



The Four Poisonous Snakes

Except for the Buddha, no teacher has appeared in the world to show the path, the emancipation from defilements and ultimate deliverance. He is a unique being, a man far excellence. The Buddha's teaching from beginning to end is open to all those who have eyes to see and a mind to understand.

We are going to discuss now 'Asivisopama Sutta' of Samyutta Nikaya. This discourse is preached about four poisonous snakes.

Four poisonous Snakes...!

At one time, the Lord was staying near **Savatthi**¹ and there He addressed the Bhikkhus. In this proclamation, the Exalted One gives a striking simile of four poisonous snakes.

There were four poisonous snakes, highly dangerous and extremely venomous. A man who is wishing to live, not wishing to die, desiring happiness and loathing distress were to come forward. Therefore, he too is just like all of us. We also do not want to die, we do not want to suffer, and we wish to live peacefully. People were to say to this man who is just like us; ‘Here is a gift for you man. Take good care of these four poisonous snakes. They are highly dangerous and extremely venomous. From time to time, you must wake them up, feed them, bathe them and make them go to sleep. But when one or the other of these four venomous snakes get angry or disturbed, then you will come by your death or suffering equivalent to death’.

What happens when this man hears all these? This man is a one who is not willing to die. He is willing to live. He loathes suffering. Hence, in terror, without accepting the snakes, he runs away.

Five murderers and an executer....!

¹ Savatthi – Sravasti of india.

While he is running in terror of the four poisonous snakes, some people were to tell him, “Man, there are five murderers chasing you saying that they will kill you the moment they get hold of you. You can’t escape”

Now, when this man hears this, he starts running even faster. While he is running faster in terror of the four poisonous snakes and in terror of the five murderers, some people were to warn him “Man, you cannot escape, a murderous executer is following after you with an upraised sword saying that he will cut off your head no sooner he sees you”.

After this warning do you think this man would say ‘Okay, let anything happens’ and stay in complacent? No. he is a man who is wishing to live, desiring happiness. He would run away in terror of the four poisonous snakes, of the five murderers and of the sixth murderous executer.

Empty village and Bandits...

While running away he sees an empty village. Thinking that he could get some assistance, he enters in to the houses. Whatever house he enters, he finds it empty. Whatever the pots and vessels therein, he finds empty.

When he is going like this from one house to another, some people were to tell him 'Man, what you are doing in this village? Bandits who attack villages are going to attack this empty village. If you get caught, they will kill you.' Immediately, he starts running away. While he is running in terror of the four poisonous snakes, in terror of the five murderers, in terror of the sixth murderous executer, in terror of the village attacking bandits, he sees a great stretch of water.

He made a raft and cross the river...

There is no way that he can cross this flowing stream. He cannot stay without crossing the stream as the four poisonous snakes, the five murderers, the murderous executer with an upraised sword and the village-attacking bandits are chasing him. Therefore, the near shore is insecure and fearful. He knows that he could get away from all these if he can cross over to the far shore, which is secure and free from fear. However, there is no boat or raft for crossing over.

Then he looks around, collects some pieces of wood, branches etc. and makes a raft, gets in to it and labouring with hands and feet using all his efforts and energy, he reaches the other shore safely. Now he is secure and free from fear.

Who are the four poisonous Snakes...?

The **Tathagatha**, Lord Buddha explained the meaning of this simile.

The four poisonous snakes, highly dangerous- this is a designation for the four great elements – earth, water, fire and air. All the material forms in the world, including our body are derived from these four great elements.

What is our understanding on the four great elements, which Lord Buddha illustrated as the poisonous, highly dangerous snakes? Our body is formed out of these four great elements. Don't we have affection for them? The Supreme Buddha, endowed with knowledge, compared these four great elements to four highly dangerous, extremely venomous snakes. What do we do for them? From time to time, they are being roused, bathed, fed and bedded down. We take care of them very lovingly. We never think that they are poisonous snakes. We have no awareness about it.

Look out...! Don't feed that venomous serpents...!!

How do we take these four great elements? We have the latent conceits for them as 'I am' and 'mine', so we look after them with much care. However, these poisonous, extremely venomous snakes become disturbed and angry. Then they bite us, and we will come by our death or suffering comparable to death. Are we not experiencing these now? Yes, we are. Without knowing that these snakes are highly dangerous and extremely venomous, we do everything very lovingly taking them as 'I am' or 'mine' or 'myself'. We beautify them, decorate them, but in the end we suffer because of them. Yet we do not realize they are poisonous. Since we have not realized things as they really are, we grieve when we suffer saying 'Oh what happened to me? Those days I was very healthy, but now I am an invalid and I am suffering from various ailments. I cannot walk about. No strength at all. I have so much pain all over....' Saying all these, we try to nurse these four snakes throughout our life.

It will be hard to escape from them....

We must become dispassionate of these four serpents through clear comprehension. What do we do now? When we are under pressure, we get fed up of everything. But when the pressure is over and when we experience a pleasure we get ourselves elated.

Dispassion should come with clear comprehension. It is hard to live clinging to nothing in the world and our effort to reach such spiritual heights may appear impossible. Yet it is possible. We must understand the doctrine of the Supreme Buddha, the Perfect One. For this discernment, listening to the true Dhamma and systematic and wise attention are essential requisites.

This body, is changing...beauty is not forever...

Once, when the Blessed One was walking in the shade of the monastery in seclusion, Venerable Ananda said,

“Lord, those days your soles were of a golden line and soft. Now, they are wrinkled. Venerable Sir, you are little hunched now”.

The Blessed One replied;

“Ananda, this is the nature of this impure body. May this body be accursed”.

Thus, you can understand the Lord’s discernment of this body. The Tathagatha very clearly realized the true nature of this body, which is derived from the four great elements. The body is not something that should be decorated or well taken care of. There is nothing to be proud of the beauty of this body. This is not something that should be protected by swallowing various kinds of vitamins. Direct knowing of the nature of the body gives rise to freedom from false notions of it.

At the end of this life, we have to suffer.!

Many like to die without suffering. But, it does not happen in the way we want. Even for a slightest sickness, we get ourselves admitted to a hospital. In case we cannot eat, then we will be fed by tubes through nostrils. We will be treated with various injections. Thus, it is not possible for us to calm the mind in such an environment. Can we contemplate on the Dhamma in that environment? Is there an environment in this society for one to face the death peacefully with a contemplative mind, with a mind placed in a divine abode? This society is not aware of the reality.

We now understand the Lord's proclamation about the four great elements. In this simile the four great elements are compared to extremely venomous four snakes, therefore it is clear to us how dangerous they are. We also understand the danger that occurs when these snakes get disturbed and angry.

There are five Murderers, inside you...!

In this story when the man was running in terror of the four poisonous snakes, five murderers were following after him. Who are these five murderers? The Exalted One declared that this is a designation for the **five aggregates of clinging**². They are the **material form** (*rūpa*), **feeling** (*vedanā*), **perception** (*saññā*), **mental activities** - or **formations** - (*sankhāra*), and **consciousness** (*viññāna*).

On previous occasions during our discussions, I have explained to you in detail that the body or material form is derived from the four great elements; the feeling is the bare sensation noted as pleasant, unpleasant and neutral; the perception is recognition of objects; mental activities is the volitional formations; and consciousness is awareness. The definition of the term 'aggregate' is the

²five aggregates of clinging – In pali, panca upādānakkhandā

existence between the time and space. Time is – past, future and present. Space means the existence as – in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near.

Five aggregates of clinging...

1. rupa upādānakkhandā

Any kind of form, whatever, whether past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – this is called the aggregate of form.

2. vedanā upādānakkhandā

Any kind of feeling, whatever, whether past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – this is called the aggregate of feeling.

3. saññā upādānakkhandā

Any kind of perception, whatever, whether past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – this is called the aggregate of perception.

4. *sankhāra upādānakkhanda*

Any kind of formation, whatever, whether past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – this is called the aggregate of formation.

5. *viññāna upādānakkhanda*

Any kind of consciousness, whatever, whether past, future or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near – this is called the aggregate of consciousness.

A great wisdom...

The Tathagatha, Our Master recognized these five aggregates of clinging as five murderers. Do we have any understanding as such? No. we are very friendly with them. We welcome them as 'I', 'mine' or 'myself'. We have been deceived by these five aggregates of clinging because of the pleasantness arising from them. Therefore, we have accepted them very gladly.

If we can see these five aggregates of clinging, - form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness, as they really are and not as they appear to be, we will gain the insight, having given up the notion of a self.

The 'way' for save from Murders...

We should discern that the four great elements are the condition for the form aggregate, hence there is no 'I', no self, or anything pertaining to a self.

We should discern that contact is the condition for the feeling aggregate hence, there is no 'I', no self, or anything pertaining to a self.

We should discern that contact is the condition for the perception aggregate hence there is no 'I', no self, or anything pertaining to a self.

We should discern that contact is the condition for the formation aggregate hence there is no 'I', no self, or anything pertaining to a self.

We should discern that mentality-materiality is the condition for the consciousness aggregate hence there is no 'I', no self, or anything pertaining to a self.

If we can understand these clearly, we will be able to identify the five murderers distinctly hence not get caught to them. We find it difficult to get away from these five aggregates of clinging. The reason is happiness and pleasure arises dependent upon the five aggregates – body (form), feeling, perception, mental activities and

consciousness. Therefore, we are being caught and held fast by the desire, attachment and craving for body, feeling, perception, mental activities and consciousness. As we are ignorant, we do not know that this craving guides us to continued and repeated sentient existence.

Dangerous executer is...

In clarifying the simile, the Tathagatha proclaims that the sixth, the murderous executer with an upraised sword is designated for craving (enjoyment and attachment). How does this murderous executer attack us with his sword? The murderous executer or craving attacks us when we cling to the six kinds of sense objects – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and mental objects. However, we do not realize the viciousness of this murderous executer – craving. The enemy of the whole world is craving through which all evils come to living beings.

An example for an execution....

If someone gives a blow on our neck with a sword, we are unable to act sensibly. From then onwards we have to do everything that he wants. Similarly when we are being caught by that craving (enjoyment and

attachment) - the murderous executer with an upraised sword, we lose the ability to work with wisdom.

During the time of the Lord Buddha, there was a very pretty Buddhist nun (*Bhikkhuni*) called **Uppalavanna**. She was an Arahant – a perfectly pure one. One day Uppalavanna, the Arahant bhikkhuni was walking on the road for **alms**³ with the **bowl**⁴ in hand. At that time, a certain libertine seeing her, was infatuated by her. Thus he got a blow on his neck by the murderous executer – enjoyment and attachment. Later this bhikkuni who has attained sainthood, returned to her monastery after she had collected enough food, and then rested on her bed for a while, as her feet were hurting. The rake whose mind was upset with thoughts of lust, stayed hidden under her bed, jumped on to her body at once. Bhikkuni Arahant Uppalavanna warned him of the bane and curse of sense pleasures, but it was of no avail. However, the man who was attacked by the vile passion, after satisfying his ignoble need, walked out from the monastery. Instantaneously the great earth opened and absorbed him in to the hell. He is still suffering in the hell.

It is clear from the foregoing the danger that occurs due to the blow of the sword of enjoyment and

³ **Alms** – In pali, *dāna* or *pindapātha*.

⁴ **Bowl** – In pali, *patta*.

attachment. We do have this enjoyment and attachment. This enjoyment and attachment is like a murderous executer with an upraised sword in whom we never can trust. This murderous executer will cut off our head any moment. So, if we are to escape we must follow the path of the Dhamma through listening, and keen investigation of the Dhamma with wisdom.

Your empty village is...

In the simile of the Blessed One, while the man is running away in terror of the murderous executer, he sees an empty village. There are six houses in this village. This is a designation for the six internal sense bases – eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Whatever, the house this man enters he finds it bare and empty. Therefore, this man who is running away in terror does not get any protection from those empty houses.

We all think as if we own these houses – the internal sense bases. We fail to see the sense organs in their respective and objective nature; hence, we take them as ‘I am’ or ‘myself’. If we can see things as they really are through insight we will realize that there is no ‘I’, no self or anything pertaining to a self in the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. The untaught average person,

unskilled and untrained in the doctrine of the Blessed One thinks all these six houses as self.

Bandits...! Six groups of Bandits...!!

Now, in this simile, while the man is running away in terror sees the empty village. Then people were to say to him, 'Man, bandits who attack villages are going to attack this empty village. So, do whatever must be done'. Then, the man in terror starts running away.

The village-attacking bandits – this is a designation for the six external bases – visual objects, sounds, smell, taste, tangibles and mental objects.

How I escape from Bandits...

When we see a beautiful object, we seize hold of its general appearance or its details thinking it is attractive, pleasing, charming etc. and we take pleasure in it. Similarly, hearing a sound, smelling a scent, tasting a flavour, touching an object, cognizing a mind-object, we

are attracted by things that are pleasing and repelled by things that are unpleasing. Lustful thoughts overcome us. So, we dwell with evil, unwholesome state of mind. This way, we have been caught by the village attacking bandits. This happens because we have not identified them as they are village attacking bandits. We are caught by the six village-attacking bandits – visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and mental objects as they delude and mislead us. Because of our preconceived notions as ‘I’ and ‘mine’, we fail to see things in their true light. On the day, we see things as they really are and not as they appear to be, we can understand the no-self nature of all these. Then we are free from the village-attacking bandits.

Our Master, the Exalted One explained this clearly:

The eye is tormented by the visual objects that are attractive and repulsive;

The ear is tormented by the sounds that are attractive and repulsive;

The nose is tormented by the smells that are attractive and repulsive;

The tongue is tormented by the tastes that are attractive and repulsive;

The body is tormented by the tangibles that are attractive and repulsive;

The mind is tormented by the mental objects that are attractive and repulsive.

Free from Bandits...

When one is attacked in this manner, he has no relief. The mind gets confused. He gets scared at various things. Then he starts going to temples of gods seeking relief. Can we evade this affliction or torment by praying to gods? To get away from this affliction, we should analyze the cause and then avoid the cause. The cause is that we have accepted the pleasing and unpleasing visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and mental objects through our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind as 'I am', 'mine' and 'myself'.

If we know through right understanding that all phenomenal existence is causally dependent, and as a result, there is no 'I', no self, or anything pertaining to a self, then we do not take pleasure in them, not persist in clinging to them. We are freed from affliction. Then we

do not have to hang around those empty houses in the empty village – the six internal sense bases and we are freed from the village-attacking bandits – the six external sense bases.

The Stream of four floods...

The man who is running away in terror in this simile next sees a great stretch of water. For him, the near shore is insecure and fearful. The far shore is free from fear, but he cannot cross over, as it is a great flood of water.

The great stretch of water is a designation for the four ‘floods’ as explained by the Exalted One. That is, sensual desire (**kāma**), becoming (**bhava**) views (**ditthi**) and ignorance (**avijjā**).

‘**Kāma**’ or sense means the visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes and tangibles. Sense desire is attachment to sensuous pleasures. Man is always attracted by the pleasant and the delightful, and in his search of pleasure, he ceaselessly runs after these sense objects. He has no escape from this great flood. That is why the Blessed One compared the sensual desires to a great flood.

The next great flood is becoming (***bhava***). This is the ***kamma*** process, or actions and the resultant process. It is our own volitional activities, which we call ***kamma***. The ***kamma*** – action and reaction continues in perpetual motion and this is becoming. Therefore, the normal being is caught by this flood. This flood is divided into three - '***kāma bhava***', '***rūpa bhava***' and '***arūpa bhava***'. According to the volition or ***kamma*** resultant rebirth process, the next life may be in any sphere or plane of sentient existence (***kāma bhava***) that of form (***rūpa bhava***) or that of formless existence (***arūpa bhava***). In whichever way as long as the volitional formations is there, ***kamma*** resultant rebirth process continues. Thus, the Buddha declared that this is like a great flood.

Unbelievable kamma-action....

All of us have been mostly got caught to the flood of sensual desire. Since our volitional formations are for sense pleasures, the ***kamma*** resultant rebirth process will be in such a way to give the birth in any sphere or plane of sentient existence. This endless play of cause and effect continues and this is becoming – a continually changing process of existence (***samsāra***) which manifests suffering. One could be a human being in the next life. But if his birth is at a place where he cannot listen to this

noble doctrine, then he is insecure. If he is born as an animal in the next life or as a ghost, it will be very pathetic.

In '**Petawattu**', there is an incident. A person is born as a goblin. Another person offered his merit to this goblin. Because of the merit, the goblin gets material comforts. However, his life span as a goblin was only five years. The goblin got material comforts during those five years due to the merit someone shared with him, but after the life span of five years, he was reborn in the hell. After woeful suffering in the hell, he may be born again as a goblin. Thereafter, he may be born in the animal world or may even fall into hell again.

Unfortunate living beings....

This happens due to the fact that wherever he is born, because of his preconceived notions he perceives, thinks and views incorrectly as 'I am', 'mine' or 'myself' This manifests suffering and frustration. Craving gives rise to deed and deed produces results. This **kamma** shapes the destiny of beings and brings about rebirth. If one is born in the animal realm, can he accumulate merit? No, he cannot. He has no power to do moral acts as a condition of good rebirth by motivating good volitional activities. Therefore, in his next birth he may

be born as a tiger, or a buffalo or a fish. On the other hand, he may be born in the hell. This is the true state of affairs in the world as mentioned in the **Dhamma**.

The existence, between death and rebirth...

Some people try to interpret this in a funny way. They say when one dies, immediately he enters into an '*antarā bhava*' which means an in between existence the state of death and that of rebirth where he finds his relations who left the world before. He stays there with them for a while until he finds a mother's womb. According to these views, one can stay in the '*antarā bhava*' happily until he finds a good mother. These harmful erroneous views arise due to ignorance. The uninstructed people who say such things are not aware of the proclamation of the Exalted One about the sphere of sentient existence, that of form or that of formless existence.

The other great stretch of water or the flood as declared by the Blessed One is wrong views. We have various preconceived notions or views that have arisen and rooted. Since we are caught up in these, we perceive, think and view incorrectly. That is why the **Tathagatha** compared this to a flood. Just now, we discussed about the wrong views on '*antarā bhava*' or interval between

the state of death and that of rebirth. If these wrong views arise in our mind, we are caught by the flood of wrong views.

Wrong views...

Some people look for an auspicious time to commence everything. Even in some temples, everything is done according to propitious time. This is due to unwise reflection, unsystematic attention. As long as these views exist, one cannot escape *samsāra*, repeated existence. If one can understand clearly the doctrine of conditionality – that the things are causally conditioned as explained in the Dhamma by the Exalted One, those erroneous views will not cloud one's vision.

The one who is keen to get rid of this *samsara* always admonishes the value of going for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha and value of the virtuous life. He advises the others to make efforts to realize the suffering. He always encourages the others to establish in the factors of Stream Entry. He is not caught in the flood of views.

The ignorance...

The fourth great stretch of water is ignorance. What is ignorance? Ignorance is, not knowing the Four Noble Truths. That is:

- Non-knowledge of the Noble Truth of Suffering that has to be fully realized;
- Non-knowledge of the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering that has to be eradicated;
- Non-knowledge of the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering that has to be realized;
- Non-knowledge of the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering that has to be developed.

The Blessed One compared this non-knowledge of the Four Noble Truths to a great stretch of water. When one is caught in this flood of ignorance, crossing over will not be easy.

In the simile, the Lord Buddha shows that the near shore is insecure and fearful. The man who is in terror of the four poisonous snakes, the five murderers, the murderous executer and the village-attacking bandits, will have no escape if he stays on the near shore.

The near shore insecure and fearful is a designation for the belief in a self (***sakkāya ditthi***). This is the wrong

view of personality belief as 'I am', 'mine', or 'myself' that is rooted in oneself. The person who has this view will be always staying on the near shore and he will never cross over to the far shore.

The Exalted One proclaimed the far shore is secure and free from fear. This is a designation for ***Nibbāna***.

What is the raft...?

The man in this story, who is not wishing to die, desiring happiness, realized that there is neither boat for crossing over nor a bridge for walking from one shore to the other. Therefore, it is not easy to cross over. But he is determined to cross over somehow as the near shore is insecure and fearful. He decided to collect pieces of wood, branches and leaves, construct a raft and supported by it and labouring with hands and feet, to cross over from one shore to the other. If the unflinching energy coupled with fixed determination is there, this would not be a difficult task.

The Exalted One declared that the raft is a designation for the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the only Path leading to the far shore – ***Nibbāna***, which is secure and free from fear. The Noble Eightfold Path is Right View, Right

Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Effort is needed...

Labouring with hands and feet, he goes to the other shore. The Blessed One declared that labouring with hands and feet is a designation for strenuous effort.

It is obvious that this Noble Eightfold Path cannot be strolled without strenuous effort. The path of purification is impossible for an indolent person. The aspirant for enlightenment should possess unflinching energy. The one who has strenuous effort will find the way to wisdom, the way to enlightenment.

The man in this simile, the man who is not wishing to die, desiring happiness, went safely to the other shore by constructing a raft and labouring with hands and feet. He has crossed over and gone beyond. He has no fear now. He stands on dry ground. Crossed over, gone beyond, the person stands on dry ground is a designation for the Perfected One (**Arahant**).

This way using a striking simile the Exalted One explained how a man will find the way to wisdom. By this, we can understand that indeed the Blessed One is

supremely enlightened, and the Dhamma is well expounded.

Do not be late anymore...

When there is such a clear Teaching, which is lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle and lovely in the end, why do some invite us to travel through *samsara*? Some admonish us to travel through *samsara* until we meet **Maitri Buddha**. Some invite us to travel the endless *samsara* with them until they achieve Buddhahood. When there is such a clear teaching for attaining Nibbāna, why do people alienate us from this path explained by the Exalted One? The reason for this is, people are not taking refuge in the Dhamma. People do not know that the Dhamma is there for the realization of the Four Noble Truths. People do not accept that the Dhamma is well expounded and something which can be realized in this very life.

We can attain Nibbāna⁵ in this very life...

If this Dhamma is something that cannot be understood in this very life, what purpose is there in the appearance of the Buddha, in His preaching of the Dhamma? If the Dhamma cannot be understood in this

⁵ Nibbāna – The enlightenment.

very life, then certainly there is no possibility for the appearance of Arahants, for the appearance of those who have attained lesser fruits of the Path. But as it has been proved over and over again, the real situation is quite different. There have been innumerable number of noble people who had realized the goal in this very life. Similarly, there have been noble beings who had realized lesser fruits of the Path. Even now, there is not to be seen even a slightest shortcoming in this Path of the true doctrine. This true doctrine is more resplendent than both the sun and moon.

The person, who has confidence, moves forward on the path. He makes an effort to understand the;

The four deadly snakes

- Truth about the four great elements –

Five murderers

- Truth about the five aggregates of grasping –

The murderous executer with an upraised sword

- Truth about the enjoyment and attachment -

The village with six empty houses

- Truth about the six sense bases -

The village attacking bandits

- Truth about six sense objects -

Sensual desire (*kāma*), becoming (*bhava*), views (*ditthi*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) – (the great stretch of water)

- Truth about the four ‘floods’ –

Raft

- The Noble Eightfold Path –

Labouring with hands and feet

- Strenuous effort –

Whilst listening to this, if one thought ‘how fearful this *samsara* is.... And if only we could cross this *samsāra* and reach the further shore...’ he of course has confidence.

Noble eightfold path...

In this discourse, the raft is the designation for the Noble Eightfold Path. The eight factors of the Path are:

- 1. Right Understanding (*sammā-ditthi*)**
- 2. Right Thought (*sammā-sankappa*)**
- 3. Right Speech (*sammā-vāca*)**
- 4. Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*)**
- 5. Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājiva*)**
- 6. Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)**
- 7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*)**
- 8. Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)**

Right Understanding is the clear comprehension of the Four Noble Truths. A person who fully understands these truths has the intuition.

Right thoughts...

Right Understanding is always permeated with right thoughts. Right thought includes thoughts of

renunciation (***nekkhamma samkappa***), of good will (***avyāpāda-samkappa***) and of compassion or non-harm (***avihimsā samkappa***)

The person, who has right understanding, tries to leave the sense-pleasures of form, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile objects. That is thoughts of renunciation. The person who wants to renounce sense pleasures, guards his sense doors. He develops concentration. He develops insight.

Directing one's thinking in order to renounce hatred is thoughts of good will. If he views things with dispassionate discernment, he will understand that hatred and violence cannot go together with true wisdom. He becomes dispassionate towards anger.

Cultivating thoughts to eradicate cruelty is the thoughts of compassion or non-harm. These thoughts are to be cultivated and extended towards all living beings. Right understanding ensures these right thoughts.

Therefore, right thought is the outcome of right understanding

Right Speech...

Right Speech is abstaining from wrong speech and talk about things leading to realization. For this one must abstain from falsehood, tale bearing, harsh and abusive speech and idle chatter.

Frivolous talk or gossip, which brings no profit to anyone, has become very common nowadays, as people are too fond of idle talk. In order to avoid gossip, we must always engage in talks of Dhamma. The Buddha was very critical of idle chatter, and has taught us ten things that we should talk about:

01. Speech relating to effort (**viriyārambha katā**)
02. Speech relating to fewness of wants (**appicca katā**)
03. Speech relating to contentment (**santutthi katā**)
04. Speech relating to seclusion (**paviveka katā**)
05. Speech relating to dispassion (**asansagga katā**)
06. Speech relating to virtue (**seela katā**)
07. Speech relating to concentration (**samādhi katā**)
08. Speech relating to wisdom (**paññā katā**)
09. Speech relating to emancipation (**vimutti katā**)

10. Speech relating to vision of emancipation (**vimutti ñānadassana katā**)

This way right understanding induces one to abstain from falsehood, tale bearing, harsh and abusive speech and idle chatter. Therefore, right speech is the outcome of right understanding.

Right action and right livelihood...

Right Action involves abstinence from wrong actions – killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and intoxicants. Here again right understanding ensures right action.

To live a blameless life is Right Livelihood. In this society there are many who observe the precepts. There are many who can develop their minds if they want. How fortunate we are to be born as human beings in a country and environment where there is Dhamma! The person who has right understanding practices right livelihood.

Right effort...

Right effort is the persevering endeavour to prevent the arising of evil and unwholesome thoughts that have not yet arisen; to discard such evil thoughts already

arisen; to produce and develop wholesome thoughts not yet arisen, and to promote and maintain the good thoughts already present. Each individual has himself to put forth the necessary effort and work out his own deliverance with heedfulness.

Right Mindfulness...

Right Mindfulness is the application or arousing of awareness in regard to the activities of the body, feelings or sensations, states of mind, and mental objects (**cattāro satipatthānā**). Right mindfulness aids right effort. He who is mindful at all times then arouses his awareness in regard to the five aggregates of clinging, six sense bases, seven Factors of Enlightenment and the Four Noble Truths.

As he, proceeds developing this mindfulness by degrees he will overcome the five hindrances to mental progress. Therefore, this Noble Eightfold Path must be practiced and developed gradually. When one develops the Path completely, he reaches the far shore.

Right Concentration...

Right Concentration is the intensified stability of the mind. When one practices right mindfulness, his mind becomes concentrated. Right concentration is the outcome of right understanding.

Right understanding is of the highest importance, for it guides the remaining seven factors of the path. Therefore, the right concentration is the concentration, which leads to the realization of the four Noble Truths.

The seven factors of enlightenment...

When the mind is well established on the Four Noble Truths, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment come to their culmination. The seven factors of enlightenment (***satta bojjhanga***)— the insight concerned with the realization of the Four Noble Truths are:

- Mindfulness (***sati***)
- Keen investigation of the Dhamma (***dhammavicaya***)
- Energy (***viriya***)
- Rapture or happiness (***piti***)
- Calm (***passaddhi***)
- Concentration (***samādhi***) and
- Equanimity (***upekkhā***)

These are the seven enlightenment factors, expounded by the Supreme Buddha for the attaining of full realization and perfect wisdom, of Nibbāna. The cultivation of these factors of enlightenment is left to each one of us. With the aid of the teaching of the Buddha, each one of us has the power to detect and destroy the cause of suffering. So, with firm determination, endeavour and earnestness, may all of us climb on to the raft of the Noble Eightfold Path and cross from this fearful shore which is full of uncertainty, over to the further shore, attain **Nibbāna** and become **Arahants** who enjoy eternal peace and freedom on dry ground of far shore.

