

Second Edition

INNER Exploration



Sayalay Susīlā



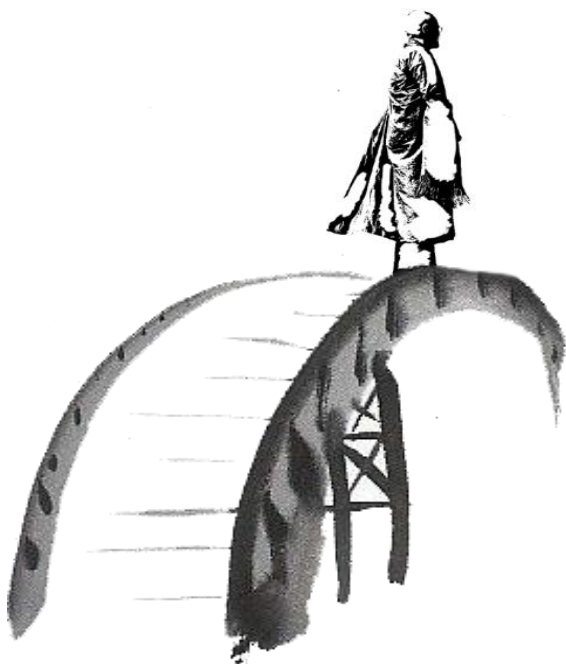
Inner Exploration

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Second Edition

SAYALAY SUSĪLĀ

Inner Exploration



Walking the Noble Eightfold Path

Inner Exploration

“WHATEVER IN THE WORLD IS OF A PLEASANT
AND AGREEABLE NATURE,
IT IS HERE THAT THIS CRAVING ARISES WHEN IT
ARISES. IT IS HERE THAT IT SETTLES WHEN IT
SETTLES.”

- SN 12:66(6)

Inner Exploration

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Address: HDPN 1585, Batu Itam, MKM 4,

11000 Balik Pulau, Penang, Malaysia

Website: www.sayalaysusila.net

Email: appamadavihari@gmail.com

Facebook: Appamada Vihari Meditation Center

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Venerable Sayalay Susīlā is the founder (2014) and current abess of the Appāmada Vihari Meditation Center (AVMC) in Penang, Malaysia.

Sayalay was born in 1963 in Pahang, Malaysia, and began developing a keen interest in insight meditation while at the University of Science

Malaysia, where she obtained a degree in mass communications in 1987. After graduation, Sayalay worked as a high school teacher for a year and a half. She became increasingly disenchanted with worldly matters and more and more interested in dedicating herself to the practice. So she resigned her post to take up meditation full time, which she did for three years.

In 1991, at the age of 28, Sayalay ordained as a Theravada Buddhist nun in the Burmese tradition at the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre in Penang. Six months after her ordination, she traveled to Panditarama Monastery in Myanmar, where she practiced intensively for nearly three years under the guidance of the meditation master Venerable U Pandita Sayadaw.

In 1994, wishing to cultivate concentration meditation, Sayalay moved to Pa Auk Forest Monastery in Myanmar. She placed herself under the guidance of the renowned scholar-practitioner Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw. She remained in the forest for 14 years. In addition to an assiduous program of meditation, she also learned the Abhidhamma, discourses, and Pāli language from Pa-Auk Sayadaw. She also became his English-to-Chinese interpreter in Myanmar and abroad.

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From 2000, Sayalay started teaching the Abhidhamma extensively in various centers internationally, including Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

In order to deepen her own understanding of the Dhamma, Sayalay practiced different meditation methods during her stay in Myanmar, including those taught by Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and Goenka.

As a result of the breadth of her exposure and depth of practice of various methods, Sayalay has become an accomplished teacher—one able to present the subtleties of the Buddha's teachings in a simple and direct way. In particular, she presents the most profound section of the teaching, the Abhidhamma, in a lucid manner grounded in actual meditation experience rather than pedantic theory.

After leaving Myanmar Sayalay studied and practiced according to the suttas, placing emphasis on teaching and practicing the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Sayalay has traveled extensively as a meditation and Abhidhamma teacher, presenting the Abhidhamma and sutta expositions in formal lectures and talks, and has conducted meditation

retreats throughout the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Singapore, and her home country Malaysia. In 2015, Sayalay led the first International Novitiate Program with Venerable Sanghasena. It was held in Ladakh, in the Himalayas of Northern India.

Sayalay has a unique gift in that she is able to present the Buddha's teachings with profound depth, vividness, directness, precision, and clarity. Her style of teaching is very well received by students globally. As an effective multilingual speaker, Sayalay is able to expound the Dhamma in a way that reaches a very wide global audience. She is fluent in English, Chinese, Burmese, Hokkien, and Malay.

Sayalay is the author of many books in English and Chinese. Her best known is *Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through Abhidhamma* 《揭开身心之奥秘》 now in its third edition and available in English and Chinese. Other books she has published in English include:

1. The Path to Happiness
2. Contemplation of Feeling
3. Dhamma Essence Series
4. The Nine Attributes of the Buddha

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Her Chinese publications include:

1. *From this Shore to Far Shore* 《从此岸到彼岸》
2. *The Practical Manual of Abhidhamma*
《阿毗达摩实用手册-完整版》
3. *Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma* 《正法初现》
4. *The Development of the Faculties* 《根修习经》
5. *The Nine Attributes of the Buddha*
《佛陀的九种德行》
6. *The Path to Happiness* 《朝向快乐之道》
7. *Dhamma Essence Series* 《佛法精粹》
8. *Mettā Bhavana* 《慈爱禅》
9. *Paṭṭhāna* 《二十四缘发趣论》

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A LETTER OF APPRECIATION



“Sayalay Susīlā has been my meditation and Dhamma teacher for the past eight years, during which I have interacted closely with her and participated in many of her retreats in the United States. I find her to be a remarkably open-minded teacher, who appreciates her students’ sometimes diverse meditation experiences and backgrounds from other traditions. She is also very passionate about Dhamma and teaches with an open hand, freely sharing all her knowledge. I have learned a great deal from her over the years, and my interactions with her have made me more mindful and strive harder. However, this past year I

belatedly realized that owing to my strong goal-orientation, I have been closed-minded toward some of her best teachings and techniques. Seeing her teachings in an entirely new light has benefited me more than from all the previous years combined. I would like to share two of my recent discoveries in the hope that more people can benefit.

First, after listening to her many recorded talks on suttas, I have gained a profound new understanding of passages that I have read before and thought I understood. For example, in a talk on Four Foundations of Mindfulness¹, she expounds on the introductory paragraphs of this revered sutta systematically word by word by linking together vivid examples and passages from other suttas, commentaries, and Abhidhamma. The result is that every phrase gains a concrete meaning pertaining to what we should do in our actual daily practice. Another example is the last talk of the same series. It centers on this brief sentence on the cessation of craving:

¹ On <http://sayalaysusila.net/pages/audio-gallery>, Four Foundation of Mindfulness (16-24 July 2016), 2nd talk: "Prerequisites of the Practice"

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*Wherever in the world there is
anything that is agreeable and
pleasurable, there [craving's]
cessation comes about
(Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, DN 22).*

Through the suttas from the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Sayalay makes clear the correct way to practice according to this profound utterance of the Buddha—like discovering a hidden jewel brought into plain sight.

Secondly, I have been benefiting enormously by applying Sayalay Susīlā's technique on the contemplation of the mind, especially the contemplation of impermanence, to all mental phenomena. For many years, whenever my breath became subtle during Anapanasati meditations, the anticipation of good results would arise, causing tension. Within a few sitting sessions after I followed her instructions (when I was finally open-minded enough to try) to use contemplation of impermanence on this anticipation, at the moment of each arising, the problem is solved. This technique, however, is far deeper than just a tool to deal with obstacles and hindrances during meditation. In the context of this approach on contemplating impermanence, other people's experiences, sutta passages, and even certain

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Abhidhamma passages are taking on whole new and deeper meanings. Most importantly, constantly contemplating mental phenomena in this way during daily life gives us a concrete action plan as to what to do moment by moment, as the Buddha taught in the “Inner Exploration” Sutta (SN 12.66).

I’d like to end by repeating a pair of Dhammapada sayings that a previous letter used:

*“Though all his life a fool
associates with a wise man, he no
more comprehends the Truth than
a spoon tastes the flavor of the
soup.*

*Though only for a moment a
discerning person associates with a
wise man, quickly he comprehends
the Truth, just as the tongue tastes
the flavor of the soup.”*

- Dhammapada (64 & 65)

Last year I realized I had been a fool for many years, but I’m glad that at least I am starting to get a taste of “the flavor of the soup” now.

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With metta and great appreciation.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Your devoted student, USA, 2017.



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INNER EXPLORATION

Inner Exploration

“Inner Exploration” is the name of a talk given by the Buddha in a town of the Kurus called Kammāsadamma.

During the Buddha’s time, the Kuru people were known to be highly intelligent and keen on practicing the Dhamma. The Buddha gave many profound talks in Kammāsadamma, such as the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and *Magandiya Sutta*.

One day the Buddha asked a group: “*Do you engage in inner exploration, monastics?*”

When this was asked, one answered, “*Venerable sir, I engage in inner exploration.*”

The Buddha asked him, “*How do you engage in inner exploration, monastic?*” He explained, but his explanation did not satisfy the Buddha.

Ānanda, who understood the Buddha well, promptly invited the Blessed One to give a discourse: “*Now is the time for the Blessed One to explain inner exploration. We will listen respectfully and remember it.*”

The Buddha then explained:

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Here, monastics, when engaging in inner exploration, a monastic explores the many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death. What is the source of this suffering, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists do aging-and-death come to be? When what does not exist do aging-and-death not come to be?

All beings love happiness and dislike suffering. However, suffering is inherent in conditioned existence. As long as life continues, suffering is inevitable. Therefore, the Buddha taught that when engaging in inner exploration, it is wise to explore the diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death.

Let us explore the many kinds of suffering that arise. When we speak of suffering—or dukkha in the Buddha's teachings—we refer to three types:

1. Dukkha dukkha
2. Vipariṇāma dukkha
3. Sankhārā dukkha

1. Bodily suffering (*Dukkha dukkha*)

Dukkha dukkha refers to physical suffering. As long as we have a body, we will have this kind of suffering. Only when the body comes to cessation will physical suffering come to an end. Bodily pain is easily discernible in meditation. When a beginner starts meditating, one feels pain after 20 or 30 minutes. This type of pain can manifest itself as excessive hardness, pressure, stiffness, heat, tightness, and so on. These are all characteristics of the Four Elements, of which our body is composed.

Some may feel pain more quickly if they are unaccustomed to sitting still with crossed legs. When they feel such pain, the overwhelming desire to move arises. And they shift and change posture. However, pain soon returns. Unable to bear that pain and lacking sustained effort, they may keep changing postures whenever pain is felt in different parts of the body, be it the neck, shoulders, thighs, buttocks, or feet.

When pain persists the mind often starts to become irritated. We may think, “Why on earth do I have to suffer this pain? Why don’t I just get up and walk to ease it?” Then one might get up and practice walking meditation. After walking for a period of

time, there may again be discomfort in certain parts of the body. As long as we carry this burdensome body, we cannot escape *dukkha dukkha*, bodily suffering.

In daily life *dukkha dukkha* cannot be felt as clearly as it can during a meditation retreat. This is because we keep changing posture whenever we feel the slightest discomfort in any part of the body. Moreover, our minds are restless most of the time. A restless mind is powerless. It cannot see the true nature of the body as *inherently* associated with pain.

During a meditation retreat we are not allowed to move and change posture as we would like until the sitting session is over. When we maintain a single posture for a certain length of time, unless we are in absorption (*jhāna*), we will feel *dukkha dukkha*.

Bodily suffering can become very intense if we are being tortured or suffering some severe illness. *Dukkha dukkha* is the first type of suffering.

2. Suffering due to change (*Vipariṇāma dukkha*)

The second type of suffering is *vipariṇāma dukkha*, suffering due to alteration. This refers in particular to the change of pleasant feeling. For example, when we go into a restaurant hungry, as soon as the food is served, we greedily scarf it down without setting up mindfulness.

Every mouthful gives a strong pleasant sensation and temporary satisfaction. The pleasant feeling conditions more craving. To satiate that craving we continue eating until we are so full we have to loosen our belt. Overeating causes heaviness and sluggishness of body and mind; it may even lead to indigestion and bloating. The pleasant feeling that came from savoring now changes into an unpleasant feeling as a result of the unguarded tongue door that leads to overeating. This is called *vipariṇāma dukkha*, the change from pleasant to unpleasant feeling.

No one can avoid *vipariṇāma dukkha* because change is a universal characteristic of existence. When change occurs—in our fortune, relationship, life, career, and so on—we feel distress.

3. Suffering as a conditioned state (*Sankhārā dukkha*)

The third type of suffering is *sankhārā dukkha*, suffering as a conditioned state. Mind and body are conditioned states in that they are produced by karma rooted in past ignorance and craving. When that productive-karma is exhausted, this body falls away, and our mind-process fares on according to the ripening of other karma.

Most people enjoy life, believing it to be pleasurable. We work hard trying to keep our bodies healthy and strong by various means. However, in an ultimate sense, these bodies undergo aging at every moment. We are unable to penetrate this truth. When death approaches, we feel sorrow and grief, unable to part with what we cling to and hold dear. Illness, aging, and death are natural processes no one escapes. This is called *sankhārā dukkha*.

What is the source of these three types of suffering?

The Buddha's teachings emphasize using cause and effect to remove the wrong view called "self." The Buddha wanted us to explore further, *"What is the source of this suffering, its origin, how is it born and produced?"*

Exploring the relationship between cause and effect—suffering and its origin—we come to understand that the many kinds of suffering that arise in the world, headed by aging-and-death, are the *effect* of causes. Now if this is so, *what* are those causes? This is a key question for inner exploration.

The Buddha answers, *"The diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world, headed by aging-and-death, has acquisition (upadi) as its source, as its origin, and is born and produced of it."*

What is "acquisition"? The commentaries explain it as the acquiring of the Five Aggregates:

- Form (*rūpa khandhā*)
- Feeling (*vedana khandhā*)
- Perception (*sañña khandhā*)

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- Volitional formations (*sankhārā khandhā*)
- Consciousness (*viññāna khandhā*).

These five *khandhā* or groups, heaps, phenomena are ultimate realities. Conventionally, the reappearance of the Five Aggregates is rebirth. And when there is rebirth, there is inevitably aging and death. Because there is rebirth one has to undergo *dukkha dukkha* (bodily suffering), *vipariṇāma dukkha* (suffering due to change), and *sankhārā dukkha* (suffering as a conditional state) during one's life.

Between rebirth and (re)death in any lifetime, there is sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair, contact with the unloved, separation from the loved, and not getting what one wants—all of which are together called “suffering.” This is the noble truth of suffering, the first of the Four Noble Truths taught by the Buddha, which have the power to *ennoble* us, that is, lead us to awaken.

If acquisition, or *acquiring* the Five Aggregates, is the truth of suffering, what is the source of this acquisition, its origin, from what is it born and produced? We can explore with insight in this sequence as the Buddha explains, “*Acquisition has craving as its source, craving as its origin. It is born and*

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produced of craving. When there is craving, acquisition comes to be. When there is no craving, acquisition does not come to be."

Craving is the second noble truth—the *origin* of suffering. Why do these “acquisitions” or Five Aggregates rearise and again come into being? The Buddha answers precisely by aiming at the cause, craving rooted in ignorance.

In order to remove the suffering inherent in the Five Aggregates, we need to know the origin and cause of our suffering: craving. That way, we know how to skillfully handle and uproot it. Without tackling the origin of suffering—which is only the *effect* not the cause—we cannot come to the end of suffering. Therefore, smart practitioners investigate and discern the causes of suffering, not the suffering itself, which as was said is only the effect, outcome, the result of craving.

What is “craving”? There are three types:

- Craving for sensual pleasure (*kāma taṇhā*)
- Craving for continued existence (*bhāva taṇhā*)
- Craving for non-existence (*vibhāva taṇhā*)

1. Craving for sensual pleasure (*Kāma taṇhā*)

Kāma taṇhā is sensual craving. It is enjoyed through the six sense doors coming into contact with their respective sense objects. For example, eyes constantly look for visible forms, particularly beautiful, pleasing, and agreeable ones. When a beautiful form contacts the eyes, we feel pleasure and gratification. This is how we enjoy sensual pleasure through the eyes.

Similarly, our ears want to hear pleasant sounds, such as music or sweet praise, which make us happy. Our nose seeks lovely fragrances. Our tongue searches for delicious flavors. Our body presses for soothing touch—such as the soft caress of a loved one. And our mind craves fantasies—freely imagining or remembering whatever we want as we try to make ourselves happy. A poor man may imagine he possesses a luxurious car or mansion filled with beautiful women. Daydreaming is a type of mental enjoyment often rooted in sensuality. This is called *kāma taṇhā*, craving for sensual pleasures.

2. Craving for existence (*Bhāva tanhā*)

Craving for sensual pleasure extends to another kind of craving called *bhāva tanhā*, craving for continued or eternal existence. Only through existence (becoming) are the Five Aggregates acquired. Without existence, there are no Five Aggregates, no six sense bases, in other words, no body-and-mind to enjoy sensual pleasure through contact with their respective sense objects.

In order to continue enjoying sensual pleasure, we crave for continued existence—also known as the acquiring of the Five Aggregates, rebirth, renewed existence, another life.

For some beings, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure through the body is repulsive. Yet, they still crave for continued existence—mental and formless, free of a body. They practice the formless or immaterial *jhānas* to be reborn in the immaterial sphere. Beings in the immaterial sphere have no body with which to enjoy gross sensual pleasures. Yet, they enjoy having a subtle mind, a mind endowed with the bliss and peace of absorption-concentration. These beings crave for existence for the sake of jhānic bliss. This is craving for continued existence.

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These two—craving for sensual pleasure and craving for existence—are often accompanied by a pernicious wrong view called Eternalism, the idea that it is one and the same being (self or soul) who enjoys sensual pleasures in one existence and the next.

Say, for example, we are born with health and wealth in this life due to previous karma and enjoy sensuality in excess. Due to negligence, we may become strongly attached to the enjoyment of sense pleasures. This inclines the mind to a future human rebirth or a divine life so that the “same self” can continue to enjoy the same kind or a higher kind of sensuality in the future.

Wrongly grasping the situation, we fall under the view that it is the *same* person, the same self, transmigrating from one life to another to yet another. This is called the wrong view of Eternalism (*sassata ditṭhi*).

Through ardent insight practice, we discover that even during a single lifetime, there is no “same self” from one day to the next, not even from one moment to the next moment.

3. Craving for non- existence (*Vibhava taṇhā*)

The third type of craving is *vibhāva taṇhā*, craving for non-existence. This type of craving is associated with the opposite wrong view called Annihilationism (*uccheda diṭṭhi*), the theory that someone exists that could be destroyed. A person who holds this pernicious wrong view believes that everything ends at death. Such a person, not believing in the law of karma operating from life to life, may therefore lack a healthy moral dread or fear of wrongdoing.

These three types of craving are the root causes of rebirth, renewed existence, again-becoming, renewed acquisition of aggregates. When one rearises—that is to say, comes into being in another life—in either the sensual sphere or fine-material sphere, one acquires a body and mind. Having acquired a body and mind, we inevitably undergo aging, illness, and death—the major sources of suffering in any life. Were there no body and mind, there would be no aging, sickness, or death to undergo. This is the law. No one escapes it, not even the Buddha. The Buddha and arahants do get beyond it, however. That is the goal of Buddhist practice, making an end of all suffering.

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Therefore, the Buddha points at craving rooted in ignorance as the truth of the origin of suffering—the second noble truth or *samudaya sacca*.

WHERE DOES CRAVING ARISE?

Another question deserves our serious attention if we are to rid ourselves of craving and suffering: When craving arises, *where* does it arise? Since craving rooted in ignorance is the origin of all suffering, we must discern *where* it arises. And when it settles, upon what does it settle?

As we explore inwardly, we come to understand: *“Whatever it is in the world that has a pleasant and agreeable nature, it is here that craving arises when it arises. It is here that it settles when it settles.”* What things have a pleasant and agreeable nature that causes craving to arise?

Six sense bases

Eyes, ears, body, tongue, nose, and mind have a pleasant and agreeable nature for us. It is here that craving arises when it arises. It is here that it settles when it settles.

Eyes appear pleasant and agreeable to us, do they not? With eyes we can greedily gaze at whatever objects we like to please and gratify ourselves. We consider eyes pleasant and agreeable. With eyes we see pleasing forms, with ears we hear sounds we like, such as the voices of the opposite sex, with a body we contact pleasant tactile sensations. The same goes for the other sense bases. These six internal bases have a pleasant and agreeable nature. So craving arises and settles on.

Six sense objects

Craving is insatiable. It proliferates, extending from sensory bases to the objects of sense. We crave not only for our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, but also for their corresponding objects: forms, sounds, scents, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects. External sense objects—such as sexually enticing forms—have an agreeable and pleasant nature to gratify the eyes.

In the time of the Buddha, a newly ordained monk, Venerable Vangisa, was left behind as the caretaker of a pleasant monastery in Alavi. Beautifully adorned women wishing to see the place visited one day. When Venerable Vangisa's unguarded eyes came into contact with their alluring forms, lust immediately infested his mind (SN 8:1). The women had a pleasant and agreeable nature, conditioning the craving that arose.

The Buddha said, *"I do not see even one other form that so obsesses the mind of a man as the form of a woman; the form of a woman obsesses the mind of a man"* (AN1[1]). The same holds true for women beholding the form of a man.

In addition to pleasing forms, craving arises and settles on pleasant and agreeable sounds, scents, tastes, tangibles, and mental objects.

In one illustration of craving arising and settling on pleasant and agreeable sounds, the Buddha's half-brother, Nanda, once developed a fixation. The Buddha visited him on his wedding day and, when departing, passed his alms bowl for Nanda to carry for him. Nanda was honored to hold the precious bowl. He did not know what else to do, as Buddha did not say anything, but just turned and walked off. Nanda, out of immense respect for the Buddha,

followed him with the bowl. As he followed the Buddha, his fiancée “the belle of the land,” Janapada Kalyani, saw him following along with the bowl.

Worried that Nanda might decide to become a monk instead of getting married, she enticingly called out: “Oh, dear, come back to me soon!” Out of respect for the Buddha, thinking he would remember his bowl at any moment and turn around to take it from him, Nanda followed all the way to the monastery.

When the Buddha arrived, he turned to look at Nanda. Seeing him holding the bowl, he asked: “Do you want to become a monk?” Nanda, of course, had no intention of becoming a celibate ascetic on his wedding day to the most beautiful woman in all the land. However, instead of speaking up and saying no, for reasons he could hardly understand, he nodded his head.

The Buddha ordained him on the spot. Because Nanda became a monk not by his own choosing but out of respect for the Buddha, he did not enjoy celibacy, solitude, or separation from his beautiful fiancée and luxurious life as a Shakyan prince. His mind could not settle on his meditation subject, for it was instead constantly preoccupied with sensual

longing and the sound of his beloved bride's voice calling out, "Oh, dear, come back to me soon!"

As days passed, Nanda became sullen and emaciated. All he could think about was that enticing sound, "Oh, dear, come back to me soon!" Craving arose and settled upon that sound. Understanding his plight, the Buddha used skillful means to rouse Nanda's sense of spiritual urgency. Then Nanda was finally able to let go of his sensual desire for his fiancée. He secluded himself from the company of all the other monks, strove diligently, and in no long time, became an arahant.

Six types of consciousness

In addition to the six sense bases and six sense objects, the Buddha taught that there are six types of consciousness—eye-consciousness, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-, and mind-consciousness—that are agreeable and pleasurable. Here craving arises and establishes itself. Without eye-consciousness, even though the eye base were to come into contact with a pleasing form, pleasurable seeing would not be achieved.

Six contacts

The coming together of eye-consciousness, eye base, and form is termed “eye-contact.” In this way, pleasant eye-contact causes craving to arise and establish itself. The same goes for pleasurable ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind-contact. As contacts are continually arising, our senses are constantly exposed to the impingement (contact) of sense objects.

Six feelings

The pleasant contacts of the senses cause pleasant feelings to arise. For example, when agreeable food contacts the tongue, pleasurable feeling arises. Dependent on pleasant feeling, craving arises and settles on pleasurable feelings born of this contact.

Six types of perceptions

Similarly, craving arises and settles on six kinds of perception. Moreover, if we perceive the six sense objects as pleasant, permanent, or cling to the perception that there is an enduring “self,” we strengthen wrong view. We fail to see things as they really are—beset by many kinds of *dukkha* in

addition to being radically impermanent and impersonal.

For example, if we previously enjoyed food that left a distinctive impression on the mind, before a meal, we might see that food. That eye-contact leads to the perception of the food as “that same tasty food.” That perception leads to the arising of craving even before the tongue actually tastes the food.

Six volitions

The way we perceive things also causes volition, the will or motivation to act. For example, when we perceive that watching a show is pleasurable, we tend to indulge and delight in it. There are six volitions for six sense objects that might gratify us. Therefore the Buddha said, *“Volition in regard to the six sense objects in the world is agreeable and pleasurable, and there this craving arises and establishes itself.”*

Thinking and pondering

What one perceives one thinks about. If one perceives that life is full of happiness, then one

thinks and ponders the prospect of renewing existence again and again. Even when we are not impinged by pleasant and agreeable sense objects in the present, craving arises when we delight in thinking and pondering past and/or future pleasant and agreeable objects. When we take delight in remembering great food or daydream about pleasing bodily sensations in the future, craving arises and settles on thinking and pondering.

In brief, when six internal objects, six external objects, six types of consciousness, six sense contacts, six feelings born of contact, six perceptions, six volitions, and thinking and pondering are regarded as pleasant and agreeable, it is here that craving arises when it arises. It is here that it settles when it settles down to establish itself.

The aforementioned mental and physical objects can be categorized into the groupings of the Five Aggregates of clinging. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, with their respective objects (forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and tangible objects) belong to the aggregate of form or the body. Perception, feeling, contact, volition, consciousness, and so on belong to the aggregates collectively referred to as "mind."

CRAVING ARISES DUE TO DISTORTED PERCEPTION

The Buddha continued, *“Whatever ascetics or Brahmins in the past, present, or future regard as in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature, if they regard it as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure, they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving, they are nurturing acquisition. In nurturing acquisition, they are nurturing suffering.”*

This statement invites us to reflect deeply. It helps us to understand the way of practice.

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We know that the origin of suffering is craving rooted in ignorance. So why does craving arise? The Buddha teaches that craving arises when we regard anything that is pleasant and agreeable as permanent, as happiness, as a self, as healthy, or secure.

From this brief and precise answer, we come to realize that if we wrongly perceive things that are pleasant—seeing them as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure—craving will arise.

In nurturing craving, we nurture acquisition. In nurturing acquisition, we nurture suffering. In nurturing suffering, we will not be free from rebirth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. The Buddha reminds us that if we nurture craving, we cannot be free from suffering.

UNDOING DISTORTED PERCEPTION

In order to remove craving, what should we do? We should first undo the distorted perception that pleasant things are permanent, pleasing, or personal. When eyes come into contact with a pleasant form, we should not think, perceive, and regard eyes and pleasant forms as permanent, as happiness, or as self. Nor should we consider eye-contact and seeing-consciousness as permanent, happiness, or self. Instead, we should perceive them as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, and as insecure.

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The Buddha further said, *“Whatever ascetics or Brahmins in the past, present, or future regard as in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature, if they regard it as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful, they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving, they are abandoning acquisition. In abandoning acquisition, they are abandoning suffering.”*

From this perspective, we understand that the correct way of practicing is to let go of craving. How? By perceiving everything that has a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, suffering, non-self, as a disease, and as frightening.

In addition to the six sense bases and corresponding six sense objects, we extend the same understanding to any consciousness, pleasant contact, pleasant feeling born of contact, perception, volition, and thinking and pondering.

HOW DO WE PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE?

We can contemplate any arising phenomena born of contact as impermanent, suffering, and non-self. However, let's focus on contemplating rise and fall, or impermanence, first.

When the six sense bases impinge on the six corresponding pleasant sense objects, pleasant feeling arises. First, we rouse mindfulness so that we are aware of the arising of pleasant feeling, mentally noting, "Pleasant feeling has arisen in me."

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While mindfulness keeps the object in view, the activity of the mind slows down. This gives wisdom an opportunity to arise and penetrate the true nature of the object. We can say mindfulness prepares the way for wisdom to directly see the three universal characteristics of all things: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).

For this reason, the Buddha said, *"Just as the farmer has first to plough the ground to be able to sow, so too mindfulness fulfills an important preparatory role for the arising of wisdom."*

PAYING ATTENTION TO IMPERMANENCE

After mindfulness has the object in view, apply wisdom by paying attention in this way: Contemplate the pleasant feeling as *anicca* or “impermanent, impermanent” or “vanishing, vanishing” or “inconstant, inconstant” or “falling away, falling away.” Here, “contemplating impermanence” means mentally noting to better discern the vanishing, falling away, and disappearing of a pleasant feeling as it is passing.

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The characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent unless we pay attention to the rise and fall of the object observed. In this case, it is concealed by the compactness of continuity. However, when the compactness of continuity is disrupted by discerning the vanishing of the object, things become disconnected. The characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent as the true nature of everything that arises.

The commentary to MN 22 pointed out specific reasons for impermanent:

“Having been, it is not, therefore it is impermanent. It is impermanent for four reasons:

- *in the sense of the state of rising and falling*
- *of change*
- *of temporariness*
- *of denying permanence or lasting.”*

By contemplating any kind of thing or phenomenon as “vanishing, vanishing,” the characteristic of impermanence becomes clear. The thing is seen as perpetually renewed, as short-lived, like a bubble on water, a lightning flash, or a dream. Phenomena are visible without a core, like mirages, unreal no matter how solid they appear. How can the mind or heart attach and cling to

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fleeting phenomena that come and go so quickly? It is, therefore, said that contemplating impermanence can prevent craving from developing in the first place.

THE BENEFITS OF CONTEMPLATING IMPERMANENCE

In addition to the most fruitful result of ridding ourselves of craving, there are other benefits to contemplating impermanence:

1. It helps get rid of any defilement that has arisen in mind, allowing the mind to return to peace.

Here is one of my student's experiences. This student is a *Dhamma* teacher in the U.S. She participated in one of my retreats many years ago.

One day, early in the morning, her mind was beset by anger. She was annoyed and very disappointed in herself. She thought that due to this anger, she would be unable to meditate well that day. Anger, we know, is one of the Five Hindrances. When anger arises, the mind is irritated, and meditation becomes difficult—unless we have the skill to know and apply the immediate antidote that deals with it.

Suddenly, she remembered what I had previously taught her: Contemplate impermanence on any emotion that has arisen. She later told me, “When you shared with us about contemplation of impermanence on whatever emotion has arisen, such as craving, anger, or jealousy, and so on, I had a doubt. I didn’t think that just contemplating impermanence could get rid of emotional states.”

As she was open-minded, she decided to give it a try—contemplating that anger as impermanent. She contemplated it many times, noting, “impermanent, impermanent, impermanent.” To her surprise, her anger subsided in no time, leaving no trace in her heart. She was filled with joy and quickly came to me to report, “The word *impermanence* is like a magic mantra! I am going to write down the word ‘impermanence’ on many papers and paste them all over my house when I go

back home. This will help to remind me not to forget contemplation of impermanence.”

We can see from her experience how effective this practice can be. Otherwise, her mind would have stayed overwhelmed and angry. If she had no way to escape the anger, she would have spent a bad day accumulating more and more unwholesome mental karma.

Remember, not only mental defilements should be noted. Even wholesome states of mind—a concentrated mind, a happy mind, a confident mind, a generous mind, even a contemplating mind—should be contemplated in the same way. The purpose is to avoid developing attachments to states of mind.

2. Contemplating impermanence also attunes the mind and harmonizes it with reality. Impermanence is the reality of the world. Distorted perception—seeing things as permanent—prevents us from seeing the truth most of the time. Then we mistake permanence as the truth. With such a distorted perception in mind, how are we going to tune into the truth? Even when impermanence presents itself, we are unable to see

it. We simply allow it to pass without developing any insight that would liberate us.

Without tuning the mind into reality, it is difficult to see impermanence as it happens. To harmonize and synchronize the mind with the reality of impermanence, our perception must regard things as changing. Only then can these two merge together.

3. Further contemplation of impermanence or *anicca* leads to seeing *dukkha* and *anattā*, the unpleasant and impersonal nature of things. When formations are repeatedly seen to be in constant flux, they appear frightening, like a murderer with an uplifted knife. They appear oppressive, a terror, suffering, and unsatisfactory to the mind of a yogi. Without seeing impermanence it is very difficult to understand the suffering of being oppressed by the incessant rise and fall of phenomena.

By seeing impermanence and suffering, we further realize that there is no permanent self exercising control over this whole process of karma and consciousness. When we talk about there being a “self,” and things that belong to a self, we are talking about something over which we can

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exercise control. But the process of things constantly arising and passing away is beyond our control. The characteristics of non-self, or anattā, are also beyond our control. So by seeing impermanence and suffering, we also see non-self.

APPROACHING INSIGHT KNOWLEDGE OF DISENCHANTMENT

The uncontrollable nature of formations due to their constant arising and passing away is wearisome. The mind gradually becomes disenchanted with all that is impermanent. Having repeatedly seen the rising and passing away and the oppressive nature of mind and body, we become disillusioned: Insight knowledge of disenchantment is achieved.

We might then feel we have been cheated for a long time by our distorted misperceptions of

permanence, happiness, and self with regard to mind and body.

Before reaching this stage, we took all of our delights in mind and body, deludedly imagining they were the sources of our only happiness. It is just like being a blind person given a soiled shirt but told it is white. Wrongly grasping that shirt as unstained, we delighted and immediately put it on. We went about boasting that a dirty shirt was a clean one.

When that blind person accepted the soiled shirt, put it on, and boasted about it, was it done while knowing and seeing or out of faith in the person who gave it? Of course, it was not from knowing and seeing, but out of misguided faith.

As long as we remained blind, we continued to be fooled. When we gained our sight, we saw the soiled shirt for what it really was and became disillusioned with it. We realized we had been fooled by the one who had given us the shirt. Feeling a sense of disgust, we grew dispassionate toward the soiled shirt and immediately took it off.

This blindness is like the ignorance that covers our eyes when we fail to see the true nature of phenomena—as impermanent, unhappy, and

impersonal. The person is like the mind. Similarly, when we are blind, we are ignorant of the true nature of things. But once we see the truth of impermanence, suffering, and non-self—the real nature of mind and body—we will feel dispassion toward mind and body and will no longer delight in them.

Feeling disenchanted with mind and body, we let go of passion and craving for them. When we are free of passion and craving for mind and body, then sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair no longer arise. Instead, letting go and freedom arise.

Let's remember what the Buddha said: *"Any ascetics or Brahmins who regard that which is in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful, as a tumor, as empty, and as void of self, they abandon craving."*

Only by repeatedly seeing the impermanent, suffering, and non-self nature of all things does one start to let go of craving and clinging. This is wise attention so important to the attainment of the supramundane stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) path and fruition moments.

Making wise attention into the true nature of things a habit

Once we have practiced in this way for some time and have become familiar with applying mindfulness and wisdom, we do not have to sit on the cushion to do it. We can do it when we are moving about.

For example, if our eyes contact an enemy and an unpleasant feeling arises, we can be mindful right at that moment of the arising of the unpleasant feeling. We can then further take the unpleasant feeling as an object, paying attention to noting it as “vanishing, vanishing.” We will soon notice the vanishing and disappearing of every unpleasant feeling.

We can also expand our comprehension by depersonalizing unpleasant feelings. How? In just this way, mentally noting, “Unpleasant feeling is just unpleasant feeling; it is not a self.” This is how it is depersonalized.

We can then further investigate cause and effect to fully understand the universal characteristic of non-self in *any* unpleasant feeling. We note, “This

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painful feeling arises due to a cause and never without cause. What is its cause?"

Upon investigation, we may find that unpleasant feeling arises because of eye-contact with an unpleasant form—perhaps an enemy. Therefore, unpleasant eye-contact is the cause. The arising of unpleasant feeling is the effect. We see that neither eye-contact nor unpleasant feeling is self. Unpleasant feeling is just conditionally arising mental phenomena. It comes and goes so long as we do not attach to it as “me, myself, or mine.”

In another moment, eyes contact a very charming and sensually-enticing form, and lust arises. As long as our mindfulness remains keen and as long as we can remember, we should contemplate the “vanishing, vanishing” of our craving. We may be surprised to see that craving is not as deeply rooted as previously thought. By contemplating the impermanence even of craving, craving loses its power to affect us. This is how mindfulness and wisdom protect our minds.

One of my students shared this story with me in a letter of appreciation:

Sayalay's teaching on cultivating mindfulness with wisdom was a precious gift to me in

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protecting the mind. It is a wise skill that I still rely on to this day to keep my mind wholesome, regardless of my encounters. Her [way of presenting the Buddha's] teachings on impermanence and renunciation of the mind and body make me feel the beauty of the Dhamma and help me to live life with ease. They arouse my enthusiasm and sense of urgency to practice diligently, which has led me to the realization that liberation from certain defilements of the mind and entering the supramundane paths of a Noble One is possible in this very life here and now!

This being the case, make the contemplation of impermanence your refuge.

Once you are familiar with the contemplation of impermanence, sharpen your insight: Attend to the Five Aggregates in different ways—as unsatisfactory, as a disease, as Mara's bait, as a murderer with a raised knife, as a tumor, as an arrow, as painful, as an affliction, as alien, as dissolution, as void, as empty, and as impersonal. In this way, liberate yourself from ignorance, clinging, and craving—the root cause of suffering.

Maha Koṭṭhita once asked Venerable Sāriputta, “Venerable sir, how should one regard the Five Aggregates to attain to the stage of stream-entry?”

I think everyone would like to know the answer. The gates of the four woeful states (rebirth in painful subhuman worlds) are permanently shut to anyone who has attained the stage of the stream-enterer. This is because identity view—the main factor responsible for casting us into the four woeful states has been completely uprooted. A stream-enterer may still enjoy sensual pleasures, but there is no chance of falling into the four woeful states in any future rebirth. As long as one has not yet attained stream-entry, the first stage of enlightenment, one needs to be careful while enjoying sensual pleasures!

Venerable Sāriputta answered, *“You need to attend to the Five Aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory, as a disease, as a tumor, as an arrow, as painful, as an affliction, as alien, as disintegrating, as empty, and as not-self.”*

If we attend to the Five Aggregates in this way, our minds will turn away from constantly grasping and clinging to these impersonal aggregates, and we can finally attain the first stage of awakening.

SUMMARY

To summarize, first ask: Where does all this suffering—headed by aging and death—originate?

You will see that suffering comes from craving rooted in ignorance. Then explore further. Ask yourself, When and where does craving arise and settle? You will discover through your own experience that craving arises and settles on pleasant and agreeable objects.

What are these pleasant and agreeable objects? They are the six sense bases, six sense objects, contacts, feelings, perceptions, volitions,

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consciousnesses, and so on. All of these objects are being clung to like the blind grasping a worthless thing. For when we regard things as permanent, happiness, or self, we nurture craving.

How do we not nurture craving? We keep contemplating them as they really are—impermanent, suffering, not-self, as a disease, as fearful, and so on. Only then are we able to abandon craving. In abandoning craving, we will be free from all types of suffering.

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TEXT FROM THE EXPLORATION SUTTA

SN 12:66(6)²

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Kurus, where there was a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadamma. There the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Bhikkhus!”

“Venerable sir!” those bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

“Do you engage in inward exploration, bhikkhus?”

When this was said, one bhikkhu said to the Blessed One: “Venerable sir, I engage in inward exploration.”

“How do you engage in inward exploration, bhikkhu?”

² Based on translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*

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The bhikkhu then explained but the way he explained did not satisfy the Blessed One. Then the Venerable Ānanda said: "Now is the time for this, Blessed One! Now is the time for this, Fortunate One! Let the Blessed One explain inward exploration. Having heard it from the Blessed One, the bhikkhus will remember it."

"Then listen and attend closely, Ānanda, I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied. The Blessed One said this:

"Here, bhikkhus, when engaged in inward exploration, a bhikkhu explores thus: 'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the world headed by aging-and-death: what is the source of this suffering, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does aging-and-death come to be? When what does not exist does aging-and-death not come to be?'

"As he explores he understands thus:

'The many diverse kinds of suffering that arise in the worldheaded by aging-and-death: this suffering has acquisition as its source, acquisition as its origin; it is born and produced from acquisition. When there is acquisition, aging-and-death comes to be; when

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there is no acquisition, aging-and-death does not come to be.'

"He understands aging-and-death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading on that is in conformity with its cessation. He practises in that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practising for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of aging-and-death.

"Then, engaging further in inward exploration, he explores thus: 'What is the source of this acquisition, what is its origin, from what is it born and produced? When what exists does acquisition come to be? When what is absent does acquisition not come to be?'

"As he explores he understands thus:

'Acquisition has craving as its source, craving as its origin; it is born and produced from craving. When there is craving, acquisition comes to be; when there is no craving, acquisition does not come to be.'

"He understands acquisition, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading on that is in conformity with its cessation. He practises in that way and conducts himself accordingly. This is called a bhikkhu who is practising for the utterly complete destruction of suffering, for the cessation of acquisition.

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“Then, engaging further in inward exploration, he explores thus: ‘When this craving arises, where does it arise? When it settles down, upon what does it settle?’

“As he explores he understands thus:

‘Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.’ And what in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature? The eye has a pleasant and agreeable nature in the world: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. So too the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind have a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.

“Bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past regarded that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they nurtured craving. In nurturing craving they nurtured acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they nurtured suffering. In nurturing suffering they were not freed from birth, aging, and death; they were not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they were not freed from suffering, I say.

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“Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the future will regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they will nurture craving. In nurturing craving they will nurture acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they will nurture suffering. In nurturing suffering they will not be freed from birth, aging, and death; they will not be freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they will not be freed from suffering, I say.

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure: they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving they are nurturing acquisition. In nurturing acquisition they are nurturing suffering. In nurturing suffering they are not freed from birth, aging, and death; they are not freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they are not freed from suffering, I say.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, there was a bronze cup of a beverage having a fine colour, aroma, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. They would tell him: ‘Good man, this beverage in the bronze cup has a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it is mixed with poison. Drink it if you wish. If you drink it, it will gratify you with

its color, aroma, and taste, but by drinking it you will meet death or deadly suffering.’ Suddenly, without reflecting, he would drink the beverage—he would not reject it—and thereby he would meet death or deadly suffering.

“So too, bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past ... in the future ... at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as permanent, as happiness, as self, as healthy, as secure:

they are nurturing craving. In nurturing craving

... they are not freed from suffering, I say.

“Bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past regarded that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful: they abandoned craving. In abandoning craving they abandoned acquisition. In abandoning acquisition they abandoned suffering. In abandoning suffering they were freed from birth, aging, and death; they were freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair; they were freed from suffering, I say.

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins in the future will regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful: they will abandon

craving. In abandoning craving ... they will be freed from suffering, I say.

“Whatever ascetics and brahmins at present regard that in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as nonself, as a disease, as fearful: they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving ... they are freed from suffering, I say.

“Suppose, bhikkhus, there was a bronze cup of a beverage having a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it was mixed with poison. Then a man would come along, oppressed and afflicted by the heat, tired, parched, and thirsty. They would tell him: ‘Good man, this beverage in the bronze cup has a fine color, aroma, and taste, but it is mixed with poison. Drink it if you wish. If you drink it, it will gratify you with its color, aroma, and taste, but by drinking it you will meet death or deadly suffering.’ Then the man would think: ‘I can quench my thirst with water, whey, porridge, or soup, but I should not drink that beverage, since to do so would lead to my harm and suffering for a long time.’ Having reflected, he would not drink the beverage but would reject it, and thereby he would not meet death or deadly suffering.

“So too, bhikkhus, whatever ascetics and brahmins in the past ... in the future ... at present regard that

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in the world with a pleasant and agreeable nature as impermanent, as suffering, as non-self, as a disease, as fearful: they are abandoning craving. In abandoning craving ... they are freed from suffering, I say."

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*Ciraṃ Tiṭṭhatu Saddhammo!
Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!*

May the True Dhamma Endure
for A Long Time!

Sharing of Merits

*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti sabbarasaṃ
dhammaraso jināti; Sabbaratiṃ dhammarati jināti,
taṇhakkhayo sabbadukkhaṃ jināti.*

(Dhp. 354)

A gift of Dhamma conquers all gifts; the taste of
Dhamma conquers all tastes;
a delight in Dhamma conquers all delights;
the ending of craving conquers all suffering &
stress. (Dhp.354)