

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE THIRTY ONE FORMS OF EXISTENCES IN SAMBARA

(The Round of Endless Rebirths and Deaths)

- I. ARUPA-BHUMI (the plane of formlessness)
- II. RUPA-BHUMI (the plane of Brahma Gods with extra-fine body)
- III. KAMASUGATI-BHUMI (the plane of sensuous and blissful states)
- IV. APAYA or KAMADUGGATI-BHUMI (the nether world of existences)

I. ARUPA-BHUMI. This plane consists of four existences of Brahmans who have no physical body, but have a mind and they can create a physical body if they want to get themselves seen. Rebirth in these existences can only be achieved by intense Samatha meditation and have reached Jhanas or mental accomplishments during their life as humans. They do not have a faculty to perceive Dhamma and therefore they are non-returnees and can never become enlightened nor attain Nibbana.

I.1 *Nevasanna-nasannayatana bhumi.* The realm of neither perception nor non-perception, the summit of all existences. They can live a life span that is equivalent to that of 84000 *Maha kappa* or universes. Udaka, the ascetic who was the second teacher abandoned by the Buddha in his search for the Four Noble Truths was reborn in this Brahma realm after dying on the night before the Buddha decided to teach the Dhamma.(3) Reaching the eighth Jhana of Samatha meditation can only attain this highest existence.

I.2. *Akincannayatana bhumi.* The realm based on nothingness. These Brahmans can live for a life span of 60000 *Maha kappa* or universes. The teacher of the recluse encountered first by the Buddha in his quest for the truth was the ascetic, Alara. He was the first person searched by the Buddha to reveal his discovery after he decided to teach, but Alara passed away seven days earlier and was found to be reborn in this Brahma realm. (3) The seventh Jhana of the Samatha practice can only reach this attainment.

I.3. *Vinnanancayatana bhumi,* the realm of infinite consciousness. These Brahmans can survive for the lifetime of 40000 universes (*Maha kappa*). Those who have practised Samatha meditation as humans and have reached the sixth Jhana can be reborn in this realm.

I.4. *Akasanancayatana bhumi,* the realm of infinite space. These Brahmans have a life span equivalent to that of 20000 universes. The fifth Jhana of the Samatha meditation can attain this existence.

II. RUPA BHUMI, the heavenly abodes of Brahmans who have a physical body, but does not enjoy sensual pleasures. There are altogether 16 realms of Rupa Brahmans divided into four categories according to the status of Jhana achievements. These Brahmans have faculties to perceive Dhamma and can become enlightened if they come to know the Dhamma.

II.A. Fourth Jhana Planes. The first five abodes in this category are called Suddhavasa or the heavens of purity and only the enlightened ones of Anagami stage are reborn in these planes.

II.A1.5. *Akanittha,* the supreme heaven where Arahats and *Anagams* who have a mature *Manyi-indriya* reside before releasing the final existence and enter *Anupadhisata nibbana*. The Brahmans of this realm can live up to the life span of 16000 universes before releasing the final existence.

II.A2.6. *Sudassi*, the clear-sighted heaven where the *Anagams* with a mature *Samadhi-indriya* reside. The Brahmas of this realm can live up to the life span of 8000 universes before releasing the final existence.

II.A3.7. *Sudassa*, the beautiful heaven where the *Anagams* with a mature *Sati-indriya* reside. The Brahmas of this realm can live up to the life span of 4000 universes before releasing the final existence.

II.A4.8. *Atappa*, the serene heaven where the *Anagams* with a mature *Viri-indriya* reside. The Brahmas of this realm can live up to the life span of 2000 universes before releasing the final existence.

II.A5.9. *Aviha*, the durable heaven where the *Anagams* with a mature *Saddha-indriya* reside. The Brahmas of this realm can live up to the life span of 1000 universes before releasing the final existence.

II.A6.10. *Asanna-satta*, the heaven of Brahmas with just a body and without any mental aggregate resides. These Brahmas regarded that the mind was the main source for corruption and had strive to annihilate the mind while practising Samatha meditation as a human. The Brahmas of this realm can live up to the life span of 500 universes.

II.A7.11 *Vehapphala*, the heaven of gods and Ariyas of great reward. This realm is shared between Brahmas who have practised Samatha and Vipassana meditation during their life as humans. Those Brahmas who have practised Samatha only can be reborn into lower realms after dying, but those who have practised Vipassana and have attained the Ariya stage can be reborn in this realm again or a higher realm. The famous Ledi Sayadaw was believed to be reborn in this realm by some followers. (7) The Brahmas of this realm can live up to a period of the life span of 500 universes.

II.B. Third Jhana Planes. These abodes harbour Brahmas who have a body with aura as the characteristic. There are three planes in this category.

II.B1.12. *Subha-kinha*, the heaven of gods full of steady aura. They can live up to the life span of 64 universes.

II.B2.13. *Appamana-subha*, the heaven of gods of infinite aura. They can live up to the life span of 32 universes.

II.B3.14. *Paritta-subha*, the heaven of gods with minor aura. They can live up to the life span of 16 universes.

II.C. Second Jhana Planes. The Brahmas of these abodes have a body with different degrees of lustre.

II.C1.15. *Abhassara*, the heaven of radiant gods. They can live up to the life span of 8 universes.

II.C2.16. *Appamanabha*, the heaven of gods with infinite lustre. They can live up to the life span of 4 universes.

II.C3.17. *Parittabha*, the heaven of gods with minor lustre. They can live up to the life span of 2 universes.

II.D. First Jhana Planes. The Brahmas of these abodes are the lowest grade of the Brahma loka. They have a huge body measuring 12 Yojanas (about 96 miles) and have internal organs as ourselves except for the genitalia although they have an appearance of a male. They are well organised and have a head in every thousand Brahmas. The Chief of Maha Brahmas is called Harita and has 100000 followers.

II.D1.18. ***Maha Brahma***, the heaven of the great Brahma Gods. They can live up to the life span of one Asankheyya, an indefinite period equivalent to 64 *Antara kappas* or human evolution cycles.

II.D2.19. ***Brahma Purohita***, a heaven of the Brahma ministers. They can live up to the life span of a half of one Asankheyya.

II.D3.20. ***Brahma Parisajja***, a heaven of a retinue of Brahmas. They can live up to the life span of a third of one Asankheyya.

III. KAMMASUGATI-BHUMI, the sensuous and blissful existences

This existence consists of the six heavenly abodes of Devas or gods and goddess or angels, the abode of humans and animals, and that of the other three nether existences. All beings of these existences enjoy sensual pleasures and suffer bodily pain and inconveniences. However, the proportion of pain and pleasure is very much different from one abode to the other depending upon the grade. Devas have more pleasure than pain, whilst animals and beings of the nether existences have more pain than pleasure. Humans have a well-balanced sensuality between pain and pleasure, but the hell beings have only pain and without any sensual pleasure.

III.A. The Six Deva realms

III.A1.21. ***Paranimmita-vasavati***, the heaven of the gods. Here, the Deva Gods have a wielding power. Mara or the devil, the most powerful of all Devas and the legendary opposition to the Buddha is considered to be from this realm. They can live up to a life span of 16000 years, which is equivalent to over 9.2 billion earthly years.

III.A2.22. ***Nimmanarati***, the realm of Deva gods who can create objects and mansions for sensual enjoyment. They can live up to a life span of 8000 years, which is equivalent to > 2.3 billion Earthly years.

III.A3.23. ***Tusita***, the delightful realm for Devas with happiness and contentment. This is the heaven where the next would-be Buddha (Metteya) resides before taking a rebirth as a human. The Devas of this realm can live up to a life span of 4000 years, which is equivalent to 576 million earthly years.

III.A4.24. ***Yama***, the heaven of blissful existence. The King Yama (Rama) rules this realm with great happiness. The Devas of this realm can live up to a life span of 2000 years, which is equivalent to 144 million earthly years.

III.A5.25. ***Tavatimsa***, the heaven of the 33 Devas. The king of this realm is known as Saka who resides in the Vejayanta Palace and rules the kingdom with his 33 followers. It was in this heaven that the Buddha taught the Abhidhamma, the philosophical and psychological text of the Buddhist Tipitaka to the Devas for a period, which was equivalent to three earthly months. The Devas of this realm can live up to a life span of 1000 years, which is equivalent to 36 million earthly years.

III.A6.26. ***Catumaharajika***, the kingdom of the four Great Deva Kings. They are also known as the guardian deities who watched over the Buddha's Sasana. They dwell in the four directions of the earth; East (*Dhatarattha*), West (*Virupakkha*), North (*Vessavana*) and South (*Virulhaka*). They can live up to a life span of 500 years, which is equivalent to 9 million earthly years.

III.B Manussa, Human realm

III.B.27. ***Manussa***, the human realm. This is a materialistic and spiritualistic abode where a mixture of pain and pleasure co-exists. It is the place where people can choose the destiny by leading a good or a bad life, and a testing ground for many faiths. Unlike most of the other existences, humans do not

remember the past life and is therefore the best place to develop a self-supportive wisdom. Buddhas of the past and of the future would appear in this human world to rediscover the Four Noble Truths and save many sentient beings from suffering.

IV. KAMADUGATI-BHUMI, the abode of profound suffering. It is also known as **Apaya** or the nether existences.

IV.A.28. *Asura*, the demon world. Asura, literally means those beings that do not shine or do not have a sporting spirit. They are regarded as the fallen angels who have power, but use it for a bad purpose and are allied to Mara, the devil.

IV.B.29. *Peta*, the world of spirits and ghosts who have a characteristic of meanness and attachment. They have different forms and shapes, but misery, delusion and hunger are the constant features found in this existence.

IV.C.30. *Tiracchana*, the world of animals. They have more pain and less pleasure, and survival of the fittest is the only rule in this existence.

IV.D.31. *Niraya*, the Hell. It is the existence of continuous suffering and without any pleasure. There are eight grades of Hell where the torture and suffering varies. According to the severity of the punishment they are classified as *Sanjiva* hell, *Kalasutta*, *Sanghata*, *Roruva*, *Maharoruva*, *Tapana*, *Mahatapana* and *Avici* hells. They are all believed to be in the different layers of the earth.

LIFE SPAN CALCULATIONS

Antara kappa=1 human evolution cycle starting from a longevity of 10 years to an indefinite period and then degrades back to 10 years again

Asankheyya=64 *Antara kappa* or human evolution cycles

Maha kappa=4 *Asankheyyas* or the age of a universe from its beginning to its end

Most people may not believe in life after-death, as other forms of existence are not proven with hard evidence. As far as our senses are concerned we can perceive only living creatures that are made up of carbon based matter particles. Animal kingdom, ranging from microscopic organisms to human beings can be perceived either with our five senses or with the aid of microscopes. Since they are constructed with carbon based molecules they are visible as light reflects on these particles. However, if living beings are constructed with other matter particles that do not contain carbon or any light reflective material their existence may not be easily detected by our senses or equipment. Nevertheless, we could not rule out their existence just because we did not detect them with our conventional methods. There are a lot of things that science cannot verify although most people believe that they exist.

According to the Buddhist philosophy there are altogether 31 forms of existence, out of which, we only know mankind and animals. At least three other forms of coexistence have been described on this planet. They are coined in Pali terms as *Peta* or ghosts, *Asura* or demons and fallen angels, and *Niraya* or hell beings. These forms of sentient beings together with animals are collectively classified as the **Apaya** or **Kamaduggati-bhumi**, the nether worlds of existence (Level 4 in the chart). It is the lowest group of existence in the round of rebirths, which is called Samsara. The sentient beings that belong to this group dwell miserably in secluded places away from humans. They usually live on trees, in forests, mountains, plains and lakes, but may associate with human dwellings sometimes. In such cases they may live in attics or other secluded places. These beings can enjoy sensual pleasures to some extent, but at most of the time they have to endure various types of suffering.

Each of these coexistence has different grades and forms. We do not normally feel their presence, but they can be detected if one has the ability to perceive their presence. They are thought to have an unconventional body that is composed of matter particles, which are different from us. They reproduce by means of instantaneous rebirth that is known as *Upapatika* in Pali. They are often hungry and live on food that has been discarded. Some *Petas* have been described as in a state of starvation, but they survive without food for an extensive period, which is the result of their meanness in the past. They can pass through solid walls, float in the air and can live inside the earth at extreme conditions. The sentient beings of *Apaya* (nether world) do not have a fixed life span. They have to survive according to the Kamma of the past, but some may benefit from the sharing of merit by humans, which can shorten their suffering.

According to the literature there are eight types of hell beings that dwell inside the earth at different depths. We can gather that hell is in the depths of the earth from the well- documented accounts during the lifetime of the Buddha. In the fifth glorious victory of the Buddha over his opponents, it was described how Cinca Manavika who tried to accuse the Buddha of her fake pregnancy was exposed of her conspiracy. Later on she was engulfed by flames and sank into the earth to be reborn in Avici Hell. Likewise, it was described that Devadatta who tried to assassinate the Buddha three times, but hurt him instead and had caused a bleeding from the Buddha's toe was engulfed by the earth near a pond and was dragged towards the Avici, the deepest and most severe state of hell. He died in the process and was reborn in Hell for these evil deeds as well as for attempting to split the Order by luring some newly ordained Bhikkhus to follow with him. These accounts have clearly associated Hell with Earth, but not with any other celestial abode. One may doubt about how the hell beings survive inside the earth, but they are constructed with different type of material that we do not know and we cannot compare with our own situations.

Hell is described as an existence of total suffering that is devoid of happiness. The hell beings can survive extreme conditions inside the earth and are said to be in various degrees of torture for the crime that they have committed while they were humans. (1-4) The Hell will last until the Dooms day of the earth and those beings who still have to suffer in hell after the destruction of the earth will be transferred to another place that survive the destruction.

The next group in the classification of existences is the realms of **Kamasugati-bhumi** or the sensuous and blissful planes (Level 3 in the chart). It constitutes of six planes of gods and angels (*Deva*) and the human realm (*Mannusa*). The abodes of the six heavenly realms are in space, but the realm of *Catumaharajika* (II.A6.26) or earthly Devas is believed to coexist with us on this planet. It is the lowest of the heavenly realms and constitutes of deities and angels with various degrees of power and capabilities. The four Great Deva Kings rule this world in the four directions of the earth. The beings of this realm have a life span of 500 heavenly years, which is equivalent to about nine million earth years.

The other five heavenly abodes are *Tavatimsa*, the realm of gods and goddesses ruled by 33 Gods of which King Sakka is the head, the realm of King Yama, the realm of *Tusita* (III.A3.23) where the next would-be Buddha resides, the realm of *Nimmanarati* and the realm of *Paranimmita-vasavati*. Each heavenly realm has many occupants governed by the respective kings. A thousand females Devas accompany a male Deva (god or angel). It has been described that they could enjoy sensual pleasures and suffered no pain, but they would have to die at a certain age. The occupants of *Paranimmita*, (III.A1.21) the highest of these realms, can survive for over nine billion earth years. When they are about to die it is said that the aura of their body fades and they just disappear without leaving any traces at death. They can be reborn in lower planes and even in the *Apaya* if they do evil deeds.

During the times of the Buddha, the exalted one explained his disciples that a sow who was feeding in the dirt had been a Brahma in her past existence. The Brahma passed away when his Kamma ceased and was reborn as a human. Next, she was reborn as a sow after she had committed a bad deed in her life as a human. A human can take rebirth in the realms of Devas and Brahmas if one has done enough good deeds, has kept the five precepts (refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, telling lies, taking intoxicants) and has practised meditation to cleanse the mind.

Rupa-bhumi, the plane of Brahma Gods with extra-fine body (Level 2 in the chart) and **Arupa-bhumi**, the plane of Brahma Gods without a body (Level 1 in the chart) can be reached only by practising meditation and keeping ten precepts. According to the description one needs to attain special mental absorptions or Jhana to be reborn in the planes of Brahma, which are eight in total. The Brahmas have renounced all sensual pleasures and are near perfection except for the belief in Atta or the eternal soul and the attachment to an eternal rebirth. The Brahmas do not have sensual pleasures including sex, and do not require food for sustenance of life, but they live on bliss as their nourishment. They have a very long life span, which is uncountable by earthly years. (1-4)

The Brahmas are the highest form of existence in the Samsara and the top Brahma realm *Nevasanna-nasannayatana-bhumi* (I.1) has a longevity equivalent to that of 84000 universes (*Maha-kappa*). An *Antara-kappa* is said to be equal to a complete human evolution cycle where the longevity of humans improves from 10 years to an indefinite period and then degrades back to ten years. A human evolution cycle can not be measured exactly in terms of earth years as it depends upon the progress of the human race in terms of morality and in science. One *Asankheyya*, which is equivalent to 64 such evolution cycles, is therefore regarded as an indefinite period. However, in describing the longevity of Brahmas, a period equivalent to four *Asankheyyas*, which is an arbitrary term called a *Maha kappa* is used. (3) This Buddhist cosmological term is translated into a modern scientific interpretation as a period equivalent to the age of a complete cycle of a universe, from the Big Bang to another Big Bang, that is from the beginning to the end.

One cannot imagine the time span of these universe-cycles exactly and may therefore regard the existence of Brahmas as eternal. However, it has been described that these Brahmas also have to die at a certain date and will be reborn at a lower plane. This fact has been unfolded in the glorious victory of the Buddha upon Baka Brahma who considered that he was eternal. The Brahmas are not untouchables, but they are in a near-perfect existence which, is the resultant of the excellent deeds that they have performed in their previous existence as humans. They are reborn as Brahmas due to the attainment of Jhana. It has been explained that the natural law of Dhamma, the cause and effect still applies to these Brahma Gods. Where there is an action, there is a reaction and where there is a cause, there will be an effect. The Brahmas cannot escape death, which is the effect of a cause, "Rebirth." Where there is a rebirth, there will surely be a death, which will come at a certain period. All sentient beings have to take rebirth and die subsequently in the round of existences indefinitely until the causes for rebirth have been abolished. The main causes for rebirth are *Avijja*, the lack of supra-mundane wisdom of the Noble Truths, *Sankhara*, the volitional responses, *Tanha*, the cravings, *Uppada*, the attachments and *Kammabhava*, the volitional actions and deeds.

A human can be reborn as an animal as well as in any other existence depending upon the life one has led. This phenomenon is explained vividly during the times of the Buddha and also in the recent times. (5-7) The followers of some faiths who have developed supra-mundane powers for observing these existences can verify this round of rebirths and deaths or the Samsara. Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, to mention a few, have different interpretations for the Samsara. However, the Samsara with the thirty-one existences and four levels is explained fully and only in the Buddhist faith. It is mentioned in the Tipitaka texts (Sutta, Vinaya & Abhidhamma) and is explained fully in the Jaimini texts. Escape from rebirth in the Samsara is the ultimate objective of Buddhism as rebirth is considered as a potential suffering in this faith.

The Abode of *Devas*

We have studied the processes of world-systems, the nature of beings in the *Niraya* (hell), etc. The sufferings and joys of mankind are known to all and they need no explanation. Here the luxuries of celestial beings in the divine mansions will be described briefly, according to the books.

The Celestial Mansions

The luxuries enjoyed by *devas* are far superior to our human pleasures, just as the mass of the ocean is incomparable to a droplet of mist on a blade of grass. In the place of *Tavatimsa* is the City of *Sudassana* sprawling at the top of Mount *Meru*. The city itself is ten thousand *yojanas* in extent. The Garden of *Nandanavana* located to the east of the city is so beautiful a park that even dying *devas* forget their grief when they enter it.

The sight of graceful couples of *devas* and *devis* strolling about among verdant foliage and flowering plants also adds to the unique beauty of the park. In the middle of the park, there are two lakes, *Mahananda* and *Culananda*; the crystal waters are indeed a sight to look at, especially from the jewelled seats placed around the lakes. There are similar lakes in the other three cardinal directions of the city.

Devas and Devis

The jewelled mansions where *devas* reside are created by their own good *kamma*. All *devas* look as if they are 20 years old, and *devis*, 16. They never age; they remain youthful and beautiful all their life. They eat only celestial food so their bodies produce no excreta. *Devis* are free from the travail of menstruation. (1) Mode of enjoying sensual pleasure is similar to the humans but are free of filth. (2) *Devis* do not take pregnancy. (3) Offspring are born directly as grown ups and appear in their arms or on their couches. There also are servant *devas* who own no mansions.

How *devas* conduct courtship to *devis* to win favour or affection is a matter for conjecture. Do they follow the human routines or devices? There was the case of love-lorn *deva*, named *Pancasikha*, who composed and sang love-songs to the accompaniment of his divine harp. His songs were dedicated to *Devi Suriyavacchasa*, the beautiful daughter of *Deva King Timbaru*.

Yam meatthi katam punnam, Arahantesu tadisu,

Tam me sabbangakalyani, taya saddhim vipaccatam.

"All along by myself, I have accumulated much merit by

observing precepts and making offerings to the most homage-worthy *Arahants*, who are always pure, free of defilements. May these accumulated merits of mine come to fruition soon in the form of inseparable partnership for life with you, my love, my beautiful queen."

In spite of his intense adoration for her, *Surivavacchasa* had an eye for *Sikhanti*, son of *Deva Matali*. So *Sakka*, the King of *Devas*, because of his services intervened and arranged the marriage between her and *Pancasikha*.

Some *devis* dwelling in their own mansion would feel lonely and long for a partner. *Devas* have different *kusala-kamma* and so some are more beautiful than others; their mansions, too, excel that of others. Naturally there will be inferior *devas* who would harbour jealousy against those who are endowed with more potent *kamma*.

All these divine abodes are full of carnal pleasures, and they are fully enjoyed by celestial beings. But of them, those who achieve *Arahantship* and those who achieve *Anagami-magga* being wearied of

sensual pleasures cannot stay long in *Deva Loka*. The *Anagamis* die in order to be reborn as *Brahmas*. The *Arahants* enter *parinibbana*.

Therefore, we cannot hope to become a yogi and meditate in the abode of *devas*, where divine sensual pleasures engulf us. Only those *devas* who had very diligently practised meditation in the previous human existence, or only those who are opportune to hear the Dhamma of the Buddha in person can improve and augment their virtue in the *deva* abode. Other *devas* are inclined to forget the Dhamma as they enter the gates of *Nandanavana* Garden.

In *Deva Loka*, let alone *Vipassana* meditation, even the observance of *sila* (precepts) is difficult to perform. The *devas* would entice the *devas* who soon tend to discard the precepts. Call to mind how *Campeyya*, the King of Serpents, failed to observe precepts in the serpent abode; and how *Sakka* had to alight to the human world in order to observe *Uposatha sila*. Because of these unfavourable environments, all *Bodhisattas* perform their fulfilment of ten *Paramis* in the human world only. They do not live to their full term in *Deva Loka*, instead they deliberately terminate their life-span to be reborn as human beings and practise *Paramis* (Perfections).

There is, however, a small hope for those virtuous *devas* who wish to perform meritorious deeds in *deva loka*. There is the *Culamani Pagoda* for worship. There also is the *Sudhamma Lecture Hall*. The *Culamani Ceti* enshrines *Bodhisatta's* hairs and right upper tooth of *Buddha Gotama*. It is built of solid emerald one *yojana* high. Couples of *devas* who have strong faith in the *Buddha* come to this pagoda with clear goodwill and offer flowers and other offerings. They devote their efforts to fulfil *Paramis* rather than to enjoy sensual pleasures in the celestial gardens.

The Dhamma preaching hall, known as *Sudhamma*, is beyond description in grandeur and splendour. The whole edifice is studded with glittering jewels. Then aroma of the *Paricchattaka* (*Pinle kathit* in Myanmar) tree growing nearby and in full bloom pervades the whole building. In the centre of the hall is the preaching throne covered by a white umbrella. On one side of this Dhamma throne are seats for thirty-three senior *devas*, such as *Pajapati*, *Varuna* and *Isana*. (Comrades of good deeds of *Magha* youth). Next come the seats for other *devas* in order of their power and merit. (Such *Sudhamma Halls* exist also in the four higher *deva* planes).

At the time for **Dhamma meeting** *Sakka* blows the *Vijayuttara* conch-shell, the sound of which reverberates all over the city of *Sudassana* which is ten thousand *yojanas* in size. The sound lasts four months in human terms. When the congregation is seated, the whole edifice glows with the radiance of the *devas*. Sometimes *Sanan kumara Brahma* comes down and delivers discourses. Sometimes *Sakka* himself preaches a sermon; or he gives the floor to another eloquent *deva*. Therefore, there is *chance* for performance of wholesome deeds like paying homage to the *Culamani Pagoda* or listening to the Dhamma discourses in the celestial realms. But these deeds cannot be expected to propel one to the extent of achieving *Magga* and *Phala*. They only serve to sustain virtuous consciousness and reduce the enjoying of the pleasures of celestial world.

In the forthcoming age of decline, there is no hope for monks and laity to be fully imbued with Dhamma. Even the present age is no more decent. If we really dread the impending sufferings in *samsara*, we all should commence our efforts this very day so that we might attain *Magga* and *Phala* as soon as possible. Those who hope to meet the *Buddha Metteyya* in person and listen to his teaching to gain enlightenment in the *deva* world will have a very slim chance to do so. No sooner had they entered the gate of *Nandavan* Garden, than they will tend to forget what they have already accumulated. Even if they are fortunate enough to meet the next *Buddha* in person, they are very much likely to be entranced in sensual pleasures.

So apart from *Bodhisattas* who are determined to save sentient beings, and apart from Chief Disciples-to-be, each and everyone ought to start endeavouring for attainment of liberation right away. Our revered teacher taught us thus: "While being confronted with dangers you should each endeavour in

solitude. But why are you being foolish neglecting the future and putting off the practice of *bhavana* (meditation) for this or that time?"

(Supplement to the 1970 Edition)

How Sakka Forgot the Dhamma

Sakka, the King of *Devas* and *Sotapanna Ariya*, once visited the celestial garden, riding on his elephant Eravana. At the gate he suddenly remembered a question he had planned to ask the Buddha. The problem was:

What was the path taken by an Arahant to realise *Nibbana*, the cessation of all craving? He was well aware that in the midst of the Garden Festival he would forget his noble plan so he decided to visit the Buddha. He left his elephant and retinue at the garden gate and vanished from there to appear in the human world.

When he arrived at the Pubbarama Monastery where the Buddha was preaching the Dhamma, he asked, "Exalted Buddha, how does an Arahant overcome his lust, greed and attachment to attain *Nibbana*, which is the cessation of craving?" He requested a brief answer so that he could return to divine Garden Festival in time. Therefore the Buddha replied briefly:

"O Sakka, a monk who is to become an *Arahant* listens to the discourse which says, 'All things are not fit to be thought of wrongly as "I" or "Mine" . He tries to understand the nature of all things (the five aggregates). When all things are known, he further understands that they all are suffering. After that he dwells viewing all feelings as impermanent. After repeated viewing, he does not cling to anything and attains *Arahantship* and is able to go freely to *Nibbana*, the exhaustion of all craving."

This, in short, was the Buddha's reply to Sakka. He was very pleased with the discourse, proclaiming "Well done=*Sadhu*", three times and returned to his celestial residence. The Venerable Moggallana heard this proclamation from inside the chamber. He wished to know if Sakka really comprehended the discourse or not, so he followed Sakka to *Tavatimsa* to find out.

When the Sakka arrived at the celestial garden, he joined the *devas* in the merriment and being enhanced by the pleasures, he forgot the Dhamma he had just learnt. When he saw the Venerable Moggallana he was embarrassed. But he greeted the Venerable with due respect and paid obeisance.

The Venerable Moggallana asked Sakka about the Dhamma he had just learnt from the Buddha. However hard he tried, Sakka was unable to recall anything at all because he was so entranced in sensual pleasures. He gave the lame excuse that he had forgotten the discourse as he was very much occupied with the affairs of *Deva Loka*. (See *Culatanhasankhaya Sutta* of the *Mulapannasa*.)

Food For Thought

This discourse shows us how objects of sensual pleasures of the *deva* world can make us become oblivious to the noble Dhamma. Even Sakka, a *Sotapanna Ariya* with great intelligence and vigilance, cannot resist such objects which deaden the conscious mind. He himself asked the Buddha a question, he himself listened to the reply, and yet he could not recall the discourse in a matter of minutes. Such was the influence of the sensual pleasures he experienced in the celestial garden. There fore the following lessons should be noted:

(1) Those who are virtuous and know that they are virtuous are very much likely to be reborn in higher abodes, namely human and *deva* worlds, and nowhere else. One cannot be a *Brahma* until achievement of *jhana*; and one cannot enter *parinibbana* until one becomes an *Arahant*. Even if one

becomes a *deva*, bear in mind that *Ariya* persons like the Sakka are also liable to be forgetful of the Dhamma. If so, we are no exception. We may also forget whatever Dhamma we have accumulated.

(2) Celestial beings generally spend their time enjoying the sensual pleasures of the *deva* world and tend to disregard the Dhamma. If they pass away while craving for their luxury, they are sure to be reborn in the four *apayas*. Once, five hundred *devis* passed away while singing and picking flowers in the garden. All of them were reborn in *Avici* hell.

(3) To be born again a human is also no comfort. To be a virtuous person in a worthy fashion (1) one must be born in a period when the *Sasana* flourishes, (2) majority of the people are righteous, (3) one's parents and teachers must be virtuous, (4) one must be born not to wretched poverty but to a sufficiently well-to-do family. Only if these essential conditions are fulfilled will it be worth to be reborn as a human being.

(4) Considering the state of the *Sasana*, we find that virtuous persons are very rare to find these days. Sensual pleasures are abound; most people pursue vain pride and wealth; charity is done more for fame than for merit: reverence of the Samgha is contaminated with false pride and propaganda. Corruption is rampant even at the very top.

(5) Devotees and supporters of the *Sasana* do not send their children to the monasteries, so monastic education is fading out gradually. There are no more lay students in most monasteries; without them how can there be *samaneras* (novices)? Without *samaneras* how can there be *bhikkhus* well versed in the texts? If such a situation prevails there would soon be no qualified abbots to preside over the monasteries. Most *bhikkhus* would be ex-family men who renounced worldly life only at a ripe age and therefore not versed in doctrines and disciplinary rules

(6) The supporters of the *Sasana* mostly send their children to modern schools where the sole purpose of education is vocational training. But such education is for the benefit of this life only. Such education does not provide knowledge of *Magga*, *Phala* and *Nibbana*, The products of such schools do not comprehend the effects of *kamma*. Hence it is unlikely for them to believe in the higher abodes or the lower woeful abodes. Such people with wrong views will surely not care to offer alms-food, let alone the four requisites, to the Samgha.

(7) In future the younger generation will no more be fortunate enough to inherit wealth from their parents. Nowadays parents have to struggle hard even to afford education for their children. Novel commodities in the form of diverse consumer goods are abound in the markets. When children grow up and earn their living, it will be difficult for them to make both ends meet. Or they may have to resort to illegal means of acquiring wealth. In such hard times, how could people support the *Sasana*?

(8) *Bhikkhus* do not at all attempt to modify the old monastic system to keep pace with the time. They are responsible for giving basic education as well as ethical teachings. Conditions are now favourable, yet some monastic schools do not devise their plans on modern lines. They cannot attract the interest of today's parents. Persons with modern education look down upon the system of monastic schools. So, will they have the goodwill to support the *Sasana*? On reflection we will find that the decline of the *Sasana* is approaching.

(9) In future the majority will not be virtuous persons endowed with morality. The age of righteous persons is the time when *metta*, *karuna* and *mudita* flourish. Today loving-kindness is a rarity. Without loving-kindness there could be no compassion for the poor and no sympathetic joy for the wealthy. Today the world is full of envy, jealousy, hatred, pride and greed. Both strata, the high and the low, are cultivating vain pride in different manners, conceit by the elite, and hurt pride or contempt by the down-trodden.

(10) Everyday we find novel commodities and sources of pleasure everywhere; and so greed gains momentum, just like adding fuel to fire. Greed when it cannot be satisfied leads to intense hatred; and

further on to atrocities, murders and wars. If righteous people are rare these days, what will be the future like?

(11) With righteous people getting rarer and rarer in future there will be few good parents and teachers. In the midst of the immoral society, future generations will find it difficult to be righteous themselves without the moral guidance of parents and teachers. It is not easy then to go to *Deva Loka*, to enjoy sensual pleasures there. Nor is it easy to be reborn in the human world where *akusala* (unwholesome deeds) are burgeoning.

(12) I would like to relate my experience at the Yangon railway station in 1957. I went to Yangon to attend the consecration of a *Sima*. On my return a *bhikkhu* friend from Yangon saw me off at the station. While we were waiting for the train, we saw people rushing, pushing violently fighting for seats on the train as it was shunted into the station. I was made to understand that it was a daily scene.

(13) I began to reason like this: "This train journey will last two days at the most. Lest they should not get good seats, some push and elbow violently for a good seat. Some pay extra money to have a reserved seat; on the train they scout around for trust worthy companions; some feel unhappy if their seats are not to their liking; some are overcome by anxiety if their neighbours look dishonest."

(14) "If people can take such toil for a journey of just two days, why can't they exert enough effort for the long, long journey, passing through many existences to arrive at *Nibbana*? Why can't they endeavour to get good places, to find the right companions to accompany them on this long journey? If, by ill chance they be reborn in the four *apayas*, they will suffer life long and *akusa/a* will be on the increase life after life; they will never get good seats in the long journey through *samsara*.

"Even when they become human beings they will be poor, needy and destitute. To avoid such catastrophes they should try really hard to be reborn in happy abodes. If they can try hard to get seats for a two-day railway journey, why can't they do so for a life-long journey. They are so short-sighted, and lack in intelligence." I began to feel pity for their stupidity; and I told my companion *bhikkhu* of my thoughts.

(15) Readers of this book should consider these facts seriously and try to comprehend the unique Dhamma as much as they could manage. If you have already accumulated some *Paramis* (Perfections) in many past existences, you should continue your efforts in the line of minimising evil deeds and consolidating your *Paramis* such as *dana* and *sila*. Only then will you be a virtuous *deva* in the *deva* world; or a virtuous human in the human world. Like Bodhisattas who practised *Paramis* even in the dark ages void of *Sasana*, you should also try to fulfil your *Paramis* as much as possible so as to gain habits and maturity in the performance of wholesome deeds.

The Pleasures of *Brahmas*

Brahmas are very peaceful beings; they enjoy the tranquillity of *jhana-kusala* they had performed previously to gain the *Brahma* realm. They are reborn as *Brahmas* only after attaining *jhana*; and for this they had to meditate in solitude in quiet places away from the crowded cities, villages, houses, monasteries, remote from the throngs of society and the worldly sensual pleasures. *Brahmas* have no spouses, no children. They have no sexual organs so they do not enjoy the pleasures of *kama-guna*. They had clearly seen the faults of sensual pleasures even during their meditation period as human beings. So they live a very pure life, free from all thoughts of sensual pleasures.

In their divine palaces and gardens, all *Brahmas* live in serenity, in saintliness. Some enjoy their *jhana* bliss while others develop *merra-bhavana* radiating waves of loving-kindness. Like in the human world there are different grades of *Brahmas*. There are *Brahma* kings, *Bramapurohitas* (advisers or counsellors) and lower grade *Brahmas* who form the retinue in attendance to the king. [Lower class *Brahmas* cannot see the *Brahma* king without his consent.]

Asannasatta Brahmas

Asannasatta Brahmas are those divine beings without any consciousness or mind. As human beings they find faults of *citta* (mind) and *sanna* (memory). They think that all forms of greed arise because of *citta*. They also think that life would be so peaceful had there been no *citta*. While concentrating on the fault of consciousness, "*Citta is loathsome. Citta is loathsome*", they develop a *kammatthana* called *sannaviraga-bhavana* (disgust for *sanna*).

When they die they are reborn as *Brahmas* in the *Asannasatta Brahma* realm and live like golden statues, standing, sitting or reclining, without consciousness. Their life-span is 500 *kappas* long.

Arupa Brahmas

Arupa Brahmas have no *rupa*; they have consciousness only. In the human world they worked for attainment of *jhanas*; after that they concentrate on the faults of *rupa*; they think that the *rupa* is the seat of suffering. Then they develop *rupaviraga-bhavana* (disgust for *rupa*). When they die they become *Arupa Brahmas*, beings without material form, in the open space called *Arupa Brahma* realm. They live as continuous streams of consciousness high in the heavens for many *kappas*.

[Non-Buddhists will find it hard to believe in these two types of *Brahmas*]

Form *Brahma* to Hog

Of the *Brahmas* born in the *Brahma* realm, the *Ariya Brahmas* (who have achieved *Magga* and *Pha/a*) will not go downwards to the lower realms. They soar higher, become *Arahants* and realise *Nibbana*. But for *Brahmas* who are not yet *Ariyas*, they will have to descend to either *deva* or human abode at the exhaustion of their *jhana* power. But they will not fall directly into the woeful planes. Due to the past *kusala* they become *devas* or humans of *Dvihetuka* or *Tihetuka* category in the next life. From these planes they, according to their own actions, may fall into the four *apaya* existences and become animals, *petas* or sinners in hell.

In the cycle of *samsara*, ordinary worldlings, *puthujjana* persons, although they reach the highest abode of *Brahmas*, are liable to fall into bad, lower planes, such as the animal kingdom. There is a saying "Once a radiant *Brahma*; next a filthy hog". Being a *puthujjana* is a very dreadful state. From *Bhavagga*, the highest *Brahma* realm, you might one day fall to the woeful planes. A rocket, missile or a projectile will soar skywards as long as there is propulsive energy; once the energy is spent, it must fall down again. So also sentient beings, at the exhaustion of their *jhana* power, must return to the lower abodes. [*Bhavagga* is the highest of all planes of existence. It is also known as *nevasannanasannayatana bhumi*]