

Bảo Anh Lạc Bookshelf 38

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

(Fifth Edition)

Bhikkhunī Thích Nữ Giới Hương

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On the Fifth Edition

This is a revised and enlarged edition of *The Cycle of Life*, which was first published eleven years ago in 2008. The second, third and fourth editions were printed in 2010, 2014 and 2016 at Phương Đông Publishing.

In presenting this edition at Hong Duc print. I have preserved the original version as the first edition. However, for the sake of clarity, a few changes have been made; errors have been corrected for better use and service, together with summary and discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge with special thanks Bhikkhunī Viên Quang, Sikkhamana Diệu Nga and Pamela C. Kirby (English editors who worked as my assistants for English translating, proofreading, design and publication).

We rejoice in introducing readers near and far to the Dharma and invite corrections and comments from our readers to be incorporated into future printings. We look forward to hearing from you.

Library of University of California, Riverside

March 01, 2020.

Bhikkhunī Thích Nữ Giới Hương

FOREWORD

From the Most Venerable Thích Bảo Lạc

Few can escape the vicissitudes of worldly life. The difficult problem of human life is always the dramatic sound that keeps continuously crying in almost impotent and hopeless ways.

Waves of suffering are omnipresent.

The traveler is riding a leaf boat.

Boats going against and toward the wind.

Let's contemplate in the waves of suffering . . .

(*The Suffering Waves* [*Bể thảm*], Đoàn Như Khuê)

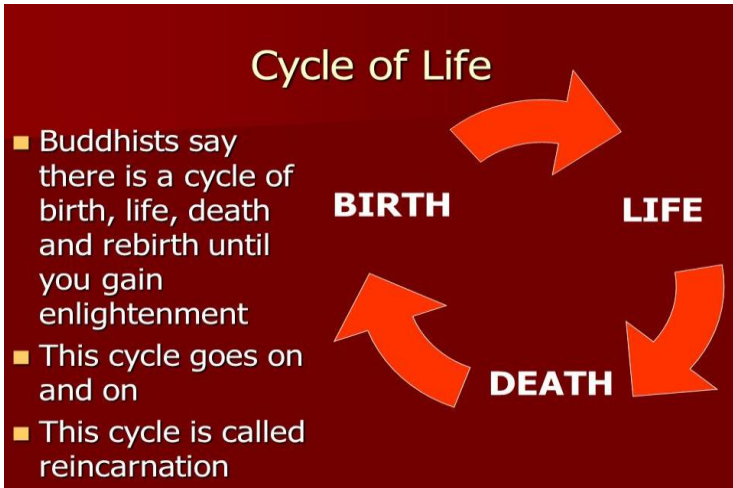
Those who go against the worldly life are like persons with a torch going against the wind—only with determination and fortitude can they escape harm. If practitioners are aware of human life, which is filled with delusion, impermanence and suffering, then they will try their best to train their illusion into a pure mind and thus they should bear fortitude with inner joy; it is an effective dose for the deadly disease. The Buddha and the bodhisattva ancestors taught:

Experiencing many ups and downs.

One, two, three-year-olds to age ninety years.

Spending various feelings of joy and sympathy.

Crying and laughing endlessly.



(*The Suffering Waves [Bể thảm]*, Đoàn Như Khuê)

Bhikkhunī Thích Nữ Giới Hương is a practitioner on the path toward enlightenment, writing *The Cycle of Life* ten years ago in 2008. During that time, she reflected with self-discipline and self-awareness to carefully and quickly step out of the binding cycles in numerous lives.

Now let's turn our attention to the book and contemplate what the author has wholeheartedly and devotedly explained to us.

.Pháp Bảo Monastery, Sydney, Australia

February 20, 2018

Sramana Thích Bảo Lạc

PREFACE

I have been wandering for years
Going around and around for a tiring life
Two moons are shining on our two shoulders
Shining hundreds of years in our cyclic life
...Endless hundred years but yet not met one another
I do not know where to return and meet my nature.
("A Place to Return," Một Cõi Đi Về, Trịnh Công Sơn)

That's it! Not only for hundreds of years, but for thousands of lives we have been wandering around the six cyclic realms¹ with weariness and without any condition to reflect or go out of our dream and know how to return to our nature.

The Buddha compassionately told the Most Venerable Moggalana to warn the descendants about the changing impermanence that arises and ceases. Each guesthouse in a monastery should draw a picture of the impermanent demon, also called the cycle of life, illustrated by the Avadāna Sūtra. Capable bhikkhus and

¹ Six cyclic realms are the realms of devas, asuras, humans, animals, ghosts and hells.

bhikkhunis are authorized to explain to the various visitors the meaning of this picture.

Our life is short. Inner afflictions of greed, hatred and delusion and our cyclic physical body with its previous karma pervades our mind. Outside, cruel teachers and friends, tempting six sense pleasures and external factors come and attack our mind. The karma of killing, theft, sexual misconduct and lying habits drag us to the negative way.

The karmic trend cycle is aided by the muddy water of greedy, angry and delusive states that continue to flow. Rebirth is the natural result of karma.

Rebirth and samsara only ceases when we no longer create new karma. We believe that mental activity (*saṅkhāra*) is the actor of rebirth. The twelve links of dependent origination are the endless cycle of samsara as we go around and around, afflicted with old age and disease. The endless cycle: without beginning and without end becomes the mutual cause and effect, without limits or boundaries.

The result of dukkha changes according to the karma. The karma changes according to the mind. We need only to purify our mind to end our suffering. Therefore, the picture of the cycle of life or the impermanent demon is very important and helps us understand defilements-karma-sufferings. Believing in

the cause and effect law of karma, Buddhist ethical values on which the precepts are based (*vinaya*) prevents wrongdoing, creates goodness and transforms our minds and helps us to know our nature.

Only with belief, understanding and realizing these profound and practical meanings can we accomplish our aspiration for liberation and bring happiness to ourselves and others. That is the wish and reason for the appearance of this book.

I respectfully pay homage to our Late Most Venerable Hải Triều Âm who wholeheartedly and compassionately taught and transferred to us the most profound meaning of life through this picture of the impermanent demon, as we entered the temple as young nuns beginning practice for dharma learning in the 1980s.

I hope scholars and knowledgeable readers will offer suggestions for better and more complete editions. I deeply appreciate the contributions of all.

April 20, 2008

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Thích Nữ Giới Hương

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*Venerable TN Giới Hương (center, first on the right)
with Nuns at Huong Sen Temple
Perris, California, May 25, 2019.*

CHAPTER I

CAUSATION

The Avadāna sutta mentions that during the Buddha's time, the Bhagavan was staying in Veluvana in Rajagriha. Venerable Maudgalyayana had supreme magic power and could see suffering scenes in the hell, preta and animal realms. When numerous heavenly gods end their lifetime, they are reborn in the three cruel realms of preta, animals and hell. The Buddha often reminded his fourfold disciples (bhikkhunis, bhikkhus, laymen, laywomen) to warn them. Those who were dissatisfied, losing their bodhicitta or those who were negligent in keeping the Vinaya rules were often brought to the Lord Buddha for his advice. Most Venerable Maudgalyayana moved many people to return to their monastic life and achieve arahantship.

The Buddha taught that the Elder Venerable Maudgalyayana could not be present everywhere at the same time to remind Buddhist practitioners. Thus, he asked that every temple have a picture of the Cycle of Life and put it in the hall with the following warning:

Concentrate your mind on the Buddha's teachings.

Let's win over Yama—the God of Death!

Live according to the Vinaya rules.

Always be alert, keep trying; then you can end the sufferings!

This picture reveals an impermanent demon with a fierce face breathing fire all around. Two hands and two feet full of claws are embracing a wheel with four layers or four cycles (the center cycle is defilement, the second cycle is karma, the third cycle is dukkha and the fourth cycle is the twelve-link cycle). This whole wheel is fiery and burning fiercely and shows us the endless failures of the impermanent demon with no beginning and no ending.

As the fourth cycle is the twelve link chain, this picture is also called the Avadāna Sutta. Since the changing wheel turns ceaselessly and continuously without any break, it is called the cycle of life. As there are pictures of demons and red light, this picture is also referred to as the impermanent demon. As a result of the mind's operation, there are six suffering realms of life creating karma and deaths. This is known as the "Trend of Mind's Operation."

In Tibet and north India, every time the temperature goes down, white snow covers the land. It's extremely chilling to the bones. The Tibetan people understand that their lives are fragile and continuously threatened by the anger of the natural forces. Thus, for many centuries, they often meditated and contemplated impermanence, samsara and death. The obvious characteristics of

impermanence and death are often the central topics for meditation and for the regular meditation sessions every morning and evening in their daily lives. Tibetans have the saying, “If you do not meditate on death and impermanence in the morning, you will waste the day. If you do not meditate on death and impermanence in the evening, you will waste the night.”

The Buddha warned us:

Concentrate on the Buddha’s teachings.

Let’s win over Yama, the God of Death!

In the Dhammapada,² the Buddha compassionately warned and advised us to reflect:

How can we laugh happily
When the life is always burnt
Living in the darkness,
Why do we not find the light?

² Dhammapala, translated by Ven. Narada Maha Thera, Maha Bodhi in Sarnath, 2000, Verse 146.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER I

Chapter I explains the origination of the Avadāna Sutta. The Elder Venerable Maudgalyayana could not be present everywhere at the same time to warn the Buddhist practitioners. Therefore, the Buddha taught us that every temple should draw a picture of the *Cycle of Life* and put it in the main hall with the following warnings:

Concentrate your mind on the Buddha's teachings

Let's win over Yama—the God of Death!

Live according to the Vinaya rules,

Always be alert, keep trying; then you can end the sufferings!

The wheel has four layers or four cycles. The center cycle is defilement, the second cycle is karma, the third cycle is suffering, and the fourth cycle is the twelve-link cycle. As the fourth cycle has the twelve links this picture is also known as the Avadāna Sutta. Since the cycle turns continuously and unceasingly, it is called the “cycle of life.”

Discussion Questions

1. What is the purpose of the Avadāna Sutta?
2. How many cycles are there in the cycle wheel? What are they?
3. What is the meaning of the warning in the picture?
4. In the picture, what is the red light around the endless tail of the demon?

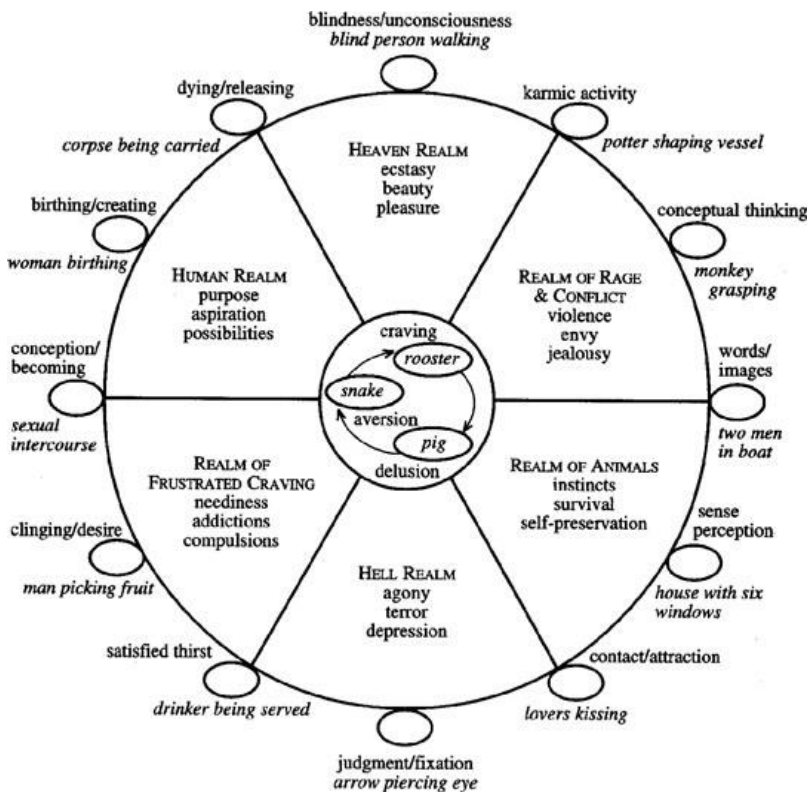


Figure 2



Figure 3

CHAPTER II

THE CYCLE OF DEFILEMENT

This defilement is the cycle or the center operating and leading the whole picture, so it is drawn in the middle of the wheel. The picture shows a rooster (sometimes a pigeon), a snake and a pig. These three animals are symbols of greed, anger and delusion which control and lead the wheel turning, so it's an important central point.

The rooster is the symbol of desire, full of limitless greed. The red feather of the rooster can be easily considered as the greed fire in those who have greed and nurture it.

Sometimes the picture shows a pigeon to symbolize craving, pleasure, self-desire. The self, like the mind, wants to grasp and be defiled, to increase impurities. The softness, pleasantness, attractiveness and sweetness makes it difficult to get out, hard to raise one's head up.

The Buddha taught that craving is a pit of coal. Ill-minded people (like us) misunderstand it as warmth and happiness, so we attach to it.

The snake is the symbol of anger. When we are angry, disturbed, annoyed or hostile, our face becomes pale with no blood, like the green darkness of the snake's skin. And if we continue to nurture anger, we shall want

to retaliate, harm and kill people like snakes that bite those who touch or harm them. If our mind is not satisfied with what we already have, then we seldom feel happy and satisfied with anyone. We complain about anything and feel disturbed and discontent. This is also the seed of anger and non-rejoicing, as in the Vietnamese folk songs:

The way to live that makes many kinds of people satisfied.

They laugh at generous people and criticize the mean ones.

They criticize tall people as being too tall and short people as being too short.

They criticize fat people as too fat,

They criticize thin people as too thin; thin like bones.

Hatred makes us lose peace and if it is strong it can lead to resentment, which is the material for hell in the present or future life. The danger of hatred is that it stimulates our body, our speech and our thoughts towards a cruel path. Then, the five aggregates or heaps appear. Eyes contacting the disliked objects, *the form* (rupa khandha). The anger that disturbs is *the sensation or feelings*, received from form, (vedana khandha), thoughts which arise in the brain are *the perceptions* (samjna khandha). That which changes the mind is *the mental activity or formations* (saṅkhāra khandha) whose nature is *the consciousness* (vijñana khandha). The uncomfortable forms that appear are rupa-khandha. So, from anger comes

the full influence of the five aggregates. This is one type of dukkha among eight types.³ Because Siddhartha wanted to get rid of these eight types of dukkha, he abandoned the mundane life of luxury and royalty to become an ascetic seeking the Supreme Truth.

Pigs are symbols of little concern with the mind's purity. Their bodies are heavy and their skins are dark. If our body is dirty, we take a bath. Tomorrow we sweat, become dirty and then we take a bath again. In that way, we are considered to have clean bodies. How about our mind? Whenever we accidentally say something wrong or perform a bad action or get angry, our mind regrets (we confess our faults and regret). Confession of errors is to renew, to bathe the mind. With delusion there is little concern for a pure mind—the afflictions, sadness, hatred, annoyance cover and ensnare the mind.

The Buddha taught that the suffering of delusion is the most fearful. As ignorance is delusion, no knowledge of avoiding evil things and doing good then leads to self-suffering.

³ Eight types of dukkha: 1. The suffering of birth, 2. The suffering of old age, 3. The suffering of illness, 4. The suffering of death, 5. The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant, 6. The suffering of separation from what is pleasant, 7. The suffering of not getting what one wants, 8. The suffering of the five aggregates.

We can see these three animals with their tails. The rooster sucks the tail of the snake. The snake then sucks the pig's tail and finally the pig sucks the rooster's tail. This means that the three poisons of hatred and delusion are connected with one another. Because of ignorance, we desire; desire meeting obstruction then leads to anger. Day and night these three animals unceasingly operate in mind and stimulate us continue the turning of suffering.

The Dhammapada, Verse 251⁴ says:

No fire is greater than desire/greed,
No attachment is greater than hatred,
No net is greater than ignorance,
No river is deeper than craving.

The Buddha with omniscience knew how many drops of rain had fallen. This cycle of bitterness, this ocean of suffering with greed, hatred and ignorance is called suffering because of the countless dukkha it contains.

Also mentioned in Dhammapada, the Buddha taught us to control our cravings and anger:

The mind is difficult to control,
Swiftly and lightly,
It moves and lands wherever it pleases.
It is good to tame the mind,

⁴ Dhammapada, translated by Venerable Narada Maha Thera. Verse 251, Maha Bodhi in Sarnath, 2000.

For a well-tamed mind brings happiness.⁵

Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world.

It is appeased only by loving-kindness.

This is an ancient law.⁶

The Most Venerable Thiện Siêu wrote :

A little anger, double more greed,

The whole life is suffering and pain.

Hundred good things, thousand times with forbearance,

Our mind is immediately relaxed and happy.

The fool sees there is a moon under the deep water and plunges into the water to find the moon. It's a worthless hardship and the fool faces death by drowning. Sentient beings for eons have misunderstood the illusive discrimination of following the six senses to be our real mind. The whole life it is so hard to seek illusive happiness and finally nothing can be attained. The mind is controlled by external factors that nurtures three poisons of greed, hatred and delusion and leads to killing, theft, improper sexual activities and lying which then traps us in samsara, and we don't know when we can get out.

⁵ Dhammapada: Verses and Stories, Verse 35, Annatarabhikkhu Vatthu, translated by Daw Mya Tin, M.A., <https://www.tipitaka.net/Tipitaka/dhp/verseload.php?verse=035>

⁶ Ibid.

The course of senses, that is, the scenes arising from contact with our six senses, if not controlled, will incur storms of desire, hatred and ignorance and nourish the mind of a rooster, snake and pig. Due to greed and anger, we speak and act wrongly. Due to ignorance, we consider good as bad and vice versa. These three afflictions are like fire that cooks us and water that drowns us.

We obey the Buddha's teaching by using our breath (mindful contemplation, *vipassana*) to return to our mind and we do not care if an opponent wants to incite or quarrel. Bad acts, ill speech just go away as their nature is impermanent. If we attach to illusive thoughts then we ourselves burn our own house. It's our anger itself that harms us, so we should calm down. Our body is composed of earth, water, wind and fire, so there's no patience to be borne for the true body. Remember our kindness to destroy evil thoughts. Remember our compassion to face cruelty, our rejoicing to minimize hatred, our equanimity to lessen grudges, which are the seeds of relatives of the snake (symbol of a hot temper).

We can see the three animals, rooster, snake and pig running on the blue line which is the delusive color. Greed, hatred, delusion, pride, doubt and wrong views are basic afflictions, the roots of rebirth and samsara. We feed these three animals in our heart so we nurture scenes of samsara forever. The central point of control in the wheel is the creation of the universe, the main cause of the world,

beings and effects but, its nature is illusory and it disappears immediately when we are awake.

For instance, Mr. Yasa was a rich man fond of sexual beauty. Many beautiful girls were around him. One night, after a party ended, beautiful girls and dancers laid down to sleep. These girls with disordered hair, untidy clothes, saliva coming out of their mouths, speaking frivolously, cosmetics on their faces shaded and dimmed so they looked ugly like ghosts.

Mr. Yasa was disgusted and ran out of the palace. He met the Buddha and paid homage to him, saying that he wanted to get out of that hell. The Buddha then gave him a sermon and after this Mr. Yasa's impure mind became pure with no attachment to sexual beauty anymore, pure like white silk. Thus, the defiled mind is a thing that comes and goes suddenly and it's not true.

For example, Angulimala the robber, the killer who chased the Buddha to offer his victim's fingers, thinking this would give him supernatural power. The Buddha went slowly and Angulimala ran quickly but could not catch him. Angulimala shouted "Gotama, let's stop!" The Buddha answered, "I stopped for a long time; it's only you who should stop now!" Angulimala became awakened listening to the Buddha's answer. He threw his swords away and took refuge in the Buddha as his disciple. So,

the mind of killing went away, abandoning the sharp knife in the heart. The cruel thought went away.

Every day we have sympathy or support for someone, but when we know that person is not loyal, is unfaithful, not good to us, naturally our sympathy disappears and hatred grows toward him. If we can meet good friends to remind us or we can hear the proper dharma at the right time, then our hatred and disturbance naturally go away.

Therefore, greed, hatred and delusion temporarily exist and if we recognize them as ourselves, we create karma. Integrating with greed, hatred and delusion they depend on us to arise and develop. When we are aware, they are nothing. Obeisance and applying the Buddha's teachings can help us get out of samsara, whereas feeding these three animals in our heart, we then build forever samsara.

Zen practitioner Huệ Khả told Zen Master Bodhidharma, "My mind is not peaceful. Please pacify it!" Bodhidharma told him "Bring out your mind, I shall pacify it." Huệ Khả returned and searched for a long time but could not find it. He was finally enlightened from the dialogue. Our pure nature is nothing, nothing can bind us. Our mind has no rooster, snake and pig as the symbol of blue ground.

Elder Venerable Ānanda in the Sūrangama Sūtra looked for his mind in seven places:⁷

1. Inside the body
2. Outside the body
3. Behind the eyes
4. Closing the eyes
5. Darkness is mind
6. Corresponding to which place there is mind
7. The mind is between the senses and their sphere, that which is unattached to anything is mind.⁸

Ananda saw seven areas but could not see where the mind resides. Because of delusions it can't be found. That is the meaning of the pigeon on the blue line. Therefore, the mind of greed, hatred and ignorance is naturally illusory (once we awaken, it disappears immediately).

The Buddha mentioned in the Dhammapada that in the stillness of destroying cravings (that is to say, not to feed the pigeon anymore), we could see that cravings are illusory and can be controlled as follows:

⁷ Sūrangama Sūtra, Vietnamese translation by Tâm Minh; English translation by Bhikkuni Thích Nữ Giới Hương, HCMC Publishing House, 1999, pp. 290–293.

⁸ If unattached, it exists or does it not exist? If not existing is a tortoise's feather, rabbit's horn, then there's nothing to be attached or unattached. But if there is detachment, it can't be called nothingness.

I have wandered many lives,
I found but can't meet
The builder of this house
It's suffering to live in samsara.⁹

and:

Oh! The builder of the house,
I can see you now,
You can no longer build houses,
The rafts are broken,
The rig poles disappear,
My mind is cessation,
All defilements have gone away.”¹⁰

The Buddha proved this when he was having a summer retreat at Kausambi (nine years after his enlightenment). There was a Brahmin looking for a bridegroom for his beautiful daughter. One day, the Buddha went by while going for alms. The Brahmin saw the Buddha's thirty-two signs¹¹ so extraordinarily bright

⁹ Ibid., Verse 153.

¹⁰ Ibid., Verse 154.

¹¹ Digha Nikaya, 14 (Mahapadana Sutta), section one describes thirty-two signs of the Buddha as follows: “Your Majesty, the prince owns the following:

1. He has feet with level tread. This mark is considered as of a great man.
2. On the soles of his feet are wheels with a thousand spokes, a nub and nave with full components. This mark is considered as of a great man.

-
3. He has projecting heels . . .
 4. He has long fingers and toes . . .
 5. He has soft and tender hands and feet . . .
 6. His hands and feet are webbed . . .
 7. He has high-raised ankles . . .
 8. His legs are like an antelope's . . .
 9. Standing and without bending, he can touch and rub his knees with either hand.
 10. His male organs are enclosed in a sheath.
 11. His complexion is bright, the color of gold.
 12. His skin is delicate and so smooth that no dust adheres to it.
 13. His body hairs are separate, one to each pore.
 14. They grow upwards, bluish-black like collyrium, growing in rings to the right.
 15. His body is divinely straight.
 16. He has the seven convex surfaces.
 17. The front part of his body is like a lion's.
 18. There is no hollow between his shoulders.
 19. He is proportioned like a banyan tree: his height is as the span of his arms.
 20. His bust is evenly rounded.
 21. He has a perfect sense of taste.
 22. He has jaws like a lion's.
 23. He has forty teeth.
 24. His teeth are even.
 25. There are no spaces between his teeth.
 26. His canine teeth are very bright.
 27. His tongue is very long
 28. He has a Brahma-like voice, like that of the Karavika bird.
 29. His eyes are deep blue.
 30. He has eyelashes like a cow.
 31. The hair between his eyebrows is white, and soft like cotton down.
 32. His head is like a royal turban.

and calm. Then he wanted to offer him alms. After that, he expressed his desire for the Buddha to become the daughter's bridegroom. But the Buddha refused:

Having realized cravings, dissatisfaction and desire,
I am not interested in sexual pleasures.

What is the body which is full of impurities?

I never want to touch it even only the foot.¹²

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER II

Chapter II explains the cycle of afflictions. This is the cycle or the central point controlling the whole picture. The picture shows a rooster, a snake and a pig which symbolize greed, hatred and ignorance leading and controlling the cyclic wheel turning. It's the important controlling center, the creation of the universe, the cause of the world, beings and karma but its nature is illusory. It disappears when we are awakened. These three animals suck their tails; the rooster sucks the tail of the snake; the snake sucks the tail of the pig; the pig sucks the tail of the rooster. The meaning of the three poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance/delusion is that they are closely connected

¹² Samyutta Nikaya, 4.9 PTS: Sn 835-847, Magandiya Sutta: To Magandiya, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1994, <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.4.09.than.html>

with one another and transform fully into five aggregates and samsara.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain the symbolic meaning of the rooster, the snake and the pig.

2. Why is the cycle of afflictions the leader of the cyclic wheel?

3. Tell a story about the danger of greed and delusion.

4. The builder in this verse symbolizes which animal among the rooster, snake and pig. Why?

Having wandered for eons,
I found but could not meet,
The builder of this house,
The cyclic life of samsara is full of suffering.¹³



Figure 4

¹³ Kinh Pháp Cú (Dhammapada), Verse 154, Vietnamese translation by Venerable Thích Minh Châu; English translation by Bhikkhuni Giới Hương

CHAPTER III

THE CYCLE OF KARMA



Figure 5

The second cycle next to the center is the karma cycle. This cycle is divided into two parts or two colors. The black base shows naked people, faltering, plunging their head downward. These are poor people heading towards darkness. Killing, theft, improper sexual conduct . . . are *the black karma* which are behaviors of animals, pretas and hell realms. This is the painful scene of the three downward bad realms. The white base shows the

fourfold disciples with a torchlight in their hands going upward. Bhiksus and bhiksunis are holding torches leading the liberation path for laymen and laywomen. This is the image of a group of four people following the light to the higher level, so it is *the white karma*.

We have hell at home with scenes such as beheading fishes, taking out fishes' bowels, taking fish's skin, extracting the crab's shells, boiling snails, cooking them alive on the fire and cutting chickens' throats and taking their blood. At big parties, there are killings of pigs, bulls, and so on. We create hell from one day to another, from one year to another, not a single instance without harming beings. Young beautiful women are demons when they kill animals to serve their husband's and children's meals; old women also became like that when they serve parties for their nieces and nephews, and so forth.

Chickens, fishes, bulls, pigs . . . they also breathe with a nose, eat with a mouth, have two lungs, also see with eyes, hear with ears, have flesh, bones and one liver like human beings. Why can we cut their throats, their skins, their flesh to feed our bodies? Treating guests by serving chicken and duck meat is considered rich, generous and hospitable. Thus, doing bad without knowing it and without shame means a person is a snake without care. A whole life of killing animals, then when we are dying, we invite monks or nuns to recite sūtras for us in one or two hours hoping that their recitation can take

us to the Pure Land (*sukhavati*). Do we think this is easy or not? Is this possible or impossible?

We lie and deceive people when selling or dealing to gain more profit; we commit sins but we still wear good clothes, even silk clothes. We commit stealing. It's painful but we are proud of ourselves and think we are smart and have better talent than other people. Thus, we are still in the black cycle, doing wrong, and are naked (shameless) but we are not aware of it. In the picture, naked women are shown lying upside down on both sides, which indicates that the bad karma pushes people down.

Therefore, only when monks or nuns lead the path can we go on the white road, the road that creates good karma. The Buddha did not compel us to endure hardships. We only need not do bad deeds. That's the good thing. No killing, no stealing, no improper sexual conducts, no lying . . . are the good deeds. Stepping on the white road, we are heading towards human and heaven realms. If we keep killing, stealing, lying, speaking falsely, using harsh speech and bad habits, we are in the black cycle, naked without becoming aware of it. We are doing wrong without awareness of it.

In Buddhism, there is a famous example of how difficult it is to be reborn in the human realm form from the animal realm. It's like a blind tortoise who, after one hundred years, can go above the water one time to find a

wooden stick in the ocean. In one hundred years it has only one chance to raise its head above the water. The tortoise wishes to crawl into a hollow tree which is under waves of wandering in the vast ocean. Do you think this is easy or not? Thus, it's very difficult to have a human body.

Blind tortoise: The blindness means attachment to dharma and to self; *Hundred years* is the time spent going through hardship in the cruel realms. This is the symbolic hundred years. In fact, there have been hundreds of thousands of lives, from beginningless time—it's innumerable. *Raising one's head* means no longer in the cruel animal realm. *The hollow tree:* The women's wombs, where the fetus becomes a human being. *Waves wandering in the ocean* are countless changing conditions, from one life to another.

In the book titled *Quy Sơn Cảnh Sách* (*Awakened Descendants* from Zen Master Linh Hựu in Quy Mount), Zen Master Linh Hựu warned Buddhist descendants about the characteristics of impermanence and advised us to return to the good way through the story of a man chased by a wild elephant.

The story tells us about a man running for his life because a mad elephant was chasing him. Encountering a dry well, he immediately clung on the roots of the banyan tree and climbed down. But at the bottom of the well, there were three dragons raising their heads breathing fire.

Around the well there were three poisonous snakes showing their tongues emitting poisonous breaths. It was so dreadful! The only way out was to cling onto the two branches of the banyan tree to survive. It was so miserable! The branches were so weak! Hanging onto life by a thread, that man was facing upward to the sky. Suddenly there were five bees flying across the well and five drops of honey fell into his mouth. Engaged in taking sweet honey, that man was thrilled and enjoyed its pleasure, forgetting all the dangers awaiting him.

In this story, *the chase of the elephant* symbolizes the urgent impermanence and the means a human would go to avoid death. *The banyan root hanging loosely to and fro in the well* means the fragility of a human life. *Three dragons* means avarice, hatred and delusion burning us to create karma. When our life stops, we shall fall into the three realms. *Four snakes* are a den of illness. *Black and white mice* means night and day passing by and our lifespan is shorter and more fragile and death is nearer. *Five drops of honey* means absorbed in licking honey (five sense pleasures). Due to sweetness of the desires, we forget the dangers and ignore the anxiety. Thus, speedy impermanence, life in one breath, continuous effort in one's dharma practice and don't let your life go by leisurely day by day, month by month. We are like a fish in a dry pond having no joy.

There was a prisoner who knew that he would be executed in three days. His religious teacher visited him and asked him what he wanted to do in the remaining three days. He replied, “I have only one thing to do, recite the Buddha’s name and my wish to be reborn in the Pure Land (*Sukhavati*).”

We all must die sooner or later. That’s a certainty, but we don’t know our death time (the god of death hasn’t notified us of the time). That’s why we still enjoy life; we are like fish stuck in dry water without knowing this. The prisoner sentenced to death was lucky to know his death time, so he prepared his journey by concentrating on reciting the Buddha’s name.

The Buddha advised us that “Each thought separates from mundane life; each mind on renunciation.” This means we have been fond of our body, which is composed of four elements for beginningless kalpas, going from one life to another because of karma. Now we are lucky to hear the Buddha’s teachings, so we must be fully aware and return to our nature and go beyond this suffering world. Buddhas, elder venerables are awakened so that we can go out of the worldly dream. We base our actions on the compassionate dharma teachings to cross life and death’s ocean. Vice versa, if we follow the illusory dream, we will have more and more sufferings. The winds of up and down provoke likes and dislikes that makes us

deeply integrate into afflictions. The Dhammapada teaches bad (black) and good (white) deeds as below:

In this life, they suffer
as well as in the next life.
Cruel people suffer in two lives,
Suffering and self-destruction,
Seeing one's bad deeds.¹⁴

* * *

In this life, they are happy
as well as in the next life,
Good people are happy in two lives,
Happy, too happy
Seeing one's good deeds."¹⁵

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra¹⁶ introduced internal and external parts of beings as follows:

The Buddha said, “Ānanda, all beings actually have a pure nature, but due to bad views there arise delusive habits, which are divided into external and internal parts.

1. Ānanda, due to craving for sense pleasure there arises delusive (sexual activity) feelings that can lead to water craving. Thus, for beings who remember delicious food, saliva will flow in their mouths. When there is

¹⁴ Dhammapada, Verse 15.

¹⁵ Dhammapada, Verse 16.

¹⁶ Śūraṅgama Sūtra. pp. 683–687.

someone whom we love or hate there will be tears in our eyes. When we want precious things, there is desire in our mind. The whole body is smooth when the mind thinks of sexual activity and the reproductive organs will have discharge.

Ānanda, cravings for pleasure are different but they have the same result of water discharge (negative mind).

Soaking wet but not being able to rise above, we naturally go below. This is called the internal part, that is, low vulgar desires inside us. Cravings and desires are illusory feelings going deeply into our mind that make it heavier. Thus, it leads to lower realms. That's the internal part.

2. Due to aspiration, there are ideals. They are only ideas pervading, but they can lead to a positive trend and perfect atmosphere. Thus, if beings keep the Vinaya rules, their whole body will be pure and light; those who recite mantras will have courageous eyes; those who want to be reborn in heaven will dream of flying above; those who vow in the Buddha's realm, the holy scenes will appear in their mind; those who worship the bodhi friends, they will lower themselves.

Ānanda, there are different thoughts but with the same trend towards lightly going up. Flying up, not plunging down and being naturally upward is the external part. That also means those are bored with this saha,

sorrowful life and aspire for upward liberation. These beings generate pure thoughts for going beyond wrong views and impurities. These thoughts, according to the mind, against the delusions make the mind comfortable and easy and go to upward realms. That's the external part. Bad deeds belong to the internal part. Good deeds belong to the external part. These two kinds of deeds pull the mind up or down. Therefore, all the six realms are due to beings' own causes and effects. They reap what they sow. The same effects will have the same realms. Different effects will have different realms.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER III

The cycle of karma is divided into two parts or two colors. The black line is pitiful people going into darkness by killing, stealing, acting unchastely and so forth. All these acts are creating black karma, the behaviors of animals, pretas, hell, the suffering scenes of the three realms. The white line has fourfold disciples like bhiksus and bhiksunis, holding light leading to liberation for upasakas (laymen) and upasikas (laywomen). This is the picture of those who follow the light, so it is on the white base. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra mentions the internal part is black karma going downward to the three suffering realms and the external part is the white karma going upward.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the black and white base/line?
2. Define the term “karma.”
3. Why does the black line show fluctuating naked women? Why “naked” and “fluctuating”?
4. Please report the story of the man chased by a fiery elephant in the book, *Quy Sơn Cảnh Sách* (Zen Master Linh Hư Warned Descendants).

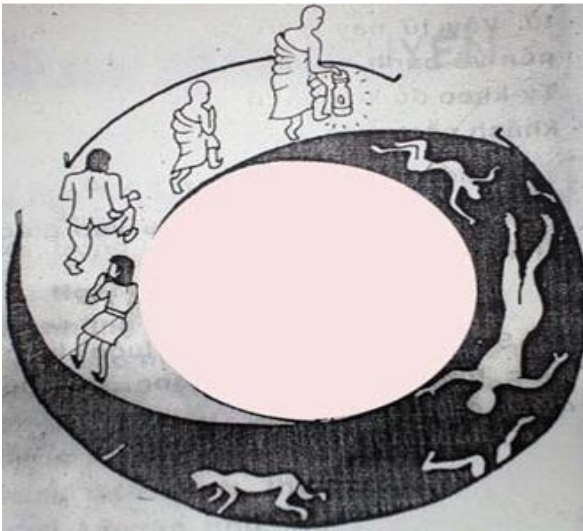


Figure 6

CHAPTER IV

THE CYCLE OF SUFFERING



Figure 7

The endless space is called *the universe*. Being in that limitless time is called *the abiding*. In that limitless time and space, according to existent Buddhist views, there are incalculable existing beings. Each type, according to their purity or impurity, variously good or bad karma, make their appearance in the corresponding realms of suffering or happiness.

According to this samsaric wheel, karma is divided into six spheres, six types, or six realms such as heavens

(*devas*), titans (*asuras*), humans (*manushyas*), animals (*tiryakas*), ghosts (*pretas*), hells (*narakas*). These realms are in the third cycle, the cycle of suffering which is next to the karma cycle. According to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, we have seven worlds by adding another realm, that is, the demi-gods.

1. HEAVENS (Devas)



Figure 8

Due to the merits of generosity and meditation, the heaven realm provides a good environment and a healthy, beautiful body. In the heaven realm, one sees beautiful scenes, enjoys a good existence with a long life. One can attain supernatural power, go to and fro leisurely, have abundant clothes, exciting journeys, naturally have and enjoy hundreds of pleasures; there is no suffering as in the Jambudvipa (continent of the terrestrial world). The merits (*punya*) in that realm, though abundant, belong to worldly

pleasure and they will disappear one day when their merits end; there is no certainty. That's the impermanence, unfixed manner. Thus, even if one lives a thousand years, one can't avoid being dragged off by the god of death.

The Aṅguttara Nikāya mentions that when virtuous females die, they are reborn in heaven to enjoy beauty, sounds and pleasure owing to the eight merits they have performed in their lives:

1. Wholeheartedly loved and cared for their families.
2. Respected sramanas (monks/nuns) and relatives.
3. Took care of household matters devotedly.
4. Treated servants properly.
5. Protected their property carefully.
6. Took refuge in the Three Jewels.
7. Kept five precepts.
8. Practiced generosity—always happy to give alms.

We often hear that if we keep ten precepts properly, when we die we shall be reborn in heaven. If we can keep five precepts without fault, we shall be reborn as human beings. But here in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, it teaches that if we keep five precepts, we can also be reborn in the heaven realms with abundance in three fields (beauty, sound and pleasure) as a result of the merits of performing one's duties to the family and keeping the precepts.



Figure 9

Therefore, no matter what position we hold, the most important practice is goodwill, wisdom and aspiration for other's happiness, not for one's own benefits. Caring behaviors, loving eyes, elegant speech, and diligent service for others around us are necessary to be reborn in heaven.

There are three kinds of heaven: The heaven realm where beings still think more or less of sexual pleasures is called the Sense Desire Realm. The heaven realm in which beings are free of sexual pleasure but still have a physical body is called the Form Realm. The heaven realm in which beings are free of sexual pleasure and have no physical body is called the Formless Realm.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra¹⁷ states:

Desire Heavenly Realm (six types of sense pleasure heaven realm) lust and form remain, (*Kāmasugati-Bhūmi*):

- Four Heavenly Kings (*Catummahārājika*): This is where beings still have sexual pleasure with their wife/husband but no improper sexual activities. Their thoughts are pure. At the time of death, they live near the sun and moon.

- The Trāyastriṃśa Heavenly Beings (*Tāvatiṃsa, Tettiṃsā*): Where beings have little sexual activity with their wife/husband and usually have a pure mind. At the time of death, they go beyond the sun and the moon, to the top of the human being realm.

- The Suyama Heavenly Beings (*Yāmā*): Heavenly beings with little thought about sexual activities. They live calmly with little activity. Their pure mind is in a space realm where neither the sun nor moonlight shine.

- The Tushita Heavenly Beings (*Tusita*): Heavenly beings who always remain calm but are still afflicted by emotions. At the time of death, they will be reborn in a complicated place where destructive kalpa and three catastrophes of human and gods of lower realms can't be reached.

¹⁷ Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Vietnamese translated by Tâm Minh, HCMC Publishing House, 1999 pp. 721–749.

- The Blissful Transformation Heavenly Beings (*Nimmānaratī*): There is no sexual lust though having to perform sexual activities one feels no taste, like eating wax. At the time of death, they are reborn into the transformation scene.

- The Transformation Heavenly Beings of the Comfort from Others (*Paranimmitavasavattī*): Here there is no worldly attachment, just acting in accordance with the world to enjoy the five pleasures. One generates the mind of tiredness (the main cause to be reborn up to a formless realm). At the time of death, they go beyond the transformative and non-transformative scenes.

In the six types of heaven there is no noise, and one is still inwardly attached to five pleasures. From the above-mentioned heavens downwards is called the sense realm. The *Twice Daily Chanting Commentary*¹⁸ and *Essential Abhidharma*¹⁹ (Thắng Pháp Tập Yếu Luận) say that the lifespan in heaven is equal to hundreds of billions of years in the human realm. Six Sense Heavens, together with human beings, animals, demons and hells are in the Desire Realm.

¹⁸ Nhị Khóa Hiệp Giải (Thời khóa tụng khuya và thời khóa tụng chiều, *The two chanting Complements and the Supreme Dharma Treatise*, Chú giải : Ngài Quán Nguyệt, Dịch giả : HT Thích Khánh Anh, <http://www.khanhanh.fr/bantin/bt0211/bt21111.htm>

¹⁹EssentialAbhidharma, <https://www.buddhinqury.org/article/outline-of-abhidhamma/>

Form Heaven Realm

These heaven realm beings no longer attach to five sense pleasures and often remain in samādhi without attachment to external factors, but still attached to the body. This is called the Form Realm (*Trūpāvācara Bhūmi*). There are eighteen types of heavens:

- Brahman Heaven Retinue (Community Brahman Heavenly Beings)

- The Brahma Minister Heavenly Beings

- Great Brahma Heavenly Beings (Maha Brahman, who attained the first dhyāna by renouncing worldly objects to gain samādhi.)

- Lesser Light Heavenly Beings (*Paritta*)

- The Limitless Light Heavenly Beings (*Appamanabha*)

- The Light Voice Heavenly Beings (They attained second dhyāna with samādhi.)

- Lesser Purity Heavenly Beings (*Parittasubha*)

- Measureless Purity Heavenly Beings (*Appamanasubha*)

- The Prevalent Purity Heavenly Beings (*Sulehakinha*). They attained the third dhyāna by leaving the pleasant to gain the ecstatic.

- Unconscious Heavenly Beings (*Asaññasatta*)

- The Blessed Love Heavenly Beings (*Anabhraaka*)

- The Abundant Fruit Heavenly Beings (*Vehapphala*)

- Heavenly Beings Without Thought (*Akanittha*)
- Without Defilements Heavenly Beings (*Aviha*)
- Without Heat Heavenly Beings (*Atappa*)
- Clear-Sighted Heavenly Beings (*Sudassi*)
- Beautiful Present Heavenly Beings (*Sudassa*)
- Absolute Form Heavenly Beings (*Aghaniwiha*).

They attained fourth dhyāna by equanimity and purity.

In other words, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra²⁰ expresses the four dhyāna in the form heaven world as follows:

- **The first dhyāna:** The Community of Heavenly Beings (*Brahmapārisajjā*), the Brahma Minister Heavenly Beings (*Brahmapurohitā*) and the Great Brahma Heavenly Beings (*Mahābrahmā*).

- **The second dhyāna:** The Lesser Light Heavenly Beings (*Parittābhā*), the Limitless Light Heavenly Beings (*Appamāṇābhā*), and the Light Voice Heavenly Beings (*Ābhassarā*).

- **The third dhyāna:** The Lesser Purity Heavenly Beings (*Parittasubhā*), the Measureless Purity Heavenly Beings (*Appamāṇasubhā*), and the Prevalent Purity Heavenly Beings (*Subhakiṇhā*).

- **The fourth dhyāna:** The Blessed Birth Heavenly Beings (*Punyaparsavas*), the Blessed Love Heavenly Beings (*Anabhraka*), the Abundant Fruit Heavenly Beings

²⁰ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, pp. 708–713.

(*Vehapphalā*) and the Heavenly Beings Without Thought (*Akaniṭṭhā*).

• **Five Without-Returning Heavenly Inhabitants (*Suddhāvāsa*) belong to the Anāgāmiphala saints:** The Without Defilements Heavenly Inhabitants (*Avihā*), the Without Heat Heavenly Beings (*Atappā*), the Good View Heavenly Beings (*Sudassā*), the Good Present Heavenly Beings (*Sudassī*) and the Absolute Form Heavenly Beings (*Aghaniwiha*).

• **Five Realms Without Defilements (*Kleśa*)** Heavenly Inhabitants (*Avihā*) to the Absolute Form Heavenly Beings (*Aghaniwiha*) are called the pure dwelling (*Suddhāvāsa*) where the no-return sages (*Anāgāmiphala*) are living.

According to the course of mind, we can let go of greed, hatred and delusion, pride and wrong views (ten entanglements, ten defilements).²¹ Instead, rejoicing,

²¹ Ten entanglements: anger (*krodha*), sleepiness, wandering, restlessness, shamelessness, bluishness, torpor, meanness and envy.

Ten afflictions: five foolish afflictions: greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance and doubt.

Five intelligent afflictions: illusion of body or self, extreme view, erroneous view, wrong view in understanding the precepts and wrong view in self-grasping.

Ten afflictions are the nature. Ten entanglements are the manner leading us to be deluded in the binding cycle of samsara.

Four defilements: greed, hatred, delusion, arrogance, which all clings to objects in the world and generates illusions of desire, anger, ignorance and pride. Its nature is slow, so it is called foolish affliction.

happiness, samādhi, equanimity (*upeksa*) depend on the power controlling our mind and we can have different dhyāna states. Like mixing strong coffee with milk, the color of coffee appears strong or weak.

Formless Heaven Realm (*Arūpāvacara-bhūmi*)

Heaven beings are detached from their bodies and desire. There are four kinds:

- The state of infinite space (*ākāśānañcāyatana-bhūmi*)
- The state of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana-bhūmi*)
- The state of nothingness (*ākiñcaññāyatana-bhūmi*)
- The state of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (*nevasañ-ñānāsaññāyatana-bhūmi*)

Essential Abhidharma also specifically presents the entanglements producing consciousness or mind, which are related between this life and the next life, from from hell up to the highest Formless Realm. There are four types of entanglements generating consciousness:

- The consciousness of the Cruel Realm (hell, preta and animals)
- The consciousness of the Desire Heavenly Realm
- The consciousness of the Form Heavenly Realm

But doubtful afflictions (the fifth one) develop this delusion to the four noble truths; its character is undecisive, ardorless so it has the same identity with desire, anger, ignorance, pride which are foolish afflictions.

- The consciousness of the Formless Heavenly Realm

Beings in these heavenly realms are there due to virtuous deeds, so there is a better environment and better birth than in human realm. But they should notice that after a long lifespan enjoying pleasures, that is, the six senses are attached to pleasures (Pleasure Realm), enjoying the state of peaceful dhyāna of samādhi (Form and Formless Realms), abiding in four types of eating²² spanning one's life. Most people are reborn in cruel

²² Four types of eating:

1. Eating by portions, i.e. eating each slice, each piece, each part and using three spheres of perfume, smell, stink and bad smell. Taste (sweet, unsalted) and contact (touch the food or its taste). Taking these three tastes to be the base and taking the changing and decaying to be the core. This is the way of eating for deities, humans and animals.

2. Eating by contact (*sparsha*), i.e. taking the mind (*citta*) corresponding to six consciousnesses, contacting with scenes pleasant to the thoughts, five agreeing senses, happy to be the way of eating. This is the way of eating for demons.

3. Eating by thought, i.e. taking the defiled mind (*citta*) of consciousness to specifically think of it in order to transform into miraculous meditation to help the body of Form Realm, continuously thinking without stopping, that is the Form Realm taking the samādhi ecstasy as food. For example, when seeing tamarind, the mouth will have saliva to avoid thirst. Hanging cookies is seen to avoid hunger which is also the way of eating by thinking.

4. Eating by consciousness: the eighth consciousness maintained the body without being disbanded. Four saint and six mundane realms have this consciousness. Only to the saint is it called enlightenment (*Tathāgata-Vijñā garbha*) while to the mundane beings it is called consciousness (ignorance). The mind of the saints is inherently fully awakened and pure because it preserved the measureless merits (*srāva*/pure) without presence, without emptiness, without residing and neither residing. This merit/consciousness serves as foo for the saint.

realms. Therefore, Buddhas often get enlightened in the human realm and advise their disciples to consider the heaven realms a danger, a problem, an obstacle for liberation; not to be reborn there.

There are seven realms (six realms plus the demi-god realm). The demi-heaven is a type with beings half divine and half human. The *Sūrangama Sūtra*²³ says there are beings from the human realm not practicing morality, concentration and wisdom but practicing illusive thoughts. Due to their illusory thoughts, they prefer to focus on strengthening the body to live long by going to the remote forest or islands and eating fruits or herbs to live. They keep a peaceful mind and train their body, detached from worldly matters. Then they become ten types of immortals with lifespans of thousands of years. Finally, they also die. But they can avoid the rule of death. Here we can see the thoughts that change the ordinary lifestyle of human beings, lengthening the lifespan. Many Chinese, Korean and Asian legendary films make films about the immortals' realm.

Ānanda, these immortals who are in human realms who train their minds in the wrong way of enlightenment aim to obtain some special way to live for tens of

²³ *Sūrangama Sūtra*, Vietnamese translated by Tâm Minh, English translation by Bhikkuni Thích Nữ Giới Hương, HCMC Publishing House, 1999 pp. 721–749.

thousands of years, and favor to stay in the deep mountains or on the islands in the oceans far away from the human world. However, they are still in the false thought of the saṃsāric wheel. If they do not cultivate samādhī, once their retributions are ended, they must return to the six realms.²⁴ There are ten types of immortals:

1. The earth-acting immortals: There are beings taking nutritious food continuously without ceasing with strong determination. They are successful in their way of eating. They become the earth-acting immortals.

2. The fly-acting immortals: There are beings using herbs without stopping with determination and their way of using medicinal herbs is successful and they become fly-acting immortals.

3. The roam-traveling immortals: There are living beings using metal and stone without stopping with strong determination and successful chemicals and they become roam-travelling immortals.

4. The space-acting immortals: There are beings training activities without stopping with strong determination and their energy force successfully becomes the space-acting immortals.

²⁴ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, pp. 715–719.

5. The heaven-acting immortals: There are living beings using saliva continually with strong determination and successful virtuous practice becoming the heaven-acting immortals.

6. The penetrate-acting immortals: There are living beings using extracts continuously, with strong determination and successful absorption. They become penetrate-acting immortals.

7. The way-acting immortals: There are beings chanting whole mantras and spells continuously with strong determination until their method of mystery succeeds. They become the way-acting immortals.

8. The illuminate-acting immortals: There are living beings training their thought with mind memorizing continuously until their method of concentrating succeeds. They become the illuminate-acting immortals.

9. The essential-acting immortals: There are beings contemplating fire and water combined continuously with strong determination and successful “cảm ứng.” They become the essential-acting immortals.

10. The absolute-acting immortals: There are beings training transformation continuously with strong determination and successful transformation practice. They become the absolute-acting immortals.

2. ASURAS (*Asurakāya*)



Figure 11

This is a type of being with merit but who often argues with others. Heroic beings do many good acts but often argue and fight with each other. To conquer the enemy, they prefer to use the strict violent means of weapons and war to win against wrong deeds without compromising, continuously fighting and struggling. These mental seeds will be reborn into this Asura (*Asurakāya*) realm. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra,²⁵ the Buddha taught that in the above three heavenly realms, there are four kinds of asuras (*asurakāya*) as follows:

1. The beings come from ghosts (*pittivisaya*) who use their strength to protect dharma and can have their spiritual superpower enter the space. These asura species are born from eggs and belong to ghosts (*preta*).

²⁵ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, pp. 715–716.

2. The beings come from heavenly inhabitants who have less merit and must stay in places near the sun and moon. These asura (*asurakāya*) species are born from wombs and belong to human beings (*manussa*).

3. There are asura kings who control the world with strong power and fearlessness, compete for positions with the Brahma Lord, the Shakra Lord, and Four Heavenly Kings. These asura (*asurakāya*) species are born from transformation and belong to heaven (*deva*).

4. Ānanda, there are some low asuras who are born in the great seas, diving deeply in underwater graves. In daytime, they travel in space. At nighttime, they sleep in water. These asura species come into being from moisture and belong to animals.

Asura (*asurakāya*) is a kind of ghost (*pittivisaya*) or non-heavenly being. They are totally different from the above heavenly inhabitants (*devas*). They have physical superpower but their characteristics are much anger, competition, fighting and killing. In short, four kinds of birth of asuras are:

The ghost asuras (*pittivisaya*): They are born from eggs, moisture-born, living in the space. There are asuras generating mind to protect dharma. So, at the end of each daily chanting in the temple, we often chant this verse:

All Gods, Asuras, Yaksas

Who come to listen to dharma

Should be attentive
Each should diligently practice
The Buddha's teachings.
Whoever comes to listen at this place
Even in space or on earth
Often generate kindness and compassion for people
We abide in the dharma day and night
Wishing all realms to be peaceful
Uncountable wisdoms and merits benefiting beings
All bad karma is destroyed
Without suffering and go into nirvana
Often using morality's scent to brighten the body
Often using meditative cloth to help the body
Miraculous flowers of Bodhicitta all over the place
Depending on the abode that is often joyful
Namah Protector of Dharma Bodhisattva!



Figure 12

1. Human asuras (*manushas*), belonging to humans in the heaven realm from womb- born): They are born from a womb, near to the sun and the moon. They are reborn from heaven into this type because of less merit.

2. Heavenly King Asuras (*tiracchānayani*) come from the transformative birth (belonging to heavens). They have power and struggle with Indra Heaven head over power and Four Celestial Brahmans in heaven. Thus, the picture shows these holding arrows and guns fighting one another.



Figure 13

3. Animal asura from moisture born (belonging to animals in the heaven): They are born from low-breath energy in the great ocean, diving into the water realm. They go leisurely in space during the day and sleep in water at night.

In the painting of the Cycle of Life, the Buddha describes asura by providing a good image of a ghost group who hold the bow, sword, and knife and fight and kill one another in battle. This is the particular karmic cause but its consequence is illusory, so they are subjected to the eternal rebirth wheel.

3. HUMAN REALM (*Manushyas*)



Figure 14

On this human planet we have seven continents: Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America. The Buddha told Venerable Maudgalyayana to illustrate the picture of human life with eight types of sufferings: birth, old age, sickness, death, suffering as a result of separation from loved ones, suffering from meeting hateful people, suffering from not getting what one wants and suffering from the five aggregates. There are scenes of war, armored tanks, guns, floods, burned houses, newborn babies, grown-ups, lying sick in bed, coffins waiting.

When the father's sperm combine with the mother's ovule, the consciousness of death goes into this combination and begins a new life. It depends on one's

karma, light or heavy, as to which sperm or ovule become human beings or animals.



Figure 15

Just like animals, human beings are born from the mother's womb. The fetus has a dirty birthplace, beside the large intestine, small intestine, near decomposed food, in fishy blood, and mucilage. This is where the body forms, so it's naturally no pride at all.



Figure 16

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra,²⁶ the Buddha explained that as animals repay their past charges, if they pay over the quantity they owed, they often rebirth as human beings to ask for the surplus. If these debtors are healthy and have merit, they can return to the owner in their human realm. In contrast, if they don't have enough merit, they will rebirth in the animal form continually to repay this debt.

Ānanda, you should know that whether money or labor, once it is paid off, then it comes to end naturally. But if in the course of payment, if they commit killing other beings or eating their flesh, then they continue in such a way, passing countless kalpas as many as molecules turning around as a rotating wheel, and exchange in the up and down states without stopping except for practicing śamatha or meeting a Buddha ascending in the world.

- You should know that after the owls have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the corrupt and stubborn beings*.

- When the ghostly species of ominous prophecies have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the strange beings*.

²⁶ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, pp. 708–713.

- When the tigers have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the foolish beings*.

- When the poisonous species have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the malignant beings*.

- When the worms have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the cowardly beings*.

- When the species of animals being used for food have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the chicken-hearted beings (khuppipasinos preta)*.

- When the species of animals being used for clothing have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the toiling beings*.

- When the species of migratory birds have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to the literate beings.

- When the auspicious species have paid off their charges, they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the smart beings*.

- When the species of domestic animals being friendly and close to people have paid off their charges,

they who regain their original form as human beings in the human realm belong to *the well-communicated beings*.

Ānanda, after paying off the past old debts, these creatures are reborn in the human shape. Due to ignorance (*avijjā*) from beginningless time, they have created the upside-down karmas of pay-borrow, lack-extra, and kill-being killed. If they have not met the Tathāgata or listened to dharma, they must rotate forever in the wearisome *samsāra* cycle without stopping. How pitiful such creature beings are!

The Buddha taught that our flesh body is born from the impure karma of previous lives.

Karma is transformed at consciousness going into mother's womb. There are five dirty places:

1. Impure birthplace: This body is not a lotus, a fragrant flower, but born out of blood and mucus/mucilage next to excremental organs.

2. Impure seeds: As a result of the combination of father's sperm and mother's ovule, this body is formed.

3. Impure signs: This body is nothing but nine holes (two eyes, two nostril holes, mouth, ears ...) and thirty-two kinds of impurities, that is, hair, fur, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons and bones, kidney, marrow, heart, liver, diaphragm, lung, bowel, mesentery, stomach/abdomen, excrement, bladder, phlegm, mucus, water in bones, urine.

4. Impure mark: Born from sexual activities with sexual pleasure as a base. If not practicing contemplation to transform, though we use all water from the ocean to bathe, we still remain unclean.

5. Impure end: A dying body has nine signs which are called *nivasamjna* (Skt):

- Sign of swelling (*vyadhmatakasamjna*, Skt.): After death, there is no eighth consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) keeping the body alive, so the body swells as it begins to decompose. Contemplation of a bloated corpse.

- Sign of discoloration (*vinilakas*, Skt.): Contemplation of a corpse changing color to dark purple.

- Decaying signs (*vipadumakas*, Skt.). Mealy flesh like a loaf soaked in water. Contemplation on a decaying corpse.

- Signs of blood (types of water, blood, mucus; *vilohitakas*, Skt.): Contemplation on blood leaking out from a corpse.

- Signs of stink (*vipuyakas*, Skt.): The body is completely ruined and begins to stink. Contemplation on a corpse covered with pus.

- Signs of stale perception (*vikhaditakas*, Skt.): Completely decayed bodies. Contemplation on a corpse torn apart by wild birds and wild beasts.

- Scattered perception (*viksiptakas*, Skt.): The flesh is gone but bone remains. Contemplation on the scattered limbs of a corpse.

- Vein sign (*asthis*, Skt.): The bones are also drying out. Contemplation on the leftover white bones.

- Signs of burning (*vidagdhakas*, Skt.): The ashes of bone also disappear into space and there is nothing left behind. Contemplation on the bones reduced to ashes.

We have those above-mentioned but when we were born from our mother's womb, we forget all these. Newly born ones only cry, grow up bearing a lot of impurities in the body and forget it all. They struggle hard to earn a living then go to old age and death's stage. Nurturing the body with rice, finally it returns to the earth.

Death is the final point. But we are not the point or semicolon but the commas, as this is yet finished and death is not the end. Delusive consciousness rises again and we are reborn. We go into the womb, stay in the mother's body and then come out of it. When we are dead, we are put into a coffin and it's called death. We can be reborn into chicken's eggs, a fish's womb and so on. Sometimes we are born in hell, a preta, an animal and sometimes we are born in heaven or the human realm. It keeps cycling in the three cycles, afflictions-karma-suffering, going around samsara, experiencing the same thing for eons. Therefore, this book is titled "The Cycle of Life."

We often go around in the three realms, eight difficulties without beginning. The three realms are hell, preta and animal realm. The eight difficulties are:

1. Non-thought Heaven: They have a long lifespan but unluckily never meet Buddhas.

2. Northern Continent (Uttara-kuru): It is to the north of Mount Sumeru. They keep ten precepts and have joyful lives but no practice of dharma, so they cannot meet Buddhas.

3. Born before and after the Buddha's time: The previous Buddha died and the future Maitreya has yet to come. There is no Buddha propagating the dharmas.

4. Worldly intelligence: They have a clever mind only interested in unorthodox books, non-buddhist books, with no belief in renunciation, so it's an obstacle to Buddha-dharma.

5. Handicapped: They lack one of the six senses. For example, deaf or blind.

6. Animals

7. Hungry ghosts (*pretas*)

8. Hell

We should reflect on such disasters or obstacles and such bad karma. Practicing the contemplation of truth and knowing our destiny to avoid being deceived by illusory views (the impure views). Training our mind, we

should recover our self-control to build our path towards enlightenment.

Even though we have the same karma as other human beings, there are individual karmas. There are mean people, rich people, beautiful people, ugly people, lucky and unlucky people—all is due to our right view or wrong view, good deeds or bad deeds in our body, speech and mind. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*,²⁷ the Buddha told Mallika, queen of King Pasenadi:

Queen Mallika! Those who are often aggressive when meeting unpleasing things, they will be angry, troublesome, quarrelsome. They will be born with ugly bodies, later they will suffer poverty. They are jealous of those abundant in things, so they bear the result of mean people, servants, uncredited people.

Queen Malika! Those who are often unsatisfied but give alms, they will be born ugly but rich. Those with a kindhearted mind often give alms and do not envy anyone; they will be reborn with beauty and wealth and high reputation.

Queen Mallika! Giving brings about worldly benefits and merits. There are two results from this cause. There are people who hardly make ends meet (when

²⁷ The Story of Queen Mallika,
http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/ma/mallikaa.htm
Dhammapada. Verse 151, https://what-buddha-said.net/Canon/Sutta/KN/Dhammapada.Verse_151.story.htm

people ask for alms, they are not eager to help. When beggars plead, then they give alms or help them). There are people who easily earn their living (previously they themselves would find needy people to help, not waiting for them to beg). Those with a tolerant mind always think of the needs of those around them as their own needs. These people in their next life will be satisfied with anything they long for. Therefore, human beings have individual karma. These are the various causes and effects for beings who are called human.

This is the generosity of heavenly and human beings, enjoying the merit in heavens. But if generosity goes along with wisdom (*prajñā*), we contemplate three kinds of emptiness (no giver, no object given and no receiver),²⁸ it will transform this merit into the bodhi seeds of bodhisattva to fill the ocean of insight.

Moreover, the Buddha taught in the Aṅguttara Nikāya the cause and effect doctrine to Elder Venerable Śāriputra,²⁹ that if we make a promise to someone but we can't keep it, we will be disappointed later. If we keep our

²⁸ Three kinds of emptiness: We contemplate there is no giver, no receiver and no object (money, food, clothing). We are the givers who are composed of earth, water, wind and fire, so the givers are empty. Receivers are composed also of earth, water, wind and fire, so they are empty. Material is composed of earth, water, wind and fire, so it is void. All three are empty, so there is no selfness to be proud of.

²⁹ Life of Elder Venerable Śāriputra,
http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/sa/saariputta.htm.

promise, later our career will naturally flourish as we wish. If we give more than we promised, the effect will be unthinkable. Promises create hope. Not keeping our promises is to bring disappointment to others, so the effect will be suffering, disappointment and pain.

We, monks and nuns who are ordained and promised to the three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), will be the strong foundation for beings' refuge. We will provide beings with the spiritual refuge and encouragement; the spiritual encouragement to go upwards. If we can't keep our promise and we are unvirtuous people unworthy of other people's refuge, the effect is so severe. Vice versa, the merit will be uncountable.

Previously, if we had bad habits, our enlarged selfishness thinks that this is ours, ourselves, our religion, our temple, our disciples; those are others' religions, other people and so on. There is no-self surrendering with other-self. It creates separation, divided community and hatred between one another. If we practice the Buddha's teachings now, we can get out of the control of our own self. We can become generous and tolerant. Previously, if we were selfish, now we are generous and can easily tolerate others. Previously, if we easily became angry, now we are calmer. Previously, if we were easily moved, now we are calmer and more peaceful. From this, our compassionate heart will be enhanced and we will think

little of material things and appreciate spiritual values. Those who know how to control their mind often live harmoniously with other people. Elder Venerable Anurudha expressed: “I don’t live with my mind but with other brothers’ minds.”³⁰

This is also proof of the effect of human civilization. When our thought is more developed, the mind gradually goes beyond the control of self and realizes the same quality and quantity with all phenomenon as ourselves, thinking as our brothers’ minds. We consider “other beings’ minds as our mind” are the key words in *Vijñāptimātratā*,³¹ that “Thousands of dharmas come from the only mind.”

Our body includes the strong physics, earth, liquid soaking in water, warmth is fire, and fluctuation is wind. These four elements’ binding divide our Buddha nature which is all-pervasive in the still wonderful mind nature.

The limited box (form of six species) is seeing, hearing, knowing, and so on. From head to toe, this body

³⁰ *Anguttara Nikāya* (The Book of Gradual Sayings), VIII. *Atthaka Nipāta*, III: *Gahapati-Vagga*. The Book of the Eights III: On Householders, Sutta 30.

http://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/an/08_eights/an08.030.hare.pts.htm

³¹ Duy Thúc Học (*Vijñāptimātratā*), Vietnamese translator, Venerable Thích Thiện Hoa, Second printing 1962, Hương Đạo Publishing, <https://thuvienhoasen.org/a7317/duy-thuc-hoc>

creates five impurities, that is, human beings who are tied in these five ignorant layers:

1. Impure kalpa: It's the time of impure kalpa and we are affected by innumerable sufferings of the short, defiled and impermanent life.

2. Impure view: Wrong view is led by cunning. It is not the true view as it is binded by karma depending on each type of species with distorted view.

3. Impure defilements (*klesas*): Desire, hatred, poisonous mind stimulating all types of grievances, afflictive emotions night and day.

4. Impure sentient beings: Human beings can bear the bitter life and at death, they fall into the appearance of six species, from one type to another type. We never think that we have the salvation path to come out of the sufferings as our nature is already truly permanent, truly joyful, true self and truly pure.

5. Impure life: We are subjected by the short life but we are not aware of impermanent forces like four-sided fire, but we just keep roaming, enjoying life ignorantly without awareness.

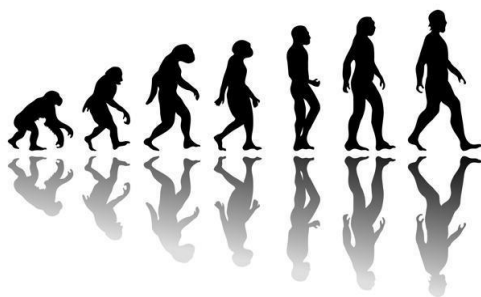


Figure 17

We know that the human realm is covered by five impurities (perverted), and only human beings can overcome the fire of life and death in the six or seven realms. Human beings have the opportunity to listen to Buddha-dharma, understand and know the way to overcome the burning house of life and death, whereas in the heaven realms they are overcome by enjoying sense pleasures so they don't care about the practice of dharma. In hell, hungry ghost and animal realms there are so many miseries with no time for spiritual understanding and practicing dharma. Therefore, in the picture of the wheel of the cycle of life, we see the red fire around the wheel without any means of escape. However, if we look at it carefully, we see a small path like a white slim thread from the karma cycle in which there are four assembly holding lights going upward through the human realm that can

escape the red fire's wheel, whereas the remaining five realms are fully covered in fire.

4. ANIMALS (*Tiryakas*)



Figure 18

Animals are one type of being residing in this vast universe. There are many types of animals such as:

A. Bone-type animals

1. *Four legs*: Cows, bulls, lions, bears, oxen, elephants, gazelles, deers, horned bulls, donkeys, camels, monkeys, orangutangs, tigers, leopards, panthers, wolves, rabbits, porcupines, foxes, horses, chameleons, lizards, geckos, varans, boars, rhinoceros, water buffaloes, frogs, toads, ligaments, and so on.

2. *No legs*: Snakes, pythons, earthworms, worms, larvaes, muckworm, insects, threadworms . . .

B. Without bone-type animals: Myriapods, fleas, centipedes, spiders, caterpillars, ants, worms, scorpions,

lice, silkworms, worms, pupas, ephemeras, moths, bedbugs . . .

C. Wing-typed, with no bone-type animals: Butterflies, dragonflies, fireflies, grasshoppers, locusts, long-horned grasshoppers, bees, termites, hawk moths, crickets, cicadas, mosquitoes, flies, mayflies, green beetles, doorbeetles, cockroaches, mason bees . . .

D. Underwater animals: Fish, squid, crabs, shells, shrimps . . .

The Bodhisattva's realm states that every time we meet any type of animals, we should guide them to take refuge in the Three Jewels and wish the best for them.

May our compassion pervade to all animals present on this whole planet!

May they transform from animals into human beings and meet the Three Jewels³² to practice Dharma.

According to scientists, there are thousands of different types of beings. We read the name of each type, contemplate on the different suffering forms of animals with our wholehearted compassion. We wish for them to encounter the Three Jewels so that in the future they can be awakened.

³² Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

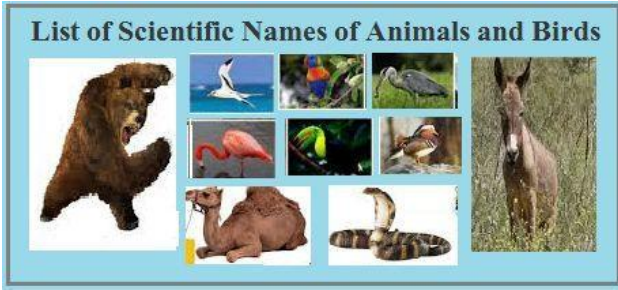


Figure 19

In the endless cycle of life and death, we have experienced being these animals incalculable times. So, we should follow the precepts to avoid and prevent us from creating the causes to be reborn as chickens, snakes, pigs, and so on.

The Buddha taught that the suffering of ignorance is the most fearful thing. Ignorance is delusion, not knowing how to avoid doing evil deeds. Ignorance leads us to fall into hells, torture, becoming animals and hungry ghosts.

The picture of samsara illustrates an earthworm bitten by a lizard. A snake is going to swallow the lizard; a vulture swallows the delicious snake. A hunter is going to shoot the vulture. The picture of the world exposes the living way of the strong types using force to threaten the weaker types. The big types eat the smaller types. The mutual eating each other arises from the instinct to

preserve their life. The scenery of animals living in fear, terrified and panicked by animals and even human beings who are always trying to kill them.

On the way, hungry horses are whipped while they carry heavy things for a long distance. In the underwater world, big fish swallow small fish. Bulls farm the fields rain or shine every day. They come back at night and rest in cages where its dung and urine are stored by its owners to fertilize the fields. Bulls have to bear with all blood-eating mosquitoes but don't have hands to shoo them away. The next morning, they must continue ploughing the fields rain or shine. When they get ill and can't work, their owners immediately kill them for meat and sell it for profit. Can the spirit of such a life go forward? With such a life, if we teach dharma, how can animals understand? Therefore, animal life is a cluster of afflictive emotions, pains and miseries.

Once bearing the animal skin, it has to go through the animal life for thousands of years since it's difficult to get out. Thousands of beings live painfully and die bitterly. If we have one insect running on our body, we can't stand it but dogs, cats, chickens, ducks can't speak out and stand their pain as hundreds of white bugs dabble on their bodies day and night without stopping. Therefore, they fall and must suffer many miseries.

Normally only committing grave sins will lead to an animal life. In a human's eyes, animals have no great value and they are considered to have a "lower status than human beings."

Generally, human beings use animals for many reasons such as food or serving as scientific experiments for human purposes. Although recently in developed countries there are laws to protect nearly extinct species, generally, animals still belong to a lower status than human beings.

Why do they fall into the animal realm? Who creates worthless, humanless (lower than the human position) karmas that lead to an animal life? As animals, they are seen with contempt and scorned. Which karma is considered as despised and responsible for losing human dignity? That kind of karma is misconduct in sexual activities between relatives, breaking other human being's moral principles, unrestrained lust, no guided intellect or consciousness—behaviors equal to animal desires. Those whose karma is similar to that of the animal life will lead that person to be reborn as an animal in their next life. Or, supreme selfishness turns into competition, combating their kinsmen with no sympathy. Like animals, they use tricks to harm others and live for themselves, Then they cannot avoid being reborn as animals.

Buddhist sūtras³³ say: “Everything in the universe is created only by the mind” or “Bearing horns or feathers or becoming Buddha only comes from our mind.” Animals are also composed from five active parts,³⁴ also four phenomenon³⁵ and they are aware of pain, hunger, love, hate, fear of death, they like to live, avoid suffering and wish for peace like us human beings. How can we eat their meat, kill them for our momentary taste cravings? When that meat is swallowed it will have no taste. It’s so cruel and ironhearted to set baits for animals to fall into our traps. Then we say things like, “you owe me money, I enjoy heavenly gifts” or “nurture human beings” or “animals exist to provide life for human beings, death is ending, eat as much as we can without any fear.” It is due to these wrong views that animals reborn as human beings then take revenge by killing animals that used to be human beings in previous lives and thus they always go together on the suffering path. People following the Confucian ideals say: “Seeing animals alive, we can’t stand their death. Hearing their fearful groan, how can we eat their meat?” Thus, virtuous people do not kill animals. Even those following the teachings of Confucius say that, let

³³ Duy Thúc Học (Vijñāptimātratā), Vietnamese translator: Venerable Thích Thiện Hoa, Second printing 1962, Hương Đạo Publishing, <https://thuvienhoasen.org/a7317/duy-thuc-hoc>

³⁴ Five formations: earth, water, wind, fire and space.

³⁵ Four phenomena: negative, positive, spirit and matter.

alone we lay Buddhists or ordained disciples of Lord Buddha—avoiding killing is our first precept.

Since every sentient being has a Buddha nature, all types of egg-born, womb-born, moisture-born and transformation-born are future Buddhas. In samsara, all types of flying, running, diving creatures used to be our parents or relatives. We should develop strong faith in this, and then we can transform our viewpoint and lifestyle.

If we use animals' hearts and livers as delicious dishes in the future, we will have to bear with forests of knives and mountains of swords and spend thousands of kalpas in hell. The remaining karma will result in us being reborn as pigs, chickens to be slaughtered, sworded, roasted, bear horseback, donkey back, dogs as slaves, bulls for ploughing.

We tend to take other beings' sufferings as our amusements. Killing animals to treat guests, throwing parties then inviting people to eat is sinful. Chickens, pigs, bulls shout wildly as their throats are cut, boiled in hot water, while we gather friends on the platform, music playing, singing, gossiping. Slaughtering, grilling geese, roasting ducks, pigs, goats is not different from acts of yaksas and ghosts . . .

It takes five hundred lives of silkworms to make a towel. More than ten rabbits die for making a warm coat.

People with goodwill think about this and then wonder how can we use the towel and the warm coat made from these animals' furs? We tend to eat meat without knowing the suffering of the animal in the slaughterhouse. Let's look at a story to illustrate:

There was a young man who was accustomed to hunting animals. One day when chasing after the blood trail of an injured deer, he saw the deer's heart fluttering under the legs of an ascetic who was meditating on a stone. The ascetic advised the hunter to give up his favorite habit and sympathized with the injured deer. He stood still. The ascetic then used his finger to touch the dead deer with one hand and with the other hand he transferred the suffering of the dead deer to the young man. He was astounded and turned pale; he could then feel the endless suffering in the body and mind of the dead deer. He could experience and feel the death of the deer. Its body produced a cold sweat, and its heartbeat gradually stopped. The young man felt painful and understood that hunting was a foolish, cruel act. He dared not to hunt anymore.

Human beings have human rights. Do animals have their rights as well? When human civilization develops, when human thought is developed higher, when human's spiritual world reaches its climax, we and animals are equal, and the intellect gradually goes beyond the control of the self and we will then see other human beings and

animals and ourselves as the same. Hopefully, animals can be treated and loved like human beings.

There is a story about an old Tibetan woman who, after spending many days in a snowstorm, had no food left. She climbed down from the mountain to reach the town to buy food. Along the mountainside, farms, plant fields, paddy fields all had a white deadly color without any life. Tired and hungry, she takes out bread from her bag to eat. Suddenly she looked up and saw a hungry dog dragging its legs towards her. Its stomach was empty and there was nobody else to give it any food. She immediately took out her old shawl to cover the dog and divided her piece of dry bread to share with the hungry dog. Then the old woman and the dog smiled together and ate the bread. The story is simple but the meaning is profound. The old woman saw herself and the dog as equal, so even though she was hungry, she willingly gave part of her clothes to the dog and shared what little food she had.

With our general conscience, maybe we tend to think the dog is lower, so even though we sympathize with it, we only give food for the last part of the bread and just a small portion as we must save the bread for tomorrow. Therefore, is our compassion limited and too little?

In the monastic novice's rules, there is a story about the three-basket profound dharma preacher. When he entered the main chanting hall and saw an old monk

chanting, he joked: “You chanted sūtras like the bark of a dog.” Due to this humorous contempt, that preacher had to spend five hundred lives as a dog. In its last life, the dog stole meat. Its four legs were cut and it was thrown into a hole by its owner. Elder Śāriputra passed by and sympathized with the dog, so he fed it some rice, gave it an awakened lecture and his blessings. The dog died and was reborn as the son named Quān Đè . When Quān Đè was seven years old playing outdoors, he saw Elder Śāriputra going for alms. He asked for his father’s permission to become a monk. After becoming a monk under Elder Śāriputra’s guidance, Quān Đè attained arahantship.

So, only joking caused five hundred lives as a dog. If he was not a three-basket profound dharma preacher with lots of sincere practice, how could he meet a saintly monk to end his path of sufferings?

The Kṣitigarbha Sūtra³⁶ says: “Beings in this Jambudvīpa realm, only walking and thinking then committing sins. For doing good deeds, we tend to lose our primary mind but for doing evil deeds we are likely to commit more and more. If we can’t meet good monks and friends to guide us towards liberation, we will wander in samsara with endless sufferings.”

³⁶ The Kṣitigarbha Sutra, Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva.http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/ksitigarbha.pdf

To sum up, from our inherent pure nature, an unaware thought suddenly generates non-dual relationship's discrimination³⁷ then creates self and environment, twelve creatures appear in the worlds, then animals are officially born within complicated consciousness and create karma to bear their bad effects.

Who formed and created conscious animals so that they must struggle miserably to survive? It's their very mind that creates these. During the struggle of survival, animals sometimes help each other. They create innumerable mixed good and bad karmas leading beings to continually fall into samsara.

5. HUNGRY GHOSTS (*Pretas*)



Figure 20

³⁷ See Samsara View in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Thích Nữ Giới Hương, Chapter 5. Hồng Đức Publish. 2008, pp. 69–81.

Preta is one type of being in this universe. This type of being only experiences sufferings and continuous hunger and thirst. The reason is that these beings in their previous lives had minds full of greed, stinginess, not liking to do good deeds, not giving nor offering, so they were reborn in the preta realm.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra,³⁸ the Buddha described the reason why some become ghosts and demons. He said “Living beings who have not defamed and destroyed the precepts, violated the bodhisattva rules, and slandered the Buddha’s Nirvana (Nibbāna) but have committed various complex kinds of karma, then after many kalpas have passed, they finally finish paying for their offenses to be reborn in the ghost shape.

1. *The odd ghosts*: Due to desire for things, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take things as their shapes. Therefore, they are called the odd ghosts (*pittivisaya*).

2. *The blowing ghosts*: Due to desire for the sexy forms, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying their sins, they take wind as their shape. Therefore, they are called the blowing ghosts.

3. *The pretend ghosts*: Due to desire for lies, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying their

³⁸ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, pp. 708–713.

sins, they take animals as their shapes. Therefore, they are called the pretend ghosts.

4. *The poisonous ghosts*: Due to desire for anger, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying their sins, they take worms as their shapes. Therefore, they are called the poisonous ghosts.

5. *The pestilent ghosts*: To desire for revenge, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take the deteriorations of enemies as their shape. Therefore, they are called the pestilent ghosts.

6. *The hungry ghosts*: Due to desire for arrogance, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take air as their shapes. Therefore, they are called the hungry ghosts. Greed causes them to be arrogant (*mada*), people commit offenses and after they finish paying for their crimes, they take shape when they encounter gases (*pittivisaya*).

7. *The paralysis ghosts*: Due to desire for cheating, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take undisclosed as their shape. Therefore, they are called the paralysis ghosts.

8. *The illusory ghosts*: Due to desire for evil views (*micchā-ditthi*), human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take the essential energy as their shape. Therefore, they are called the illusory ghosts.

9. *The servant ghosts*: Due to desire to blame, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take vividness as their shapes. Therefore, they are called the servant ghosts.

10. *The spreading ghosts*: Due to their desire for covering the group's evil, human beings commit offenses. After they finish paying for their sins, they take human beings as their shapes. Ghosts enter their bodies to control and demand them to speak lucky and unlucky things. Therefore, these beings are called the spreading ghosts.”

Pretas often must bear two karmic obstacles:

Inner obstacles: The throat is like a needle, the mouth like a torch, the belly is as big as a drum and full of fire and it's difficult to eat or drink. This is the effect of a dry mind, no giving. There are hungry ghosts who can eat but once the food goes into the stomach, it then turns into swords and fights against their skin and flesh. This is the effect when giving things with cruel mind or harsh words. Afternoon is the time that hungry ghosts³⁹ eat, so in the temple it's advisable not to eat in the afternoon (in the Theravada tradition is strictly kept). If eating is done, it

³⁹ Nhị Khóa Hiệp Giải (Thời khóa tụng khuya và thời khóa tụng chiều), Chú giải: Ngài Quán Nguyệt, Dịch giả: HT Thích Khánh Anh, morning is the time for devas to eat (gods); noon is the time for Buddhas to eat and sunset is the ghosts' time for eating, <http://www.khanhanh.fr/bantin/bt0211/bt21111.htm>

should be considered as medicinal food (to cure hunger, sickness and thinness of the body). We must avoid making sounds from the bowls touching chopsticks so that pretas see the food and thirst for them with fire coming out of their mouth.

For instance, Elder Mohagallana offered rice for his previous mother named Thanh Đè. She was too hungry, one hand picking the food, the other hand covering the food for fear of other hungry ghosts struggling to eat the food. But, once the rice was just going into the mouth then it turned into a red coal. Despite extreme hunger, she could not eat the food.

External obstacles: Hungry ghosts in fire or blood scenes are beaten by knives and sticks continuously. The river, according to a preta, is either blood or dry with completely hot sand. There are pretas in the river for thousands of years, but they can't ever drink any water to satisfy their thirst and only see completely hot sand. The cool and windy moon for pretas is seen as hot sun and vice versa, hot sun is seen by them as a cool scene due to their own karma. Trees full of fruits are seen by them as withered and barren. They are always hungry as they can't eat anything.

There are three kinds of pretas:

1. With merit: They have a lot of food and drinks:
 - a. They have great power and a beautiful palace.

b. Looking forward to being worshipped, they can go in the air or in their own house or in mounds where their relatives offer them something (due to their generosity in previous lives).

c. Eating phlegm, dung and stale things.

2. With little merit: They have some food:

a. Tiny fur: They thrust themselves, run painfully, and rarely have something dirty to eat;

b. Bad-smell fur: Scratching, pulling out their hair due to stale bad smell. This leads to torn skin and flesh, painful day and night. They rarely have something dirty to eat.

c. Big tumor: Stinging, stale pus bleeding and they pick these up for eating to fill their hunger.

3. No merit: Nothing to eat or drink, extreme hunger:

a. Vile mouth.

b. The whole body is like a burning torch.

c. Needle mouth, big belly like a drum.

There are many pretas such as:

- Pretas who are boiled by hot water (due to their killing career or not paying their debts and quarrelling with the owner).

- Small mouth like a hole in a needle.
- Eating vomited things.
- Eating feces.
- Eating fire.

- Eating odor.
- Eating dharma (previously due to preaching dharma for their own benefit, so today bearing hunger and only surviving by listening to dharma).
 - Dry and thirst for drink.
 - Hoping for relatives' offerings (due to cheating in sales to get other people's things).
 - Eating spitted things (due to offering impure things to monks and nuns).
 - Eating garlands of flowers (stealing the Three Jewels' flowers).
 - Eating blood (frequent killing).
 - Eating meat.
 - Eating incense (they stole incense from the temple).
 - Going fast, fire burns the whole body.
 - Every pore streams out fire.
 - The blackest dye: Will be in dark places where there are snakes biting (due to acquiring money by unjustly accusing others)
 - Great superpower but with lots of sufferings (stealing things from one person then giving them to another person).
 - Always feeling like they are being burnt (due to killing people and robbery).
 - Watching children urinating or evacuating their bowels will eat the impure breath.

- Misconduct in sexual activities (tempting people to do something).
 - In sea dune (due to cheating people for money).
 - Holding sticks as servants (due to being minister flattering the king to do evil deeds).
 - Eating children's flesh.
 - Eating human sperm.
 - Rakshanas (killing animals).
 - Eating fire (greedy for food of monks and of the three Jewels).
 - In small lane eating impure things.
 - Eating wind (due to breaking promises, not doing as promised).
 - Eating coals (due to torturing prisoners and not giving food to them).
 - Eating poison.
 - In a paddy field.
 - Eating hot ashes where dead bodies are burnt.
 - Under the foot of a tree (due to people grow trees for giving shade and they cut these trees).
 - On streets (exploiting passers-by).
 - Mara (king of ghosts): Ghosts harm monks and nuns.

In the Petakhatha Sūtra, there is a list of names and forms of pretas as follows:

- Atthisankhalika: Only a set of bones fly in the air with a heartrending cry, with birds rushing to bite the bones.

- Mainsapesi: Pretas like a block of meat bitten by birds (due to killing animals for earning one's living).
- Mainsapinda: Pretas like a piece of meat (due to being a hunter in a previous life).
- Vicchavi: Red flesh nibbled by earthworms.
- Asloma: Hair like a sharp knife flying up and down to thrust into the body.
- Sattiloma: Sword flying up and down to pierce the body.
- Usuloma: Arrow going up and down.
- Suciloma: Needle going up and down (used to hasten horses, cows, bulls to run fast).
- Cumbhanda: Penis is too big to sit down, and birds nibble (convincing people wrongly to eat bribes).
- Gidhathadi: Eating feces (due to offering impure things to monks and nuns).
- Okilini: Hot coal pouring on the body.
- Ansakabandha: Headless pretas, with eyes, nose and mouth in the middle of the breast (due to being a headsman).
- Pabbazila: Fire body (due to breaking precepts as monks or nuns).

The above-mentioned pretas have to bear their fruit in hells; today they suffer the remaining effects in ten kalpas to five hundred kalpas. Offering lunch to the sangha and transferring this merit to the preta can help them be free from preta's life.

- Vantasa: Bushy hair and skin, crooked hands and legs, swollen belly, uneven teeth, foul-smelling and fetid, scabies, eating spit, living in dirty places (due to leaving dirty trash, dirty spit on the ground of the temple).

- Xumpa: Potbelly, eyes big as a bowl, teeth like a ploughshare, hair long enough to cover the ankles, head is fetid, bigger than the body, eating only blood and dead bodies, but the more they eat the hungrier they become (due to offering forbidden things to monastics).

- Gutha: Living near a restroom, eating bloody feces, (due to being insolent to ascetics, stingy to parents).

- Aggisala: Body of fire fumes, hungry but can't die (due to despising monastics).

- Sucimlbkha: Small, sharp, lengthy mouth like a needle, big body, hungry their whole life in remote forests (due to being stingy to parents or destroying flowers, leaves, or gardens of the temple).

- Xanhaji: Drinking water turns itself into fire; food turns itself into fire.

- Nijiha: Mouth growing fetid hair, never eating or drinking (used to speak harsh words to monks and nuns, teasing deficient people, dividing virtuous people).

- Sabbanka: Body full of scabies, swarmed by flies. They are so hungry that they use their sharp fingers like a knife to take out their flesh for eating. Eating and crying at the same time, the more they eat the hungrier they are. This type of demon is abundant in valleys, mountains and

duns (due to being undutiful to parents and treacherous to benefactors).

- Pappanka: Solid flesh like earth, red fire, hungry and thirsty for millions of years (due to insulting virtuous people).

- Ajagara: Long middle part like a python, the whole body big as an elephant, many heads ... the whole body burnt, consecutive hunger, crying night and day. In mountains and duns there are lots of these types of demons (due to violently cursing parents and virtuous people).

- Vemanika: Half a month they can enjoy happiness like the heavenly realm. Half a month they suffer like a hell realm torturing beings. Extremely miserable and hungry (due to ignorance, if people asked them to do evil, they would and if people wanted them to do good, they would create merit).

- Mahiddhika: The body is beautiful like a super-powerful deva, with supernatural power to fly in the air, clothes made only of jewels. They have a stale body and hunger for thousands of years. Food put into the mouth turns into a red hot iron burning the mouth, bowels and liver (due to being ascetics with wrong living, expecting benefit, fame and breaking precepts).

- Ahi: The body is a snake whereas the head is human. They are big as a mountain, striving and crying, living a long time in the mountain (due to destroying temples out of anger).

- Nimygga: They always plug their head down to the dung's basement, eating feces until they are full. Then they go down in feces their whole life (sexual misconduct), leaving one's spouse and children in miserable states. Sins are in hell, today it's the remaining effect.

- Sukara: Pig's head, ulcer in the mouth (due to cruel words).

- Mainguhi: They are leprous, stale, floating in the air, with hawks biting (due to exploiting and robbing).

- Chataka: No clothes, no drinking and eating, live as long as ninety kalpas. This type of demon is abundant (due to not paying reverence to the Three Jewels).

- Surruta: Holding a hammer in daytime to beat each other's brains; the body swells considerably while at night the whole body emits fire. The fire is extinguished when morning comes. Then they hold hammers to beat each other (due to sloth and drinking wine, playing bull, cockfighting).

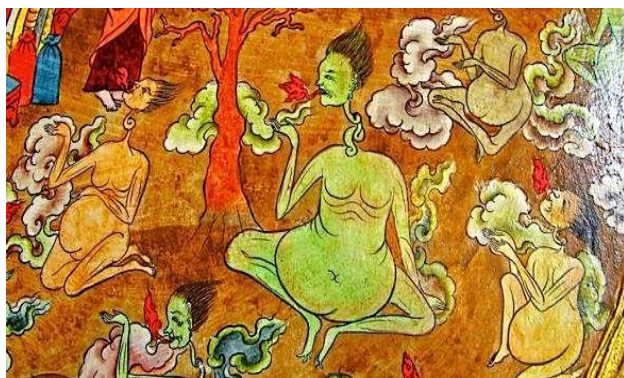


Figure 21

The Compassionate Confession Scripture describes the pitiful images of ghosts:

- Each armpit has rim of hot iron burning the body (blazing due to one *sramanerika* dividing cookies for the assembly of sangha and stealing two pieces and hiding them under his armpit).

- On his shoulder there is boiling waterpot; he himself takes the water and pours it on his head, crying because of pain (as a result of being a manager of general things in the sangha dividing the milk equally for the sangha members). Waiting until guest monks went away, he divided the milk for the present sangha assembly in the temple. Above sins are all initial effects. The real effects are in the hell.

The Kṣitigarbha Sūtra mentions that the king of demons has form and identity such as cruel eyes eating egg-wombs, torturing, cruelty, evil, red tiger, green tiger, flying, lighting, sharp teeth, eating animals, carrying stones, disaster, animal owner, and the magic of appearing and disappearing figures . . .

There are four heavenly kings in charge of eight types of heavens and demons:

- Gandhava (heavenly musician)
- Kumbhanda (fiery)
- Pisaci (eating, smelling and air)
- Hungry ghost
- Putana (stale, foul-smelling)
- Yaksa
- Traditional demons
- Rakshanas (eating human flesh)

The Saṃyutta Nikāya mentions that Elder Moggalana saw in the air a set of bones walking and crying because of its body being bitten by innumerable black vultures. The Buddha revealed that in the past he was a bull killer in Rajgir and was tortured in hell for thousands of years to pay their debt and the result is a currently remaining karma of being a skinny demon like a set of bones and being bait for flocks of vultures (i.e., bulls in previous life, now rebirthed as vultures).

One person argues that since there are people to eat animal meat so there should be animal-killers. The outcome of the animal-killers is stated above—how about the effects of non-vegetarians—we should think about this. People eating meat will owe that meat as to where it came from. Later, those killed animals will turn into bacillus harming and causing pain or transmitting diseases into our bodies.

How about ghosts? In Sanskrit, “mara” means robbing life, creating hindrances, making trouble, destroying and harming. There are four types of mara:

1. Defiled mara: defilements of greed, hatred, illusion, ten entanglements, ten afflictions of harming body and mind. This is called “ghost.”

2. Skandha mara: Due to form, feelings, mental action, consciousness, generating defilements—so it’s called “ghosts.”

3. Death mara: The death often stops the sense organs (blood veins) of our lives.

4. Mara of Akanistha Heavenly Realm: Mara in the sixth heavenly desire realm often causes trouble for monastics. Therefore, according to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, if a person makes a strong aspiration, the ten directions of ghosts’ realms shake. Ghosts are fearful of light and goodwill and often destroy the will of these monastics. Now, as the ghosts saw the strong-willed aspiration of

practitioners, they were terrified and the insightful light of these practitioners makes the ghosts' palaces move.

Pretas and demons are different types. Pretas are banished to be hungry, while demons are like great kings of demons, asuras, and so forth . . . they are demons with merit and supernatural power living in heaven realms and they are also the dharma protectors. Demons expect to use their supernatural power to move mountains and cover rivers. There are demons with less transformative power and demons with innumerable virtuous power. Right gods owning great merit live in high mountains and great rivers, enjoying offerings from worldly people. Demons with merit but less virtue, like yaksas and rakshanas enjoyed the blood of sacrificed animals.⁴⁰ In general, pretas and demons are hungry, miserable and lonely beings. Thus, we should develop loving-kindness, patience and meditative power towards them.

Every noon when the Sangha has lunch, they pick out seven seeds of rice and place in a small pot containing water to give these to hungry ghosts, as they chant verses: Dharma power is unthinkable.

⁴⁰ Samsara View in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Thích Nữ Giới Hương, Chapter 13, Hồng Đức Publish. 2008, pp. 294–328.

Seven seeds of rice are to be spread in all ten directions,
No obstacle to compassion.

Mother and child of hungry ghosts in the empty field
All can be treated.

Án độ lợi ích tóa ha.

At least seven seeds of rice for hungry pretas, but that quantity can be food for all beings. The scripture verse expresses that Buddha-dharma is soaked with every seed of rice, with the expectation that hungry beings will soon leave their suffering lives behind to be born in a better life. It's the borderless compassion. We know that if there is compassion, all difficulties can be solved and without compassion, anything is limited.

May all souls of abrupt deaths, short-lived deaths, on-the-road deaths, drowning deaths, well-drowning deaths, dead-on-the-battlefield soldiers, by-accident deaths, twelve types of lonely ghosts and above-mentioned demons are soon freed from the ignorant path and return to the awakening path.

6. HELLS (Narakas)



Figure 22

In the drawing of hell, there is a hot bronze pole, sinners lying on the very sharp spike-beds, mountains of knives, forests of swords, a spring of hot blood pouring on the body. There is a sinner bearing stewing bones and flesh; there is a sinner hanging on piles of eagles, owls taking turns to bite the flesh and red fire everywhere.

These sufferings in this realm are prolonged from one kalpa to another kalpa. The Buddha advises us to avoid ten causes of falling into hell. They come from desire, greed, contempt, anger, cheating, grudges, wrong view, slander, and concealing one's faults and finding others' errors.

King Crystal and Bhikkhu Sanaksatra⁴¹ declared that death was the end, no cause and effect, so there was no need to worry. Bhikkhuni Fragrance of Precious Lotus also claimed that sexual activities are not evil karma, causing no harm, like killing people or robbery. Due to wrong view and such misunderstanding, these two people were banished to Avici immediately after their last breath. The law of cause and effect is so complicated that only sages and profound meditators can stop the fluctuation of false thoughts. Clear wisdom can understand this.

The Buddha taught that when we have the near-dead karma or when dying, our body is exhausted so that we can't hear anything. Embarrassed consciousness appears in many scenes; according to the memory in one life, good and the evil deeds that one used to perform appear. If that person performed evil deeds while still alive, then upon their deathbed, one sees many ranges of volcanoes, a fire wall, an ocean of fire, a mountain of fire covering all without any escape. There are many fire-snakes, fire-dogs, bullheaded prison's guards, horsehead rakshanas holding sinners in the suffering part of hells.

⁴¹ Bhikkhu Crystal and Bhikkhuni Sanaksatra in Mahaparinirvana Sutra, No. 2.
https://www.bdkamerica.org/system/files/pdf/dBET_T0374_NirvanaSutra1_2013_0.pdf



Figure 23

Commentary to Twice-daily Chanting⁴² mentions the following hells:

Unremitting hells: Continuous misery in hell for consecutive kalpas.

Eight types of hot hells: So strong that a three-meter square stone, when put into the fire, immediately smelted; one expires in one hell then falls into another hell. Eight types of hells are:

1. Samjiva (hell of reviving repeated attacks): Beings use iron fingers to touch until their flesh is torn.
2. Hell of black wires used as guides for the saws: Iron coil bind, iron hammer, cooked in cauldrons.

⁴² Nhị Khóa Hiệp Giải (Thời khóa tụng khuya và thời khóa tụng chiều), Chú giải: Ngài Quán Nguyệt, Dịch giả: HT Thích Khánh Anh, <http://www.khanhanh.fr/bantin/bt0211/bt21111.htm>

3. Samghata: Hell of being crushed by big things and being born into nothing.

4. Raurava: Hell of screaming while running around on burning ground, living in only water.

5. Maharaurava: Hell of great screaming while being eaten by animals, boiled in an iron saucepan, thrown on the iron-plate to be roasted.

6. Tapana: Hell of scorching heat while being pierced by spears; a hot oven.

7. Pratapana: Hell of being pierced by tridents; prison guards fiercely scorch sinners, then stand them up in a fire cell.

8. Avici: Hell without interruption while being roasted in ovens. Skins are shed then put under the fire cart for the wheel to pulverized.

There are **sixteen sub-hells** as follows:

1. Spears: axes and hatches
2. Jackals and wolves
3. Forests of knives
4. Swords
5. Black sand: burns skin to the bone
6. Boiling excrement and feces
7. Five hundred iron nails
8. Boiling bronze water

9. Iron pellets (forced to eat these)
10. Cauldron of bronze
11. Many cauldrons of copper
12. Stone pestle (crushing bodies)
13. Pus and blood (boiling us inside)
14. Hot iron pecks
15. Ash river
16. Hot iron pellets

Eight cold hells: Hot hells, a long time of torture, like having twenty sesame seeds and every hundred years, we take out one seed. When the seeds are gone, the supply is gone. Eight cold hells are:

1. Arbuda: Sinners in that are extremely cold, freezing while the skin blisters
2. Niranbuda: Hell of freezing where the cold wind blows and the body turns into foam, blisters break open
3. Atata: Voice of Atata moaning
4. Hahava: Hell of shivering and moaning
5. Huhuva: Hell of chattering teeth, plus moaning, a hell of chattering
6. Utpala: Hell where one's skin turns blue like frozen flesh in ice
7. Padma: The lotus where one's skin cracks with red fresh flesh

8. Mahapadma: So frozen that bone became white and the body falls apart

Moreover, there are hells in scattered mountains, underwater, on the paddy fields. Jeweled Repentance of Emperor Liang⁴³ expresses that there are sagging irons, darkness, iron caves, a cart of knives, sharp stones, iron machines, coal cell, thorn forest, burnt forest, boiling water, grinding stone, hot coal, plowing bull, fierce tiger and splitting fire.

The Kṣitigarbha Sūtra mentions a hell of stabbing swords, rivers of fire, fire rockets, army of knives, mountains of swords, swamp, iron bulls, iron dogs, iron fire, binding hot red pole, tongue-plowing bulls, burnt fingers, burnt toes, eye eating, quarrels, many insects, fire-elephants, fire-stones, tooth-sawing, fire-beds, skin-slaying, drinking blood, upside down hanging, fire burning house, iron house, fire walls, tongue-cutting, surgery, ignorance, crying, sharp iron mines, fire well, flying pebbles and hot wind.

The sūtras say: “Being burnt in hell is still not called suffering. Only being ignorant, not knowing the path to go is called suffering, as ignorance is the original cause of sins.

⁴³ Jeweled Repentance of Emperor Liang,
<http://readingreligion.org/books/repentance-ritual-emperor-liang>

Those who break the precepts, criticize and destroy Buddhism, hurt beings' wisdom, have to bear the hell effect for many eons. Sentient beings who cause other evil deeds, once they fully pay off their sins, they will be reborn as demons to bear the remaining effects of those evil deeds until the leftover effect is finished. Then the cruel outcome is over and they can be reborn as animals to pay their old debts.

To sum up, the cause-effects in the three evil realms are hells, ghosts and animals, with deeds done by ourselves, so we have to bear the bad results. Those effects have not fallen from heaven and nobody brings it to us. Due to our delusion about self-attachment, attachment to things, we take action according to wrong view. All comes from our own mind and thoughts which produce the bad effects. If our Buddha nature is awakened, all things are illusory as there is nothing to be done, no doers to do anything and nobody to bear or withstand. Hells, ghosts, animals seem to appear by us and disappear also by us. Our Buddha nature is inherently pure.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, there is the “Continuing Karma”⁴⁴ section. The Buddha taught that while bearing the animal form to pay old debts, if the debt is overpaid, they can be reborn as human beings to claim back the overpaid amount. Thus, in samsara, beings owe and pay

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 292–293.

each other, especially when owing a life though experiencing innumerable eons but still having to pay this debt (of life). Sentient beings create evil karma. When completing habitual effects and behavior, they can become human beings again, according to previous karma. There are intelligent people; there are also foolish people. So, it's not easy to be reborn as a human being. If one does not understand right dharma, knowing the law of cause and effect, giving up evil and doing good, then once falling into a bad place, it's very tough to be reborn as a human being.

Musician Trịnh Công Sơn, in his song named “Far from the Sun Trace” expressed this:

Today when I wake up, I don't see the sun, no human beings are around me speaking nice words. Today when I wake up, I can't see the sun, no human faces, or I get lost. Today when I wake up, I feel embarrassed. Today I wake up, my body is tired.

This is the state of the mind to be lost in a world of human karma. This scene is worse than the human realm, hungry ghost and hell realms where one can't see the sun, human faces ...

The concluding sentence on the cycle of six (or seven) suffering realms emphasizes this:

You are rolling in the turning wheel of samsara. Your mind is being burnt. Just like one who hurriedly puts

out the fire on your head, it's the same with your hurrying up to practice escaping from the rebirth cycle. The sense desire is the root of suffering. Let's extinguish immediately the fire of sense desire.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra,⁴⁵ Lord Buddha remarked that knowing the delusion of seven types is to encourage proper practice of dharma: “Ānanda, examine clearly seven types: hells, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, demi-heavens, devas and asuras. According to karma. all dark forms originating from false senses, false perceptions appear, according to karma. To the intrinsic Buddha nature, there is neither subject nor object, neither active nor passive acting. It is like when our eyes are tired, we see a sky-flower. Once the eyes are fine, the sky-flower disappears. The seven realms are like sky-flowers. Once we are awakened, the seven worlds end. They have nothing to do with mere illusion, no root at all.

Ānanda, these beings can't recognize their own nature, so they have to stay in samsara for incalculable eons without recognizing the true nature. It's all due to their being in accordance with killing, stealing, sexual misconduct or vice versa, that is, no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct.

“To be.” We call that where there are demons, hell, animals. “Not to be.” We call heaven beings, immortals or

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 745–746.

human beings. “To be” and “not to be” take turns and generate samsaric nature. If beings are running after discriminating illusions, then they can’t go beyond “to be or not to be.” The desire realm has forms and desire. The formless realm has no form and no desire but can’t go beyond “to be and not to be” of generating samsaric nature.

We can see the key to samsara already. In the six realms of samsara, the four lower realms (ghosts, animals, hells and asuras) there is too much suffering to practice dharma. There is no mind to understand and no dharma conditions. Heavenly beings often enjoy sense pleasure and material merit. Only human beings who have enough awareness to understand and practice dharma have chance to transform themselves. If we miss this opportunity, it takes endless time to be reborn as a human being again, like a blind tortoise finding a loose branch floating on the sea. One who is lucky enough to meet and practice the dharma is very rare.

There are seven types of realms as a result of heaviness or light in internal and external parts. In other words, due to our mind, which has more or less a state of positive thought or negative emotion, ten realms appear as clarified in the as Śūraṅgama Sūtra:⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, translated into Vietnamese by Tâm Minh, translated into English by Bhikkhunī Giới Hương, HCM City Publishing, 1999, pp. 687–688.

“Ānanda, all beings in the world are in the consecutive course of birth and death.

They live following their habitual inclination. Once they die, they change into a different flowing. At the time of dying, when the final warm air has not left their bodies, all the good and bad karmas which they have accumulated in this life suddenly and simultaneously manifest. They experience the intermingling of two trends, such as the antagonism toward death and attraction to living.

1. THE WHOLE POSITIVE STATE: Whoever is in the total thought state will ascend to certainly be born in the heaven realms. If they have blessings, merits and wisdom, as well as pure vows, they will be awakened to see all pure lands of the Buddhas in ten directions and they will be born in the realms as they wish.

2. THE STATE OF MORE POSITIVE THOUGHT, LESS NEGATIVE EMOTION: Whenever they have more positive thoughts than emotion, they ascend not very high where they can become the flying immortals, the great mighty ghost kings, the traveling space *yakshas*, or the traveling earth *rakshasas* who go to any corner of the four heavens without barriers. If they have good vows and hearts to protect Buddha-Dharma or precepts, they will go to support whomever keeps precepts, chants the mantras, practices meditation, and follows the dharma patiently. These heavenly beings themselves stay close to the Buddhas under the

Tathāgatas' seats.

3. THE EQUAL STATE BETWEEN THOUGHT AND EMOTION: Whenever thought and emotion are equal, they are neither flying up nor falling down, but they are born in the human realm. If their thought is bright, they will be smart. If their emotion is dark, they will become foolish.

4. THE STATE OF LESS THOUGHT AND MORE EMOTION: Whenever they have more emotions than thought, they enter the animal species. By having the heavier emotion, they become the fur-bearing beasts. By being the lighter emotion, they become the winged creatures.

5. THE STATE OF SEVEN EMOTIONS AND THIRD THOUGHTS: Whenever they experienced the state of seven emotions and third thoughts, they are born in the ocean or at a fire region, where they often bear the heat. Having the bodies of hungry ghosts, they are constantly burned by that blaze. Because water can hurt them, they have nothing to eat or drink for hundreds of thousands of kalpas.

6. THE STATE OF NINE EMOTIONS AND ONE THOUGHT: When they experienced the state of nine emotions and one thought, they are born in the fire realm and in the interacting point of wind and fire. By having the lighter emotion, they are born in the intermittent hell. By

being the heavier emotion, they are born in the unintermittent hell to bear constant suffering.

7. THE WHOLE EMOTIONAL STATE: When they experience the whole emotional state, they sink into the *avīci* hell. Moreover, if they defame Mahāyāna Buddhism, slander the Buddha's precepts, expound the Dharma for offerings as well as the respect from the devotees, execute five felonies as well as ten major offenses, then they are further reborn in *avīci* hells in ten directions. Due to evil karma, we face bad results. In the same community karma of human beings, there is the available personal hell for any crime."⁴⁷

Owing to the emotional states, these creatures fall down to the low realms. Due to the positive thought states, these creatures appear in the high realms. As their karmas are paused, they will be reborn as another shape. These retributions which they must bear themselves come from false thoughts. If they become awakened at the bodhi nature, then they will realize that there has not anything at all in the wonderful perfect illumination.

All beings usually desire to live and are afraid of death. Human beings are wrongly confused with the self, taking the consciousness discrimination as our mind and the flesh as our body, thus we go together with the false body and mind to be cycled in the round of samsara.

⁴⁷ The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, pp. 687–689.

Human beings in every karma while living daily act according to their present consciousness, but at their time of death they have to go according to habits that change into another karma. So, the Buddha emphasized that “The evil deeds belong to *the internal site*. The good deeds belong to *the external site*. These two take turns to drag the consciousness upward or downward. All the six realms are caused by human beings, and then they bear the results. The same effect generates the same environment. The different outcomes bears the different scene.”⁴⁸

The unawakened mind can only see the world, but with an awakened mind, instead of seeing the world, we can see the dharma/phenomena’s world. We know that hell (*naraka*) is the creation of personal consciousness and community and we can escape it. If our mind creates hell, it’s also the very mind to end the hell. If we discover the pure mind, it’s obvious to discover the Pure Land. If we are fed up with hell and wish for the Pure Land, then naturally the mind will aspire for the Pure Land. If we give up *naraka* and turn our face towards the Pure Land, then it comes naturally. This is the core instruction of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. The *Scripture of Donating Food for*

⁴⁸ Please see Samsara in Surangama’s Glass View, TN Gioi Huong, Chapter 12, pp. 274–294.

Hungry Ghosts (Mông Sơn Thích Thực)⁴⁹ describes terrible misery in the hell:

Fire of hunger melts the iron,
Hungry ghosts complain,
To wish for rebirth in the Pure Land,
They must read the Avatamsaka verses:
If one wants to know clearly,
The three past, present and future Buddhas,
One should contemplate the phenomena's nature,
All is created from the mind.

If we want to break others' hells, we first should escape our own hell. If we want to untie others' binding cords, our suffering cords must be untied first. We should generate compassion, forgiveness, loving-kindness and non-hatred, then no hell can be present in this human realm.

⁴⁹ Nghi Thức tụng Niệm Hàng Ngày (Daily Chanting), Mông Sơn Thích Thực (*The Scripture of Donating food for Hungry Ghosts*) by the Most Venerable Thiện Thanh, 2010, pp. 156–157.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER IV

According to the wheel of samsara, the six realms depend on the karmic result. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra added one immortal world to be seven realms. They are:

1. The heavenly realm has desire, form and formless realms.

2. The immortal realm has ten types.

3. The asura realm has four types.

4. The human realm has five impure worms, eight types of sufferings, five impurities, three bad realms and eight disasters.

5. The animal realm has backbones, without backbones, wings and under water.

6. Hungry ghost have inner hindrances and karmic obstacles, three kinds of merits. With merit, with less merit and no merit. There are thirty-six types of demons and four types of skandha ghosts.

7. There is the intermittent hell, eight hot hells, sixteen sub-hells, and eight cold hells.

All the results in these seven realms come from our own causes or actions and we must receive our own fruits.

Discussion Questions

1. How many realms are there in samsara?
2. Explain the characteristics of the human realm.
3. Retell the story of “Three-baskets Profound Dharma” about a preacher who was reborn as a dog (in Novices’ Rules).
4. For what reasons are there a set of bones in the air walking and crying as its body is bitten by vultures (Elder Mahamogallana’s story in the Samyutta Nikāya)?

CHAPTER V:

**THE CYCLE
OF TWELVE DEPENDENT ORIGINATION
LINKS**

The outermost of the wheel is the cycle of twelve chains (*nīdanas*). The cause brings about the effect. The condition helps the cause to turn into the effect. There are many names of the twelve links, such as twelve branches, twelve independent-arising, twelve threads linked together, twelve connecting and returning chains. Enlightenment depends on ending one chain then all twelve chains are broken.

When the morning dawned on December 8, Bodhisattva Gautama realized the Theory of Dependent Origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*), that is, the twelve *nīdanas* under the bodhi tree on the Nairanjana Riverside in Bodhgaya, India. After that, he used the light of conditions to make torches for the path, opening the Buddha way for worldly sentient beings.

The twelve chains of conditions are:

1. Ignorance (<i>avijjā</i>)	2. Formations (<i>sankhāra</i>)
3. Consciousness (<i>viññāṇa</i>)	4. Name and form (<i>nāma-rūpa</i>)
5. Six Perceptual Entrances (<i>saḷ-āyatana</i>)	6. Contact (<i>phassa</i>)
7. Feeling (<i>vedanā</i>)	8. Craving (<i>taṇhā</i>)
9. Clinging (<i>upādāna</i>)	10. Becoming (<i>bhāva</i>)
11. Birth (<i>jāti</i>)	12. Aging and Death (<i>jarā-marāṇa</i>)

1. IGNORANCE (*Avijjā*)

The picture shows a blind old woman walking with a stick in a forest of bones. That is because we have been reborn with a spine and rib bones for many ages of samsara.



Figure 24

Blindness is not bright, generating thoughts and forgetting our intrinsic nature. The forest is old, dense and abundant. The path of only bones we have used since time immemorial, so are we tired of it? We still care about the story of the snake, pig and rooster, but the whole day we are greedy and angry, so there is no time for us to recognize that we are that old blind woman going in the forest of bones.

Contemplating conditions arising, we see the interrelation of all phenomena, born of illusion. Smart people have loving-kindness for colleges and have tolerance for foolish people, and compassion to teach others.

Ignorance is generating illusory thought leading us to forget our true nature and lose our brightness of wisdom. Due to ignorance, we caused evil or good deeds to continue the cycle of rebirth. Thus, ignorance and *sankhāra* (karma, effect).

Ten entanglements (anger, deceit, torpor, sleepiness, joyful wandering, restlessness, shamelessness, ungratefulness and envy) are the cords that tie beings and prevent us from going beyond samsara and always bind us. We have no escape from the thread of craving and desire and we can't reach the other shore. Ten entanglements are the food of ignorance. When ignorance is deleted, wisdom arises.

We need to train our brain, change our understanding and transform ourselves by virtue patriarchs and Buddhas (source of compassion-wisdom, enhancement and completion of our mind following in the good steps of previous elders.)

The key to happiness is simplicity and modesty. Starting with these qualities, our mind is free to train our spiritual practice; we no longer nurture the three animals of rooster, snake and pig (desire, anger, delusion) in our heart.



Figure 25

2. FORMATIONS (*Sankhāra*).

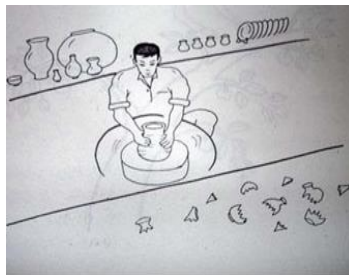


Figure 26

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha taught that if we speak or act with a pure or defiled mind, happiness or suffering will follow us like our shadow or like a wheel follows the ox cart.

Mind leads all phenomena,
Mind is the owner and creator,
With impure thought,
We speak or act,
Suffering will follow us,
Like a wheel follows an ox cart.”⁵⁰

and

Mind leads all dharmas,
Mind is the creator,
With pure mind,
Happiness will follow us
Just like our shadow never leaves us.”⁵¹

Like a potter throwing a pot, if he makes it well, the pot will be beautiful. If he makes it badly, the pot is distorted. Let’s shape it carefully, our body, speech and thoughts are ornamenting or distorting our future. If we do

⁵⁰ Dhammapada, translated by Ven. Narada Maha Thera, Maha Bodhi in Sarnath, 200, Verse 1.

⁵¹ Dhammapada, Verse 2.

good deeds, our future will be glorious. If we do evil deeds, sufferings wait for us. Present behaviors bring about future outcomes, so mental activity conditions with consciousness. Present behaviors have potential capacity, controlling consciousness in depth to lead beings towards the future. Karma often changes according to our changing mind like a potter who makes thousand types of pots according to his favorites.

Based on the Buddha's teachings, knowing clearly the skandha conditions of birth, impermanence, non-self, thanks to meditative power, doing without doing, gaining and achieving without achievements, we can stop on the path of endless samsara.

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya III, chapter on attachment,⁵² the Buddha teaches that:

There are six thoughts of this body: form, hearing, smelling, tasting, contacting and dharma. Monks, this is called formation (*sankhāra*). Due to the arising of contact, there arises formation. Due to contact ceasing, formation ceases. This is the noble eightfold path leading to cessation: right view, right notion, right speech, right karma, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

⁵² Saṃyutta Nikāya III, chapter on attachment, Section 22b, www.buddhismtoday.com

The Buddha taught that the sight thought, hearing thought, smelling thought, tasting thought, touching and thing thought is thinking about form, sound, smell, taste, touch and dharma, and these six bases are called formation. Thought is the force leading to rebirth—according to tidy or clumsy hands a pot is beautiful or ugly.

Mind is the root of samsara. Pure mind is the root for liberation. Pure thought is the base for progress. Karmic thought always arises according to external conditions, stimulating six senses and going through the whole body. All good or bad karma come from the mind. Complicated, light or heavy, the bull-mind is very difficult. We ourselves have to train our mind as the Dhammapada says:

Those who lead water,
Those who make arrows,
Carpenters modify wood,

The wise knows how to control themselves.⁵³

Our mind is like a river. The movement of a river is the generalization of all movements of every drop of water. Similarly, our mind is a chain of good or bad, sad and happy thoughts. This continuous movement changing,

⁵³ Dhammapada, Verse 80.

transformation is sankhāra. Leaving out thoughts of no formation, then we say karmic creation is selfless.



Figure 27

3. CONSCIOUSNESS (*Viññāṇa*)



Figure 28

The picture shows a monkey jumping from one branch of a tree to another one. The old branch (previous karma) has withered, the new branch is full of fruits (maybe good or bad). The real consciousness is pervasive in the universe, but due to ignorance, we feel happy, sad and generating like or dislike upon seeing outside worldly objects. We can't know by like or dislike, we are trapped to be reborn with name and form. The next life is called rebirth. This body is the outcome of the previous five skandhas. The consciousness in accordance with karma bears the effect of rebirth to repay gratitude, get revenge, enjoy blessings or bear sins. That is called consciousness related with name and form (*rūpa*).

Consciousness is a set of changes of conditions arising that makes the fetus alive with knowledge of six following senses. If there is the fixed karma to be a son, then the *antara-bhāva* body (the intermediate body existence between death and reincarnation) is generating love for the mother-to-be. If there is the fixed karma to be the daughter, then the *antara-bhāva* body will generate love for the father-to-be. Due to love being the *bija* generating inverted perception into the womb of the mother, it's *sankhāra* conditioning with consciousness. The karmic creation is transferred to the consciousness.

When the consciousness feels happy upon seeing the mother and father have sexual intercourse, three hot breaths or this point (mother, father, the *antara-bhāva*

body) get mixed together like a glue in the fetus. That consciousness is the spirit; the father's sperm and the mother's ovules are materials. Then the womb has three elements, the life, the warmth of three fires (father, mother, the consciousness-soul). The consciousness is the knowledge nature. The Buddha's nature when going into the human body is called *ālayavijñāna*. When reborn, this consciousness comes first, and then gradually come the other seven consciousness. The consciousness is the name (the intangible shape), the fetus is form (the tangible shape), thus consciousness conditions with the name and form.

When growing up, the six senses are in contact with the six objects which generated six consciousnesses to discriminate. Tasting honey is sweet; eating "mere rice" we feel the vapid food. Each type of food has its own taste but when going out from the body, they are different. The bowl is bigger than a cup but it is smaller than a basin. The discriminating mind in accordance with its karma add and color all phenomenon. The world of six objects is created by it with full of discrepancies and discrimination. For example, sweet sugar, salty salt, happiness or suffering, stillness or movement are subjected by the conditions, so they are selfless, impermanent, miserable and empty. We only need to be self-awakened and clear minded.

We notice all feelings arising and later disappearing with their impermanent nature. The illusory mind is like a jumping monkey with various feelings such

as dislike, love and hate, craving then giving up again. When six senses often jump with worldly objects, the ignorant consciousness stands there, however with mindfulness, then the wisdom generates. The mindfulness is forced to be present in a place where the senses are troubled. Do not misunderstand, enlightenment does not mean deaf or blind, only mindfulness of objects without attachment. It is illusory, so the six senses vanish quickly. The vital thing is to learn how to control the mind and master the monkey. Do not be enslaved under the consciousness.

Eight consciousnesses discriminate splendidly as follows:

1. The king of eye consciousness is the lord of the world of color and form.
2. The king of ear consciousness creates the world of voice.
3. The king of nose consciousness creates the world of perfume and bad smell.
4. The king of tongue consciousness creates the sour and sweet world.
5. The king of body consciousness magically creates the world of heat, cold, slippery and screeching.
6. The kind of brain consciousness is the master who is quick and talented, taking care of phenomenon,

contemplating the past, present, future and controlling the above-mentioned consciousnesses.

These above consciousnesses, in accordance with karma, depend on conditions to transform the five external worldly objects. *The wrong view* assumes five senses as real. The consciousness that discriminates things as beautiful or ugly is the *wrong thought*. Both wrong views and thought are the root of samsara.

Whoever often contemplates selflessness, then the consciousness turns into the Wonderful Wisdom of Observation, paving the way for the *ālayavijñāna* (the eighth consciousness) to come back to the Great Wonderful Scenery. Then it becomes a fully enlightened one (*anuttara samyak sambodhi*). In fact, the eye consciousness is born due to the following three conditions:

a. Mental nerves: We see things in our mental eye. The light of the sun radiates on the flowers in the garden, then reflects into the pupil of the eye in the mental optic.

b. An illusory shadow of a picture: The mind sees a shadow of a picture in the eye. This is called eye consciousness.

c. Human karma: The shadow of the picture according to human karma has the eye-consciousness of the human. For instance, due to parents, family, the school's teaching us, we call yellow flower marigold.

Previously we thought we see the real flower in the garden, but in fact, we only see the shadow of a flower in the mental state of human karma depending on conditions arising. That is called the eye-consciousness. Then it disappears as there is no condition that is called the eye consciousness—it is ended. The shadowy picture does not reflect the truth. It goes with the arising of the sunlight, falsely appears in the dark eyeball of humankind. The eyes of crabs are round and convex outwardly to get the rays of light differently. The flower that appears in the crab’s eyes is maybe another form. The selfless illusory eye-consciousness and karmically illusory eye consciousness falsely appear through the five consciousnesses (ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mental consciousness) accordingly.



Figure 29

4. NAME AND FORM (*nāma-rūpa*)



Figure 30

The Buddha taught us to draw a boat carrying four boxes (form: earth, water, wind and fire) of objects (our body). The illusory body is like a boat floating on the river of birth and death.

Name is mind (person rowing the boat). It's our daily love, hate, happiness and anger that cause us to be reborn like a monkey climbing up or down. The Buddha calls the fetus name and form.



Figure 31

Mind is name, the driver of the boat is the eighth *ālayavijñāna* consciousness. Once the body is fully formed, this consciousness gradually generates the other seven consciousnesses. The karma (of our illusional body) is like a boat floating on the river of birth and death. If there is name and form, the womb will have six sense organs, so name and form contact with six sense organs.

5. SIX PERCEPTUAL ENTRANCES (*Saḷ-āyatana*)



Figure 32

Six perceptual entrances develop doors of perceptions. Six sense organs are six conceptions (the complete fetus coming out of the mother's womb). The Buddha taught us to draw a house with six doors, that is, six worldly objects enter the doors of six sense organs to direct the mind. Sense organs contact with objects so the consciousness can discriminate and the form appears. Thus, the consciousness is the root dividing duality causing the wrong self-root. The subject of recognition and the object of recognition depend on each other to arise at the same time due to the broker of six sense entrances.

The *Sūrangama Sūtra*⁵⁴ says that Buddhas in ten directions with different speech confirm that “The root

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 354–357.

cause of ignorance leading to samsara is six entrances, thus basing on six entrances to untie to gain the permanent fruit of happy liberation.”(Tri kiến lập tri tức basic ignorance; tri kiến vô kiến tư t, ức Nirvana).



Figure 33

Therefore, now we are sentient beings while the Buddha is the saint. The difference is that the Buddha, when his six entrances contact with six worldly objects, he does not generate any discriminating consciousness for arising negative feelings. But we as sentient beings, open all our entrances like a house opening all doors to input and the external world, then calculate the good and the bad, gain and loss, benefit and harm. Then, innumerable desires, hatred and delusion are generated and create the karma of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying . . .

Due to six sense entrances being open to input from the external world, there is contact, thus, six entrances connecting to contact touch.

6. CONTACT (*Phassa*)



Figure 34

Sense entrances contact objects (eyes contact with sight, ears contact with sound, nose contacts with smell, tongue contacts with taste, body and mind contact phenomena) but the most dangerous thing is the sexual contact between two sexes. This is the powerful source flowing into the ocean of samsara.

This body is the result of desires. Then while having this body, we continue to create innumerable causes for future effects. Every day we like this shirt, insist on using a certain pen for our signature, only work with people we like, feel satisfied with our favorite dishes, only talk or email to someone we like, and so on. Those little

things all show seeds (*bijas*) of defilements. We are ignorant and incidentally or intentionally create those rebirth seeds.

Thus, our first duty of a monastic is to protect the six sense entrances (protect eyes from seeing impure things, protect ears from wrong sound, protect tongue from speaking ambiguous words, protect nose from smelling the scent of cosmetics, protect body from touching passion, protect our thoughts from arising improperly). Contemplate that this body is composed of four elements, earth, water, wind and fire which are temporary formed together, non-self, non-others, no living beings as they are.

The contact is the non-existing dharma. There is only the presence of two conditions of sense organs and objects. Widely observing things, we can see that all phenomena is non-self-existing. In fact, there is only *the presence of conditions*. Whoever understands this truth, really comprehends Buddha-dharma.

If we do not recognize this truth of all phenomena, we neither understand thoroughly our real nature, nor do we have right view. This ignorance is illustrated in the first picture where we see an old blind lady walking in the forest of bones. Ignorance is controlling all things in the universe until we can open our awakened eyes to the enlightenment's light of the Buddha.



Figure 35

7. FEELINGS (*Vedanā*)



Figure 36

Every day we eat rice, drink water, take breaths of air, see the sunlight. We grasp earth, water, wind, fire . . . to wrongly consider these impermanent parts as ourselves. Thus, assuming that is our body, every time sense organs contact external objects, consciousness immediately takes objects to produce the feelings of joy or sadness, which are only illusory feelings.

Feeling skandha is the stimulating elements, binding and ordering us clearly. Feeling is suffering, as there is receiving, there will be suffering. Feeling this body as our own body; feeling this mind as our mind, which is the first feeling and from that arises other feelings. This is the eating receiving, wearing receiving, staying receiving, form receiving, sound receiving, smell receiving, taste receiving, touch receiving, receiving of what we like, receiving of taking unnecessary things, then feelings of luxuries, feelings of abundant things as the habit of greed can't be ignored. Every sentient being, every life is a set of continuous feeling or receiving.

Life is an epic of suffering (the noble suffering with eight types⁵⁵). There are many other types of suffering caused by emotions, like receiving precious things and being afraid of losing them and trying to keep them. How to be sure they are is still available to us? The rich are afraid of losing their wealth. People with high status are afraid of losing their position. Those having lovers are afraid of losing their beloved. Famous people are afraid of losing fame. A good feeling is happy and an adverse feeling is miserable. Feeling neither good nor bad is

⁵⁵ In the first Noble Truth, the Buddha said there are eight sufferings in life. They are: suffering of birth, suffering of old age, suffering of sickness, suffering of death, suffering of separating from loved ones, suffering of associating with those we dislike, suffering due to unfulfilled wishes and desires, and suffering of the flourishing of the five skandhas/aggregates.

delusional. There are happy feelings, bad feelings and illusional feelings. Generally, all three are miserable.

The body is selfless (illusory as it includes eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and thought). The mind is also selfless (illusional mind as feelings, perception, formations, and consciousness are empty). Body and mind are two separate identities, independent and separate. They always go together, connect closely with each other and arise from an ignorant (*ālayavijñāna*) consciousness.

Every day six sense entrances contact six objects with wonderful feelings of happiness, suffering, perceptions of love, hate, karmic creations of thinking and discriminating consciousness. Everybody knows that feelings are only the sensation of arising conditions. If it is sensation, it is fictional. The arising condition assumes self inwardly (supposing this body is real), externally assuming things (supposing six objects are real). For example, the eyes see a beloved, the mind is then happy (happy feeling, happy due to good situation leading to desiring self). Looking out the garden, if our pots of daisies are put away, we feel annoyed (sad feeling due to bad situation). Seeing the sad situation is neither good nor bad (delusional feeling as we can assume we are looking at that scene). If happiness comes from the mind, then why are we not often happy? If happiness comes from the scenery, then what does it have to do with us—feeling is clearly illusional and empty of intrinsic existence. Every

day six sense organ entrances contact six objects, nurturing the three poisonous desire, hatred and delusion. Patriarchs have wisdom, so they are calm. This is called the feeling of equanimity.

Ordinary beings suppose feeling to be happy so the more they receive the better and the merrier. The Buddha taught that there are three receives which are suffering.

1. Decaying suffering: We call it joy (pleasant feeling; the Buddha calls it suffering as all phenomena are impermanent, the past is gone, the present is being lost, feeling happy is due to decay following the objects).

2. Suffering superimposes sufferings: The Buddha called suffering over sufferings as the body of aging, illness and death is already suffering but it has to bear the sufferings in the external world.

3. Suffering from mental action: we call it ordinary/neutral, unpleasant or unhappy (delusional feeling); the Buddha calls it suffering from formations as delusion and assumes that six sense organs and objects are real, supposes self and dharma, the more accustomed the thicker; then surely fall into the three evil realms, thus all three feelings are suffering.

Feeling unpleasant is suffering as it increases anger. Generally accustomed to ignorance without wisdom, feeling neutral is suffering.

If feeling happy, then it increases craving, going deeply into the ocean of ignorance. It's difficult even to think of heading out, so happy feeling is also miserable.

The river contains moving drops of water. Our body is a river. Innumerable cells are changing. Our mind is also a river. Feelings of birth and cessation, cessation and birth never stop according to the activities of six senses. Happy feelings cause attachment, while suffering causes boredom. Every feeling stimulates the arising of desire and anger. Only mindfulness can change the situation. Feeling is performed and illumined under the light of consciousness. Mindfulness does not receive feeling as ourselves; it does not speak that I like this or that, I am happy, I am miserable.

The first effect is to recover the ownership, thus, feeling loses its magic power.

The second fruit is seeing that the root of feeling is ignorance. Due to self-supposing, phenomena supposing that we have feeling.

The third result is to know the intrinsic nature of delusional feeling without nature, only the feeling of produce and cessation according to conditions.

Though practicing Buddha-dharma for years, we still can't thoroughly understand these meanings. Please think it over.

If the whole day we feel annoyed and say harsh words because we stayed up late and lack sleep—this is the suffering feeling rooted in biology. If we are misunderstood by our friend, we feel disturbed and suffer—this is rooted in psychology. When entering our room, if we see dirty trash, untidy things and feel irritated, this is suffering feeling rooted in physics. If we feel happy when being praised, contemplate it and discover that the basic feeling of happiness comes from the loving self and happy feeling causing an illusion. If we are awake, we can avoid useless pride and conceit. Once the delusion of a happy feeling disappears it gives a place for wholesome happiness that nurtures enlightenment and maintains saintly conduct. Thus, feeling is clearly unfixed. Feeling good or bad depends on the dependent-origination.

Therefore, the Buddha taught us to draw a picture of samsara illustrating feeling like a person's eye shot by a poisonous arrow. If he is a wise person, he will pull the arrow out, but we ourselves hold the arrow that pierced us from morning till evening, from one day to another until our body is fully torn apart. If anyone asks about it, we then take it to pierce into another person. For example, if someone mis-accused us, that is, an arrow is shot into our eye, our heart; we can't forget the unpleasant words. Every time we think of it, our eye is pierced once more. More than that, we often make calls or write emails to many people everywhere to tell others of our sufferings. It

means we continue put the arrows to pierce others'eyes. So, every day we transfer countless arrows without knowing. That slander is the play of movement and stillness, the sound of echoing waves, the non-existence. Only when we are equanimous with the feeling is our mind is peaceful and finds the cool abiding. One Zen master says:

Harsh words fall down like early flower

Let our heart be frozen with wind and fog.⁵⁶

Every day we observe our body, mind and scenery as illusions, so our mind is calm. The arrow is flying towards us but if we don't receive and hold it, it is broken by itself and falls like the fall of flowers. If not so, though as monastics, we are yet open to afflictive emotions and burdens in our whole life.

Those winning earn the hatred/venge,
Those losing can't sleep,
Winning or losing is gotten rid of,
Our mind is peaceful.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Please read: <https://www.thivien.net/tran-nhan-tong-son-ky-man-hung-ky-2>.

Loving sickness is the deepest arrow in our heart. “I love you so I will wait for you even ten eons; I still love you though hundreds of thousands years pass.”

As happy feelings and loving-self lead to attachment and get into ocean of ignorance, so people are attached to each other in many lives or kalpas. This arrow has many poisons, the arrow of desire. A old French saying mentions: “There are three kinds of people who are not afraid of the falling sky—they are crazy, drunken and in-love-people.” As these people have the arrow deeply rooted in their hearts, they are too attached to care about the dangers in the surrounding area.

Four Mindfulnesses are the general or best method to defeat illusional thought or this defiled feeling. We are crazed by four adverse things:

1. The body is impure but we are so attached to it as our pure refuge.
2. Feeling is suffering but we desire more—the more the better.
3. Mind with delusion is impermanent but we surely consider it as brightly loyal without change.
4. The phenomena are unreal, but we suppose that six inner sense entrances, six external objects and six middle consciousness are real.

Contemplating the above until we are accustomed to them, then six objects can't affect us, and we reestablish

the calm and smooth way. The four mindfulnesses teach us to use our breath to contemplate the presence of happiness and suffering, the impure craving feeling, and then we can gradually control them. Gradually, the subtler the breath is, the more peaceful we feel. Our body and mind become gradually calmer and soother. Thus, in this way we still have the three receives and three perceptions. With the right view, we clearly see the root, the nature and effect of happy and sad feelings, so we can liberate their control. To cope with mindfulness is not to recognize the feeling as ourselves. We are aware of the ignorance's source of feeling; its nature is delusional.

If we can clear away the forest of five skandhas, we can enjoy peace and tranquility in life without any attachment. This is the path to Nirvana.

Let's observe that if there is feeling, there will be suffering. The more we receive, the more suffering we feel. The Buddha taught to let it come and go naturally, feeling yet without feeling. The patriarchs have wisdom, so they calmly call it the feeling of equanimity.



Figure 38

8. CRAVING (*Taṇhā*)



Figure 39

In the picture above, we see a drunkard drinking many bottles of wine. He is very drunken with lots of empty bottles of wine lying on the floor. On the table, there is a new bottle available for drinking and many more bottles are waiting in queue. The meaning of this picture shows that desire for feeling is still endless in all types of animals, in all beings. In the past, they used to enjoy sexual desire, at present they are enjoying sexual desire and it will continue in the future. The sweetness of sexual activities causes people to be very much attached to it, thus losing their right view.

Knowledge senses arise after feeling. Attachment comes next to happy feeling. Hatred follows unpleasant feelings. Thus, when love no longer exists, then comes hatred and vice versa and this continuously generates

delusional thoughts. In fact, perception, that is, emptiness, as it is detached from the present object and dharmas remembering the past, the future, perception does not really exist, only through conditions does it temporarily exist. If conditions cease, then delusion disappears.

The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva knows and hears all things and he is not covered and controlled by anything. All the good or bad, auspicious or inauspicious things to them are like a breeze or like space. If you can be like that, no sufferings come to you. Words and speech are delusion; it is a game of motion and standstill, the play of breath, due to the movement of air (the echoing wave) that the mental ear turns itself into sound for discrimination. The wisdom of *prajñā* knows that words are like a breeze so it does not care about them; it does not embrace that moving air to think and develop hatred or love.

Practicing *prajñā* deeply does not mean to sink deep in that thought. It's the uninterrupted peaceful mind which is a motiveless state. Perception skandha is never affected, thus sufferings end. While we contemplate, the perception skandha is pacified. But when dealing with others, it recognizes delusion as itself. Thus, due to the superficial practice of *prajñā*, when we have a problem, we feel miserable.

There is a famous saying: “We won't be reborn in the saha world if we have no impure desire.” Due to the

cause of impure desire, we are present here. Thus, Lord Buddha taught that at the chain of “contact,” the most dangerous contact between male and female is the source of an ocean of samsara. The sensation mostly discussed in the world’s human poems is the love between a man and a woman. This is a more vehement desire than other sensations because it relates to the deep human instinct. Human beings always want to appropriate the type of person who can bring them happiness; this is the selfish psychology. The love between man and woman has the potential stimulation of sexual activities, a kind of activity causing the most clearly sensual pleasure; the condition of many lives, the machine to create the turning wheel of samsara. If one does not have deeply good karma, the fixed aspiration, the support of good gurus then monks or lay people are hard to escape this net of impurities.

If we examine it carefully, love is only the selfish nature that increases self-attachment; if someone loves me, I will love him in return. This is also the enjoyment of the human instinct. It’s the attachment to enjoyment that motivates a man and woman to meet each other for seeking happiness and vice versa. It also stimulates them to cause sufferings for each other (many couples quarrel, beat, divorce, have sexual misconduct, but there are also many couples with true love, devotion, generosity and tolerance. That true love can decrease the sad color of the selfish instinct).

The seamy side of craving (love) is hate. Loving this thing and hating the other. Vietnamese folksongs have the following verse:

If we love each other, only one betel-nut of six is divided into three,

If we hate each other, only one betel-nut of six is divided into ten.

or

If we love each other, even caltrop is also round,

If we hate each other, even the soapberry is square.

We remember each other when we are in love, but if we hate each other, we remember each other more. The mind is attached and although the body does not stay close it still carries dislike in the heart. We do not want to let go of the suffering binding but the more we remember, the more deluded we become. The more deluded we are, the more suffering we feel. It continues until time immemorial. In Vietnam, we have the following two verses:

The rain without pinion, but it can keep the guests' feet, Beauty without the big waves can even plunge the hero.

The rain is without string but it can restrain the steps of the guests.

The beauty of nice girls is not the big wave but it can plunge heroes.

This is the strength of love and craving desire. The Dhammapada contains many teachings of the Buddha about craving desire such as:

The flow of craving runs everywhere,
Like liana growing everywhere,
Seeing liana grow,
Use the sword of wisdom to cut the root.⁵⁷

Whoever lives in this world,
Sensual desire is defeated,
Sufferings gradually disappear,
Like a drop of water on a lotus leaf.⁵⁸

Knowing that the body is like floating foam,
Aware this body is illusory,
Break the arrow of craving,
Going beyond the eye space of the lord of death.”⁵⁹
Those who gather the flower of pleasure,
Their mind is foolishly craving,

⁵⁷ Dhammapada, translated by Ven. Narada Maha Thera, Maha Bodhi in Sarnath, 2000, Verse 344.

⁵⁸ Ibid, verse 336.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Verse 40.

Passionate in pleasure,
Being a slave of the lord of death.⁶⁰

Thus, do not love anybody,
Separation from love is suffering,
Those who do not love or hate,
Nothing can bind them.⁶¹

Sexual attachment causes worry,
Craving causes fear,
Who liberates sexual attachment,
They do not worry and are not fearful.⁶²

Desire causes worry,
Desire causes fear,
Who liberates desires,
They do not worry and are not fearful.⁶³

Samyutta Nikāya says: “Monks! From beginningless samsara, it’s not easy to find sentient beings

⁶⁰ Ibid., Verse 349.

⁶¹ Ibid., Verse 211.

⁶² Ibid., Verse 214.

⁶³ Ibid., Verse 218.

in this world who have never been a mother or father in the world

Newsweek weekly magazine dated November 3, 2003 contains an article written by Robert J. Samuelson, a famous economist who says: “Generally young people want to be older, and the old people want to be younger. This is only part of the path in one’s effort in seeking happiness of human beings.”

In the *Sūrangama Sūtra*, Lord Buddha taught in detail about this defiled world⁶⁴ as follows:

If we don’t practice the *samādhi dharma* specifically to escape the rebirth; if sensual desire is defeated, we can be freed from rebirth. Even though we have much present wisdom of *samādhi* , if sensual desire is not defeated, we can’t be freed from *samsara*. Even though with much available wisdom of *samādhi* , if sensual desire is not conquered, we will get lost in heretic tradition. The top becomes the king of ghosts, the middle becomes ghost citizens and the lowest becomes female ghosts. These ghosts also have disciples and they claim themselves to have achieved *anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi* (the highest supreme enlightenment).

After the Buddha took *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, there were many types of this ghost. They falsely claimed themselves to be gurus, and then caused human beings to

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 553–555.

fall into cells of craving view and lose their bodhi path. The Buddha taught, “Ānanda, if you teach human beings to practice samādhi , first of all, desire in the heart must be deleted.” This is called the clearly pure teaching, the most decisive teaching of Buddhas. If craving desire is not abandoned, practicing samādhi with non-virtuous behavior is like cooking sand and stone and expecting them to turn into cooked rice. Despite hundreds of kalpas passing, they are only called hot sand and stone. Why? Because it’s the hot sand (*bija*), hot stone, not the basic nature of rice.

You offer your body and mind for achieving wonderful Buddhahood and even though you are enlightened, it’s only the root of desire. Once the root has become sensual desire, one must stay around in the evil realms with no escape. So, there is no path to Nirvana. Surely, maybe our body and mind defeat the seed of craving and sensual desire, even if the defeat no longer exists can we hope for Buddhahood. As I have been saying, these are called the Buddha’s words.



Figure 40

9. CLINGING (*Upādāna*)



Figure 41

The mind with grasping and love or hate is eager to create karma, so Lord Buddha taught us to draw a person trying to rise up to get the fruit (maybe poisonous fruit or good fruit); she does not know how to let go to find spiritual joy.

Since the desire is increasing they wander to find places to expand their business and family, and try to persist with their name, fame, career and beloveds. Thus, we say desire contacting with adoption. Desire and adoption belong to defilements (*klesa*).

The person consists of five aggregates (form, feelings, perception, karmic creation and consciousness) which mean the habit of binding five aggregates. Numerous customs of ignorance all assume it as “me,” that is, my body, my sufferings, my joy, my life, my bad

temper. Thus, they are stimulated and create karma. The root of suffering is not the five aggregates but the attitude of grabbing the five aggregates as ourselves. If we are awakened, calm, bright, non-adopted, then these five delusions will gradually vanish. If we want to be awake, we should obey the Buddha's teachings and practice these contemplating dharmas, that is, the form aggregate, the fixed delusion, karmic creation (mysterious delusion) and consciousness aggregate. These are the subtle skandhas.



Figure 42

10. BECOMING (*Bhāva*)



Figure 43

When we have the seed of becoming, then karma is created. This is shown by drawing a pregnant woman (creating karma is forming a seed in the *ālayavijñāna* consciousness to get results in the six realms of samsara). Keeping five precepts is the cause to be reborn in the human realm. Ten good deeds cause one to be reborn in heavenly realm. If complemented by meditation, one can be reborn in the desire and formless realm. All good deeds without the bright contemplation of the wisdom of *prajñā* have a potential capacity to become fruit in the future, lengthening the birth and death journey. When we do Buddhist work or perform some virtuous works without contemplating three turnings of emptiness (no person, no receiver and no object given) or contemplate the wonderful manifestation to ornament the ocean of bodhi

that we often want to enjoy the good fruit of that deed, then we can have that fruit. Therefore, we go upwards to enjoy the blessings in the heavenly realm, in the human realm and the asura realm, but sometimes we go downward to repay the debts, the revenge, and withstand the fruit in the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm and the animal realm. Thus, the wheel of samsara rolls around and around since beginningless time until endless time without any cessation.



Figure 44

11. BIRTH (*Jāti*)



Figure 45

Drawing the picture of a newly born baby, if we have the body, we'll have fear, sickness and old age. This is the nest of afflictions, the source of all sufferings.

The universe is a uniform living body in which all objects seem to have a hidden deep life inside, though it's the organic or inorganic substance (sentient being or insentient being).

All depends on the procedure of birth, growth, change and death. Even the destiny of a planet is only the next rebirth following the universe. Even if a yellow leaf falls, a dry old rooted tree dies; an old person lying down—all do not go beyond the process of humankind and all beings. All live and are reborn endlessly.

Krishna Murti,⁶⁵ an Indian philosopher and writer, said, “This morning flowers and leaves are eternal, go

⁶⁵ Mind and Consciousness as per J. Krishnamurti,
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3673342/>

beyond time and thought, comprise love and joy. Flowers will die this afternoon but they are potential in petals of flowers, all die but have hidden life's death. Petals of flowers will fall down but fall down in arising . . . ”

In the round of sentient beings and insentient beings, life is shown most clearly through the intercourse of the two beings, male and female; father and mother giving birth and continuing to breed to maintain humankind. This is called birth.

If fixed karma is going to be a son then the *antara-bhāva* body⁶⁶ generates love for his mother. If a daughter, she generates love for her father. Loving as the seed (*bija*), perception leads him or her to enter the mother's womb.

When the consciousness is joyful with the combination of father and mother, the three (father, mother, and the antara-bhāva body) are merged with one another like a glue in the fetus. That consciousness is the spirit; father's sperm and mother's ovule are the materials. Then the womb has three elements:

- The life has the limited period of the womb (fetus).
- The warmth of three fires (father, mother, consciousness mixed in that block of sperm and ovule; this is called the one point to start a new birth).

⁶⁶ Antara-bhāva: The state of intermediate existence between lives, lasting up to forty-nine days, between death and an ensuing rebirth, <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/dictionary/details/antarabhava>

- Consciousness: The knowing-nature, Buddha nature which upon entering a human body is called the *ālayavijñāna* consciousness. When it is being reborn, this consciousness comes first, and then other seven consciousnesses come after.



Figure 46

12. AGING AND DEATH (*Jarā-marāṇa*)

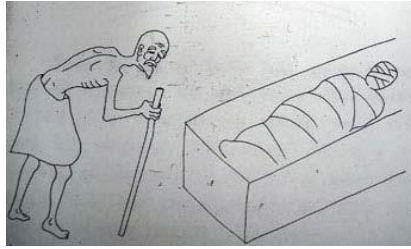


Figure 47

Death surely happens to us all and when it comes, we are terrified and sad. No matter the circumstances, it is the warning for us that human life is very short, unpredictable and so fragile. Death is the common term from the lord of death, the same fixed karma and common denominator for us all. Death reminds us of the ephemeral nature of the short life and causes us to rethink our ideas about ourselves and advises us to live a more meaningful life. Do not waste our time on normal pursuits, useless activities, trite and hollow words, as these cause suffering for us. When our soul leaves this world, all belongings, achievements, good fame and reputation become useless. Only human morality's nature exists. Only correctness and right view, kindness, patience, wisdom and devotion for others always exist. Let's practice these noble qualities and when death comes, it will be a comfortable going, a big accomplishment and nothing to fear. Death will be joy; thus, we should beat the drum and be happy as we

complete our duties. Death is over, the burden is put away, what needs doing has been done, nothing remains.

The Buddha taught that to conquer the physical desire by the virtue of dhutanga and contemplation on death (*nivasamjna*,⁶⁷ nine types of meditation on corpses which helps free us from attachment to the human body), practicing to see oneself as a dead body. A young beautiful girl passing by is only a set of bones covered by flesh, skin, and perfumed externally. The nature is thirty-two impurities of blood and flesh and it is going to be transformed into maggots and decay to be returned to sand and dust. Reflection on the impure body is a key to insight and transforms our wrong view and understanding.

Grandchildren attend their grandfather's funeral, sons and daughters attend their father's funeral. Thus, they maintain the continuity of digging the pit of impermanence and do not change their view and lifestyle for ages.

⁶⁷ Nivasamjna (Skt.) Nine types of meditation on a corpse which helps free us from attachment to the human body: 1) Vyadhmatasamjna (Skt.), contemplate on a bloated corpse, 2) Vinilakas (Skt.) contemplation on a corpse changing color to dark purple, 3) Vipadumakas (Skt.) contemplate a decaying corpse, 4) Vilohitakas (Skt.), contemplation on blood leaking out from a corpse, 5) Vipuyakas (Skt.), contemplation on a corpse covered with pus, 6) Vikhaditakas (Skt.), contemplation on a corpse torn apart by wild birds and wild beasts, 7) Viksiptakas (Skt.), contemplation on the scattered limbs of a corpse, 8) Asthis (Skt.), contemplation on leftover white bones, 9) Vidagdhas (Skt.), contemplation on the bones reduced to ashes.

<https://phatgiao.org.vn/tu-dien-phat-hoc-online/cuu-tuong-quan>

We practice to see that our body and those of others are impermanent collections full of suffering. Therefore, we are liberated from the dangers of craving. Thinking about death, termination, we won't be attached to our life. Thus, our mind rejoices and is stable. As we know its real nature and truth, we are not bound.

If we do not contemplate death and its obvious character, we won't have the preparations; we lose our mindfulness when death comes, especially if our beloveds in the family, friends or we ourselves are dead. Instead, we can prepare our psychological luggage for our peaceful death. If we let our life go after material things, we shall die in worry and regret. On the contrary, if we wholehearted serve others with our compassion, then we can die with a happy and calm mind. Hence, the best method to prepare for death is to live a life of devotion for humankind with our wholehearted kindness.

Most of us are hindered by karma and other emotions from seeing our real nature. Karmic results continue to tie us to the endless cycle of rebirth. So, everything is unstable, depending on how we live and think in the present moment. Our present lifestyle affects our future life. It's the vital reason for us to prepare our path with an intelligent attitude. It is necessary to avoid the round of samsaric tragedy of twelve *nidanas*. This life is the time and only place for us to make arrangements. We make real arrangements by returning to our real

nature/true mind. Patriarch Padmad taught that: “Human life is short, there is no time to allow our mind to wander. We need to see, hear and contemplate continuously, without negligence to aspire for enlightenment. There are three tools of hearing-thinking-practicing which can help us realize who we really are and express the joy of liberation called selfless wisdom.”

Life and death is a transition. The Buddha does not intervene on the path of karma. He only explained its mechanism and influence. The root of rebirth is desire, hatred and delusion, which are drawn on the blue, illusory background, that is, non-existent. In such a way Zen tradition calls it non-original.

Naturally it is non-original,
It comes from emptiness,
It again goes from emptiness,
We naturally do not come or go,
Death and life do no harm to us/cause us no trouble.

Zen Master Như Trừng Lâm Giác

* * *

Where does birth come from?

Where will death go,

Knowing the way to come and go,

He then can be called a true dharma practitioner.

Zen Master Hưong Hải

The Buddha taught that there are five uncertain things:

1. *Uncertain life*: A human life consists of a lifespan, a warm substance, the eight consciousnesses preserving the root of life, five skandhas, six sense organs, six operative consciousnesses, and so on. It is unfixed as we do not know when it originated and when it ended. It has no subject, if it does not want to activate, it no longer activates, then the lifespan ceases.

2. *Uncertain illness*: Bacteria penetrates the body and makes it sick. According to Buddhism, the four elements (*tanmatra*) of earth, water, wind and fire are sometimes harmonious and sometimes inharmonious, so the body is healthy and unhealthy. In such a way, it is unfixed.

3. *Uncertain time*: Time is moving and changing, daytime is bright and nighttime is dark. Past, present and future do not stop and fix in one place. Time is like a running horse. The worldly life is like blurry cloud. The Buddha knows how to save as much as possible, even one minute, because death can come any time. For people comprehending dharma, time is the magic medicine to

awaken impermanence, foster and cultivate wisdom and bear flowers and fruits.

4. *Uncertain death*: We can't die as per our wish, so it is unfixed. We can die at a young age, middle-age or at an old age. We can die from disease, accident and we suddenly die for no reason. We are born where we know, live in one place or many places, but how can we fix where we shall die? Maybe in the desolate forest, windy plateau, in traffic, in rivers, in oceans, our homeland, our forefather's graves, temples, monasteries . . . all without knowing when. Death is the interruption of a human life, the stopping of fragile breath.

5. *Uncertain place for rebirth*: This is the sphere of unfixed rebirth, the present region after death. Death is not the end but a stage changing from one life to another life. Human beings leave this physical body in a realm to go to another realm.

In such way, the cause and the effect mixed together lead the wheel of life turning continuously without ceasing. In the samsaric cycle, death and life are conditioned with each other. Death in this place and birth in another place, one being is present in one place and another is absent in the other place. There is death then rebirth in the same place. If we want to know our rebirth, examine our present karma.

The human life is unstable; the body is always sick. Time ceaselessly goes by, the date of death is uncertain, the place of rebirth is unfixed. Let's live and keep our precepts and have a pure mind.

OUTLINE OF TWELVE NIDANAS

In the twelve nidanas, cause creates conditions for effect. Effect then creates conditions for cause, making the endless chain of samsara, life and death for thousands of years without stopping. If it is divided into passing causes and effects of the past, present, future and “defilement-karma-suffering,” the twelve-chain link is understood as follows:

Two past	{	Ignorance: illusory defilement obscure ->
causes		Sankhāra: illusion causing the three present non-stopping karma -> Karma

Five present fruits:

Consciousness : the see of karma with external generates consciousness

Consciousness is to know how to cope with external world to discriminate

Karmic consciousness is fruitful karma, a karma -
> **Sufferings**

Name and form: Mind is name. Five senses are form.

Six entrances: Six senses are complete, depending on the sense that object enters into the senses.

Contact: Which sense encountering the object will generate contact.

Feelings: Sense contacting objects feel good or bad.

These four show the physical body and the feelings of the body in life and death, so they belong to -> **Sufferings.**

Three present causes { Craving: Due to acceptance of feelings generates craving.
Grasping: Due to defiled desire, thus following looking.
is the attached desire, hence it belongs to

-> **Defilement**

Adoption: Due to monitoring expectations, it causes afflictive karmas.

Two future Birth: Because of karmic cause, it certainly grabs the future birth.

results this is karmic creation of body, speech, mind; thus, it belongs to -> **Karma**

Aging, Illness and death: Owning the body means to bear the misery of illness, aging and death.

This is taking the effect in samsara, thus -> **Sufferings.**

If any one of twelve nidanas is deleted, all the remaining nidanas disappear.

If the cause is obliterated, there won't be any seeds left.

If conditions are removed, there won't be the sub-assisting region.

The Buddha concluded the twelve links as follows:

Two dharmas which can be known and must be mastered are name and form.

Two dharmas which can be known and must be removed are ignorance and sensual desire.

Two dharmas which can be known and must be practiced are morality and meditation.

Two dharmas which can be known and must be realized are liberation and wisdom.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER V

The outermost circle of the wheel is the circle of twelve nidanas. Due to the present nidanas, there is samsara of realms. We need to avoid the binding tragedy of the suffering round in these twelve links. This depends on the ability to generate or delete a link in that whole chain of twelve links. If a cause is born/obliterated, then there is seed/no seed. If conditions are produced/removed then there is/is not an assisting region. The Buddha concluded the chain of twelve links as follows:

Two dharmas which can be known and must be mastered are name and form.

Two dharmas which can be known and must be removed are ignorance and sensual desire.

Two dharmas which can be known and must be practiced are morality and meditation.

Two dharmas which can be known and must be realized are liberation and wisdom.

Discussion Questions

1. Please detail the twelve links.
2. Please explain and state the reason why it is said: “Two dharmas which can be known and must be mastered are name and form.”
3. Why are the four establishments of mindfulness recommended to defeat illusion or four adverse things (pure body, happy feelings, permanent mind and true dharma)?
4. Explain five uncertain dharmas of human life, illness, time, death and place of birth.



Figure 47

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

THE ENDLESS FLOW OF REBIRTH

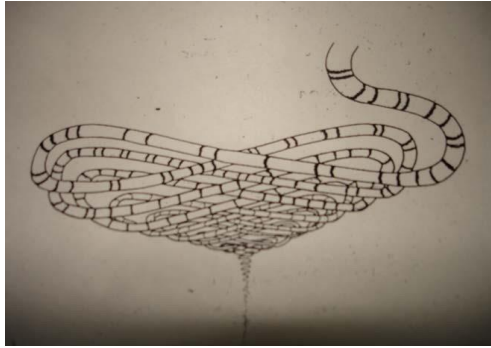


Figure 48

The picture shows the tail of the impermanent demon (holding the wheel of life). It is endlessly long, immemorial, that is to say, old age, sickness, ignorance then turn around in the full twelve circles of cessation. Birth and death, death and birth continue successively and endlessly. In such a way, this turns around forever into a circle with no beginning and no ending, making the cause and effect mixed from time immemorial.

Let's observe the operative flow of mind:

If a mind creates five terrible sins (*vamas*), ten cruel things, they are the causes of being born into a *hell realm*.

Stinginess and delusion are signs of being born as *hungry ghosts*.

Beings with little desire, hatred, and delusion will be born as *animals*.

If one wants to struggle to win, he will be born as *asuras*.

Keeping the five precepts patiently is the cause for rebirth as *human beings*.

Ten wholesome deeds, together with meditation, open the way to *heaven realm*.

Those who are bored with rebirth and pleasant with nirvana are *sravakas*.

Those knowing twelve links of causation and emptiness are *prateyaka-buddha*.

Those owning six perfections (*ṣatpāramitā*), benefiting oneself and others are right *bodhisattvas*.

Equally pure mind, the complete combination is the merit of dharma's realm, *the Buddha*.

Thus, the picture of ten realms draws the Chinese letter “mind” in the middle.



Figure 49

The whole wheel of rebirth turns into the impermanent fire. From hell to heaven, all fall into the clutches of impermanence (birth, old age, illness, death). The Buddha taught us to draw the three-eyed impermanent demon as the impermanence itself awakens the supermundane sages (the third eye is the divine eye).

Whereas, old age and illness in the cycle is sucked into ignorance then turns around in full twelve circles. In such a way, this revolves around forever into a circle with no beginning and no ending, making the cause-effect chains mixed from beginningless time.

Impermanence is the only thing we can recognize. What is born, will die. Things gather, and then they disperse. Things are built then they fall. Things go up then go down. A varying general lays the foundation for things.

All worldly hardships fall in the words “birth, death, rebirth” or “birth, growth, change and cessation.” The human body is difficult to have, but so easy to lose. Falling into three evil realms is easy but it's challenging to get out of them. The world in hell must be counted by eons, thousands of burning miseries; we can't know who can save us. After repaying debts in the hell realm, humans are born as animals to pay old debts. Being born from the pig's belly, they claim themselves as pigs, bringing the limitless light into the fetid womb, borrowing the horse's belly and the bull's stomach to be born. It's so pitiful.

Seven lives of Buddhas have passed but ants are still ants; eight thousand eons have passed and pigeons do not escape from being pigeons. Leaving this body and taking another shape—it takes thousands of years to get a human form. Bearing the intermediate forms many times, how can we have a bright mind to remember previous lives? Feeling, touching with senses and objects, birth, old age, illness, death—how can we keep ourselves in mindfulness? In such a way, samsara continues forever.



Figure 50, Impermanent Demons

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra⁶⁸ explains samsara's meaning in three ways of the continuing world, continuing beings and continuing karma as follows:

Venerable Mahakaushthila asked whether the consecutive presence of living beings, the world, and karma are related with all dharmas (phenomena) and hoped from the Buddha's answer to clear his cloud of doubt. The Buddha answered:

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 290–293.

1. THE CONSECUTIVE WORLD

“Enlightenment is inherently luminous while space is dark. Both are dualistic and constantly changing, so the wind energy appears to maintain the world. Due to space, it produces movement and solidity to become an obstacle. By the illuminating enlightenment, a precious metal forms the hardness, thus the countries are protected by the metal. Attachment to solidity establishes the metals, while knowing the vibration is to be aware of the blowing of the wind. The wind and metal touch each other to create the fire whose nature is movable. The flame glows upward, the shining metal produces wetness. Hence, the water pervades over the realms in ten directions. Fire rises up while water flows down. Both touch each other to set up the hardness. Wherever is wet becomes the ocean. Wherever is dry becomes the continents or mountains. From the great oceans, fire often rises up, while from the continents, rivers flow down. As water energy is weaker than fire, it causes high mountains to form. In these mountains, rocks which are hit create sparks. These cook and melt as liquid.

“As the earth level is less than water, that causes grasses and trees to be established. So, the forest is burnt and turned to ashes. Illusory thoughts interact to make

karmic seeds. These cause-conditions cause the consecutive world.”⁶⁹

2. THE CONSECUTIVE CREATURES

“Moreover, Purna, the false illumination is nothing but the mistake of putting more light in the awakening. After the falseness of a bright object is produced, the scope of the bright subject cannot transcend it. Due to this dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*), hearing cannot go beyond the sound, and seeing cannot go beyond the form. Because six illusory organs, namely, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch are established, the reality is divided into six functions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing.

The community karma binds together to form separation, formation and transformation. Once seeing is created, sight is generated. Recognizing clearly the sight, thinking comes into being. Differing ideas generate dislike. Similar ideas produce lust. Spreading the craving is a seed, collecting the thoughts is the womb. The cooperation developed to be attractive to the community karma. Since then, these causes conditions (*pāda*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*) create the *kalala*, and the *arbuda*.

⁶⁹ Sūrangama Sūtra, Vietnamese translation by Tâm Minh; English translation by Bhikkhuni Giới Hương, HCMC Publishing House, 1999, pp. 290–293.

The womb-birth, egg-birth, humid-birth, and transforming-birth are presented according to their own response. For example, the egg-birth is produced due to thought; the womb-birth is formed due to affection; the humid-birth arises from a combination of one another; and the transforming-birth occurs through separation.

When the emotion, when the thought, when the union and when the separation have exchanged with one another, all the karma species are affected either going up or going down. These cause-conditions caused the consecutive creature beings.”

3. THE CONSECUTIVE KARMAS

“Purna, thought and craving have ties to connection so that people who fall in love with each other cannot bear to separate. Consequently in the world, parents, children and offspring who are produced continuously without end, have taken strong sexual desire (*sarāgam*) as the root.

“Lust and love (*trishna*) connect with each other to develop. Lust is consumed with an insatiable appetite, consequently in the world all the creature beings who are born in various forms of eggs, wombs, humidity and transformation and who have competed and harmed one another have taken the killing desire as the root.

“If a human (*manussa*) being eats a sheep and after death, the sheep becomes a person, after the human being dies he will be reborn as a sheep. Likewise, up to ten

species are alternated in the cause-effect cycle to death-birth and eat one another's bodies. Their evil karmas have developed up to the future. They have taken the stealing desire as the root.

“This person owes a life to that person. One person must repay the old debt to another person. Due to these cause-conditions, we have passed hundreds thousands of kalpas (lives) in the cycle of transmigration (*samsāra*).

“This person loves that person's mind. That person likes this person's figure. Due to these cause-conditions, we have passed hundreds thousands of kalpas in the cycle of the mutual entanglement. Killing, stealing and lust are the basic roots of the cause-conditions for consecutive karmas. Purna, the three kinds of upside down continually come from the inherent luminous brightness which is added to enlightenment. With this false enlightening of the knowing-nature, subjective awareness gives rise to objective appearances. Both are born of false views (*micchā-ditthi*), and from this falseness, the mountains, the rivers, the great earth, and all conditioned appearances unfold themselves in a succession that recurs in endless cycles. Purna, three things (the world, living beings and karma) have continued to go upside down, because the luminosity of the enlightenment is bright and clear. Following false thought, the wrong view (*micchā-ditthi*) appears to have all phenomena of mountains, rivers,

mainlands that changed, rotated back and forth without stopping.”⁷⁰

That is the reason the Buddha taught that monastics do not cook by themselves; they depend on their short life in the three realms and do not eat meat by any means. Then all old grudges can be paid off in one life. They bid farewell to this world and are free from defilements, make their manifestation in one return and if they go away, they never return. We decide to leave our whole body and mind, This body of blood and flesh becomes the general possession of beings. The Buddha taught us to contemplate this body as impure and impermanent. We (the world) are deluded, wholly fallen in afflictions and withstanding the karma of six realms. Thus, we increase our evil deeds, create worse karma, the cycle of rebirth and in this way, turn around and around endlessly.

We obey the Buddha's teachings; we ourselves see our faults and confess. Alternatively, we contemplate impermanence and selflessness to root out the ignorance. Afflictive fetters are rooted accordingly. We do not attach to the selfness inside us and we do not grasp the external phenomena, then we are undoubtedly calm.

⁷⁰ ⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 290–293.

Life does not end with death, bearing in mind there are many more future lives. Most of us do not prepare for death as well as for life. Milarepa, a Tibetan sage, said: "My religion is how to live and die without regret." Ancient sages often said: "Life is the temporary, death is the return." They consider life as a guesthouse and human beings are guests who come and go. Who is crazy to put all his money, wastefully decorate the hotel room that we only rent a few days then leave?

We have wasted our whole life to run after illusions to take care of our boardinghouse while we will surely leave this house. The rhythm of life is so busy that there is no time to think about the truth. Humankind is worried to arrange one thing to another their whole life without preparation for sudden death. Only those who can see the fragile nature of life know how valuable life is.

Theravāda and Mahāyāna commentaries mention the same reminder that we all have three leftovers:

- Old habits (*vasana*)
- Bad karma
- Defilements

We have created countless cruel crimes for ages. We have paid the heavy sins in the hell and preta realms. With little craving karma, we are reborn as birds, fishes; with less anger, we are reborn as snakes, cats, tigers, leopards; with less ignorance, we are reborn as elephants,

pigs, flies, ants. Now we still have remaining karma, so we have to pay for it:

1. Due to **old bad habits**, both monastics and laypeople must guard against violating the precepts of no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying and no intoxication.

Buddhist laypeople undertake to observe the five basic precepts, while male bhikkhus undertake the full 250 precepts and female bhikkhunis keep the full 348 precepts.

2. Because of **remaining bad karma**, we are deaf or mute or encounter unfortunate situations and many miserable obstacles.

3. We are **easily affected by afflictions**, so it's difficult for us to control ourselves. Due to hardships, it's easy to create more evil causes of desire, hatred and delusion. Thus, we have to go around and around in the three evil realms.⁷¹

Luck is the result of good deeds. Being unlucky is the outcome of evil deeds. With wisdom, one can make progress from any situation. This person is aware, so whenever he has an accident, he knows that he paid the old karma and the accident is the broom to sweep away all the trash of past sins.

⁷¹Sūrangama Sūtra, Vietnamese translation by Tâm Minh; English translation by Bhikkhuni Giới Hương, HCMC Publishing House, 1999, pp. 642–649.

Zen Master Viên Chiếu⁷² said: "Where do all beings come from, where will they go after death? Blind tortoise illuminates the cliff; lame loach climbs the high mountain."

Nicodemis asked: "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Lord Jesus replied, "Don't be strange about what I told you: You have to be reborn. The wind can blow anywhere, you hear the noise but can't know where the wind comes from and where it will go . . . Indeed, indeed, I told you, I told you what I know. I confirmed what I saw. You still do not receive my testimonies. For instance, what I said about the earth (concrete), you don't believe, let alone when I talked about heavenly things, how can you think them?"⁷³

When the Buddha was enlightened, he considered humankind as a pond of lotuses: some are in the mud, some get out of the slurry but are still underwater, some rise up from the water, some surpass water to stand in the air and fragrantly blossom. We should consider which types of lotuses are we? If we are still underwater, watch out, as we can't escape from a flock of fish and tortoises

⁷² Thiên đạo và văn chương qua kệ và ngữ lục của Viên Chiếu thiền sư. Nguyễn Công Lý. <http://www.daophatngaynay.com/vn/mobile/phatgiao-vn/van-hoc-vn/9561-Thien-dao-va-van-chuong-qua-ke-va-ngu-luc-cua-Vien-Chieu-thien-su.html>

⁷³ John 3, http://web.mit.edu/jywang/www/cef/Bible/NIV/NIV_Bible/JOHN+3.html

dabbling us. As long as we are still in the samsaric cycle of rebirth, whether in the human or heavenly realms, we are not in peaceful places. With supramundane wisdom, we need to have competent gurus with the same mind, the same force, same aspiration, the same path as drops of water to help one another gain strength. We must go with the current to flow into the big ocean.

Delusion is the ignorance; karma is habit. Due to ignorance that causes karmic formation, it is said ignorance conditions with formation (*sankhāra*). The Buddha taught that the karmic formation is drawn as the potter kneading the vase. The pot is the effect according to the potter's wish, depending on his two clever hands. Like that, karma often changes according to the transforming mind or relies on the mind's flow. One cruel person today can become a sage tomorrow. A reasonable person can become a criminal for some reasons.

The karmic stream is also provided with the bulk of muddy water which is full of desire, hatred and delusion and continues to flow. Rebirth is the same natural outcome of karma. For example, when an electric bulb breaks, the light goes out, but the electricity does not disappear so that the light will return with another bulb, either square, round, neon, tube, night lamp with various colors. Even our body breaks up; our karma still exists, inevitably we get rebirth. Thus, samsara only stops when we no longer create karma.

To sum up, *the suffering result passes according to karma, which is carried by the mind. Suffering can be ended only by illuminating the mind.* Thus, the light of enlightenment of the Three Jewels is the savior of all beings. The Three Jewels are permanently residing in the world because monastics successively pass on to the next generation. Beings take refuge in the Three Jewels to transform sufferings and advance towards being sages until they become Buddhas.

Knowing that our body is like pottery,
Preserving our mind like a bastion,
Defeating ghosts by the sword of wisdom,
Let's keep the victory,
Surpassing all impurities.⁷⁴

To attain Buddha's knowledge, first of all, we need to give up the ordinary knowledge. It's necessary to leave the hand pressing the eyes to see the real moon. The first thing to do is generate bodhicitta; do not attach to worldly objects. The moon in the bottom of the water is an illusory shadow, only a form of the sign without the force of illumination-destroying darkness. The illusion of mind is due to conditions. Karma is the cause. The conditions are

⁷⁴ Dhammapala, Verse 40.

six senses. Like a person with craving karma, upon seeing money, his intention of stealing is immediately produced. Foolish people live with the delusional mind, unaware of (the six deceiving senses, objects, and consciousnesses) developing an attachment to self, clinging to objects, so they engage in killing, theft, sexual misconduct, lies, and so on. Thus, they encounter the consequences of hindrances and can't return to their true nature and permanent truth body (*dharmakaya*).

Contemplating impurities to delete the three poisons of desire, hatred and delusion. Contemplating impermanence to liberate the pride of self-love, considering on breath to harmonize both the body and mind.

Looking up to see the real moon, that is, using wisdom to return to live with our awareness or Buddha-nature, at that time, we can see that the five illusional skandhas are Tathāgatagarbha. In the night of birth and death, all beings are sunk in sense pleasure. If they want to return home, they have to rely on the second moon, that is, the primary essence of mind as the main cause for practice to transform the worldly objects and to merge with the inner awareness.

Once when Elder Śāriputra was standing beside the Buddha, he complained, "Blessed One! It is pitiful! There

are people who drown by jumping into the deep water to look for the moon."

The Buddha replied, "Yes! It's pitiful! But even more pitiful, there are those who never believe there is a moon in the world."

We never forget that countless beings writhe in the circle of defilements-karma-suffering. We aspire to try and try more, rely on the light of wisdom and compassionate examples of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to find the way back to the real moon to repay Four Great Debts and liberate all low beings from their suffering.

The Dhammapada describes the ecstatic state of liberated people as follows:

Do not accumulate properties,
Think about eating and drinking,
Content in the realm,
Emptiness, no form and liberation,
Like a bird flies in the air
It's difficult to find its way.⁷⁵

The Sūrangama Sūtra,⁷⁶ in the item, "Show Two Roots to Discriminate Delusion and Realization," the

⁷⁵ Ibid., Verse 92

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 66–67

Buddha said to Ānanda: "From beginningless time onward, all living beings who have been many upside-down ways have created karma seeds which are naturally grouped as the *aksha* cluster.

Those who cultivate cannot accomplish the unsurpassed bodhi, but instead reach the level of voice-hearer (*śrāvakas*), *pratyeka* Buddhas, heretics, heavenly beings (*devas*), demons (*maras*), or relatives of ghosts (*pittivisaya*), because they have not yet recognized the two fundamental roots. They have cultivated wrongly and confusedly, as if trying to cook sand in the hope of creating rice. They may pass through countless eons as molecules of dust, and they will obtain nothing of what they want.

What are two fundamental roots? Ānanda, first of all, the root of beginningless birth and death is the illusory consciousness (*samohaṃ*) that you and all living beings now make use of and consider as your self-nature.

Secondly, the purified origin of beginningless bodhi nirvana, the bright original reality of the seeing essence, can create all conditions and is disregarded. Living beings have ignored the original awakening, therefore, though they use it to the end of their days, they are still unaware of their enlightenment, and then they regrettably enter the six realms.

Have you not heard Tathāgata saying that: “The Tathāgata often expounded that all dharmas are arisen by the mind. All causes and effects, the worlds as much as molecules of dust, come into existence by the mind.

“Ānanda, we reflect that all phenomena in the world, such as grass, leaves, threads, knots, and so on, have their fundamental roots. Even space has its name and shapes, even more so the bright, wonderful, pure mind that is the reality of all phenomena?

“Why do you who consider motion to be the body, taken motion to be the external environment from the beginning to end, who continuously have this thought after that thought, arising and falling, upside-down crazy. You lose your true nature, take the motion as yourselves and accept the cycle of six realms.

Although fallen in the six low realms or becoming sages, the quality of seeing and hearing is unchangeable, which is the main esoteric Tathāgata seed or the precisely basic bodhi for return. Zen tradition names it as follows:

If one thing exists then everything exists

If one thing is non-existent, then everything is non-existent

Existence and emptiness like the moon in the bottom of the sea

Do not engage in existence and non-existence.

Zen Master Đạo Hạnh

All dharmas return to void and there is no refuge
Silent Buddhahood appears clearly
Penetrating the source of the mind without indication
The water of mind, the shadow of the moon are
unthinkable.

Zen Master Tịnh Giới

The wise are awakened from one ksana to another, wiping out impurities like a goldsmith diligently filtering dust and sand from the pure gold. We must be sincere about changing this body of birth, old age, illness, death into the spiritual body of morality-meditation-wisdom, and then we are not the corpses which make the earth dirty, but we are praised for having lived a life with the holy qualities.

Let us contemplate the solid components in a body belonging to the earth, fluidity containing water, heat energy made up of fire, a movement consisting of air, space belonging to air, discrimination comprising in consciousness. Let us reflect on the relative characters, mutuality between us and everything. The sun exists outside the body, but if there is no sun, our body can't survive.

If we are courageous to look at the truth, we shall not be pessimistic but will appreciate our life and the truth. We shall live carefully so as not to waste our precious human life, which is hard to attain. We are happy with all

surrounding things like the joy of musician Trịnh Công Sơn in his song named “Every Day I Choose Joy:”

Every day, I choose joy.

I choose flowers and smiles.

I pick up heaven's wind and invite you to hold it,

To see your eyes smiling like a flying leaf

And thus, I am happy every day

In such a way, I live in/come to the world

So, I love this life by my heart.

Our fundamental ability is the inferior level and a human being's internal part is too heavy. The external part of saint seems light, only to learn and understand the sūtras because we ourselves are not deeply awakened.

The awakened role models of sages are worthy for us to think over and shed light on our own life. It's the joy at the moments we meditate on life and immortal words of master teachers that are our first steps towards transforming our innermost internal life, to overcome completely one part of our bad habits, which begin to silently stagnate. Hence, the transformation of inner life is the solid foundation for the next change of karma and the starting point in the process of transforming our innermost feelings.

Patriarch Lâm Tế declared that:
Depending on conditions to transform old karma
We happily put on our robes.

Taici, a Japanese poet uttered:

Amid the remains of autumn
Rise up from the trash
One branch of beautiful flower.

Or Basho expresses his enlightenment at the beauty
of nature:

I look far away
Along the line of cherry blossom
A branch of Nazuna.
I look far away
Watermelons lying in the grass
Opening some flower buds.

We should examine carefully the three circles of defilements-karma-suffering. Defilements (circle 1 in the center), karma (the second circle: black and white), suffering (the third of six realms), and have strong faith in the law of cause and effect (the fourth circle outermost) and realize our bud of Buddha nature. Then we can hope to cut the tail of the demon or the samsara wheel from

immemorial time and can complete our aspiration of liberating ourselves and others.

May all Buddhists succeed in your career of immediate liberation in this world!

Namo Buddhas and Bodhisattvas proved it.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER VI

Chapter VI mentions the tail of the impermanent demon that is endlessly long. The twelve links turn around like the samsara wheel from time immemorial.

The Avadāna Sūtra illustrates this excellent picture to awaken the future generations to the impermanence of birth and death, to contemplate the three circles, “defilements-karma-suffering.” Due to creating karma, the fruit of changes according to karma, which shifts corresponding to mind. Samsara only ceases when we no longer create karma. If we do not create karmic action (*sankhāra*), then there is no seed to cause rebirth. We only need to shed light on the karmic mind to end suffering and it naturally cut the tail of the samsara demon.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain the relationship of the circle, defilements-karma-suffering.

2. What is the meaning of the demon holding the fire wheel with a tiny line to escape from the white circle of karma to get out of the wheel?

3. Explain the meaning of, “If we realize the twelve nidanas and the theory of emptiness, we can become a pratyeka buddha.”

4. What should we cultivate to be free from the wheel of samsara and how?



*Venerable TN Giới Hương and Nuns
Chanting and donating food for hungry ghosts*

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