This metaphysical truth is so fundamental that it should make us think that to live with the idea of self and consequently 'I', must be to live against the reality. Then conflict must arise, and dukkha must naturally follow. We should, therefore, try to live with no self. This is an ethical suggestion as to how should man live his life. From this point ethics and religion are concerned with the same thing, that is, suggest the better way of living for man. Buddhism is ethics and a religion in this way: it offers the ideal of life. And it is a philosophy by the way it tries to lay the foundation for this ideal by analysing the problem of the real nature of life. The analysis shows that life is without

<sup>34</sup> See Buddhādāsa, *The Problems of God, Karma, and Anattā*, Bangkok, Suvichanont, 1956.

self. When there is no self there is no 'mine'. When there is no 'I', dukkha does not occur. Therefore self, I, and dukkha are all inseparable.

## V. ANATTĀ AND THE PROBLEMS OF NIBBĀNA, KAMMA AND SAMENESS

Dukkha is the fundamental problem of Buddhism. In the last chapter we tried to show how dukkha is related to the problem of attā-anattā. Nevertheless we could also regard other Buddhist concepts as fundamental, for example, nibbāna, because nibbāna is the cessation of dukkha. When we talk about nibbāna we could not avoid talking about dukkha. In other words, our understanding of nibbāna becomes clearer when we talk about dukkha, and dukkha becomes clearer when we talk about attā-anattā. This chapter attempts to show, if we regard nibbāna as fundamental, how the concept of anattā would help us to understand it better. This examination would also be useful to the analysis of dukkha in the last chapter.

We can look at Buddhism from another aspect, by considering the concept of kamma as fundamental. The teaching says that man must get the result (vipāka) of his action (kamma). The result could be happy or unhappy, wholesome or unwholesome. It is the person who reaps the fruit. Here the problems arise. What does it mean by 'reaping the fruit of the act'? How and what fruit? What is the meaning of 'the person' who reaps? Is the reaper the same with the actor or different? This gives rise to another problem, i.e. the problem of sameness.

Both the problems of kamma and sameness cannot be separated from the concept of the truth of life. This is anattā. We shall try to show in this chapter how the concept of anattā is related to the concept of kamma and the problem of sameness.

### 5.1 Anattā and Nibbāna

#### 5.1.1 *The Meaning of Nibbāna*

What is nibbāna? Nibbāna is the state without dukkha, that is, the state of peace. Peace could arise only when there is cessation. This is not the cessation of life, but of defilements (kilesa) and craving (tanha). Sometimes the Buddha teaches that nibbāna is "the destruction of rāga-dosa-moha",<sup>35</sup> that is, a state without lust, hatred and delusion.

Defilements, craving, lust, hatred, and delusion cannot be separated from grasping (upādāna). We have said that five khandhas and five grasping khandhas are different. The former is life, the latter is life with problems or dukkha. Life with problems is life full of grasping, that is, full of lust, malice, and delusion. Five khandhas is different from five grasping khandhas. That means it is possible to live a life without dukkha or without grasping. That life reaches an arahantship, that is, "the destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of illusion."<sup>36</sup>

Sometimes it is explained that "nibbāna has its goal in the deathless, ends in the deathless."<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that nibbāna is something that exists eternally. It is true that 'deathless' means not dying. But here 'deathless' means not relating to time. Mortal things exist only for a time being. Timeless things do not arise and do not cease. When we hold fast to the idea of our self, we have given meaning to the world. And when we

<sup>35</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part IV, p.170.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.171.

<sup>37</sup> Woodward, F.L.(trans.), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part V, The Pāli Text Society, 1994, p.33.

give meaning to the world, we will either face fulfillment or disappointment, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, that is; happiness or dukkha. Neither happiness nor dukkha is permanent, each is not stable or eternal, but changes to and fro. This is the state of becoming and passing away, not that of deathless or permanence. But arahatabhāva or nibbāna is the state of deathless in the sense that one who has attained that state will not change to and fro between dukkha and happiness, fulfillment and disappointment, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, but will be in a state of peace or neutral, not going to and fro between the positive and the negative. It is beyond change, that is, beyond time or not relating to time. In this sense it could be called the deathless.

The Buddha sometimes explains that the path to nibbāna is to enlighten to the truth of the nature of the world and of man:

“Body is impermanent,... consciousness is impermanent. Body is not the Self... Consciousness is not the Self. Impermanent are all compounded things. All conditions are not the Self. Nevertheless, for the calming of all activities, for the giving up of all the bases of birth, for the destruction of craving, for passionlessness, for cessation, for Nibbāna, my heart springs not up within me.”<sup>38</sup>

Knowing things as they really are helps us from believing falsely. Where there is no false belief, there cannot arise grasping.

Nibbāna is clarified by the Buddha in many ways. One crucial and simple way in the researcher’s view is in *Mūla Sutta*:

“Monks, in such a person the evil, demeritorious conditions born of greed are abandoned, cut down at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, made unable to become again. In this very life he lives happily, unharassed, freed from life’s fret and fever, in this very life he is released. .... In such a person the evil, demeritorious conditions born of malice, ... born of delusion are abandoned, cut down at the root, made like a palm-tree stump, made unable to become again, in this very life he lives happily, unharassed, freed from life’s fret and fever, in this very life he is released.”<sup>39</sup>

Greed, malice, delusion are the three roots of evil. We have said that these three unwholesome roots are the origin of the false belief that there is self. The existence of self cannot be separated from the existence of these three defilements. This is because these three are only different phenomena of one and the same feeling called “I”.

In fact we may say that mental phenomena like defilements (āsava), lust, craving, grasping, greed, malice, or delusion are only different manifestations of the feeling “I”. Wherever there is ‘I’, there arise grasping and craving. “I” is the center of these phenomena. In some acts we obviously see that “I” is the originating cause of that act. For example we get angry when we are rebuked for our attitude to take advantage over others. In these acts, “I” stands prominently at the center. In other acts it may seem that “I” is not relevant. But if we look carefully we will find ‘I’ secretly standing behind these acts. For example, we wholeheartedly gave a big sum of money donation to a charity with an intention to help our fellow people. In this act there seems to be no ‘I’, because we did it in order to help others, not for ourselves. Suppose in an annual report of that organization our name is missing from the list of donators, maybe by careless typing or some other reasons. Anyway we are upset. Here ‘I’ that was hidden comes out. At the

<sup>38</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part III, p.112.

<sup>39</sup> *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. I, p.182.

time when we made donation, our feeling, on the surface, was for others. But in reality, 'I' was standing secretly there.

Nibbāna is a state without dukkha, and dukkha will cease when defilements, craving, grasping, lust, greed, malice and delusion disappear. These phenomena will not appear when the feeling 'I' does not appear. The feeling 'I' disappears when the false idea of 'self' does not appear. Therefore nibbāna and the state of anattā is the same thing. Wherever there is anattā there is nibbāna. Wherever there is nibbāna there is anattā. In particular, nibbāna is the same thing as the state without 'I', or the state of knowing the truth: "that is not mine, that I am not, that is not myself."

If we understand nibbāna as the state without 'I', and understand the state without 'I' as the state without defilements, craving, greed, malice, and delusion, etc. An experience of nibbāna could happen in our daily life. It is the liberation from attachment which has 'I' as the center. This attachment is what ordinary people call kilesa-tanhā:

"By comprehending all the world, in all the world just as it is, from all the world is he released. In all the world he clings to naught. 'Tis he who loosens every bond: by him is reached the perfect peace. Nibbāna that is void of fear...." <sup>40</sup>

Therefore we can say that nibbāna is the liberation from 'I'. We call it the liberation because people in general are still swimming in the whirlpool of "I". Let us explain the meaning of the liberation from 'I'. We shall first examine how our acts (physical, verbal, and mental), having 'I' as the center, are. Why do they arise? We shall find that for intentional or purposive acts the beginning and the end are the same. Acts arising from 'I' will have "I" as their goal also. Suppose we walk from home to school, the school is our destination. But if we ask what causes us to walk, the answer is our presence at school does. In other words, our presence at school is both the beginning and the end of the walking. In the same way, acts having 'I' as the originating cause will also have 'I' as their end. That is, the acts arise 'for me'.

The word 'for me' is broad. To be more specific, it may mean 'for my eyes, for my noses, for my shirt, for my children, for my job, for my reputation,' etc. In a word, for everything that is 'mine'. Therefore the liberation from 'I' means the liberation from acts having 'mine' as the aim.

According to this view, nibbāna is merely a state that does not have 'I' as its aim, or to make it simpler, it is the state of selflessness. Therefore it is possible to experience nibbāna in this present world of daily life. Nibbāna is peace, and peace arises when 'I' disappears. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu explains thoroughly that nibbāna is something we can experience now, not necessary after death. He says:

"... To say reaching nibbāna only after death is not correct.... Nibbāna is here and now...."

There is another meaning of 'death': Besides bodily death, or dead body in a coffin, here we have death of 'I' without bodily death. This is another meaning of death, to think through ignorance about 'I' and 'mine'. This thinking about 'I' and 'mine' can die.... If 'death' here means the latter sense, then saying reaching nibbāna only after death is also correct, that is, whenever 'I' dies, there is nibbāna." <sup>41</sup>

### 5.1.2 *Nibbāna and A Psychological State*

If we understand nibbāna in this sense, nibbāna is a psychological state, not a metaphysical one. A metaphysical entity is beyond knowledge by learning or training. It

<sup>40</sup> Woodward, F.L.(trans.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol.II, The Pāli Text Society, 1992, p.25-26.

<sup>41</sup> Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *The Buddha Who Is Always With Us---Nibbāna Now and After Death*, 1971, p.103.



is beyond nature. To reach it requires a special method which may not accord with causes and conditions. It is suddenly and immediately self-caused. God understood by some group of people is this kind of entity. But a psychological state can be known and experienced by training, and the enlightenment is not possible without cause, but must be experienced in accordance with causes and conditions:

“There are, householders, some recluses and brahmans who are of these views: ‘There is no cause, no reason for the defilement of creatures, creatures are defiled without cause, without reason. There is no cause, no reason for the purification of creatures, creatures are purified without cause, without reason. There is not energy, there is not human vigour, there is not human effort; creatures, all breathing things, all beings, all living things are without power, without strength, without energy, bent by fate, chance and nature, they experience pleasure and pain, this is to be expected for them : Having laid aside the three good things : right conduct of body, right conduct of speech, right conduct of thought, and taking up these three bad things : wrong conduct of body, wrong conduct of speech, wrong conduct of thought, they practice them. ... And because there is indeed cause, the view of anyone that there is not cause is a false view of his ....

Householders, there are some recluses and brahmans who speak in direct opposition to these recluses and brahmans, and who say this : ‘ There is cause, there is reason for the defilement of creatures, creatures are defiled with cause, with reason. There is cause, there is reason for the purification of creatures, creatures are purified with cause, with reason. There is strength, there is energy, there is human vigour, there is human effort ; ... Having laid aside these three bad things : wrong conduct of body, wrong conduct of speech, wrong conduct of thought, and taking up these three good things : right conduct of body, right conduct of speech, right conduct of thought, they practise them. And because there is indeed cause, the view of anyone that there is cause is a right view of his.<sup>42</sup>

This means that the defilement and purification must arise from some causes, from accepting the truth first and then practice it with effort step by step. Purification here means being without defilement, which means nibbāna. We have already known that the path to nibbāna is the eightfold path, which can be divided into 3 ways: morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā). These three support one another on the path to nibbāna, which is nothing but the peace of mind. The eightfold path, which consists of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, is not a marvelous or miraculous method. It is a process of gradually reducing one’s selfishness. Nibbāna or peace is the result of the effort after training, and consequently knowing the truth. Nibbāna is therefore a psychological state. A psychological state could be known and attained without any special faculty. If Nibbāna were metaphysical, the Buddha would have mentioned the special faculty for experiencing nibbāna. It was not mentioned at all. Only is given an analogy that nibbāna must be known by noble eyes or wisdom eyes.

An example may help. Suppose there are 3 persons: A, B, and C. Each of them donated the same amount of money to a charity. Their purposes, though, are different. A really wanted to give beneficial things to others. B wanted reputation. C wanted reputation and also expected the organization to pay him back by purchasing goods from his company. When the organization’s annual report had been published, the names of all these three were missing from the list of donators. It was a printing mistake. C was very angry, because the donation did not lead him to the expected aim for “my company” and

<sup>42</sup> *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. II, p.76-78.

“my reputation”. B was a little bit displeased but not as much as C. He thought his name should at least be shown on the list. As for A, he was neutral when reading the report, because he did not expect anything from his donation except helping his fellow people.

After reading the annual report these 3 persons felt differently. We can say that each of them had different psychological experiences. C was in the state of ‘anger’, B, ‘disappointment’, A, ‘peace’. C was in that state because his act was motivated by ‘I’. In his act the feeling of ‘I’ is strong. ‘I’ was both the beginning and the end of his act. The case of B is similar to that of C. The only difference is that the feeling of ‘I’ present in his act is less strong than C. His dukkha was therefore less intense. C was closer to fire (that is, ‘I’), so he suffered more. B was a little far from fire, so he suffered less. As regards A, his donation was not centered on ‘I’, the root and the end of his act. So when ‘I’ did not appear on the list, he was neither sorry nor disappointed nor angry at all. Whether there is a person like A is a factual problem. But if there is, it may be said that at that moment he had experienced a psychological state, namely, ‘peace’. The writer believed that this state is nibbāna. Because whenever ‘I’ does not stand as the center of his act, there is no dukkha, or there is peace. Whenever ‘I’ is standing there, there is dukkha, more or less depending on the intensity of the feeling ‘I am this’. Both peace and dukkha are psychological states, though the opposite ones.

Nibbāna is the state of liberation from ‘I’, which is a psychological state. This liberation may be permanent or temporary. The Buddha and the arahants are liberated permanently. After enlightenment all of their acts, looked from outside, are like others’. But inside, they are essentially acts without greed, malice, and delusion. They are acts having no ‘I’ as their center. According to this interpretation, nibbāna can appear and disappear and then reappear for common people. For nibbāna is merely liberation from selfishness. There may be liberation in this act, but there might not be liberation from the feeling for myself in the past act. Therefore their liberation would not be permanent like those of the arahants, who are absolutely liberated.

### 5.1.3 *Nibbāna and Liberation*

It is well known that Buddhism teaches man to destroy craving in order to be free from dukkha. Craving is generally understood as desire. But to look very closely, craving is not just desire. It is an unwholesome desire, that is, desire ‘for me’. Buddhism does not teach us to destroy a wholesome desire, such as trying to do benefit to others; helping unselfishly those who are weaker in intellect, wealth, and power; or sacrificing for public good. The proof can be shown from the Buddha’s act, he traveled from place to place to render an intellectual assistance to mankind. To say, therefore, that Buddhism teaches man to destroy desire is correct. But desire here means desire ‘for me’. What the Buddha wants us to destroy is the desire originated from selfishness.

If we understand nibbāna in this way, that is, a state opposite to or a state without the feeling ‘for me’. When Buddhism teaches that nibbāna is man’s highest moral value to seek for, this does not mean that Buddhism teaches man to escape from the material world, from the world of shapes, tastes, smells, sounds, and touch. We have eyes, ears, noses, tongues, bodies, and mind to contact with the outside objects. This we cannot escape. What we can escape is grasping to the idea that: “that is mine, I am that, that is my self.” It is up to us to escape from it or not. Let us consider the following statements:

“Uttara, does Pārāsariya the brahman teach the development of the sense-organs to his disciples?”

“Good Gotama, the Brahman Pārāsariya teaches the development of the sense-organs to his disciples.”

“But in what way, Uttara, does Pārāsariya the Brahman teach the development of the sense-organs to his disciples?”

“As to this, one should not see material shapes with the eye, one should not hear sounds with the ear. It is thus that the Brahman Pārāsariya teaches the development of the sense-organs to his disciples.”

“This being so, Uttara, then according to what Pārāsariya the Brahman says a blind man must have his sense organ developed, a deaf man must have his sense-organ developed. For a blind man, Uttara, does not see material shape with his eye, nor does a deaf man hear a sound with his ear.”<sup>43</sup>

From this we see that the Buddha does not teach us to close our eyes, ears, etc. or to ignore what is going on in the world. He only teaches us to be mindful, that is, not to create ‘I’ as the center of binding to worldly things. If you do, you will have dukkha. The Buddha teaches man to be neutral. It does not mean by this that we should not do anything. To be neutral here means not to hold fast to ‘my self’. Without grasping to my self, there will be no grasping to my world. Peace will come. If nibbāna will arise only when eyes do not see, ears do not hear, etc., wooden sticks and bricks would all attain nibbāna, because these things have no faculties to perceive the external world. But nibbāna means to live among shapes, tastes, smells, sounds, and touch, with impartiality or with mindfulness:

“There are Six Things that are to be developed to pass: the six chronic states. Herein a brother on occasion of seeing with his eye, hearing with his ear, smelling with his nose, tasting with his tongue, touching with his body; as well as on that of any impression or idea, is neither delighted nor displeased, but remains equable, mindful and deliberate.”<sup>44</sup>

Happiness and sorrow arise when there is clinging to ‘I’. An act done by having ‘I’ as the center will have ‘I’ waiting for the result of that act. The result may be positive or negative. If positive, happiness arises; if negative, sorrow. Neutrality towards acts and results happens when there is no ‘I’ as the origin of the act or as the one who gets the result. Therefore whatever the result is, positive or negative, does not cause any emotional change. This is detachment. But it does not mean doing nothing. It means that our acts or our attempt to do something is not motivated by ‘for me’. Man has the faculties to relate with the outside world. This relation is inevitable as long as he is still alive. But it is twofold: a loser’s relation or a winner’s relation. To live as a loser is to live a life with attachment, grasping to ‘I’ and ‘for me’. He is then swung back and forth by shapes, tastes, smells, etc.; he is not himself, but a slave of the external world; in a sense, a slave to ‘I’. To live as a winner is to free from ‘I’. Being free from ‘I’; shapes, tastes, smells, etc., cannot swing us or cling to us. We can say that we live in the world but conquer it, or is its master. It is in fact to conquer ‘I’:

“Just as, brethren, a dark blue lotus or a white lotus, born in the water, come to full growth in the water, rises to the surface and stands unspotted by the water, even so, brethren the Tathāgata having been born in the world, having come to full growth in the world, passing beyond the world, abides unspotted by the world.”<sup>45</sup>

The Buddha who attained nibbāna did not escape from the world. He still ate, drank and performed activities like others. But there has been no ‘I’ in his acts; he therefore has

<sup>43</sup> *The Middle Length Sayings*, III, p.347.

<sup>44</sup> *Dialogues of the Buddha*, III, p. 234, 257.

<sup>45</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part III, p.118.

been in the state of peace. We can say that he is the winner. Though he lived in the world having relations with things in it, he was freed from them, i.e., not affected by changes in the world. He was liberated.

## 5.2 Anattā and the Problem of Kamma

### 5.2.1 *The Meaning of the Past*

It is well known that Buddhism teaches the theory of kamma: you reap what you sow. “According to the seed that’s sown, so is the fruit ye reap therefrom. Dou of good will gather good, dou of evil evil.”<sup>46</sup> Whatever a man becomes is the result of what he did in the past because “deeds are one’s own, beings are heirs to deeds, deeds are matrix.”<sup>47</sup> The Buddhist view on this is related to the teaching that everything that happens must have its cause. Nothing happens out of nothing and everything does not happen from some supernatural power. What we are now is the result of our acts in the past.

The question is what ‘in the past’ here means. How far have we to go back in the past? Past lives may go back to ten, hundreds, or thousands years ago. Or it may mean only this life, and past here is yesterday, the day before yesterday, last year, twenty years ago, or during the childhood. That is, not previous lives but the present life. According to the former sense, acts done in previous lives, and in the past of this present life, are the causes that make us what we are now. But to the latter sense, only acts in the past of a person’s present life are the causes.

If we take the first meaning, we have to accept the idea of rebirth. Rebirth here means: a man who died from sickness or is killed in an accident will be reborn in the new body, but there still exists something which makes him the same person. This belief is yet to be proved by scholarly means. The Buddha himself, when asked, did not explain, because it has nothing to do with destroying man’s dukkha in this present life. Moreover rebirth in this sense seems to be contradictory to the Buddhist rejection of attā. Since rebirth is the belief in soul which goes out from this body to another one.

In the writer’s view, if we accept the foregoing interpretations of anattā and nibbāna, the concepts of kamma and rebirth could be understood in terms of this present life, without referring to those ideas which have not yet been generally accepted, such as the next life or the previous life.

The problem of kamma could not be separated from the problems of nibbāna and anattā. Kamma is a state of not yet attaining nibbāna, a state that still clings to self. We have talked about nibbāna and anattā. Now we will talk about kamma, from the similar point of view with those two problems which we have discussed.

### 5.2.2 *Intention and Act*

The word kamma literally means “act” or “act done”. This term is related to the word ‘vipāka which is translated as ‘fruit’. Wherever there is action (kamma), there is a fruit of the action (vipāka). The fruit or result may be wholesome or unwholesome, that is, good or bad. Good kamma gives rise to good results; bad kamma to bad results. The problem is: what is the difference between the good kamma and the bad one?

“Monks, I say that determinate thought is action. When one determines, one acts by deed. Word or thought.”<sup>48</sup> This means that according to Buddhism, intention is the most

<sup>46</sup> *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, Part I, p.293.

<sup>47</sup> *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III, p.249.

<sup>48</sup> Hare, E.M.(trans.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol.III, The Pāli Text Society, 1988, p.294.

fundamental of an act. It is an essential feature that makes an act meaningful. An act done without intention should not even be called act. Suppose we are sitting for joy on a branch of a tree. Suddenly a storm comes and we are forced to fall down damaging things under the tree. Our fall is without intention. This should not be called our act. If we intend, however, to damage our enemy's property under the tree and jump down, this is our act.

Since intention is the essential part of an act. It determines our act, that is, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. Wholesome acts are acts motivated by good intention, unwholesome acts; bad intention. The former yields wholesome fruits, the latter, unwholesome ones. The problem is: which intention is wholesome? Which intention is unwholesome? Buddhism gives a clear answer to this. The wholesome roots (the origin of goodness) are three, i.e. non-lust, non-malice, and non-delusion. The unwholesome roots (the origin of badness) are also three, i.e. lust, malice and delusion.

“Monks, these are three causes of the origins of actions: lust, malice and delusion. An action done in lust, born of lust, caused by lust, originated by lust is not profitable : it is blameworthy, it has sorrow for its result, it conduces to the arising of further action, not to the ceasing of action. An action done under the influence of malice..., an action done under the influence of delusion ... it is not profitable, it is blameworthy, it has sorrow for its result ...

Monks, these are three causes of actions: absence of lust, absence of malice, absence of delusion. An action done without lust, not caused by lust, not originated by lust is profitable, it is praiseworthy, it has happiness for its result, it conduces to the ending of further action. An action done without malice..., an action done without delusion is profitable, it is praiseworthy, it has happiness for its result....”<sup>49</sup>

The word ‘action’ (kamma) in the above has a neutral meaning. It is not used to mean only a negative side. Kamma may be originated by wholesome intentions, i.e. non-lust, non-malice, and non-delusion; or by unwholesome intentions, i.e. lust, malice, and delusion. These intentions determine the fruits of the acts. Why does the Buddha teach that the roots of unwholesome acts are lust, malice, and delusion? This is because lust, malice and delusion are, in fact, grasping to self or ‘I’. Lust is desire, that is, desire something to be mine (or others’ who are attached to ‘I’). If desire for others or the public, it is not regarded to be lust. Malice is hatred, which cannot arise if things are not divided into ‘this is I’ and ‘this is not-I’. Delusion is ignorance, which cannot happen if there is no ‘I’ being the center of the attachment. (See 4.8)

Therefore good intentions are those that are not originated by lust, malice, and delusion, that is, those that are not aimed at ‘I’. Bad intentions are those that are originated by lust, malice, and delusion, that is, aimed at ‘I’. The fruit or result will be in accord with the intention which is the root of that action.

### 5.2.3 *The Meaning of “You Reap What You Sow”*

This is the real meaning of ‘doing good’ in Buddhism. ‘Doing good’ is doing with good intention. Good intentions are intentions with non-lust, non-malice, or non-delusion. These intentions are intentions not originated by the idea ‘for me’. Bad intentions are intentions caused by the feeling ‘for me’. Both of these intentions are of different degrees, that is, they can be more or less intense.

<sup>49</sup> *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol.I, p.241-242.

Some acts, therefore, may superficially be good. But when we examine the essences of or the intentions behind them, we may find that they are not really good. An actor must receive the result of his intention himself. Let us go back to our example of the donations of A, B, and C. (See 5.1.2.) Suppose that all these three donate the same amount of money to help others. Superficially it may be thought that each of them did what is good equally. That may not be the case, if we look at it more closely.

The act done by A just for helping others is originated by non-lust; i.e. without desire to gain reputation or other things for himself. This is a good intention, for it is not self-directed. 'I' is not the essence or the purpose of the act in this case. But 'others' is. He did not do it for getting something in return. His donation came from pure kindness, without any greed. He did it because he thought it was right. The act was therefore wholesome, or we may say that he was 'doing good'. When it happened that his name was missing from the list in the annual report, he did not feel sorry or disappointed, because it was not his aim. This means that the result that occurred to him was a 'good' result. He got the wholesome fruit, that is, peace. In our daily speech, we say that he 'receives good'.

This is the real meaning of 'receiving good'. According to Buddhism, receiving good does not mean receiving fame for me, a benefit for me, a respect for me, etc. It means no sorrow, no worry, only peace; in short, a sort of experience of nibbāna. One must know only by oneself how these experiences: peace, no worry, no sorrow, are like. Whether there is, or how many there is such a person like A in the world, is another question. In the Buddhist view, a person like A is a good man, and he receives good. Because 'doing good' means doing an act without intention for our own. And 'receiving good' means being at peace, with no worry, and without dukkha. This is an answer to the problem people sometimes argue that doing good does not go with receiving good. Understood in the Buddhist way, this is never possible. Let us now consider C's action.

C's act (donation) was caused by greed. He wanted reputation for him, and profit for his company. This is self-directed intention. This act had 'I' as its essence. If he did not aim at these two benefits, he might not have donated. His donation was not pure because his intention was fundamentally self-directed, mixed with greed. In fact his donation was merely a kind of investment for profit. If he had not 'my' profit as his aim, he might not have donated. From this example, his investment was unexpectedly facing a loss. He did not gain fame and could not make profit from selling goods. He was then unhappy and got dukkha.

Did C do good but did not receive good? No, certainly. C received the fruit of what he did. What did he act? He made a donation. But that is not significant. What is significant is his intention. What was his intention of making donation? If he just really wanted to help others, his donation was good, wholesome. It is 'doing good'. If he did it for himself, for 'I', his donation, though should not be regarded as bad, was not wholesome. It is not 'doing good' in its real sense. He merely invested an amount of money, and an investment implies expecting a profit. When he did not receive a profit, he was disappointed and suffered. This means he was 'not receiving good', he was unhappy and was not at peace. These are fruits from his act, or to speak truly, from the intention of his act. Intention determines the wholesome or unwholesome of the act. So it determines also whether the fruit is wholesome or not. In other words, it determines whether happiness or unhappiness will follow as the Buddha says:

“Where there have been deeds, personal weal and woe arise in consequence of the will there was in the deeds. Where there has been speech, personal weal and woe arise in the consequence of the will there was in the speech. Where there has been thought, personal weal and woe arise in consequence of the will there was in the thought.”<sup>50</sup>

Though A, and C did the same thing. This does not mean that both did things of equal value. Value of an act does not depend on what one does, but on what reason or what one is intending to. Intention is the measure of goodness of an act, and ‘receiving good’ does not mean receiving a fortune or fame as the Buddha says:

“Dire, brethren, are gains, favours, and flattery, a bitter, harsh obstacle in the way of arriving at uttermost safety. Wherefore, thus should ye train yourselves: - When gains, favours, and flattery come to us, we will put them aside ...”<sup>51</sup>

But ‘receiving good’ means getting the Buddhist highest value. This is a state of liberation or nibbāna, which is a state of no worry, no anxiety, and no sorrow. These are opposite to peace.

#### 5.2.4 Rebirth

According to this interpretation, wholesome acts are those done without ‘T’, unwholesome, with ‘T’. Fruits that a person receives now, that is, peace or dukkha, are caused by his acts in the past. The past may mean last second, last hour, last day, last month, depending on appropriate conditions for the appearance of those results. It means that the law of kamma could be applied to the present life. This law, according to this interpretation, can be easily understood. We do not have to believe in the previous or next life. Those who act with self-directed intention will get dukkha. Those who act without this intention, will get no anxiety or dukkha. Whatever result follows would not cause them dukkha.

To die and to be reborn could be understood in this way, that is, in this very life. Let us go back again to the above example of the donations made by A, B, and C. Suppose C donated at time  $t_1$ . At the moment  $t_1$  C did something. His act was self-centered, motivated by greed, expecting to gain something for himself in the future, let say at time  $t_2$ . When C had donated money at time  $t_1$ , his act (donation) was ended. His expectation, to gain something at  $t_2$ , however, had not been ended at the same time. This means that his ‘T’ was not ended along with his act of donation, but was ready to be reborn at time  $t_2$  in order to enjoy the fruit of his act. Readiness to be reborn arose at the same time with self-directed intention, at time  $t_1$ . When time  $t_2$  came, his ‘T’ came into being to enjoy the fruit, but it was contrary to his expectation. He therefore suffered. Nevertheless, whatever the result at  $t_2$  would be, C had to be worried, anxious during  $t_1$  to  $t_2$ , because he did not know what would result at  $t_2$ . The intensity of his anxiety depended on the intensity of his ‘for me’ intention at  $t_1$ . And his ‘T’ would be reborn to get the expected result at  $t_2$ :

“An action done in lust ...done under the influence of malice,... under the influence of delusion, ...is not profitable: it is blameworthy, it has sorrow for its result, it conduces to the arising of further action.”<sup>52</sup>

The case is different for A. His intention to donate at  $t_1$  was not self-directed. It was aimed at others. When the donation was finished, his act was done. The expectation for the result for him did not arise. He then would not be reborn at  $t_2$  in order to get the

<sup>50</sup> Davids, Rhys, Mrs.(trans.), *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part II, The Pāli Text Society, 1994, p.31.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.153.

<sup>52</sup> *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol.I, p.241.

result. Readiness for rebirth was absent. Readiness for rebirth ceased at the same time the selfless intention arose. We could say that he died at  $t_1$ . As for C, he did not die at  $t_1$ , because his intention was different.

Death here means the death of 'I', and rebirth means the rebirth of 'I'. According to this interpretation, there is an endless of death and rebirth during the lifetime of each person. When the acts are done with self-directed intention, or done with greed-malice-delusion, there must be bhava, i.e. readiness for rebirth. And when the appropriate time comes, 'I' would be reborn. Sometimes the intention for me is very light or absent, in that case there would not be rebirth.

### 5.3 Anattā and the Problem of Sameness

#### 5.3.1 Sameness and Existence

Buddhism denies self. Self does not exist but we are mistaken, or have a false belief that it does. This belief is the root of dukkha, as said earlier. Self which Buddhism denies is something that is permanent, changeless, and exists inside each of us. It is something that makes a man still the same person in the past.<sup>53</sup> To deny self or the thing as such, causes some problems. How would we explain that we, at present, still are the same person in the past although we change in the course of time? If there does not exist self which is the principle of sameness, it would follow that an agent is one person but the result of his action occurs to another. How does Buddhism answer to this?

Let us go back to the example of the donations of A, B and C. If self does not exist, is C who donated at  $t_1$  and C who receives the result, sorrow, at  $t_2$  the same person? If they are the same, and if there is no self, what is the common thing that makes C at  $t_1$  and C at  $t_2$  the same person? But if they are not the same, C, at  $t_2$ , has to receive the result of what he did not do, but others did (i.e. C at  $t_1$ ). In the Book of the Kindred Sayings there is an answer to this problem:

"Is suffering wrought by one's self?"

"Not so verily."

"Is one's suffering wrought by another?"

"Not so verily."

"Is suffering wrought both by one's self and by another?"

"Not so verily."

"Has the suffering wrought neither by myself nor by another?"

"Not so verily."

"What then is suffering non-existent?"

"Nay, suffering is not non-existent; suffering is."

"Then Master Gotama neither knows nor sees suffering."

"I am one that knows suffering, Kassapa, I am one that sees suffering."

"... Teach me, Master, Exalted One, the nature of suffering"

" 'One and the same person both acts and experiences the results' : -- this, which you called at first 'suffering self-wrought,' amounts to the Eternalist theory." " 'One acts, another experiences the result' : -- this which to one smitten by the feeling occurs as 'suffering caused by another,' amounts to the Annihilationist theory." To you, the Tathāgata, not approaching either extreme, teaches the Norm by a middle way: -- conditioned by ignorance activities come to pass, conditioned by activities consciousness come to pass, etc.."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>54</sup> *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, Part II, p.15-16.



This means that, according to Buddhism:

1. That the one who grows and the one who reaps are the same person is not true.
2. That the one who grows and the one who reaps are different persons is not true.

If the grower, for example, C at time  $t_1$  (will be called  $C_1$ ) is the same person as the reaper C at time  $t_2$  (will be called  $C_2$ ), we must admit that there is something permanent, unchanging in  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ . This is self (will be called T) of C. It is the real C, the nature of C.  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are essentially not different. Because the real self of  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  is T. T is the essence of both  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ . The difference between  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  is therefore superficial, only accidental. For their essential nature is T.  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are merely two different manifestations, or two appearances of one and the same thing, T. This real thing is not born, not decaying, not dead. It exists without any condition. It exists by itself, absolutely. This is called Eternalism, the view that there is an absolute. The Buddha denies this, as we have said in chapter 3. So the grower and the reaper are not the same person.

Nevertheless, the grower and the reaper are not different persons. If  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are absolutely different, the case would be that  $C_1$  has gone out of being and  $C_2$  just emerges from nothing. That fact that  $C_1$  changes into  $C_2$  does not mean that the former is wiped out (annihilated) of the world and the latter just comes up, without foundation. In fact  $C_1$  is the base for  $C_2$ .  $C_1$  changes into  $C_2$ , he does not go anywhere, and  $C_2$  does not come from nowhere. To view  $C_1$  is destroyed and does not change into  $C_2$  is to view that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are completely different persons. This view is called Annihilationism.

According to Buddhism, therefore, we cannot say that the grower and the reaper are the same, or that they are different. Superficially, this seems contradictory. If they are not the same, they should be different. But this is not true. If we examine this closely we will find that this seeming contradiction is not surprising, because it is a characteristic of any conditioned existing thing. And according to Buddhism, everything in the world exists conditionally.

A conditioned thing is in a sense exists but in another sense does not exist. A car, for example. Suppose we now see a car in front of us. When its parts are well composed, there is this car. But it only exists as long as its parts are gathered together. Before this happening the car did not exist. When someone put those parts together, it comes into being. In this sense it now really exists. Since its being comes from a composition of its parts, its decomposition, i.e. its non-being must be its nature too. The moment the composition of the car is finished, the moment its decomposition starts. But the decomposition is the non-being of the car. Therefore, when we finished making up this car, its being and non-being came up together at that moment:

“This world, Kaccāyana, usually bases its view on two things : on existence and on non-existence. Now he, who sees the uprising of the world ... does not hold with the non-existence for the world. But he, who sees the passing away of the world ..., does not hold with the existence of the world...”<sup>55</sup>

Kaccāyana, everything exists: -- this is one extreme. Nothing exists:-- this is the other extreme. Not approaching either extreme the Tathāgata teaches you a doctrine by the middle....”<sup>55</sup>

Most people tend to place a strong emphasis on one side or another of the fact. Those who emphasize on the existence of things would believe that being is the nature of the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.12-13.

world. Those who emphasize on the perishing of things would believe that non-being is natural, that is, everything is illusion. As a matter of fact, being and non-being are the qualities that exist in the thing at the same time.

Consider the problem concerning  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  from this respect; we can say that at time  $t_1$ ,  $C_1$  really existed. Since his existence was conditioned, his non-existence was also there, potentially. Or he was both  $C_1$  and not  $C_1$  at the same time. Let us ask whether  $C_1$  is the same as  $C_2$ . If we say that he is, in a sense it is true but not completely. Because we do not say yet another truth, that is,  $C_1$  is not the same as  $C_2$ . If we only say that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are not the same, we do not say the whole truth. So we should say that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are both the same and different. Or to be precisely, we should say that it is neither true that they are the same, nor that they are different:

“He who does the deed, is he the one to experience?”

“He who does the deed and he who experiences are the same: -- this is one extreme.”

“Well, then, he who does the deed is not the same as he who experiences?”

“He who does the deed is not the same as he who experiences: -- this is the other extreme. The Tathāgata, not approaching either of these extremes ...”<sup>56</sup>

### 5.3.2 *Sameness and Continuity*

By saying that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are not completely different persons, we mean that  $C_1$  is not annihilated, but changes into  $C_2$ . That means there is continuity. The existence of  $C_2$  is continued from the existence of  $C_1$ . If there is no  $C_1$  there will be no  $C_2$ .  $C_1$  is the foundation for  $C_2$ , gives birth to  $C_2$ . What  $C_2$  would be depends on how  $C_1$  makes of it at time  $t_1$ . This making has the intention at time  $t_1$  as its essence. If the intention is self-directed,  $C_2$  would be created one kind of person (i.e., a reaper of the bad fruit). If the intention is not self-directed,  $C_2$  would be created another kind of person (i.e., a reaper of the good fruit). This has been said in the beginning. In the former case,  $C_2$  would live his life with grasping to self, that is, five grasping khandhas. In the latter intention,  $C_2$ 's life would be without grasping. It is only the life of five khandhas, without the appearance of self, that is, ‘I’ will not be reborn.

Buddhism denies the sameness, but not the continuity. To deny the sameness is to deny self, which is ‘something’ that stays permanently throughout all the time of changes. Those who believe in self think that if there is no self, how we are able to say that we today and we of last year are the same person. But this is the problem when viewed from only one aspect. If we view it from another perspective, the problem will be that we today have changed a lot from what we used to be last year, both in my character and belief, etc. So we should be a different person from last year. We of last year disappeared from this world. These two point of views look at one fact from their opposite perspectives. Both are true but it is only one side of the truth. Buddhism is at the middle, sees both sides. One can say that there is self, if he has in mind that self is not absolute, not complete in itself, but exists conditionally. One can say that there is annihilation, if he understands that it is not a complete destruction, but it is a transformation into a new thing. One can say that nothing really exists, if he understands that it is ready not to exist. Or one can say that all does not really exist, if he understands that it comes to exist conditionally. There is neither an absolute being nor an absolute non-being.

This is the truth of middle way. It is the center that connects various truths from various perspectives together. There is neither pure sameness nor pure difference. The

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.51-52.

continuity is the real truth. A mango picked from the mango tree behind the house is not the same mango we grew five years ago. We, however, cannot say that they are not the same. Its properties for example, taste, smell, shape and color resulted from the mango five years ago. In a sense the five years ago mango now disappears, but not completely. It changes into or gives birth to the mango in our hand now. Other examples:

“Just, Kitta, as from a cow comes milk, and from the milk curds, and from curds the butter, and from the butter ghee, ... when it is milk it is not called curds, or butter, etc., when it is butter it is not called milk, or curds, etc., ...”<sup>57</sup>

This is the continuous transforming process from milk into curds, from curds the butter, and so on. In this process there is no one thing being itself completely. When it is curds, it is ready to stop being curds and turns into the butter. When it is the butter, it is butter...etc. If there is a kind of animal which can perceive like man but lives a very short life; suppose it lives only for 15 days, the same amount of time for which the curds ‘live’. If viewed from the animal’s perspective, the curds are just the curds. That is all, because it does not see the whole process of change. But we who see the whole process understand well that there is nothing exist permanently as such and there is nothing absolutely disappear. Human life is in this process. If we see the process of life in this way, we will not doubt whether the one who experiences the result of the deed is the same with the one who does the deed. The doer and the reaper are not completely the same or absolutely different. There is neither sameness nor annihilation, but only continuity.

## VI. CONCLUSION

### 6.1 The Significance of the Concept of Anattā

In discussing the problem of attā-anattā, we have considered the concept of anattā as the basic concept, and employed it to explain other teachings of Buddhism. We started with the meaning of attā or self, and then showed how Buddhism rejects the existence of self. The reason given in chapter three for this rejection is metaphysical. The problem of self is in fact metaphysical. It is well known that Buddhism does not pay much attention to metaphysical problems. The concept of self, however, must be dealt with carefully for right understanding. Right understanding is the foundation for practice. Wisdom supports morality. Anattā or no-self is the real nature of life. Attā is unreal. People in general misunderstand that this unreal is real. This is the cause of grasping. Grasping for self is the cause of grasping for ‘I’.

‘Self’ originates ‘I’. Knowing the truth that there is no self leads us to the idea that there is no ‘I’. This idea gives rise to the acts done without ‘I’ as their center. In chapter four we tried to show that whenever the idea ‘I’ arises, dukkha will follow. Whenever there is I there is dukkha. They cannot be separated. Wherever ‘I’ ceases, dukkha will cease.

The problem of dukkha is the heart of Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths are all about dukkha. Here dukkha does not mean physical pain such as sickness, but worry, sadness, disappointment, etc. We can get rid of the former (physical pain) by proper cure. The latter (mental pain), originated from misunderstanding and consequently malpractice, could come to an end by right understanding and consequently right practice. Right understanding means there is no self. Right practice means to act without ‘I’. Acts

<sup>57</sup> *Dialogues of the Buddha I*, Vol. II, p.263.

beginning with 'I' will have 'I' as an end. 'I' is the root of the latter. The elimination of 'I' means the elimination of dukkha.

The cessation of 'I' is the cessation of impurities and all unwholesome things. The cessation of 'I', therefore, is nibbāna, as said in chapter five. The concept of nibbāna is as much fundamental as that of dukkha in Buddhism, because they are the same concept, but approached from different aspects. Nibbāna and dukkha are opposite. Wherever there is nibbāna there is no dukkha, wherever there is dukkha there is no nibbāna. Both concepts could be understood with reference to self-non self problem. Dukkha means the existence of 'I', nibbāna is the non-existence of self, of 'I'.

The concept of kamma is quite similar. It could be regarded as the core of Buddhism by connecting with the concept of self. The theory of kamma holds that man must receive the fruit of his act. The essence of the act is intention. The fruit of the act, therefore, is the fruit of intention. There are two kinds of intentions: wholesome and unwholesome. Wholesome intentions are intentions that are free of lust, hatred and delusion. Unwholesome intentions are those done with lust, hatred and delusion. Wholesome intentions, therefore, are those done without 'I'; and unwholesome, with 'I'. The former causes a good result, that is, peace; the latter, a bad result, that is, grief. This means that wholesome acts are selflessness and unwholesome acts, selfishness. Those who act wholesome deeds are not reborn; those who act unwholesome deeds are reborn. It is 'I' who is reborn or not, as shown in chapter five.

Therefore the problem of kamma is the same as nibbāna, founded on the understanding of the concept of self or I. Nibbāna is the state without I. Selflessness renders an act good. Kamma and dukkha are the same. Dukkha arises when the feeling of 'I' arises, and the arising of 'I' renders an act bad. Dukkha, nibbāna, kamma, therefore, are the same concept, approached from different perspectives. They are the same problem because they could be explained by the same basic concept. This is anattā. The concept of anattā, therefore, is very much significant to the understanding of Buddhism.

According to Buddhism, when analysing human life, we find that there is in fact no such thing as self. Life is not-self. Anattā is the genuine property of life. If the question is asked: what is man? There are as many answers as answerers. Physicists may say that man is a physical thing governed by the same law as other physical things. Biologists would say that man is merely a biological being, having the same properties like others, for example, man eats, excretes, procreates, etc. Physiologists would regard man as a mechanism consists of different organs working within one and the same system. Sociologists and anthropologists would see man as a member of society, establishing custom, culture and institutions; which determine man's behaviour in society. Educationists would see man as something to be developed for the good of his own self and society.

From what perspective does Buddhism see man? The answer is from the most fundamental one. Whether we see man as a physical, biological, economical, or social being, man is composed of body (rūpa), being able to be conscious of the external world (viññāna), can feel glad or sad; happy or unhappy (vedanā), can recognize and remember (saññā), has a tendency to do some acts (saṅkhāra). Whatever his skin color is, whether he is tall or short, how his social and economic status is, or what kind of education he receives; he is still a person who is happy when he gets this, unhappy when he does not get that. He is happy when this happens, unhappy when that happens. He is in peace when he did this, worried when he did that. This is the basic relations man has

with things in the external world, whether these things maybe other men or material objects.

Things in the outside world, including objects, men, institutions, are merely data. This means that they have no meaning in and by themselves. Their meanings depend on man. If we become related to them with real understanding, no conflict arises. What is this real understanding? It is to see thing in this way: “that is not mine; I am not that; that is not my self.” If we become related to them with misunderstanding, the conflict arises, and consequently dukkha. To have misunderstanding means to see thing in this way: “that is mine; I am that; that is my self.”

To see what is real is to see no-self. Anattā is the real basic property of life. This is a fact. When we know this fact, the Buddha teaches, we *should* live with truth. To live with truth is to live a selfless life or live without ‘I’. Living without ‘I’ is an ideal of life that everyone should seek. This is to say that nibbāna is an ideal state or something worth to be attained. This is the teaching about a matter of ‘value’. The Buddhist view on man, therefore, is twofold:-

1. Human life is no-self. This is a basic fact, the answer to the question what man is.
2. Human life *should* be lived with no self. This is a matter of basic value, the answer to the question what the summum bonum is.

## 6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

These two questions: what is man? and what is the most valuable thing for man?, are basic problems. This is because all other problems of man are connected with these problems. The position on these two problems will determine the position in the other problems. We have now the Buddhist position on these two basic problems, it would be interesting to look for its answers to other problems of man, such as ethical, social, etc.

### 6.2.1. Ethics

What is Buddhist view on ethics? In a sense, our previous discussion has partly dealt with this issue. There are three basic problems in ethics. Firstly, what is the most valuable thing for man? Secondly, what is the ultimate standard to judge whether an action is good or not? Thirdly, what is the status of the ethical value?

As regards the first question, the answer is obvious: to live a life without self or ‘I’ is the most valuable thing.

The second question should be: what is the ultimate standard to judge an act, according to Buddhism. It may be viewed like this: if the most valuable thing is to live one’s life without ‘I’, any act which goes with this would be regarded as good. Anattā should be the ultimate standard. Sometimes we may be in a situation that if we do one thing we would do wrong by one standard; if we did not do it, we would do wrong by another standard. That is whether we do it or not, we must do wrong by one or another standard. For example, if a patient is told the truth by his doctor, he may get shocked and consequently loses his life. If the doctor does not tell the truth, he may be cured. If the doctor does the former, he is wrong because he causes a person dead, knowingly. If he does the latter, he lies. Lying and causing people to death are both wrong. What should the doctor do in this case? The answer might be like this: we should consider first which act is more wrong between causing someone dead and lying? When we get the answer, we should do the less wrong. But the problem is: how do we judge which act is more wrong? What is the ultimate standard to judge it? The concept of anattā as said may help to answer the question like this or not. This should be interesting for a further study.

The third problem is about the status of the ethical value, such as, are good and bad, right and wrong, objective or subjective? Is moral value absolute or relative? It would be interesting to look for the Buddhist answer.

One more topic that should be studied is to compare the Buddhist position with the similar views, such as Kant's and Hinduism. Buddhism teaches man to destroy his 'I', in particular, to get rid of a false belief about 'I' and 'self'. In short, in doing things do not think of 'I'. The less you think of 'I', the better is your act. It means that when you do some deed, do not regard yourself higher than others. Because detachment from 'I' means there is no separation between I and others; everyone is equal. It means that 'universality' is of great value which man should increase. This seems like Kant's principle: "act with an intention that your maxim should become a universal law." Universality is the most important idea in Kant's moral philosophy. We can say that Kant's philosophy also teaches us to eliminate 'I', because only in doing so will the universality occur. This does not mean that Kantian ethics and Buddhism agree on every point. But it would be interesting to compare these two schools of philosophy, and other similar views. We may find that 'anattā' is the core of these moral philosophies.

#### *6.2.2 Social Philosophy*

We have a society when people come to live together. Society is a collective of men. The problems concerning the collective cannot be considered separately from the problems of each member of it, that is, men. There are many problems in the social philosophy. One important of these is the problem of 'ideology'. The answer to this problem will determine the position and the attitudes towards other problems.

The problem of ideology is: what is the best state which we should attain? We could not give a good answer to this problem unless we have considered the problem of human nature. Firstly, what is man? Secondly, how should man live? The position on the second problem helps us to set up the ideology of our society. A society should help its members to reach the most valuable thing for each, as best as it could. Therefore the direction of society should not be separated from that of individuals. What is valuable to man then is the foundation for what is valuable to society. Views on what is man would help us to know whether our social ideal is possible. If the social ideal is in contrast to human nature or conflicts with the reality of life, it would not be possible.

Buddhism has already the answers to the questions: what is man and how should man live? It could be asked further: what should a society consisting of people with these kinds of nature have as ideal? After that, what should be the structure of this society? When a society become a state what is the ideal relationship between the state and individuals? What direction should the state plan its education? What should be the foundation of its economic policy? Liberalism or socialism? Which one is the better way to reach social and individual ideals? What kind of social ideal should fit the Buddhist society? This is the most important problem of each society. It will give direction to the society's activities and management. There should be a further study on these issues.

[Translated from the Thai version by *Somrudee Wisadavej*]