

Everlasting Happiness,  
as Buddha Attains 7

**Presented by Venerable Da Shi**

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## Preface

Buddha came into this world to lead all sentient beings away from suffering and towards enlightenment. He forsook his throne and worldly possessions for the pursuit of enlightenment. It was his wish to guide all sentient beings in their understanding of the karmic cycle and the path to Nirvana. After his passing into Parinirvana, his teachings were collected and compiled by his followers.

It is Venerable Da Shi's wish to continue the Buddha's teachings, spread the seeds of compassion, and carry on his wish for all sentient beings to attain Nirvana. Since his ordination, Venerable Da Shi has been actively involved in the teaching of the Dharma in many places, including Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore. In 2004/2005, Venerable Da Shi was invited by the Life Television Station in Taiwan to present talks on various Dharma topics. This book was written based on the consolidated content of Venerable Da Shi's televised talks, in hope that his compassionate wish would be furthered through the spreading of the Dharma.

## Foreword

### ***EVERLASTING HAPPINESS, AS BUDDHA ATTAINS***

The Buddha was born into this world out of great compassion with the aim to help all mortal beings avoid sufferings and attain endless bliss.

The world of mortal beings is full of suffering. It is a surreal world of endless desires and yet fulfillment of all desires is impossible. We have to work hard to find fulfillment but it is all transient. It is like a trap where we relentlessly pursue wealth, appearance, fame, gastronomic satisfaction, and excessive sleep without ever pondering what all these could lead to. We repeatedly go through birth, aging, sickness, and death and in this continuous cyclic existence, we suffer immeasurably.

The Buddha is like an expert doctor with the ability to diagnose and treat all kinds of ailments. Indeed, he dispenses eighty four thousands procedures for as much trouble that mortal beings could possibly face in this world. All these are found in the Buddha's teachings. If we practice his teachings with complete faith and realization, besides saving ourselves from suffering in this life, we can also find liberation in time to come.

There are very few fortunate beings that have the chance to hear the Buddha's teachings. The number of people who are able to hear and learn the Buddha's Dharma teachings is said to be like the amount of soil caught in one's nail if one were to use hands to dig into the ground.

***Everlasting Happiness, as Buddha Attains*** is translated from a Chinese compilation of Venerable Da Shi's Dharma teachings on television in Taiwan, R.O.C. He has used the Agama Sutra as the central focus of these teachings, supplemented by relevant Dharma from Mahayana Sutras, including the Prajna Sutras, the Middle Way, the Maha-prajna-paramita-Sastra, the Dasabhumika-Vibhasa-Sastra, the Saddharma-Pundarika, etc. for better understanding. Through his skillful narration and explanation, Venerable Da Shi has made the Buddha's Dharma very easy to understand and at the same time, interesting. There are also many citations of examples where one can apply in one's life and practice.

It is the wish of Venerable Da Shi that these teachings should reach out to more people, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. For Buddhists who have sought refuge in the Triple Gem, these teachings serve to strengthen their understanding of the Dharma and improve practices. For non-Buddhists, may it serve as a guide to attain true bliss.

After learning the teachings of practicing giving (Dana) and upholding precepts (Sila), the next step is to observe the impurities of worldly desires and to seek renunciation. This book focuses on three topics - taking rebirth in the heavenly realm; reflecting on the impurity and ramifications of desires; and the importance of renunciation. This is the seventh installment of a translated series and it will also be made available on our website at ***www.mypty.sg***. Other topics in the series will be published progressively in subsequent books.

The Dharma introduced in this series accords with the teachings in the Chinese Mahayana tradition, which have originally been translated from Sanskrit scriptures. Hence, Sanskrit has been used for the names and specific Buddhist terminologies in the text. Readers can find help from the footnotes on the relevant

pages and Glossary at the end of this book for explanation of common Buddhist terms (first appearance in italics) and concepts.

*@@@ This work is an effort to uphold and support Venerable Da Shi's great vow of spreading the Dharma in gratitude of the Buddha's compassion. Please help to spread the wisdom and cheers of the Dharma by passing this book on to someone else should you feel that you do not need it anymore. As the Buddha taught, the gift of the Dharma excels all gifts! May all have the chance to know the Buddha's Dharma! @@@*

***Miao You Pu Ti Yuan (Singapore)***

## Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm: Chapter 1

### Everlasting Happiness as *Buddha* Attains – Taking Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm



To attain everlasting happiness, we must practice giving, uphold precepts and observe the impurities of worldly desires. Mental *defilements* cause great affliction so we should strive to understand the importance of renouncing desires. When our minds are set upon renunciation, we can apprehend the truth of suffering, the causes of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

We will no longer be trapped in the cycle of life and death when our vexations cease and we thus attain *Nirvana*. Taking rebirth in the heavenly realm is one of the crucial factors to the attainment of Nirvana.

## **The Right Approach to Learning the *Dharma***

Like a child who is curious about everything and whose mind is simple, we should learn the Dharma with an inquisitive, uncomplicated mind.

Age is no hindrance to our learning skills if we adopt a positive attitude like a child. This is because a child takes pleasure in learning and will readily absorb everything he sees or hears.

Furthermore, it is unwise to dwell on past glories. The achievements that we possessed during our youth are impermanent. As the saying goes, "a hero does not bask in his past glories." Complacency can become a hindrance to our learning.

So we should be well prepared for Dharma lessons. When attending lessons, it is imperative to concentrate attentively. After lessons, we revise the content and seek to contemplate their practical application in our daily lives. This sums up the correct attitude in learning the Dharma.

The Buddha, when expounding the Dharma, often urged his audience, "Listen attentively! Contemplate these teachings deeply." As there were no textbooks or scriptures when the Buddha propagated the Dharma, the audience did not know what Buddha would say beforehand. Even if today the teachings are available to us in print, it is still vital for us to listen attentively at all times.

Why is it that at times, we feel that the Dharma expounded by the Venerable is very simple, while at other times, we feel that it is very profound and difficult to grasp? One of the factors might be due to our inattentiveness. Our minds may not be able to concentrate well if we multitask while listening to the Dharma.

The Buddha said, "Everything is achievable as long as we focus our minds." Great merits are generated only if we concentrate and focus on listening to the Dharma with a composed mind.

It is important to contemplate the Dharma constantly in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. This helps to maintain our diligence in learning the Dharma and to achieve good results.

The influence of wholesome karmic deeds from past lives is also a contributing factor to good Dharma learning abilities. This is known as innate wisdom – the inherent wisdom resulting from past wholesome karmic deeds. Knowing these causes, we endeavor to be diligent in this given lifetime and learn extensively. Otherwise, our future lives will turn out to be even more challenging.

We must not give up learning Dharma easily, even if there is insufficient karmic influence from our past lives. We should instead be more diligent in cultivating ourselves in this life.

### Example 1

Venerable Ananda was a wealthy man in one of his past lives. One day, a young *Sramanera* went to his home for alms during the summer retreat (*varsa*). Puzzled that the young *Sramanera* seemed to be murmuring to himself on his alms round, the wealthy man asked, "What and why are you speaking under your breath?"

The young *Sramanera* replied, "I have to memorize Buddha's gathas<sup>1</sup> every day and collect alms as well. Hence, I have no choice but to do both simultaneously."

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<sup>1</sup> Gathas are poetic verses of the Buddhist scriptures.

The wealthy man was deeply touched by the young Sramanera's efforts and asked, "How many gathas can you memorize in one day while collecting alms?"

The young Sramanera answered, "I can memorize more than ten verses."

The wealthy man further inquired, "How many gathas could you memorize in one day if I offer you sustenance so that you do not have to go round collecting alms?"

The young Sramanera said, "I will be able to memorize more than a hundred verses."

Thus, the wealthy man offered to provide sustenance to the young Sramanera and this helped the Sramanera to concentrate on memorizing ten thousand verses within ninety days.

This is one of the cause and conditions that led to Venerable Ananda becoming the most learned disciple of the Buddha.

Likewise, we will also generate merits of wisdom if we perform wholesome karmic deeds by helping others to learn the Dharma.

### Example 2

Venerable Ananda was a *naga* king in one of his past lives, while Sakyamuni Buddha was a crown prince in the human realm.

The crown prince had a practice of donating generously from the king's treasury to the people. In view of this, the ministers raised their concerns to the king that the national treasury might be severely depleted if the prince continued with his offering. So the king decided to restrict the prince from offering further.

The prince decided to turn to three naga kings for help as he knew each of them had in their possessions a precious pearl

which could help his people. This precious pearl could transform into many treasures that sentient beings in Jambu Dvīpa could use to lead better lives and not suffer in poverty.

The first naga king, who was Venerable Ananda in one of his previous lives, was deeply moved by the crown prince's *Bodhicitta* vow to save and guide sentient beings. So he gave his pearl to him and made an aspiration to become the most learned disciple of the prince when he attained Buddhahood.

The second naga king was Maha Maudgalyayana. When he offered his pearl to the prince, he also made an aspiration to be the disciple most proficient in *supernatural powers* when the prince attained Buddhahood.

The third naga king was Maha Sariputra. Upon offering his pearl, he made an aspiration to be the wisest disciple of the prince when he attained Buddhahood.

From these two examples, we learned that it is essential to cultivate wholesome karmic deeds and develop meritorious cause and conditions before learning the Dharma.

## **Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm**

Taking rebirth in the heavenly realm prevents us from being born in the *three lower realms* and the human realm, where there is immense suffering.

### (1) Hell Realm

In the Hell realm, there are eight freezing hells, eight flaming hells, and sixteen itinerant hells. Beings born into the hell realm suffer immeasurably for very long periods of time and it is very difficult to break out of this suffering.

## (2) Animal Realm

In the Animal realm, there are creatures of the land, sea and air. These animals live in constant fear of being devoured by predators within each other's food webs.

### Example 1

Tiny ants are always busy transporting food to their nests during autumn in preparation for the cold winter. Consider the immense efforts these tiny bodies had to bear to transport morsels of food to their new abodes. Yet they would be easily drowned with a mere gush of water.

Cockroaches and rats are also commonly detested by humans. Any sheer sight of their presence warrants strong reactions and claims on their lives. Worker bees, known as the most hardworking creatures, also lead very tough lives. Hence, animals suffer immensely throughout its life.

### Example 2

People are generally afraid of snakes. However, snakes too are afraid of humans. When a snake is caught, it coils to things tightly for fear of being captured.

I once had the experience of encountering a *Bungarus multicinctus* on my way to the city. Due to construction works, this snake has been excavated from its cave dwelling. What was extremely horrendous was not the sight of the large snake, but the fact that more than ten people were trying to get their hands on it in order to transform it into medicinal ointment for alleged tonic purposes. The *Bungarus multicinctus* is a highly toxic creature, yet the minds of human beings, when afflicted with defilements, can be more venomous than the toxins of this reptile. Some humans even go to the lengths of slaughtering snakes for consumption of their meat. Hence the suffering as snakes or any creatures in the animal realm is evident.

### Example 3

Poultry and sea creatures such as chickens, pigs, fishes and shrimps face miserable deaths and are very pitiful as they are slaughtered and put up in the markets for sale daily.

### Example 4: Nagas and Garudas

Their extraordinary features include having a huge body, longevity, and living in a great magnificent palace. Nevertheless, such special features are not necessarily a blessing.

During the era of the Kasyapa Buddha, there was a *Bhikshu* who had picked an erapattra leaf from the monastery. He asked Buddha, "World Honored One, is it an offense to pick this leaf?"

Kasyapa Buddha said, "You have picked this leaf without seeking consent from the other Bhikshus. This constitutes as stealing from the *Sangha* and such offense will lead to rebirth in the hell realm."

The Bhikshu did not believe the Buddha's answer and experienced annoyance upon hearing it. In other words, he showed displeasure at the Buddha's teachings.

After he died, he was reborn as a naga king named Erapattra. Only then did he realize that his rebirth as a naga king was due to the transgression of precepts and not believing in the Buddha's words. The naga king was filled with remorse and lamented, "Even though a naga has a long lifespan, a huge body, and lives in a magnificent palace, a naga cannot renounce to be a Bhikshu."

So it went to seek repentance from the Kasyapa Buddha and asked, "The World Honored One, when can I be liberated from this naga form?"

Kasyapa Buddha said, "When you meet the next Buddha - Sakyamuni Buddha, he will tell you when you will be able to relinquish the naga form."

The naga king asked, "How would I know that the Buddha I meet is the Sakyamuni Buddha?"

The Kasyapa Buddha then recited several gathas to the Erapattra naga king and told it, "If a person could explain the meaning of these gathas, he is the Sakyamuni Buddha."

Thus, the Erapattra naga king memorized the gathas and incessantly asked around if anyone could interpret its meaning. Hundreds of billions of years passed before it finally met the Sakyamuni Buddha. It asked Sakyamuni Buddha, "When can I be liberated from this naga form?"

Sakyamuni Buddha answered, "You may only relinquish the naga form and take rebirth as a human being after Maitreya Buddha is born. You will then renounce to be a monastic and practice under the Maitreya Buddha before ultimately attaining *Arahatship*."

5.67 billion years span from the time of the Sakyamuni Buddha till the Maitreya Buddha is born; and the period between the Kasyapa Buddha and the Sakyamuni Buddha is even longer. Thus, the lifespan of a naga is evidently very long indeed.

The naga is gigantic and lives in the immense ocean. When it met with the Buddha, its tail was in the Indian Ocean while its body traversed the Ganges river right up to the city of Sravasti. Such is the incredible scale of its colossal body!

Nagas have many extraordinary features but they often live in fear of being eaten by garudas which prey exclusively on nagas. Nagas and garudas may be viviparous<sup>2</sup>, hatched from eggs, born under damp conditions, or via miraculous transformations.

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<sup>2</sup> Giving birth to living offspring as most mammals do.

Those nagas who were being preyed on by the garudas went to seek the Buddha for his protection. Seeing this, the garudas lamented, "World Honored One, if you protect these nagas, we will end up starving to death!"

The compassionate Buddha hence said, "From now on, my disciples will feed you before they have their meals."

And henceforth, the garudas ceased preying on the nagas as the Bhikshus would recite a gatha while offering food, "May all beings, be it the great golden-winged Garudas, ghosts and spirits in the wilderness, Hariti and her Raksasa children, be nourished with this sweet nectar and the Dharma."

This is one of the numerous ways through which The Great Buddha's *compassion* is exemplified.

### (3) Hungry Ghost Realm

Particular characteristics of ghosts include having a long lifespan and a huge body. They also feed on impure substances that have to be obtained from others.

There was a mother ghost who went into the city and procured some food for her child, who was waiting outside to be fed.

However, she did not dare to leave the city recklessly as there was a mighty ghost guarding the city gate and preying on her possessions. The ghost mother told Maha Maudgalyayana that for seven times she had witnessed the city being reconstructed but still she could not leave the city.

The mother ghost had lived for such a long time and had to suffer from hunger all this while. This is the immense suffering of hungry ghosts.

Therefore, rebirth in the heavenly realm spares us from suffering in the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, and animal realm.

#### (4) Asura Realm

Asuras reside in spacious, magnificent, and untainted palaces. Asuras enjoy fighting and they often battle with the *devas*. Their minds are also often filled with anger and easily harbor strong suspicions.

The asuras doubted, "Although Buddha expounded the *Four Noble Truths* to us, he could have withheld a Fifth Noble Truth and taught it to the *devas* instead."

Having such unwholesome suspicious thoughts not only makes one miserable but also bring agony to others. This is evident in human beings, where spouses and friends are distrustful of one another. When we see others stop talking while we pass by, we begin to suspect if they were speaking ill behind our backs.

With such suspicious thoughts, aren't we suffering like the asuras?

#### Example 1

There was a wife who was always feeling insecure and her imagination started to run wild when her husband went away on a business trip. Her easy suspicions led her to call her husband incessantly to track and monitor his whereabouts.

One day, she was on a call with her husband when he was out of office. A child happened to be crying next to him. This child's mother tried to appease the child by coaxing that Dad and Mom would buy a toy for you later.

The wife who was on the other end of the line heard this lady's voice clearly. Mistakenly thinking that her husband was having

an extra-marital affair, she flew into a rage and demanded that he stop working and head home straight away.

From this incident, we learn that women are extremely suspicious. If this unwholesome habit is not eradicated, their lives will be very miserable.

So, it is miserable being an asura, but such suffering would not exist if one is born into the heavenly realm.

### Example 2: Why is one reborn as an asura?

There was an asura king who collected firewood for a living when he was a human being in his past life. Every day, he would have to hike up the hills to collect the firewood and pass through a river on the way home. The fast flowing river often washed away his stack of firewood and he would at times even be swept away by the rapid river. This made him feel that human life was extremely miserable.

One day, he offered his only meal to a monastic who happened to be a *Pratyeka Buddha*. When he made the offering, he generated a foolish vow – "May I never be hindered by water in the future life." The merits from offering to a Pratyeka Buddha subsequently led him to be reborn as an asura king.

An asura king's body is towering. When he stands in the ocean, the seawater only reaches his waist and he will never be drowned. Being an asura is extraordinary but there is also much suffering, as an asura is very suspicious and is often battling with others.

Therefore, to be free from these sufferings, one should aspire to first take rebirth in the heavenly realm.

(5) Human Realm: Human beings suffer in various ways

Example 1

One day, the Buddha was on his alms round in the city of Sravasti when he passed by the house of Subha, a young and promising Brahmin who was Todeyyaputta's son.

The master of the house, Subha, was away at that time. He had a white dog in the house which was resting on a luxurious bed and eating from a gold-plated dish. When the World Honored One approached the house, the white dog barked wildly at the Buddha.

The World Honored One said to the dog, "You should not bark wildly at the Buddha. You were a human being in the past life and could speak but as a dog now you can only bark."

The white dog was so angry after hearing this that it leapt down from the bed and laid down sullenly against a pillar.

When Subha returned home, he noticed the depressed dog lying next to the pillar and queried his family, "Who is the one who has annoyed my dog?"

His family answered, "Sramana Gautama came by to collect alms today and it barked at him. Sramana Gautama then told it, 'You should not bark wildly at the Buddha. You were a human being in the past life and could speak but you can only bark now as you were reborn as a dog.' The dog has been annoyed since this incident."

Subha was furious upon hearing these words and wanted to confront the World Honored One. So he left Sravasti and headed towards Jetavana Monastery.

At that time, many disciples were gathered around the World Honored One, listening attentively to him propagate the Dharma.

The World Honored One saw Subha walking angrily from afar and said, "Subha is angry at Tathagatha. If he were to die now, such unwholesome thoughts of anger will definitely lead him to be reborn in the hell realm."

Subha walked up to Buddha and asked, "Sramana Gautama, did you come to my house to collect alms this morning?"

Buddha answered, "Yes, I did."

"What did you say to my dog to make it so angry?" Subha demanded to know.

Buddha said, "I told the white dog that it should not bark so wildly at the Buddha. It was a human being in the past life and could speak but it can only bark as a dog in this life. This led to it being so angry."

Subha further enquired, "Was there any relationship between the white dog and me in its prior life?"

Buddha answered, "Young Brahmin, do not ask any further! Knowing the answer will only upset you."

But Subha insisted and asked, "What exactly is the connection between the white dog and me in its prior life?"

Buddha answered, "Since you have asked repeatedly, I will tell you truthfully. The white dog was your father in its prior life."

Subha was enraged by the answer and asked Buddha, "My father, Todeyyaputta, often gave to others in his lifetime and accumulated much merits. He made huge offerings during rituals and would have taken rebirth in the pure Brahma Heaven. Why would you claim that he was reborn as a dog?"

Buddha answered, "Your father, Todeyyaputta, was proud, arrogant, and opinionated. His pride in his superiority (adhimana) resulted in him becoming a dog.

"If you are doubtful, you may go home now and say to the white dog, 'Lie on the bed if you were my father in the prior life.' It will certainly heed your instruction.

"You may then continue to say, 'Finish eating the food in the gold-plated dish if you were my father in your prior life.' It will then clean all the food off the gold-plated dish.

"You may then ask it again, 'Show me the place where you buried your gold, silver, crystals, and other treasures if you were my father in your prior life.' It will lead you to a hidden place unknown to you where he had buried all the treasures."

Subha returned home and said to the white dog, "Lie on the bed if you were my father in your prior life." The white dog went to the bed indeed.

"Finish eating the food in the gold-plated dish if you were my father." It then ate up all the food in the dish.

"Show me the place where you hid all your gold, silver, crystals, and other treasures if you were my father."

At once, the white dog leapt from the bed and led Subha to the room where it lived in its prior life. It then used its forelegs to dig at the four corners of the bed. Subha then instructed his servants to dig further and indeed discovered plenty of treasures soon after.

Delighted to find so many treasures, Subha established strong faith in the World Honored One.

So he knelt down with his right knee and put his palms together devoutly. Facing the direction of the Jetavana Monastery, he then praised the World Honored One repeatedly, "There is nothing false in what the World Honored One says! The World Honored One speaks only the truth! All his words are verified!"

After praising the Buddha, Subha headed to the Jetavana Monastery to see the Buddha. The Buddha saw Subha coming from afar and said to his disciples, "Subha has unshakable faith and utmost respect for the Buddha. If he were to die now, he will be reborn in the heavenly realm."

Subha then stood before the Buddha and paid his obeisance before sitting aside respectfully. The World Honored One asked Subha, "Subha, did everything happen as I said it would?"

Subha answered respectfully, "Yes, The World Honored One. All things were as you had said. However, I still have a doubt in my mind. May I ask for the Buddha's advice please?"

The Buddha answered compassionately, "You may ask any questions you have."

"The World Honored One, even though we are all humans, what are the cause and conditions leading us to our different destinies? Some people have short lifespans while others live long lives; some people fall ill constantly while others have good health; some look unpleasant whereas others look dignified; some are well-respected while others are belittled; some are born into nobility while others are born in lowly families; some are rich while others are poor; some are wise whereas others are less intelligent."

The Buddha replied, "Sentient beings have different destinies due to their *karma*. Committing wholesome or unwholesome karmic deeds will generate different corresponding karmic results."

Subha said, "The World Honored One, your brief explanation still leaves me in doubt. May the Buddha please kindly explain in further detail so that I can fully understand?"

Buddha said, "Subha, listen attentively and contemplate my words deeply. I shall analyze the different cause and conditions for you now.

"Some unkind people liked killing either insects or other beings and eating their meat. This unwholesome act led to them taking rebirth in the hell realm upon death. When they are reborn as humans, these people will have short life spans a consequential effect.

"On the other hand, some people abstained from killing and generated *loving-kindness* and compassion for other sentient beings, down to even the tiniest insects. They take proactive actions to deliver other sentient beings from their deaths or miseries. As a result of such deeds, they will take rebirth in the heavenly realm and when reborn as humans thereafter, they will live long lives.

"Some people get angry easily and administer violence, such as hitting others with their fists or using weaponry in the likes of knives and sticks. This causes much distress and suffering to the victims. Consequentially, such people will be reborn in the hell realm upon their deaths. Subsequently, they will have many illnesses when they take rebirth as humans.

"Conversely, a person with a compassionate heart who does not get roused to anger easily and not hurt others, will take rebirth in the heavenly realm after death. When he is reborn in the human realm, he will be largely healthy and less afflicted by illnesses.

"There are people who are good-looking and others who are unpleasant looking. The cause of those afflicted with unpleasant appearances is that in their former lives as humans, they possess a bad temper and were easily agitated and irritated by others. They got angry often. Hence, they will descend to the hell realm when they die. When they are reborn as humans thereafter, they will look ugly and have unpleasant countenances.

"People who are good-looking exercise compassion in their lives. They have good tempers and are able to keep their calm and remain resolutely patient in the face of unkind words, reprimands and accusations. They do not rise to anger easily and are able to use proper ways to resolve any burgeoning afflictions in their minds. This results in them being reborn in the heavenly realm after death. Subsequently as humans, they will have pleasant and dignified appearances.

"Some people do not receive respect from others. This is as they get jealous when they see others receiving offerings or being respected. They are also greedy and jealous of others' wealth. Such people will be reborn in the hell realm after death and will not be respected when they are reborn as humans.

"Conversely, there are well-respected people who have power and virtue. These people take pleasure in seeing others receive offerings or being respected. They are not jealous but also rejoice in others having wealth. These people will take rebirth in the heavenly realm and will be well-respected when reborn as humans.

"Some people have lowly births in society. They have been conceited people who are disrespectful to their elders, their benefactors or the respectable virtuous. They are ill mannered and do not provide sustenance to their respectable elders. They also do not greet the elders with joined palms as a mark of respect, nor stand to receive the elders or give up their seats for

the latter. Such conceited and haughty people will be reborn in the hell realm and thereafter, they will be reborn as humans into a lowly status.

"On the other hand, some people are born into families of high and respectable social status. These people have been polite and humble. They respect and offer sustenance to those who are virtuous and respectable. They greet the virtuous with joined palms and pay their respects humbly. They also stand up to receive these respectable elders and compassionately give up their seats for them. This kind of person will take rebirth in the heavenly realm and be born into noble families as humans.

"Some people have lives of poverty with lack of financial possessions. They have been stingy and did not practice giving. They did not offer sustenance to virtuous people who observed precepts, the monastics, or even those who were poor, lonely, and destitute. Not only did they not give food and clothing, they also discouraged others from giving. Thus, these people will descend to the hell realm after death and will be born into poverty in the human realm.

"Contrarily, some generous people offer food and clothing to the virtuous, the Sangha, or the poor and destitute. Moreover, they encourage others to offer as well. Such acts will lead them to take rebirth in the heavenly realm. When they are reborn in the human realm, they will receive plenty of riches.

"There are people who lack intelligence and wisdom. This is as they do not ask about and listen to the Dharma when they see virtuous monastics. Hence they could not distinguish between wholesome or unwholesome; sinful or meritorious; suffering or joy, and how each came about. They are ignorant about present and future karmic results, the *three periods* of cyclical existence (*Samsara*), and were oblivious about liberation from suffering. Even if they inquired about the Dharma, they did not put it into

practice either. This will result in them being reborn in the hell realm. When they are reborn as humans, they will be ignorant and unwise, and may even hold erroneous views.

"On the contrary, some people have intelligence and wisdom, as they frequently associate with the virtuous and often ask about the teachings of the Right Dharma. Subsequently, they practice according to the Dharma and hence are clear about what is wholesome or unwholesome; sinful or meritorious. They also understood the *law of causality* spanning the three periods as well as the path to liberation. So they will take rebirth in the heavenly realm after death. Thereafter, they will be reborn with wholesome wisdom as humans."

After hearing this Dharma exposition, Subha exclaimed joyously, "The World Honored One is indeed all-knowing. From now on, I wish to take refuge in the *Triple Gem* and uphold the *Five Precepts* in this lifetime. May the Buddha accept me as a disciple please."

Thus, another disciple with the *Right View* and *Right Understanding* was born under Buddha's teachings.

If we could, after learning the Dharma, practice in accordance, we would receive karmic results of longevity, good health, dignified appearance, respectable status, nobility, great wealth and wisdom in the future.



## Example 2

There are four continents with different characteristics in the human realm:

- ① Purva Videha (East Continent): The body of humans here is splendid and the earth is vast and extraordinarily wonderful.
- ② Aparā Godaniya (West Continent): Ox, sheep, jewels, gems and precious stones are in abundance. These items are thus used in economic transactions.
- ③ Uttara Kuru (North Continent): The most extraordinary continent among the four continents. People here are selfless and do not get into disputes as they understand the non-existence of *atman*. They are free individuals and are not bound to anyone.

The life span of the people here is a thousand years and they will not die prematurely. They do not feel fearful as they will take rebirth in the heavenly realm after their deaths.

Man and woman have no need to form families but desires for the opposite sex still exist.

If both parties have desires, they will meet under a tree. If they happen to be siblings in their past lives, leaves from the tree will not hang down to hide them from view.

But if they were unrelated, leaves from the tree will hang down naturally to hide them from view so that they can have a sexual relationship.

If it happens that the woman becomes pregnant after this incident, she will leave the infant on the streets after giving birth. Baby boys and girls will then be cared for by men and women respectively. So man and woman are not obliged to be bound to each other.

④ Jambu Dvipa (South Continent): Jambu Dvipa has three extraordinary features.

(1) Its people are diligent and possess strong memory faculties; they are able to perform karmic deeds.

These are common features of the humans of Jambu Dvipa.

Children in particular have exceptionally good memory. Sometimes, while an adult is memorizing the Heart Sutra, a child beside him may be able to recite it successfully just by listening to it while playing around.

Also, elderly people in their eighties are still able to remember many things that happened when they were young.

When one sets his or her heart to achieving a goal, be it to come up tops in the examinations or to earn a lot of money, he or she would be very diligent in planning and carrying out wholesome or unwholesome deeds in order to attain their goals.

(2) Diligent and possess strong memory; they may cultivate pure practice if they wish to.

When people are inclined toward wishing to do good, they would be willing to donate and give of themselves generously and observe the precepts. Hence they are able to have the opportunity to cultivate pure practice.

If one is a renounced monastic, one would be focused and persistent in one's practice, enduring all kinds of suffering in order to cultivate the pure practice and attain liberation.

(3) Diligent and possess strong memory; the Buddha was born in this continent.

The seven previous Buddhas, including the Sakyamuni Buddha, were all born in Jambu Dvipa. In the future, the Maitreya

Buddha would also be born in Jambu Dvipa. Thus, it is easier for sentient beings of this continent to be close to the Buddha.

Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han Dynasty once dreamt of the Buddha's golden-hued body flying around the palace's main hall. So he sent people to the west territories to request for Buddha statues and sutras. It is with such a karmic affinity that the Buddha is born into this particular continent.

This is the extremely unique and exceptional feature of Jambu Dvipa that we live in.



## Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm: Chapter 2

### Establishing Confidence in the Dharma

How do we know we will take rebirth in the heavenly realm?

As cited in the Agama Sutras, Elder Anathapindika, the donor of the Jetavana Monastery, told people that his family could take rebirth in the heavenly realm. These words travelled around in Sravasti and the Buddha came to hear of them too.

One day, Elder Anathapindika went to the vihara to pay respects to the Buddha. The Buddha asked the elder, "Did you ever state that people in your family could take rebirth in the heavenly realm?"

The elder answered, "Yes, The World Honored One."

The Buddha asked, "Did Tathagata confirm this claim?"

"No, the World Honored One never stated this."

"Did an *Arahat* or an enlightened practitioner tell you this?"

"No, they did not proclaim so either."

"Was it the heavenly beings who told you then?"

"It wasn't them too."

"In this case, how can you be sure that your family members could be reborn in the heavenly realm?"

The elder answered, "The World Honored One, I am certain because I derived this conclusion through contemplating cause and effect according to the Dharma expounded by the Buddha."

The Buddha asked, "What is the Dharma you applied to deduce the cause and effect for rebirth in the heavenly realm?"

The elder said, "My daughters-in-law, prior marrying into my family, are required to take refuge in the Triple Gem, uphold the Five Precepts, practice giving, and cultivate meritorious deeds. My wife and children practice similarly. People who wish to enact business transactions with me or serve as servants in my house also have to cultivate likewise. Otherwise, I would neither trade with these businessmen nor hire the prospective employees as servants. So long as one is able to practice generous giving, observe and uphold precepts, cultivate meritorious deeds and live with a compassionate heart, I firmly believe that they would definitely be reborn in the heavenly realm."

Buddha positively affirmed the link between cause and effect as concluded by the elder based on contemplating the Dharma.

From here we can see that Elder Anathapindika contemplated the Dharma and deduced that his family could take rebirth in the heavenly realm. Although the Buddha never spelt this out explicitly to him, he was able to examine the teachings meticulously, without the need to seek for alternative forms of divine guidance to come to the conclusion of their "afterlives". Similarly, if we are able to contemplate and examine the Dharma deeply, our confidence in the Dharma will be firmly established.

## **Splendid Features of the Heavenly Realm**

The heavenly realm consists of heavens in the:

- ① Kama Loka (World of Sensuous Desires)
- ② Rupa Loka (World of Form), and
- ③ Arupa Loka (World of Formlessness).

### Six Heavens of the Kama Loka:

Catur Maharaja Kayika (*Heavens of the Four Deva Kings*), Trayastrimsat Heaven (Thirty-three Heavens), Yama Heaven, Tusita Heaven, Nirmanarati Heaven, and Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven.

### Four Dhyana Heavens of the Rupa Loka (total of eighteen heavens):

First Dhyana Heavens - Brahma Parisadya (Heaven of the Brahma Class), Brahma Purohita (Heaven of the Ministers of Brahma), and Maha Brahma (Great Brahma Heaven).

Second Dhyana Heavens - Parittabha (Heaven of Lesser Light), Apramanabha (Heaven of Infinite Light), Abhasvara (Heaven of Radiant Sound).

Third Dhyana Heavens - Paritta Subha (Heaven of Lesser Purity), Apramana Subha (Heaven of Infinite Purity), Subha krtisna (Heaven of Universal Purity).

Fourth Dhyana Heavens - Anabhraka (Cloudless Heaven), Punyaprasava (Heaven of Blessed Birth), Brhat-phala (Heaven of Extensive Fruition), Asanjnisattva (Heaven Above Thought), Avrha (Heaven of No Vexation), Atapa (Heaven of No Heat), Sudarsana (Heaven of Skilful Vision), Sudarsa (Heaven of Skilful Manifestation), Akanistha (Heaven of The End of Form).

Four Heavens of the Arupa Loka:

Akasanantyayatana (Heaven of Infinite Emptiness),  
Vijnananantyayatana (Heaven of Infinite Consciousness),  
Akincanyayatana (Heaven of Nothingness), Naivasam  
Jnanasamjnayatana (Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-  
Perception).

Though the heavens of the three worlds have varying splendiddness, there are ten extraordinary features in common:



- (1) No limitation in flying towards a destination.
- (2) No limitation in flying from afar: Heavenly beings can fly freely and are unrestricted by length of time, distance, or number of flights.
- (3) No obstruction in going towards a destination.
- (4) No obstruction in coming from afar: Nothing can obstruct the devas whether they are flying to other places or from afar.
- (5) Devas have no skin, bone marrow, tendons, flesh or blood: Devas are born through transformation and hence, they have no skin, bones, tendons, or blood.
- (6) Body is pure and devoid of impurities like urine or feces: Celestial beings do not urinate or defecate.
- (7) No fatigue: Celestial beings do not feel tired.
- (8) Female devas do not give birth: Unlike human beings, female devas do not have to endure nine months of pregnancy nor the labor pains of childbirth.

Male devas are born from the kneecaps of male devas whereas female devas are born between the thighs of female devas.

A newborn deva in the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings has a body size similar to a human child of five years old;

A newborn deva in the Trayastrimsat Heaven is similar in size to a human child aged six years old;

A newborn deva in the Yama Heaven has a body size like a human child who is seven years old;

A newborn deva in the Tusita Heaven is similar in size to a human child aged eight years old;

A newborn deva in the Nirmanarati Heaven is similar in size to a human child of nine years old;

A newborn deva in the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven has a body size like a human child aged ten years old.

After birth, a newborn deva will grow up to be an adult deva very quickly.

- (9) Heavenly beings do not need to blink their eyes.
- (10) Color of body is altered by one's mind: The body color of a celestial being can change according to one's thoughts. The original body color differs in accordance with their merits and virtues.

Their luminosity also varies. The Buddha described the difference in luminosity using comparative analogies.

The faint glow of a firefly is not as bright when compared to candle light.

The light from a candle is not as bright as a fire torch whereas a fire torch cannot be compared to the brightness of a pile of burning wood.

The light from a pile of burning wood pales in comparison to the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings, where light from the palaces, ornaments, clothing and the devas' luminosity is brighter.

And the brightness increases with each higher heaven, from the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings, Trayastrimsat Heaven, Yama Heaven, Tusita Heaven, Nirmanarati Heaven, to the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven; and from the First Dhyana Heavens, Second Dhyana Heavens, Third Dhyana Heavens, to the Fourth Dhyana Heavens, and likewise, within the Fourth Dhyana Heavens, the brightness increases with each higher heaven; from the Brhatphala Heaven to that of the Akanistha Heaven.

Finally, brightness from the Akanistha Heaven cannot be compared to the brilliance of the Buddha.

Yet, even if the light from all of the above is combined, that brightness cannot be compared to the brightness of the Dharma of the Four Noble Truths.

During the Buddha's era, when it was often that heavenly beings seek the Dharma teachings from the Buddha or came to visit the Arahats, they would illuminate the grounds with their ethereal light brilliant as gold.

Therefore, it is most excellent to take rebirth in the heavenly realm. As Buddhists, although we do not aspire for rebirth in the heavenly realm, it is necessary to know the criteria as well as the cause and conditions that lead to such rebirth.

It is only after having ascertained the cause and conditions for rebirth in the heavenly realm can we advance and cultivate towards renunciation from the mundane world.

## **Splendid Features of the Kama Loka Heavens**

There are three splendid features of the Kama Loka Heavens – longevity, dignified appearance, and joyousness.

There are six heavens in the Kama Loka. Here, celestial beings still enjoy the *Five Sensual Pleasures* and sexual desires. However, sexual desire decreases as the heavens get higher.

**1) Heavens of the Four Deva Kings** – There are four heavenly kings ruling each heaven separately.

The East: King Dhrtarastra (King who protects the country)

The South: King Virudhaka (King who increases growth)

The West: King Virupaksa (King who sees all)

The North: King Vaisravana (King who is well learned)

King Vaisravana is ranked first among the four deva kings.

As the four deva kings are protectors of the Dharma, their statues are often present in Buddhist temples.

1.1) Lifespan: Lifespan in the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings is five hundred years, which is equivalent to nine million years in the human realm.

1.2) Desire: Despite having no tendons, bones, and skin, heavenly beings of the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings engage in sexual activity like human beings.

**2) The Thirty-Three Heavens** – King *Sakra* is the ruler.

The Thirty-Three Heavens is also known as the Trayastrimsat Heaven, which is constituted of a total of thirty-three heavens, with eight heavens in each of the four directions and one in the center.

King Sakra resides in the Golden City situated in the center of the Thirty-Three Heavens. There are also four parks serving different functions:

- ① Caitrarathavana: Has magnificent precious chariots.
- ② Misrakavana: Has many recreational objects to play with.
- ③ Nandanavana: One feels great joy and happiness in this park.
- ④ Parusakavana: There are many weapons here. Upon entering this park, one will develop unwholesome thoughts and begin to speak harsh words.

Asuras often wage battle against the devas of the Thirty-Three Heavens. If defeated, the losing party will be captured and tied up. Hence, when the asuras start a fight, all the devas will gather at the Parusakavana to retrieve their weapons. As soon as the devas enter the Parusakavana, they generate unwholesome thoughts and speak maliciously.

There was once when the asuras launched an attack. Although King Sakra ordered the celestial generals to prepare for battle, they were unwilling to fight.

King Sakra then told them, "Our aim is not to kill the asuras but to protect our territory. If we do not engage in battle to defend ourselves, our territory would be conquered by the asuras. This is only a measure of defense."

So, the celestial generals gathered their army and battled with the asuras in the spirit of protecting their territory.

2.1) Hall of Fine Dharma: The Hall of Fine Dharma is situated in the south-west.

Celestial beings contemplate the wonderful Dharma as taught by the Buddha and think of how to cultivate their practice when they enter the Hall of Fine Dharma. They also praise the Triple

Gem and discuss ways to help sentient beings in the human realm cultivate to eradicate unwholesome deeds and develop wholesomeness.

During the six days of purification, heavenly beings will inspect the human realm. On the eighth and twenty-third day of every lunar month, the four deva kings send their ministers to the human realm to check on the extent of good and unwholesome deeds that sentient beings engage in and report to the four deva kings. On the fourteenth day and twenty-ninth day of each lunar month, the crown prince of the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings will inspect the human realm whereas on the fifteenth day and last day of each lunar month, the four deva kings will personally inspect the human realm and report their findings to King Sakra.

If sentient beings perform more wholesome deeds than unwholesome ones, the kings will be very pleased. On the contrary, the deva kings would feel troubled if sentient beings commit much unmeritorious deeds.

All deva kings and celestial beings wish for humans to cultivate wholesome deeds so that they would be reborn in the heavenly realm in future. Thus, they will convene at the Hall of Fine Dharma to discuss how to help sentient beings eliminate unwholesomeness and cultivate meritorious deeds. From this, we see that celestial beings in the Thirty-Three Heavens and the Heavens of the Four Deva Kings are protectors of the Triple Gem with the aim to benefit all sentient beings.

2.2) Lifespan: One thousand years, which is equivalent to thirty-six million years in the human realm.

2.3) Desire: Although they have no tendons, bones, and skin, the devas still have sensual desires and engage in sexual activity as humans do.

**3) Yama Heaven:** Yama means constant joy and expression of happiness.

3.1) Lifespan: Two thousand years.

3.2) Desire: Mutual hugging between opposite genders is an indication of sexual activity of devas in the Yama Heaven. There is no intercourse.

**4) Tusita Heaven:** Tusita means being contented with the Five Sensuous Pleasures and being able to curb one's greed.

4.1) Lifespan: Four thousand years.

4.2) Desire: Sexual activity between male and female is evident through the mere holding of hands.

**5) Nirmanarati Heaven:** Nirmanarati means being able to freely transform one's happiness as well as the happiness in the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven.

5.1) Lifespan: Eight thousand years.

5.2) Desire: Smiling between male and female symbolizes sexual activity.

**6) Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven:** Paranirmita Vasavartin means that one is able to freely enjoy the happiness that is transformed from the Nirmanarati heaven. Thus, there is no need to transform happiness personally.

6.1) Lifespan: Sixteen thousand years.

6.2) Desire: Gazing at each other represents sexual activity between male and female.

## **Splendid Features of the Rupa Loka**

Sentient beings who are born in the Rupa Loka have a complete stature and are clothed in fine celestial clothes. They are also not afflicted by sexual desires.

As noted in the scriptures of the Great Vehicle, all *Bodhisattvas* from the other worlds have already abandoned all desires.

There was a Bodhisattva named Perfect Light (无垢光女). When she was in her mother's womb, she already could meditate and listen to the Dharma expounded by Buddha. Soon after she was born, King Sakra offered her a set of celestial clothes. She replied, "I do not accept tainted clothing from the Kama Loka."

Immediately after she spoke, a set of untainted clothing from a distant pure world was draped over her body. The celestial clothing from the Rupa Loka is pure, wonderful, and splendid because sexual desire is absent.

There are four Dhyana heavens in the Rupa Loka.

**1) First Dhyana Heavens:** Ground of joyous bliss of renunciation.

The joyousness of heavenly beings lies in being free from the affliction of desires of the Kama Loka. They are able to meditate in single-minded concentration, and enjoy the bliss of no desire.

1.1) Three Heavens: Maha Brahma Heaven, Brahma Kayika Heaven, and Brahma Parisadya Heaven.

1.2) Body Height:

Maha Brahma Heaven – One and a half yojana, equivalent to sixty miles. One yojana is approximately forty miles.

Brahma Kayika Heaven – One yojana, equivalent to forty miles.

Brahma Parisadya Heaven – Half a yojana, equivalent to twenty miles.

As the heavens get higher, the celestial beings become taller.

1.3) Lifespan:

Maha Brahma Heaven – One and a half *kalpa*.

Brahma Kayika Heaven – One *kalpa*.

Brahma Parisadya Heaven – Half a *kalpa*.

**2) Second Dhyana Heavens:** Ground of joyous bliss of meditative concentration.

Celestial beings here attain single-minded concentration of the mind without vitarka (觉) and vicara (观). This gives rise to priti (喜) and sukha (乐).

2.1) Three Heavens: Abhasvara Heaven, Apramanabha Heaven, and Parittabha Heaven.

2.2) Body Height:

Abhasvara Heaven – Eight *yojana*

Apramanabha Heaven – Four *yojana*

Parittabha Heaven – Two *yojana*

2.3) Lifespan:

Abhasvara Heaven – Eight *kalpa*

Apramanabha Heaven – Four *kalpa*

Parittabha Heaven – Two *kalpa*

**3) Third Dhyana Heavens:** Ground of wondrous bliss of being apart from joy.

One has single-minded concentration of the mind, without priti and the body feels sukha. Happiness of this realm is the best joy among the first three Dhyana heavens.

3.1) Three Heavens: Subhakrtsna Heaven, Apramana Subha Heaven, and Paritta Subha Heaven.

3.2) Body Height:

Subhakrtsna Heaven – Sixty-four yojana

Apramana Subha Heaven – Thirty-two yojana

Paritta Subha Heaven – Sixteen yojana

3.3) Lifespan:

Subhakrtsna Heaven – Sixty-four kalpa

Apramana Subha Heaven – Thirty-two kalpa

Paritta Subha Heaven – Sixteen kalpa

**4) Fourth Dhyana Heavens:** Pure ground of abandonment of thought. There is no priti, sukha, soka (忧), and dukkha (苦).

4.1) Nine Heavens: Anabhraka Heaven, Punyaprasava Heaven, Brhatphala Heaven, Asanjnisattva Heaven, Avrha Heaven, Atapa Heaven, Sudarsana Heaven, Sudarsa Heaven, and Akanistha Heaven.

4.2) Body Height:

Akanistha Heaven – 16,000 yojana.

Anabhraka Heaven – 125 yojana.

Their physical bodies are very light.

4.3) Lifespan:

Akanistha Heaven – 16,000 kalpa.

Anabhraka Heaven – 125 kalpa.

There was an elder (手长者) in the human realm who was reborn in the Atapa Heaven as a male deva named Shou (手天子). He provided guidance and taught Dharma to the other devas.

One day, he descended to the human realm to pay respect to Buddha. However, he could not stand upright when paying his respects as his body was so feathery light that it became like a pool of melted honey the instant he touched the ground. He was unable to stand upright no matter how he tried.

Buddha told him, "Use your willpower to transform your body into a heavier one."

The deva followed Buddha's teachings and finally managed to stand up and be grounded.

Thus, the body of a deva in the Rupa Loka is very light and thin indeed. Comparatively speaking, in terms of our human realm, those lighter and of a more slender frame would have it easier in carrying themselves around. Conversely, people of a heavier weight might not be as agile physically and mentally and are more prone to illnesses. From this comparison, we can liken ourselves to the heavier when compared to the devas, unable to fly agilely due to our hefty bodies and lack of meditative focus in our minds.

### **Splendid Features of the Arupa Loka**

Celestial beings in the Arupa Loka have no physical bodies and are exempt from its impermanence. They only possess consciousness of the mind.

There are four heavens:

- 1) Heaven of Infinite Emptiness: lifespan is 20,000 kalpa.
- 2) Heaven of Infinite Consciousness: lifespan is 40,000 kalpa.
- 3) Heaven of Nothingness: lifespan is 60,000 kalpa.
- 4) Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception: lifespan is 80,000 kalpa.

Having known the various heavens and their splendid nature, the next step is to understand the kinds of causes that we should cultivate in order to achieve such wondrous fruits of karma.

## **Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm: Chapter 3**

### **Buddha's Method of Teaching**

The Buddha taught the Dharma aptly using skillful means that are grounded in everyday living and thus accessible to the layman.

A horse trainer once asked Buddha how he taught his disciples. The Buddha responded by asking the trainer his method of taming horses instead.

The horse trainer replied, "I use three methods to tame horses – a soft approach, a tough approach, and a combination of both. The soft approach is used to tame gentle horses while the tough approach works for rebellious horses. As for horses that are unpredictable in nature, I use both soft and tough approaches depending on the circumstances."

The Buddha asked, "What if all three methods fail to tame the horse?"

"This leaves me with no choice but to kill it, for an untamable horse is wild and useless," the trainer explained.

The horse trainer then asked Buddha again, "The World Honored One, how do you teach your disciples?"

The Buddha said, "I employ three approaches too – a gentle approach, a stern approach, and a combination of both."

"If my disciple is kind-hearted and virtuous, I will gently preach about the cause and effect of rebirth in the human and heavenly realms. Cultivating wholesome actions, speech, and thoughts will lead to rebirth in the heavenly realm, and if he further aspires for liberation, he will attain Nirvana.

"If my disciple is unkind and less virtuous, I will firmly and solemnly warn about the woefulness in the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, and animal realm. Once he realizes that committing unwholesome karma through actions, speech, and thoughts will result in immense suffering in the three lower realms, he will stop committing unwholesome karma and cultivate goodness instead.

"As for those whose minds are yet unsettled, both approaches are used alternately. At times, I will teach them about the suffering in the three lower realms while on other occasions, I will expound to them the splendor of the human and heavenly realms, and the attainment of Nirvana and liberation."

The horse trainer queried further, "What if a disciple is not receptive to teachings via any of these approaches?"

The Buddha said, "He will be 'killed', just like how you will kill your horse."

Alarmed, the horse trainer exclaimed, "The World Honored One, why would you say that he will be 'killed' when the Dharma teachings do not encourage killing?"

The Buddha said, "You are right, killing is not advocated in my teachings. But if I do not teach him the Dharma and the precepts or guide him, it is equivalent to 'killing' him."

"Why is this so?" asked the horse trainer.

The Buddha explained, "When a person does not listen to the Right Dharma and has no one to teach him, his wholesome thoughts will eventually diminish while defilements arise. As a result, he will commit unwholesome karmic deeds and descend to the hell realm. This is equivalent to 'killing' him as one is unable to meet the Buddha, listen to the Right Dharma, offer sustenance to the Sangha, and is deprived of opportunities to cultivate meritorious deeds. Such a person is similar to a dead person."

Upon hearing the Buddha's manner of teaching students, the horse trainer felt that it was similar to how he trained horses. However, the Buddha's teachings could enable sentient beings to be liberated from suffering in the three lower realms, take rebirth in the human or heavenly realm, and ultimately attain Nirvana.

Therefore, the horse trainer took refuge in the Triple Gem, undertook the Five Precepts and became an Upasaka disciple of the Buddha.

### **Cause and Conditions for Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm**

Cultivating wholesome actions, speech, thoughts, and refraining from committing unwholesome karmic deeds will enable us to be reborn in the heavenly realm. When we observe the Five Precepts and practice the *tenfold meritorious cause of action*, it brings us closer to realizing the splendid nature of the devas in terms of ease of minds and bodies.

Once wholesome karma is reaped, we will take rebirth in the heavenly realm and receive the various splendid merits that devas have. So, when we keep in mind the wonderful merits of the heavenly realm, our mind would be free from the defilements of tainted thoughts.

## **Cause and Conditions for Rebirth in the Kama Loka Heavens**

### **(1) There are six cause and conditions:**

- (a) Three bodily actions: No killing, no stealing and abstinence from sexual misconduct.
- (b) Four verbal actions: No lying, no divisive speech, no frivolous speech and no harsh words.
- (c) Three mental actions: No greed and jealousy; no thoughts of hatred and harm; and not holding wrong views in ignorance.
- (d) *Right Livelihood*: Maintain a right livelihood such that our careers or means of livelihood is pure, and do not involve any form of killing, stealing, promoting sexual misconduct, lying or cheating, using harsh words, gossiping, praising ourselves while slandering others, and propagating wrong views or misguided teachings.
- (e) No thoughts of killing: We always maintain a compassionate mind with no thoughts of harming any sentient beings.
- (f) No jealousy: Jealousy refers to being unable to rejoice in the well-being of others. This leads to anger, and hurtful words and actions that will result in future rebirths in the three lower realms.

Hence, eliminating jealousy is essential for rebirth in the heavenly realm. We should always rejoice in the merits of others and praise them for their good deeds and feel happy for them when good things come their way.

### **(2) Four Indestructible Faiths (catvaro vetya-prasadah)**

Having pure and unwavering faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, as well as upholding the Buddha's teachings of the Five Precepts and even the Monastic Precepts.

### **(3) Practice Six Kinds of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness of the merits of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; mindfulness of the virtuousness of upholding precepts; mindfulness of generosity which is a fundamental act of wholesomeness; and mindfulness of the brilliant merits of the heavenly realm.

### **(4) Cultivate the ten meritorious deeds**

Countless heavenly beings attained liberation after paying their respects to the Buddha and learning the Dharma, and their brightness illuminated the entire Jetavana Monastery. This is an indication of the innumerable beings the Buddha had guided.

#### Example 1

Many years ago, there was a musician named Cu Niu (粗牛) who made a living playing the zither in the populous Kosala city.

One day, he went into the forest and while resting in the wilderness, six female devas descended from the heaven and came before him requesting, "Please play for us some music."

Astonished to see the dignified looking devas, whose bodies shone like gold with magnificent palaces accompanying them, he asked, "Where do you come from? Why do you look so extraordinary and even have palaces by your sides?"

The female devas said, "Please go ahead to play some music and we will sing out the cause and conditions through the songs."

So he started playing and the six female devas danced and sang along.

The first deva sang, "In my past life, I offered with great pleasure beautiful clothes and belongings that I had treasured. Thus, I

now possess this heavenly golden body and have a palace by my side. Hence the extraordinary deva self now."

The second deva sang, "In my past life, I offered aromatic incense to the Triple Gem respectfully and joyously. Thus, I receive this heavenly golden body with a palace by my side and hence the extraordinary deva self now."

The third deva sang, "In my past life, I offered delicious food generously to others with respect and pleasure. Thus, I have this heavenly golden body as well as an accompanying palace. Hence the extraordinary deva self now."

The fourth deva sang, "I was a lowly maid in my past life. I diligently and responsibly carried out all duties and never once pinched any food greedily or stole from my master. I led a frugal life and offered meals to help the less well-off. Thus, I attain this heavenly golden body with a palace by my side and hence the extraordinary deva self now."

The fifth deva sang, "When I was in the human realm, I did as a daughter-in-law should. I dutifully respected and diligently served my in-laws even though they were aggressive and rude towards me. Hence the extraordinary deva self now."

Finally, the sixth deva sang, "When I was in the human realm, I associated closely with and learnt from Bhikshus and *Bhikshunis* and listened to the Right Dharma. I also observed the *Eight Precepts* for one day and night. Thus, I was reborn with this heavenly golden body with an accompanying palace and hence the extraordinary deva self now."

After stating the various cause and conditions from their past lives, the female devas returned to the heavens.

The musician was delighted to hear the cause and conditions for the devas' rebirth and witness the wonderful merits of rebirth in the heavenly realm. So he made a vow, "From now on, I endeavor to cultivate good deeds, give generously, observe moral ethics, save all sentient beings and safeguard them. I will associate with the Triple Gem, listen to the Dharma, and observe precepts in order to enjoy immeasurable happiness in the heavenly realm in the future."

### Example 2

Golden Bhikshuni (Bhadra Kapilani) was a very handsome man named "Brahma" in her past life and everybody was delighted to see him.

One day, a beautiful lady attracted the attention of everybody on the streets. This made him jealous and he ended up making a foolish vow after making a meritorious offering to the Buddha, "May I be reborn as an attractive woman in the future."

After his death, he was reborn as a female deva whose alluring beauty led to five male devas contending to win her over through a competitive composition of gathas.

Through this anecdote, we learn that the act of giving can lead to rebirth in the heavenly realm. However, the root cause of taking rebirth in the heavenly realm is still the upholding of precepts.

### **The Path to Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm**

A deva with sharp faculties is able to instantly know the cause and conditions for his rebirth in the heavenly realm.

The first thing a deva does after his birth is to observe where he had come from in his past life. He will then realize that the cause and conditions for his rebirth is due to him associating with the

Triple Gem and performing the ten meritorious deeds or observing the Eight Precepts while in the human realm. Thus, he will descend to the human realm to pay respect to the Buddha and learn the Dharma.

A deva once asked Buddha while paying respect, "What is the path to rebirth in the heavenly realm?"

The Buddha replied, "Performing the ten meritorious deeds leads to rebirth in the heavenly realm."

Other than the abovementioned, another cause and condition is practicing the Six Kinds of Mindfulness – Mindfulness of the Buddha, Mindfulness of the Dharma, Mindfulness of the Sangha, Mindfulness of the Precepts, Mindfulness of Generosity, and Mindfulness of the Heavens.

**(1) Mindfulness of the Buddha:** This establishes indestructible wholesome faith in the Buddha.

We practice mindfulness by reciting the Buddha's name, visualizing the Buddha's splendid form, and being mindful of the wholesome merits and virtues of the Buddha.

The Buddha has Thirty-two Major Marks, Eighty Minor Marks, Ten Powers of Mindfulness, Four Types of Fearlessness, Four Forms of Unhindered Wisdom of Eloquence, Eighteen Distinctive Abilities, Great Loving-Kindness, *Great Compassion*, and Complete Wisdom that knows all things.

Upholding the precepts virtuously, the Buddha's mind is always composed and focused, absent of greed, hatred, ignorance and conceit.

The Buddha's Great Loving-Kindness and Great Compassion regard all sentient beings equally and the Buddha is immeasurably wise. Not only has Buddha extinguished all

mental defilements, there are also no remnants of unwholesome habits either. Hence, the Buddha is the most honorable one in both heavens and on earth.

When we think of The Great Buddha's merits and virtues, we generate extreme joyousness and respect towards the Buddha, which leads to five meritorious results in our future life:

- (1) Dignified appearance: We will look dignified when we generate respect and joyousness towards the Buddha while recollecting the Buddha and being mindful of the meritorious virtues of the Buddha. Thus, it is not about silent mouthing without any feeling when we recite the Buddha's name, but that such mindfulness of the Buddha is done in a genuine, mindful and joyous spirit.
- (2) Pleasant voice: If we pay homage to the Buddha with happiness through reciting "Namo Buddha", our voice in the future will sound pleasant and melodious.
- (3) Affluence: Joyfully offering flowers, incense, lamps, food, clothes, accommodation and medication to the Buddha will result in us having great wealth in the future.
- (4) Rebirth in a rich and respectable family: Paying obeisance to the Buddha with a sincere, respectful and pure state of mind without any form of attachment will enable us to be reborn into well-to-do nobility, who is also respectably regarded by others.
- (5) Rebirth in the heavenly realm: We have faith in the Buddha, practice the Buddha's teachings, uphold the precepts, and listen to the Dharma. This enables us to develop wisdom and cultivate Right Understanding and Right View. Hence, we will be reborn in the heavenly realm, treading the path towards Nirvana.

Being mindful of the Buddha's Thirty-two Major Marks and Eighty Minor Marks, thinking of the Buddha and reciting the Buddha's name leads to rebirth in the heavenly realm.

Our bodies are calm and at ease when we practice mindfulness of the Buddha with joy. With a relaxed body, both body and mind are at blissful ease. This in turn allows our minds to be focused and aids our practice of single-minded meditative concentration. Without mental defilements and with non-arising of greed, hatred, and ignorance, we will be reborn in the heavenly realm.

**(2) Mindfulness of the Dharma:** This establishes indestructible wholesome faith in the Dharma.

The purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to enable sentient beings to extinguish all mental defilements and affliction to realize true happiness.

The marvelous teaching of *Dana* helps to cease our defilements of greed and miserliness, which brings us inner joy.

When we observe the precepts, our mind is at ease as we do not commit offences through actions or speech. We are free from regrets or vexations and neither do we annoy others. This results in everybody being happy and peaceful. Hence, the teaching of upholding precepts is wonderful indeed.

Through the teaching of taking rebirth in the heavenly realm, sentient beings are able to experience peaceful joy in the present and future lives.

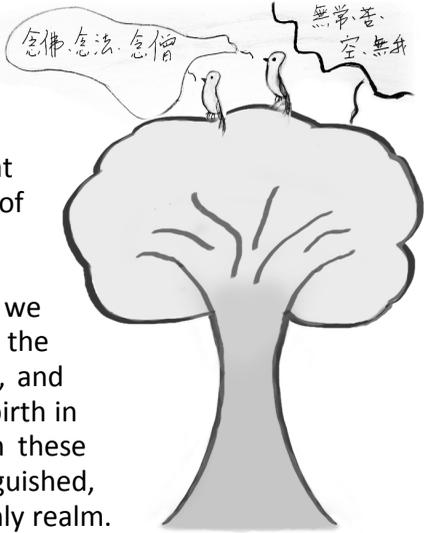
By expounding on the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha enables sentient beings to be liberated from the woes of endless cycles of rebirth and enables them to attain the blissfulness of Nirvana.

All the Dharma that the Buddha expounded during his forty-nine years of teaching was intended to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings and to help them realize true happiness.

So, the teachings of Dharma are truly splendid and extraordinary!

When we concentrate our minds on the Dharma and generate happiness towards the teachings, our minds feel joyous and our bodies are at ease. This makes the practice of meditation easier.

With sustained concentration, we may then contemplate that the *three poisons* of greed, hatred, and ignorance are the causes of rebirth in the three lower realms. When these mental defilements are extinguished, we will be reborn in the heavenly realm.



**(3) Mindfulness of the Sangha:** This establishes indestructible wholesome faith in the Sangha.

The pure and dignified Sangha has no vexations. Living in harmony, they practice keeping Precepts, train themselves in Meditative Concentration and develop Wisdom, which ultimately leads to Liberation and attainment of merits associated with achieving the Knowledge and Vision of Liberation. Thus, the Sangha is honorable and precious and we should be delighted to see them.

With a joyful mind, the body is at ease, which makes it easier to observe the precepts and attain meditative concentration. With a focused mind, there will be no greed, hatred, conceit, and ignorance. One will establish absolute faith in the Triple Gem

and have no doubt in karmic cause and effect; this is the path to rebirth in the heavenly realm.

**(4) Mindfulness of the Precepts:** This establishes indestructible wholesome faith in the precepts and the fulfillment of upholding holy precepts.

Observing the virtuous precepts as taught by Buddha will make us feel calm and have no regrets.

So we undertake the precepts willingly and abide by them: no killing, no stealing, no engaging in sexual misconduct, no lying, no divisive speech, no frivolous speech, no harsh words, no greed, no hatred and jealousy, and no ignorant Erroneous Views.

With calm minds free from remorse, we feel joy and our bodies are at ease and happy. These result in a collected mind with no greed, hatred, ignorance, pride, and doubt. Hence, we will take rebirth in the heavenly realm.

**(5) Mindfulness of Generosity:** When the Four Indestructible Faiths are established, we will give willingly.

In this world, there are many who are stingy and refuse to part with their possessions. Once, there was a man who, upon encountering a robber, refused to let go of his possessions, holding on tightly to the NT\$100 in his hand and ended up being killed.

As Buddhist disciples, we should learn to give joyfully and equally to all sentient beings at all times. In this way, we will feel joy and the body and mind will be at ease. This enables us to cultivate concentration of the mind. Without greed, hatred, and ignorance, we will be reborn in the heavenly realm.

**(6) Mindfulness of the Heavens:** Thinking of the various merits and splendid karmic rewards of heavens will inspire us to practice according to the Dharma which in turn leads to rebirth in the heavenly realm.

### Example

There was a rich Brahmin named Nandi in Dirghagama. Saddened to hear that the Buddha and the other Bhikshus would be leaving Kapilavastu after the summer retreat, he asked the Buddha, "The World Honored One, who should I depend on in your absence? Especially since Maha Sariputra, Maha Maudgalyayana, and Maha Kasyapa will not be around as well?"

Buddha said, "You should always cultivate the Six Kinds of Mindfulness (Mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the Precepts, Generosity, and the Heavens) regardless of whether the Buddha is present or absent. Practicing in this way is equivalent to being with the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and the other venerable Bhikshus."

Since the Buddha has already entered into *Parinirvana*, it is even more vital for us Buddhists to practice diligently and cultivate the merits of the Six Kinds of Mindfulness to extinguish all mental defilements.

## **The Kind of Person We Should Aim To Be**

There are four kinds of people, namely people who progress:

**1) From darkness to darkness:** These are destitute people who lead strenuous lives.

They disrespect the Triple Gem and cannot differentiate between good and bad. They are unaware that a future life exists and do not believe in cause and effect. They also hinder others from respecting the Triple Gem. Not only are they

unwilling to give, never listen to the Dharma and not observe the precepts, they also prevent others from doing so.

Such a person is equivalent to having consumed poisonous feces; he becomes more venomous and foul the more he consumes.

Despite already suffering in this life, it would get considerably worse when he descends to the hell realm in future. This is known as going from darkness to darkness.

**2) From darkness to brightness:** Some destitute people live in poverty and lead hard lives, having to endure ridicule and abuse from people who despise them.

However, they respect the Triple Gem and strongly believe in cause and effect. Understanding that their present suffering is the karmic result of past causes, they observe the precepts, practice giving, and learn the Dharma in the current life. They also encourage others to do likewise.

Though they are being despised in this life, they will enjoy happiness in the heavenly realm after death. This is known as going from darkness to brightness.

### Example

There was a poor man in Rajagrha during the time of Buddha. Having firm faith in the Triple Gem, he offered whenever conditions allowed him to. He also wholeheartedly observed the precepts and learnt the Dharma enthusiastically. Consequently, he was reborn in the Thirty-three Heavens and possessed three extraordinary features that were superior to other devas:

① Heavenly Lifespan: His lifespan was longer than the usual 1000 years of other devas.

② Heavenly Form: His dignified appearance outshone the other devas.

③ Heavenly Reputation: He was well respected as he had deep faith in the Triple Gem when in the human realm. He also learnt the Dharma, upheld the precepts, gave to others, and was compassionate and patient.

**3) From brightness to darkness:** Despite having wealth and happiness in the present life, one will suffer in the hell realm after death if one disrespects the Triple Gem, does not believe in cause and effect, commits unwholesome deeds of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, frivolous speech, being miserly, greedy, jealous and angry, annoys and harms sentient beings, and holds wrong views. This is comparable to going from brightness to darkness.

Just like consuming poison that has been sugar coated, one will eventually die from the poison after one has finished indulging in the sweet joys of the present life.

**4) From brightness to brightness:** Some affluent people associate with the Triple Gem and show deep respect. They listen to and learn the Right Dharma, practice giving, uphold the precepts, and develop Right Understanding and Right View. They also encourage others to do likewise.

They lead splendid lives and will continue basking in the brilliant happiness of the heavenly realm in future and become even happier. This is known as going from brightness to brightness.

A wise man will not let his life end up in darkness. Instead, he will strive towards brightness.

We should endeavor to bring our lives toward the fourth type of person – from brightness towards greater brightness, because the light of wisdom is present in all of us.

Be it renowned politicians or influential businessmen, it is vital that others are encouraged to give, respect the Triple Gem, have strong faith in cause and effect, listen to and learn the Right Dharma, give to others, observe the precepts, and develop Right Understanding and Right View.

In this way, not only will we develop wisdom, others will also develop wisdom and all will have bright futures in the splendid heavenly realm.

### Example

One day, Venerable Sariputra was eating under a tree after collecting alms in the city. A female heretic named "pure-speech" (淨口) passed by and asked him, "Sramana, do you make a living by Adhomukha?"

Venerable Sariputra answered that it was not through Adhomukha that he made a living.

She then continued to ask if he made a living by Ubbhamukha, Disamukha, or Vidisamukha, and Venerable Sariputra said "no" to all three as well.

This puzzled the woman and she asked, "As far as I know, these four ways are the only means to make a living but you have denied all of them. Please enlighten me."

Venerable Sariputra replied, "If a renounced monastic made a living through cultivating the land and growing grains or fruit trees, he is making an impure living by Adhomukha.

"Making a living by divination through astrology is called making an impure living by Ubbhamukha.

"Fawning over the rich and powerful and seeking connections with them to gain benefit is known as making an impure living by Disamukha.

"If one makes a living by casting curses and fortune-telling, he is known as making an impure living by Vidisamukha."

The female heretic asked, "Venerable, since you do not make a livelihood using these four ways, how do you make a living then?"

Venerable Sariputra answered, "I collect alms and with the collected food, I am able to sustain the physical body and live on. I can then learn the Dharma from the Buddha and cultivate wisdom to obtain the *Dharma-kaya*. With the power of wisdom, I can extinct all afflictions and attain Nirvana."

After hearing these words, the woman thought that disciples of Buddha were indeed extraordinary. They aspire to become a Buddha and attain the Dharma in order to liberate and enlighten other sentient beings. This altruism is indeed respectable and everyone should offer sustenance to them.

So, she persuaded others to support and sustain Sakyamuni Buddha and the Sangha. She also encouraged people to have faith in and take refuge in the Triple Gem, to practice giving, and to observe the precepts.

This act of her propagating the merits and virtue of the Sangha made some heretics jealous and they ended up killing her.

~ REBIRTH IN THE HEAVENLY REALM (3) ~

However, as she had pure unwavering faith in Venerable Sariputra, she took a happy rebirth in the Tusita Heaven after her death.

Hence in this society, faced with all sorts of situations, we should reflect and think deeply: We are heirs of our own karma. With this law of causality in mind, we have faith in our virtuous actions and need not worry about the question of where we would end up in our future.



## Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm: Chapter 4

### The Cause and Conditions for Becoming King Sakra

Once, a group of Bhikshus were discussing about a very filial son who went around begging for alms because his family was very poor. Each time, this filial son would offer the savoriest food to his parents before having the remaining.

The Buddha heard the Bhikshus and commented, "This man collected food through proper means and offered them to his parents respectfully. He will have good reputation in the present life and will be reborn in the heavenly realm."

Henceforth, we should learn to respect and provide for our parents as this will also lead to rebirth in the heavenly realm.

There are seven cause and conditions for King Sakra's rebirth as the ruler of the Thirty-Three Heavens:

- (1) Offering sustenance to parents: King Sakra offered to his parents respectfully in his past human life.
- (2) Respectful to elders and offering them sustenance: He also respected his family elders, relatives, and friends.
- (3) Kind words and amicable: He treated everyone kindly and spoke in a gentle and modest manner.
- (4) No harsh words: He was humble and polite.
- (5) No divisive speech: He was a peacemaker and never gossiped nor caused disputes.

- (6) Truthful: He was honest and never slandered or deceived anyone with lies.
- (7) He was generous as he would gladly give to all sentient beings equally and diligently.

Example 1: King Sakra is also known as "Thousand-Eyes", which means possessing the "eye of wisdom".

King Sakra was wise and alert in his previous life. He was named "Thousand-Eyes" ("eyes of wisdom") as he excelled in realizing the meaning of Dharma teachings within a short span of time and is able to share the Dharma widely.

Hence, we should learn to be like King Sakra, always contemplating and observing the Dharma teachings.

Example 2: How King Sakra handled the annoying yaksa

A hideous looking yaksa once sat on King Sakra's throne. This act enraged the celestial beings and they tried to drive him away. However, the yaksa's appearance transformed and became more pleasant as the devas got angrier.

King Sakra then told the devas that the yaksa was known to be a type of yaksa that would look increasingly splendid when others become angrier. It feeds off the anger of others, but would get weaker with the energy of compassion.

So King Sakra went to meet the yaksa personally and said in a humble and soft voice,

*"Do not be angry when annoyed,  
and never repay unkindness with malevolence;  
Seek to eliminate conceit,  
as truly wise men rise above anger."*

When King Sakra spoke gently to the yaksa with loving-kindness, the yaksa morphed into an ugly creature and eventually dissipated.

We can learn from King Sakra's example in our daily lives. When others lash their anger at us, we should conversely respond to them with kindness and endurance, till they give up on the antagonism of their own accord. If we could practice this in this lifetime, it would generate merits for us to take rebirth in the heavenly realm in the future.

Example 3: King Sakra remained silent when insulted by an asura.

King Sakra was asked why he did not retort to the insults that were thrown at him.

King Sakra answered, "Great men practice tolerance and there are three circumstances under which tolerance is necessary.

"The first circumstance where I need to tolerate is when the opposition is more powerful in the event of a duel as I will definitely lose. This is known as exercising tolerance on a stronger opponent out of fear.

"The second circumstance is where both parties are equally matched. Here, I should also tolerate because we will both be on the losing ends if engaged in a fight. This is known as exercising tolerance on an equivalent opponent to cease disputes.

"In the third case, although I can easily defeat the other party, I choose to show compassion and tolerance instead. This is known as exercising tolerance on a weak opponent, which is the highest form of tolerance."

Hence, regardless of which of the three circumstances we find ourselves in, we can always practice endurance. This is the valuable lesson we can learn from King Sakra.

#### Example 4

King Sakra often sang praises of the diligent cultivation of meritorious deeds. He paid homage to the Triple Gem and often visited the human realm to praise and pay his respects to the Buddha.

He would also pay obeisance to diligent Bhikshus, marveling that these monastics are singularly focused in their aspiration to remove mental afflictions, be liberated from Samsara for the eventual attainment of Nirvana. They do not go after sexual desires nor do they hanker after wealth and fame. To them, affluence is unimportant just like a passing cloud.

When they speak, it is wholesome and wise words that would benefit sentient beings, eliminate their mental afflictions, and that which convey the Right View of cause and effect. When not engaged in speech, they practice meditation, cultivate wisdom, stillness of mind and insight.

In contrast, the conversation of laity revolves around the pursuit of mundane happiness of the *Five Desires*. Even in silence, their minds continue to be preoccupied with the vexing affairs of the secular world. They work hard their entire lives, just to fulfill their dreams to marry an attractive spouse and acquire fame and fortune.

Monastics do not crave for anything as they truly realize that *"All conditioned phenomena is impermanent as they arise and cease. The extinguishing of arising and ceasing brings about the ultimate cessation (i.e. nirvana) that is real blissfulness."*

No matter what comes their way, they are at ease and do not have attachment to ego, any person, object or place. Neither do they pursue fame and wealth.

So, like King Sakra, we should often praise the monastics, the Sangha and Triple Gem.

### Example 5

When I was journeying the entire island of Taiwan on foot, I comprehended the meaning of a common saying, "Running water holds no poison; a traveler bears no evil." This is because a drop of poison has no effect to cause harm in rapidly flowing water.

At that time, the political election campaign was ongoing. As a monastic, I was aware of the elections but disengaged from all kinds of communication that pointed to the hottest topic in town.

During my journey, a campaigning van had offered me the sustenance of buns and water. However, this kind action had not created any partisan obligation between the donor and me. As a monastic, it is understood that there is no attachment to the food – a mere sustenance for the biological functioning of the physical body. Similarly, there is also no attachment to its provider, only a sincere heart of gratitude.

Along the journey too, there are some who would scold and hurl unkind words at this travelling monastic, but without any effect or response. This comes from the understanding that when the sound of insults dies down, it is already past – I too have walked past these insults and admonishers, bearing no traces of discomfort.

With no attachment or hatred towards anything that arises throughout the journey, a renounced monastic understands that all phenomena are impermanent. This relates back to the saying, "running water carries no poison; a travelling person bears no evil."

This is why King Sakra speaks so highly of monastics.

## The Cause and Conditions for Rebirth in the Rupa Loka

The fundamental requirement for rebirth in the Rupa Loka Heavens is to achieve meditative concentration towards the Four Dhyana Concentrations of the Rupa Loka and the Four Meditations of the Arupa Loka.

However, taking rebirth in the Rupa Loka Heavens without attaining meditative concentration is also possible by the following ways:

### (1) Building Buddhist temples:

This generates good merits as it provides the Sangha with a place to practice Right Dharma teachings and continue propagation of the Buddha's teachings. Sentient beings will benefit from paying respect to the Buddha images, learning the Right Dharma, and practice offering sustenance generously. Hence it is a very meritorious deed indeed.



(2) **Repairing old temples:** As all phenomena are impermanent, some temples might have collapsed in the event of natural disasters such as earthquakes, or there may be signs of wear and tear from use over time. Helping to repair and maintain the structures of these temples is another meritorious cause to take rebirth in the Rupa Loka.

(3) **Foster harmony among the Sangha:** One should never create disharmony among the Sangha. We should always respect and encourage the practice of loving-kindness and learn the teachings of Dharma diligently. These good merits will enable our rebirth in the Brahma Heaven.

**(4) Appealing to The Buddha to remain in the world and to expound the Dharma:** In his past life, the Great *Brahma King* had pleaded the Buddha to remain in the world to expound the Dharma. This is the cause for his rebirth as the Great Brahma King.

Another way to achieve rebirth in the Rupa Loka is to practice loving-kindness and compassion diligently, i.e. the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

### **Prerequisite to Practicing Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta)**

There are four prerequisites to practicing loving-kindness:

**(1) Strong faith in the Right View of cause and effect while upholding the precept of non-killing**

We should have strong faith in the law of cause and effect in that good begets good and bad begets bad. If we do not believe in karma and perform unwholesome acts of insulting and divisive speech, jealousy, hatred and the like, how do we even start nurturing a compassionate heart without such upholding of precepts that guard against these unwholesome actions?

A heart that harbors ill and malicious intent is the opposite of a heart of metta. In order to cultivate this heart of loving-kindness, we have to first have deep faith in the law of cause and effect, eliminating any malicious acts that go against the precepts.

If we bear grudges or foster enmity with any sentient being, we would descend into the three lower realms in our next rebirths while seeking vengeance on our enemies. Locked into never-ending acts of enmity, it would be difficult to cultivate a heart of loving-kindness.

Hence, we uphold the precept of non-killing as a pre-requisite to the cultivation of metta. Believing in the karmic law of causality, we do not kill and forge ill grudges with any sentient beings.

## **(2) Know the merits of tolerance**

Believing in the karmic law of cause and effect, we should learn to observe the merits of exercising tolerance and be willing to practice it.

### Example 1

In the history of China, there is a person well known for his virtue of great tolerance. This is Han Xin, a scholar who was unskilled in farming and menial labor and had to depend on his elder brother's family for a living. As a result, he was often ridiculed as a good-for-nothing.

When he was ridiculed, Han Xin would get angry and would want to fight with the antagonists. However, he would rationalize that if he were not able to exercise tolerance over such minor matters, how could he attain great achievements in the future? Hence with such a thought, Han Xin would display tolerance every time he is being ridiculed.

Once, Han Xin was surrounded by a group of thugs who not only mocked at him but also demanded that he crawl through beneath their legs. Han Xin again endured the humiliation and acted accordingly. This group of thugs took pleasure at his expense and spread the word widely of this moment of shameful, humiliating submission to them.

Years later during the Chu-Han battle, Han Xin was recruited into Xiang Yu's army as a junior. However, as he was not valued and regarded by Xiang Yu, Han Xin soon left for the opposing Liu Bang's camp.

Like Xiang Yu, Liu Bang was also unable to recognize Han Xin's talent and was nonchalant about Han Xin wanting to leave his army too. During that critical moment, it was Xiao He who managed to convince Liu Bang to keep Han Xin. He pointed out to Liu Bang that Han Xin is definitely cut out to be a great army leader as he was able to endure the most humiliating act of going beneath someone's legs.

When Han Xin returned, he was appointed by Liu Bang to be the commanding general. To show his highest regard for Han Xin, Liu Bang offered his own precious clothes and food to the former.

From then on, Han Xin was able to exercise his talent and was triumphant in subsequent battles. For all his merits of tolerance, Han Xin was made the great General and eventually became the King of Chu.

We should reflect and ask ourselves whether we usually exercise tolerance? It might only be a simple sentence or two from another and this would easily get us agitated, enraged or depressed. Sometimes we would even retaliate with insults and unkind words. Worse still, we could very well be the antagonists, reprimanding and criticizing others even before the other could respond. Let us ask ourselves: Could we accomplish great deeds with such behavior? Could we walk on and practice the path of the sages with such habitual tendencies?

Understanding the value of tolerance, we should be mindful to practice it in our daily lives as it paves the way for accomplishments in our daily lives and moves us along the Right Dharma path.

## Example 2

We have seen from Han Xin's example the worldly accomplishments that we can attain in the mundane world from the practice of tolerance. What kinds of merits do the practice of tolerance bring in the Supramundane world then?

In accordance to the *Ekottaragama*, six types of forces that energize us toward our goals are cited, of which the force of tolerance is one of them:

### (1) Babies gain energizing strength from wailing

When infants are still unable to speak and not yet able to communicate their daily needs of hunger or their passing of motion, they use the method of crying to get their needs attended to. With the power of the wail, others would immediately bring attention to and care for the babies.

### (2) Kings gain energizing strength from their sense of superior pride

A king has the highest social status and possesses the most power and authority. To accentuate his own superiority, he uses prideful arrogance to get others to obey him.

### (3) Women gain energizing strength from anger

If a woman has something to say, it is more often than not that she already has some anger in her that propels her to voice out.

### (4) Monastics gain energizing strength from forbearance

A monastic exercises tolerance and remain steadfast in the face of fame and fortune, restraining from any desires of the mundane world. In the face of others' insults, he also derives strength from forbearance, not letting anger arise. This strength helps the monastic to uphold the precepts diligently.

(5) Arahats gain energizing strength from concentrative diligence

Arahats practice the *Eightfold Noble Path* with single-minded concentration to attain liberation from mental defilements.

(6) Tathagatas gain energizing strength from Great Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Tathagatas are wholeheartedly mindful of the suffering sentient beings entrapped within the cyclical existence of life and death in the three realms. With great loving-kindness and compassion, they aspire to save the sentient beings and endure all sufferings in the human realm through the diligent practice of the *Six Paramitas*. Such great force of loving-kindness and compassion propels them toward the attainment of Anutara Samyak Sambodhi to become the Buddha for deliverance of sentient beings from their suffering.

Hence, we should learn from the monastics, Arahats and Tathagatas to practice the Right Dharma path from the basis of the practice of tolerance.

**(3) To know the merits of loving-kindness:**

① To be able to have calm sleep

Unlike an angry person who is plagued by distress and constant worries, a person who practices loving-kindness has no enemies and is able to asleep peacefully.

② To have ease at all times

With loving-kindness, one would feel at ease when awake at all times and is never afraid of getting hurt.

③ No experience of nightmares

One who bears grudges against others often dream of poisonous snakes. In fact, hatred is more toxic than venomous snakes and

we will be pestered by nightmares of venomous snakes when resentful.

On the other hand, one with loving-kindness will sleep in peace and may even dream of Buddha, lotus or divine light.

#### ④ Safeguarded by celestial beings

A person with loving-kindness will be safeguarded by celestial beings.

#### Example

There was once a very compassionate Bhikshu who went into the forest to practice, intending to stay in the forest for four months. After four months, when the Bhikshu was preparing to leave, a tree deity in the forest appeared and appealed for him to stay.

This is because prior to the arrival of the Bhikshu, the forest deities and animals had been having conflicts and enjoyed no moment of peace. However, after his arrival, the deities and animals had been co-existing harmoniously and peacefully. In the presence of this kind and compassionate Bhikshu, everyone had peace and calm arisen within them and thus they no longer engage with conflicts and disagreements.

The kind Bhikshu agreed to the tree deity's request and stayed for an extended four months. However, after four months, the tree deity again appealed for him to stay on.

The compassion of the kind Bhikshu led him to remain and live in the forest till he entered into Nirvana. The tree deity was deeply grateful and moved by the kindness of the Bhikshu.

If a household has someone with a compassionate heart, the family would be harmonious, happy and peaceful. Likewise, if a country has a leader who is compassionate, the entire country would enjoy peace, stability and prosperity. Conversely, if the

leader were one without compassion, the country would be embroiled in ceaseless conflicts, turbulence and unrest.

The Buddha used an analogy of a wise and compassionate buffalo king that would lead his group of buffaloes across a river. The buffalo king would not lead its team into a fire pit, but would lead them to a safe, happy and peaceful place abundant with water and grass. This is the merit of the loving-kindness possessed by the king.

⑤ Well-respected by all

A kind person will be protected by celestial beings and well respected by others.

This respect and love for the ruler is just like the presence of only one *Wheel Turning Monarch* ruling the country. This is due to the good merits accrued by the Wheel Turning Monarch in his past life, as he did not create enmity with others. Hence, there will not be someone else to vie the throne with him and he is well respected and loved by his people.

Likewise, there will always only be one Buddha in a Great Trichilocosm. This is because The Buddha possesses Great Compassion and is able to generate loving-kindness to all beings with equality. Hence, it would be impossible for two Buddhas to appear at the same time.

On reflection, the reason why we always have people vying for positions with us is because we had created enmity with others in our past life. Hence in this life, we should learn to treat others with compassion, love, graciousness and forgiveness, practice the ten meritorious deeds and exercise tolerance at all times.

As mentioned in the Mahayana Sutra of Mental Contemplation (心地观经), if a king teaches his people to practice the ten meritorious deeds, 2/7 portion of the merits goes to the king

while 5/7 portion of the merits belongs to the people who carry out the good karmic deeds.

Conversely, if the people commit bad karma, 5/7 of the demerits belongs to the people while 2/7 belongs to the king.

Thus, as a leader of a household or country, he should learn the Dharma, understand the Right View of cause and effect so that he would know to treat his people with kindness and gain their respect and love.

### ⑥ Unharmd by poison

Kind people will not be poisoned.

#### Example

An Arahat was meditating peacefully in a forest cave when a venomous foot-long snake fell from the cave ceiling and bit him. After the Arahat was poisoned, he was clear that he would not live for long. So he told Maha Sariputra about it, saying that he had been bitten by a venomous snake and would soon forsake this body of karmic retribution.

Maha Sariputra said, "You look very well, why do you say you will die soon?"

The Arahat replied, "I look fine physically only because my mind is calm and not attached to this body. This body is not mine, so I am neither panicky nor fearful when it undergoes impermanence. But as the body has been poisoned, it will soon deteriorate. So I would choose to enter into Nirvana.

"Honorable One, please help to deal with my body with my passing into Nirvana and inform the Buddha."

Venerable Sariputra then collected his ashes and sarira, and took them to the Buddha.

The Buddha praised the Arahata for being fearless and at ease while facing death, as he had already attained liberation from Samsara.

Buddha told the Venerable, "If the Arahata had practiced loving-kindness and upheld the snake dharani (持蛇咒) in his daily life, he would not have died from the poison even if he was bitten by a venomous snake."

⑦ Unharmd during war

Those with loving-kindness will not be killed in times of war.

⑧ Unharmd by water

Those with loving-kindness will be safe from drowning during floods.

⑨ Unharmd by fire

Those with loving-kindness will come away unscathed in fire disasters.

⑩ Unthreatened by thieves

Those with loving-kindness will not be attacked by thieves and robbers.

⑪ Rebirth in Brahma Heaven after death

Those with loving-kindness will take rebirth in Brahma Heaven after their deaths.

**(4) Besides these merits, practicing loving-kindness enables us to end suffering and achieve happiness.**

As a continuation from the teachings on Dana and *Sila*, the teaching on taking rebirth in the heavenly realm is the third step to attaining true happiness.

Apart from avoiding the three lower realms and being free from the sufferings in the human realm, one will not face the Eight Difficulties upon rebirth in the heavenly realm.

Practicing loving-kindness prevents degradation to the three lower realms due to the *three obstacles*.

A person with loving-kindness will also have complete *six sense bases* along with a whole body. He will not be blind, deaf or dumb, and will have a pleasant and dignified appearance.

He will not be attached to lay life but is keen to renounce and practice the Dharma with a pure mind. He will be able to meet the Buddha and learn the Dharma from the Buddha. He will also be able to make offerings to the Buddha in person.

He will be reborn in the Brahma Heaven instead of heavens with long lifespans, and will not take rebirth in the Thoughtless Heaven or in the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

He possesses the Right View of cause and effect, and will not have Erroneous Views or be engrossed with only the knowledge of mundane studies. He will not take rebirth in places without Dharma.

Practicing loving-kindness will also enable one to achieve his goal, be it attaining Arahantship, Pratyeka Buddhahood, or *Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi*.

## **The Way to Practice Loving-Kindness Meditation**

- 1) **Sitting Posture:** Sit straight while practicing loving-kindness.
- 2) **Breathing:** Use abdominal breathing. The abdomen should expand when inhaling and contract when exhaling.
- 3) **Unity of body and mind:** Close our eyes and focus the mind on the body. Do not let the mind wander.
- 4) **Contemplation:** When the body and mind is united, recite the following sentences and reflect over their meanings:
  - ① **To oneself:** May I be free from anger; may I let go of hatred; may I have no vexations and thoughts of harming others; may I end suffering; may I have good health; may I be happy; may I be blissful; and may I be blessed.
  - ② **To respected, beloved people:** We practice loving-kindness to those we respect and admire.
  - ③ **To common acquaintances:** Common acquaintances are people whom we neither strongly respect nor hate.
  - ④ **To those whom we have grudges with:** Make a list of people we dislike or have had disputes with.

The practice of loving-kindness enables us to not harbor grudges towards others, and resolve past disputes. Thus, we meet no rivals or enemy in our future life.

- ⑤ **To all sentient beings:** We can extend loving-kindness to all sentient beings and rejoice their happiness.

We wish every sentient being free from anger, hatred, vexations, and suffering. May all sentient beings be healthy, blissful and blessed by the Triple Gem. This is a very joyous sight indeed.

Once loving-kindness is ingrained in us, it becomes our inner force. If we continue to be diligent in our practice after listening to and learning the Dharma in this present life, we will be free from hatred, our body and mind will be calm and at ease. This is truly blissful!



### Example 1

Before Buddha attained enlightenment, he practiced loving-kindness for seven years. After his death, he took rebirth in the heavenly realm.

The merits of his loving-kindness resulted in him not descending to the human realm or the three lower realms for seven Kalpas of Formation and Destruction.

During this period, he took rebirth in the Abhasvara Heaven, the Asanjnisattva Heaven, and also became the Great Brahma King who ruled over ten thousand worlds.

Thereafter, he was reborn thirty-six lifetimes as King Sakra and became the Wheel Turning Monarch for countless lifetimes. Ultimately, he generated Bodhicitta and became Buddha. From this, we see the great merits of practicing loving-kindness.

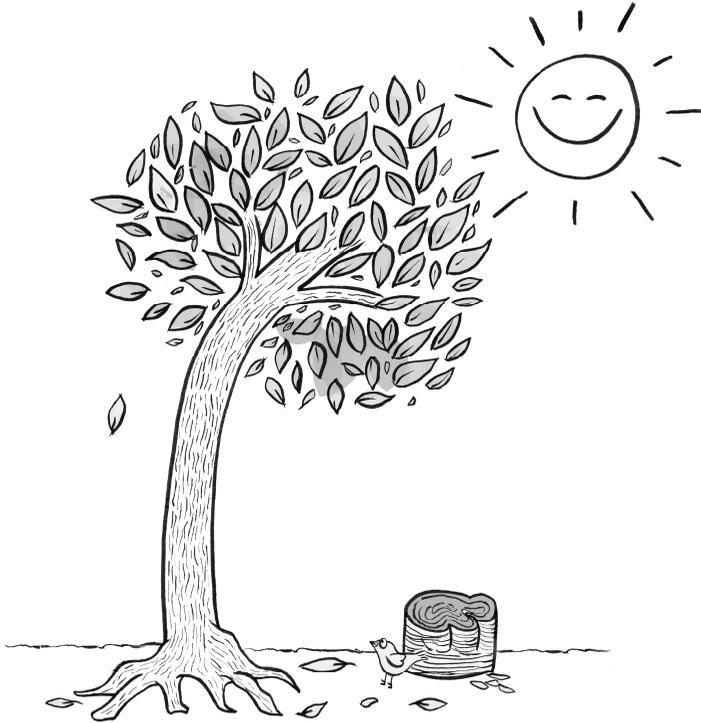
### Example 2

We should value the opportunity of learning loving-kindness.

Elder Maha Nan from the Sakyan clan had faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. He upheld the precepts strictly and is considered to be endowed with the Four Indestructible Faiths.

At one time, he went to ask Buddha, "There are many wild oxen, elephants, and horses roaming the streets. Though I practice the Dharma, where will I take rebirth if I were to die suddenly without *Right Mindfulness*?"

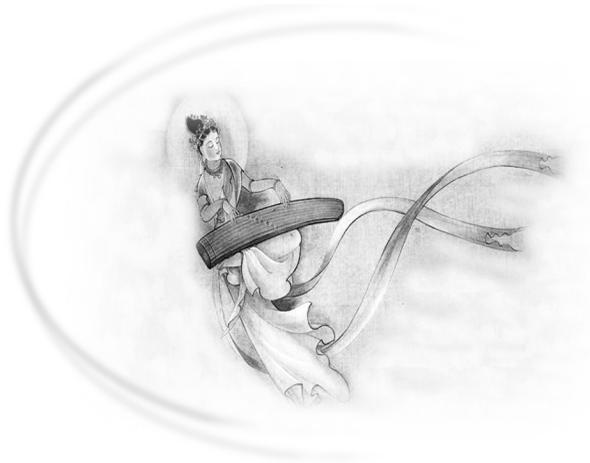
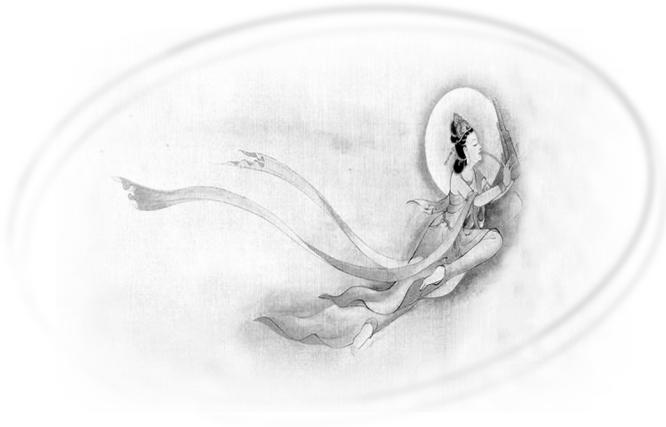
Buddha answered, "Every tree grows in the direction of the sun; they will fall in that direction when felled.



"You have faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, with strict adherence to the precepts; your heart will be in the direction of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and the precepts even in the event of impermanence. So you will take rebirth in the heavenly realm."

~ REBIRTH IN THE HEAVENLY REALM (4) ~

In present day, with the advancement of economies, there are more and more accidents and unstable situations. However, we do not have to worry unduly. Taking faith and refuge in the Triple Gem with strict adherence to the precepts, coupled with the diligent practice of loving-kindness, we can be confident that these would be contributing causes for rebirths in the splendid heavenly realm.



## **Rebirth in the Heavenly Realm: Chapter 5**

### **Difference Between Compassion and Attachment**

There are people who believe that grievances from resentful dead beings of cured patients will be re-directed to the doctors.

This is illogical as good only begets good. A doctor will not suffer unwholesome consequences, as his responsibility is to help patients.

Similarly, the Buddha remains unblemished even though he had helped endless sentient beings be liberated from unwholesome karma.

Therefore, the fallacy of such reasoning proves that such belief is merely an Erroneous View. We should remain compassionate to all sentient beings. This is a cause and condition for rebirth in the Rupa Loka heavens.

All mothers love their children, but this love comprises of attachment and compassion.

How can we deduce it as attachment?

We get angry when our children are disobedient. We will also feel sad when they leave our sides to study and work overseas, start dating, or when they pass away.

How can we deduce it is compassion?

When our children are in pain, we are willing to sacrifice and suffer in their places. We would use all kinds of means to relieve their suffering.

Upon knowing the difference between the two, we should place compassion above attachment. This is because attachment is suffering and will lead to degradation to the three lower realms whereas having compassion enables rebirth in the Brahma Heaven.

### Example 1

The sutras cited an account of a mother crossing a river with her two children. While carrying her younger child in one arm and holding the elder child with the other hand, she accidentally slipped. Both children were swept away by the current and she desperately tried to save them. Nonetheless, her attempts were futile and all of them lost their lives. Even though this mother was drowned, she took rebirth in the Rupa Loka heavens as her mind then was filled with compassion towards her children.

### Example 2

The media once reported a case of a grandmother saving her grandchild. As a fire raged through their house, she used her body to protect her grandchild from being burnt. Unfortunately, she died as a result. However, she was also reborn in the Rupa Loka heavens because her mind then was also full of compassion.

### Example 3

Many doctors and nurses faced great pressure during the SARS crisis. Despite the fact that they should be respected for taking care of patients, there were people who distanced from them for fear of being infected. Some of their own family members even disallowed them from treating the SARS patients. This is indeed a very selfish and ignorant act.

Taking care of patients are acts of compassion, so family members of medical workers should show support and encouragement. If the doctors and nurses died of infection while caring for the patients, they will definitely be reborn in the heavenly realm. They might even take rebirth in the Brahma Heaven just like the earlier example of the compassionate mother who was drowned while saving her children.

Hence, we should cultivate compassion diligently. The practice of compassion not only benefits us, it also results in a more harmonious society.

#### Example 4

During the Buddha's time, there was a Great Brahma King by the name of Baka. As he outlived seventy-two other Brahma kings, he mistakenly believed that he was immortal.

Knowing that Brahma King Baka had such a wrong view, the Buddha advised him, "You should not think you are immortal. This is a wrong view."

Brahma King Baka said, "But since I became the Great Brahma King, seventy-two Brahma kings have died, and yet I am still alive."

The Buddha replied, "Your life will soon end after some time even though you think that your lifespan is infinite."

Brahma King Baka then asked, "World Honored One, what is the cause and condition of my rebirth in this Brahma Heaven? And why is my lifespan longer than the other Brahma kings then?"

The Buddha replied, "There were three cause and conditions:

1) You were a compassionate sage in your previous life. At that time, when an evil naga tried to harm a boat of sea travelers by

causing rogue waves to swell up, you used your supernatural powers to bring those people to safety, thus saving their lives.

2) When you were once a practitioner, you had helped the villagers to defeat the bandits with your supernatural power and saved their lives and homes.

3) While a group of practicing sramaneras was suffering from hunger while walking in the wilderness, you had kindly provided food for them, thus relieving them from hunger and allowing them to concentrate on their practice.

Your never-ending compassion to save others never diminished throughout several kalpas. Thus, the merits accrued from your numerous acts of compassion led you to achieve rebirth in the Brahma Heaven with a long lifespan."

Brahma King Baka gained faith and confidence in the Buddha as he was fully convinced that the Buddha understood the cause and conditions of his rebirth.

The brilliance of the Buddha's wisdom is unsurpassable and outshone that of the Great Brahma King as well as the other Brahma kings. So, only The Great Buddha can be named as Samyak-Sambuddha, which means "Equally, Perfectly Enlightened One".

The Great Buddha then taught him the Dharma and Brahma King Baka was full of joy after learning the Dharma. With that The Great Buddha returned to the Jetavana Monastery via supernatural powers.

So, seeking rebirth in the Rupa Loka is not difficult; we just need to practice compassion with due diligence.

## **Discerning the Thirty-Two Parts of the Body**

The sutras recounted a woman who saw a Bhikshu seeking alms on a street. Attracted by his dignified appearance, desire arose in this woman. She boldly approached the Bhikshu and said, "I am wealthy and I have fallen in love with you deeply. Please denounce from monkhood and come with me to live in luxury."

This Bhikshu was a Pratyeka Buddha. He could see that the woman was deluded by her defilements and asked, "Which part of me do you love?"

The woman answered, "I love all of you, your eyes, your eyebrows, your nose, your mouth and skin."

The Pratyeka Buddha said, "Now, please look at me closely."

Using his supernatural powers, he then took out an eye and showed it to the woman, "If you love this eye, I can give it to you!"

The woman's yearning ceased immediately as deep disgust arose. The pair of beautiful eyes was no longer attractive as they turned bloody and grotesque when removed from their eye sockets. So, the beauty that she had immersed deeply in was only an illusion.

Realizing that the Bhikshu was an accomplished saint, the woman sought repentance, "Venerable, please accept my repentance for being ignorant and committing such unrespectable deed."

The Pratyeka Buddha said, "Desires only cause one to be reborn in the Kama Loka and suffer endlessly. This is a karmic fruition of my unwholesome actions in previous lives. I will now teach you the method to be liberated from the Kama Loka and achieve

rebirth in the Rupa Loka, even attaining relief from suffering in cyclic existence."

He then taught the woman to view the body from head to toe, discerning all kinds of impurities associated with the body.

The six sense bases of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind are impermanent, suffering, empty, egoless, and impure; and one should not be attached to them.

When one's desire is subdued, he can practice the Four Divine States of Mind and take rebirth in the Rupa Loka after death.

### **Discerning the Thirty-Two Parts of the Body**

The body consists of thirty-two parts:

Head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidney, heart, liver, spleen, lungs, pleura, intestines, mesentery, stomach contents, feces, brain.

The thirty-two parts are categorized under four elements, namely earth; water; fire; wind.

To practice discerning of the body, we must begin with adopting a correct sitting posture.

With the right posture, we begin to focus on:

our hair → eyebrows → eyelashes → moustache → body hairs → leg hairs.

This would be followed by:

toenails → finger nails → teeth.

Next, we concentrate on:

the skin around the area under the nose and above the mouth (philtrum) → skin on top of our head → skin on the back of the head → skin on the back of our body → hips → thigh → calf → sole.

We view the skin of our legs, and to return to discern the skin of the upper part of body, followed by hands and that of the philtrum.

Next, we focus on:

the flesh underneath the skin: downward from head to face → body → sole. We then move to the sinews in calf → thigh → hips → waist → back → spine → cervical vertebrae.

Next, we discern:

from the bones in our head to bones inside our neck → cervical vertebrae → in shoulder → in chest → spine → in hips → thigh → calf → feet.

This is followed by:

our bone marrow; followed by the kidney which is positioned at the back of the waist.

Then, we move on to discern:

our heart → liver → spleen → lungs → pleura → intestines → mesentery, and the complex contents inside our stomach.

Finally, we discern on:

brains and the feces in our intestines.

The next step is to observe and reflect that our hair is impure as unwashed hair will smell bad, lose its shine and turn brittle. It will no longer be appealing.

This applies to our eyebrows and eyelashes, as well as our toenails and fingernails.

Our teeth will decay and smell bad if not properly cleansed. Likewise for an unclean body and an unattended wound. The skin would be infested and unhygienic with a foul smell.

Understanding the impurities of our body enable us to contemplate deeper, so that we will not be overly obsessed with it.

Next, would be the twelve water elements.

The bile, gastric juice (phlegm), and pus within our body are filthy. Blood flows within us and we perspire with sweat which is sticky and pungent.

Fats, grease, tears, nasal mucus, saliva, synovial fluid, and urine are water elements. These are gooey, impure, and stink in reality.

When we examine the individual parts of the body closely, we will begin to realize that the body is unattractive and our desires will reduce gradually and fade out eventually.

Besides loving kindness and the *Four Divine States of Mind*, we should diligently discern the thirty-two parts of this body with none as being pure. This would guide us to have the mind of samvega (厌). We no longer possess strong desires and will be released from afflictions and attain wisdom.

In one of his previous lives, the Buddha was named Sunetra (善眼). At that time, he taught his students to practice the Four Divine States of Mind.

Some students who followed his teachings achieved Appana *Samadhi* while others achieved Upacara *Samadhi*.

Those who achieved Appana *Samadhi* were reborn in the Maha Brahma Heaven, Brahma Kayika Heaven, and Brahma Parisadya Heaven.



Master Sunetra thought, "My students were reborn in the extraordinary heavens. As their teacher, I should practice diligently."

And so, Master Sunetra was reborn in the Abhasvara Heaven. Thereafter, he generated Bodhicitta and achieved Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi, becoming Sakyamuni Buddha.

Therefore, it is also a great privilege to take rebirth in the heavens.

However, as a practitioner not born in a world where the Buddha is physically present, we should practice the Four Divine States of Mind diligently. If our merits are great enough to lead us to take rebirth during Buddha's presence, we could further our practice on the Four Noble Truths under the Buddha's guidance.

### **Learning to Examine the Acumen of Food**

While food is essential to sustain our lives, overeating will result in obesity and illness. To avoid gluttony, it is important to understand the liability of food.

Eating to the right amount of food would enable us to concentrate on practicing and achieved Samadhi. To achieve this goal, we can begin by reflecting on the amount of effort and hardship needed to obtain our three meals.

First, contemplate on the ways and methods of food being processed. Food we consume originated from plants on ground that is impure. Subsequently, reflect on the sequence that consumed food is being broken down as it enters the mouth and make its way to our intestines.

This process can only happen with the aid of teeth chewing, mixture of stinky saliva, awful gastric juices, the burning heat that helps to digest, and the wind that pushes it down to the "mushy pipe-like" stomach intestines.

Earlier, we have learnt to reflect on how our unclean body will turn foul if we do not brush our teeth, wash our faces, or shower

for days. Yet the insides of our body, such as the stomach, have never once been washed since birth.

Overeating can upset the stomach and make us feel bloated. We will fall ill and throw up the excess fluids that have an unpleasant smell. Likewise for excretion, which has a dreadful sight and smell.

Thus, a wise person eats just enough for bodily functions and spends more time on practicing. Cultivating these good habits help us to focus on extinguishing suffering and benefiting sentient beings. This good karma will lead us to be reborn in the heavenly realms.

Practicing food loathsomeness also helps to curb our greed, anger, delusion, and pride. Thus, with a light body and stable mind, we can practice diligently to achieve Samadhi, which in turn is a cause for rebirth in the Brahma Heaven or the Abhasvara Heaven after death.

The Dharma and methods on taking rebirth in the heavenly realm help us to not be reborn in the three lower realms and avoid all sufferings in the human realm.

We could also practice to be liberated and become a Buddha in the heavenly realm.

### **Cause and conditions for Rebirth in the Arupa Loka**

After attaining Fourth Dyana concentration, continue to cultivate to the Heaven of Infinite Emptiness, Heaven of Infinite Consciousness, Heaven of Nothingness, and Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

### Example 1

There was a girl who enjoyed solitary. She was born at time where there was no Buddha. Unable to acquaint with a virtuous teacher (kalyana-mitra), she sought advice from a masquerader who taught her about nothingness and whatsoever. With this advice, she attained concentration of nothingness and was reborn in the Heaven of Nothingness for 60000 mahakalpas.

After which she was reborn as a sow and gave birth to five piglets. At this point, the Buddha walked by and smiled. Noting the particularity, Venerable Ananda respectfully sought the Buddha's enlightenment on his reaction. The Buddha related the incident to Venerable Ananda and told him that if the girl had met a Buddha then, she would have been liberated from Samsara. However, she continued to undergo repeated births and deaths as she was unable to acquaint with a virtuous teacher.

### Example 2

There were two spiritual cultivators who attained the concentrations of the Arupa Loka. However, they were not able to meet with a Buddha when they were alive.

One of them, named Udraka Ramaputra, was reborn in the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. He lived in this heaven for 80000 mahakalpas. After that he was reborn as a flying fox, which was killed while flying and was reborn in hell.

Another, named Alara Kalama, was reborn in the Heaven of Nothingness. He lived in this heaven for 60000 mahakalpas. After that he was reborn as a king who killed a lot of people. He was reborn in hell after he died.

## **Hardship in the Kama Loka**

A withered leaf drifts in unpredictable directions. It goes with the flow if dropped into a river. It will burn into ashes if it drifted into a fire. The withered leaf simply has no control over itself.

Beings in the Kama Loka are just like withered leaves. Due to their unstable minds, they tend to commit karmic acts according to the underlying cause and conditions, for good or evil.

To take rebirth in the heavenly realm, we must hold the Triple Gem in our hearts dearly, be disciplined and uphold strict precepts, practice loving-kindness, reflect on the thirty-two parts and impurity of the body, reflect on our greed on food, eradicate our desires and curb our anger.

When we establish our strong faith in the Triple Gem, our minds will be stable and we will not react impulsively to external situations.

Our aspiration ought to be like a falling iron ball that does not change its direction in spite of varying circumstances. We are confident that the fruits of our practice will lead us to the heavenly realm.

The World Honored One taught us the Dharma of generosity, upholding of precepts, taking rebirth in the heavenly realms, the afflictions of desires and the need for renunciation, the Four Noble Truths: suffering, cause of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the way to end suffering to liberate us from cycle of birth and death and to attain Buddhahood.

We must be grateful to The Great Buddha and practice his teachings diligently to develop Samadhi.

### Example

Once, a king who ruled a big country deliberated on his country's need to establish the military might to defend the country. He had chariots, soldiers and elephants but no horses.

When he managed to purchase some horses of fine breed, horse-trainers were engaged to train the horses for battles. The horses were well trained after some years.

Fortunately, the country was stable and peaceful for the next several years. The king then thought, "Since the horses are not needed in the battle field, they should be put to good use. It will be a good idea to train them to grind soybean milk for the soldiers."

Hence, the trainers were instructed to train the horses to grind soybean milk. To grind soybean milk, horses need to circle round the grinder. So, the trainers had the horses' eyes covered and began the re-training sessions.

After a period of training, the horses were schooled to saunter in circles. However, mishap befell on the country a few years later. The country was invaded but the king thought confidently, "My country is well equipped and we will definitely win the battle."

But when the generals mounted their horses, the horses could only walk in circles. Alas, the king and his country were naturally defeated.

The above situation describes our active mind, always wandering in grasp of sensuous desires. This is dangerous, as we may take rebirth in the lower realms and suffer endlessly.

If our hearts are constantly pursuing and revolving around worldly and mundane desires, we would be unable to abide calmly in stillness and attain peace. If we are not mindful of the Triple Gem, do not adhere to the precepts and do not practice

loving-kindness, where would we end up after our deaths? It would be a precarious gamble with no sense of security.

Hence, in our daily lives, we should already seek refuge and be mindful of the Triple Gem, practice generous giving, uphold the precepts, be diligent in the practice of loving-kindness in the Right Dharma path, reflect on the impurity of the body and food, and cultivate meditative stability. Only then can we emerge victorious against our mental afflictions and direct us ever closer to the goal of Nirvana.



## Glossary

**Anagamin:** One who has attained the third stage of Liberation. Such a person has abandoned sensuous desires. Upon passing from the human realm, he will take rebirth in one of the five special worlds in the World of Form, called the Suddhavasā worlds, or "Pure Abodes", from which he will attain Arahatship and will never return to the human realm. Hence, he is also known as a Non Returner. An Anagamin has abandoned the five lower fetters, out of ten total fetters, that bind beings to the cycle of existence. See also Arahatship.

**Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi:** The Supreme and Complete Enlightenment.

**Arahat:** One who has traversed the Eightfold Noble Path to reach the fourth and final stage of Liberation, called Arahatship. An Arahat has abandoned all ten fetters that bind beings to the cycle of existence. Also known as the Perfect One. See also Arahatship.

**Arahatship:** The fourth and final stage of Liberation, in which one is fully liberated from Samsara and is no longer subject to death and rebirth. The four stages of Liberation are: The First stage known as Srotapanna; the Second stage known as Sakradagamin; the Third stage known as Anagamin; and the Fourth stage known as Arahat.

**Atman:** The essence of things that does not depend on others; it is an intrinsic nature. The non-existence of atman is selflessness.

**Bhikshu:** A fully ordained male member of the Buddhist Sangha or monk observing two hundred and fifty Precepts.

**Bhikshuni:** A fully ordained female member of the Buddhist Sangha or nun observing five hundred Precepts.

**Bhutatathata:** The true character of reality. The inherent or true nature of phenomena or true suchness. (诸法实相)

**Bodhicitta:** Also known as the Bodhi-mind or the Bodhi-heart, in which "Bodhi" means "enlightened". It is the aspiration to attain supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

**Bodhisattva:** A being who has developed Bodhicitta and is striving for enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

**Brahma King:** The King of the Brahma World.

**Brahma World:** In the widest sense, this is the name of the World of Form; in a narrower sense, it is the collective name of the first three heavens of the World of Form. See also Three worlds of existence.

**Buddha:** The Fully Enlightened One, who possesses perfect wisdom and compassion.

**Compassion:** Also known as Karuna. See also Four Divine States of Mind and Great Compassion.

**Cycle of existence:** See Samsara.

**Dana:** Charity; benevolence; generosity.

**Defilements:** The mental states of greed, hatred, and delusion which temporarily cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions. These defilements are seen as the very roots of Samsaric existence and are known as the three poisons.

**Deva:** A heavenly being.

**Dharma:** The Teachings of the Buddha.

**Dharma-kaya:** The Dharma body, the truth body, the reality body.

**Eight Precepts:** Observed by lay Buddhists during certain retreats: (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not engage in sexual activities; (4) Do not tell lies; (5) Do not take intoxicants; (6) do not wear bodily adornments, use perfumes, engage in singing and dancing, and watching dances or plays; (7) do not sleep in a raised bed; and (8) do not eat after noon.

**Eightfold Noble Path:** The fundamental teaching of the Buddha that shows the path that leads to the cessation of suffering: (1) Right View or Right Understanding; (2) Right Thought; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Action; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Mindfulness; and (8) Right Concentration.

**First Stage of Fruition:** Also known as the first stage of Liberation. One who has attained the first stage of fruition is known as a Srotapanna or Stream Enterer.

**Five aggregates:** Form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.

**Five Desires:** Wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep.

**Five Powers:** Obtained through the practice of the Five Wholesome Faculties: (1) Power of Faith; (2) Power of Effort; (3) Power of Mindfulness; (4) Power of Concentration; (5) Power of Wisdom.

**Five Precepts:** (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not engage in sexual misconduct; (4) Do not tell lies; and (5) Do not take intoxicants.

**Five sensual pleasures:** Pleasurable feelings derived from the contact between the five sense bases of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and the five sense objects of form, sound, odor, flavor, and tactile object.

**Five Wholesome Faculties:** (1) Faculty of Faith; (2) Faculty of Effort; (3) Faculty of Mindfulness; (4) Faculty of Concentration; (5) Faculty of Wisdom.

**Four Divine States of Mind:** (1) Maitri or Loving-kindness; (2) Karuna or Compassion; (3) Mudita or Altruistic Joy; and (4) Upeksa or Equanimity.

**Four Foundations of Mindfulness:** (1) Contemplation of the body; (2) Contemplation of feelings; (3) Contemplation of the state of mind; and (4) Contemplation of phenomena. See also Right Effort.

**Four Noble Truths:** (1) The noble truth of suffering; (2) The noble truth of the cause of suffering; (3) The noble truth of the cessation of suffering; and (4) The noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

**Four pairs and eight categories of Sravaka practitioners:** This refers to Sravaka practitioners who practice the Srotapanna path and those who have attained Srotapannaship; the ones who practice the Sakradagamin path and those who have attained Sakradagaminship; the ones who practice the Anagamin path and those who have attained Anagaminship; the ones who practice the Arahat path and those who have attained Arahatship.

**Four Right Endeavors:** (1) the effort to get rid of unwholesome thoughts that have already arisen in one's mind, such as the desire to take another's property; (2) the effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts; (3) the effort to develop wholesome thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion; and (4) the effort to maintain and develop further wholesome thoughts that have already arisen in one's mind.

**Four Ways of Attaining Samadhi:** The basis to attain Samadhi: (1) Desire to practice Concentration; (2) Effort; (3) Mindfulness; (4) Contemplation.

**Great Compassion:** The aspiration to remove the sufferings and causes of sufferings of all sentient beings.

**Heavens of the Four Deva Kings:** Also known as the Heavens of the Deva Kings of the Four Heavens. This is the first of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

**Kalpa:** Also known as Eon. It is often used to denote a very long period of time. There are small, medium, great, and incalculable kalpas. A great kalpa indicates the length of time between the creation and

recreation of a universe, spanning the period of the universe's formation, existence, destruction, and non-existence.

**Karma:** The deeds carried out by a person and their effects on the person's future, especially in relation to their succeeding rebirths. Karma can be classified as actions of the body, speech, and mind, each of which can have the moral quality of wholesomeness, unwholesomeness, or indeterminate.

**Law of causality:** Also known as the law of cause and effect. This is a fundamental concept within Buddhism governing all situations, in which all actions, which is a cause, will produce a corresponding effect. It is also stated as good begets good, evil begets evil; good will not beget evil, evil will not beget good.

**Loving-kindness:** Also known as Maitri. See also Four Divine States of Mind.

**Mara:** The Demon King who resides in the Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven.

**Naga:** Dragon or serpent. A beneficent divine being who governs the various water bodies, such as seas, lakes, rivers, and springs.

**Nirmanarati Heaven:** This is the fifth of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

**Nirvana:** The perfect state of mind that is free from greed, hatred, and delusion, and hence all suffering. See also Parinirvana and Residue-less Nirvana.

**Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven:** This is the sixth of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. Mara, the Demon King, resides in this heaven. See also Three worlds of existence.

**Parinirvana:** Also known as the Great Nirvana; it indicates the Buddha's entering into the state of residue-less Nirvana. See also Nirvana and Residue-less Nirvana.

**Pratyeka Buddha:** Also known as the Silent Buddha, or Self-enlightened One. The Pratyeka Buddha appears in an era when there is no Buddha or the Buddha's teachings. He lives apart from others and achieves enlightenment through self-contemplation and realization of dependent arising.

**Pure Dharma Eye:** The pure vision of the true Dharma.

**Residue-less Nirvana:** Also known as Nirvana without residue. It refers to the state of total liberation from all physical and mental conditions. This is in contrast with Nirvana with residue, where the body still exists. See also Nirvana and Parinirvana.

**Right Action:** To conduct oneself in moral, peaceful, and honorable ways, that is in keeping with the precepts of not killing, not stealing, and not committing sexual misconduct. See also Eightfold Noble Path and Tenfold meritorious cause of action.

**Right Concentration:** To develop one's meditation according to the four Dhyanas. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

**Right Effort:** To develop the Four Right Endeavors. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

**Right Livelihood:** To live honorably in a profession which is in no way harmful to sentient beings, and in keeping with the precepts. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

**Right Mindfulness:** To practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. See also Four Foundations of Mindfulness and Eightfold Noble Path.

**Right Speech:** To abstain from telling lies, slandering, frivolous speech, and harsh speech. See also Eightfold Noble Path and Tenfold meritorious cause of action.

**Right Thought:** To have only thoughts which are in line with Buddhist teachings. See also Eightfold Noble Path.

**Right Understanding:** See Right View.

**Right View:** To develop the understanding or view that complies with the Buddhist teaching of causality or the law of cause and effect; understanding the Four Noble Truths. See also Eightfold Noble Path and Right Understanding.

**Sakra:** The King of Trayastrimsat Heaven.

**Sakradagamin:** One who has attained the second stage of Liberation. Such a person, upon passing from the human realm, will take rebirth in the heavenly realms, after which he will be reborn in the human realm one last time to attain Arahatsip. Hence he is also known as a Once Returner. A Once Returner has abandoned the first three fetters, out of ten total fetters, that bind beings to the cycle of existence. He is distinguished from the Stream Enterer by the fact that the Once Returner has weakened greed, hatred, and delusion to a greater degree. Therefore, he has fewer than seven rebirths. See also Arahatsip.

**Samadhi:** Meditative concentration. Often used to denote the deepest state of pure concentration, in which the mind is free from distraction and totally absorbed in the object of concentration. There are many levels and types of Samadhi, such as the Samadhi of Loving-kindness and Compassion.

**Samsara:** Also known as the Cycle of existence or cyclic existence. This refers to the endless cycle of suffering caused by birth, death, and rebirth in the six realms of cyclic existence.

**Sangha:** The Buddhist monastic order or community.

**Seven Factors of Enlightenment:** (1) Mindfulness; (2) Discriminative investigation of the Dharma; (3) Effort; (4) Joy; (5) Ease of body and mind; (6) Concentration; and (7) Equanimity.

**Sila:** The precept; code of morality; Buddhist ethics.

**Six Paramitas:** The Sanskrit word Paramita means to cross over to the other shore. Paramita may also be translated as perfection, perfect realization, or reaching beyond limitation. Through the practice of these six Paramitas, we cross over the sea of suffering (Samsara) to the shore of happiness and awakening (Nirvana); we cross over from ignorance and delusion to enlightenment. The six Paramitas refer to:

- The Perfection of Generosity (Dana Paramita),
- The Perfection of Ethics (Sila Paramita),
- The Perfection of Patience (Ksanti Paramita)
- The Perfection of Joyous Effort / Enthusiastic Perseverance (Virya Paramita),
- The Perfection of Concentration (Dhyana Paramita),
- The Perfection of Wisdom (Prajna Paramita).

**Six realms:** The realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, asuras, and heavenly beings.

**Six sense bases:** Eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

**Six sense objects:** Form, sound, odor, flavor, tactile object, and phenomena.

**Sramanera:** A male novice monk observing Ten Precepts.

**Sramanerika:** A female novice nun observing Ten Precepts.

**Srotapanna:** One who has attained the first stage of Liberation. One who has attained this stage is said to have entered the Stream that leads to Liberation, hence he is also known as a Stream Enterer. Due to the fact that the Stream Enterer has attained an intuitive grasp of Buddhist teachings ("Right View") and has complete confidence in the Triple Gem, he will not be reborn in the three lower realms again, and will take at most seven cycles of rebirths alternating between the heavenly realm and the human realm before attaining the final stage of Liberation, Arahathship. A Stream Enterer has abandoned the first three fetters, out of ten total fetters, that bind beings to the cycle of existence. See also Arahathship.

**Supernatural powers:** The six supernatural powers are: (1) Divine eye or clairvoyance; (2) Divine ear or clairaudience; (3) mental telepathy or ability to read the thoughts of others; (4) psychic travel or telekinesis; (5) knowledge of the past and future; and (6) ending contamination. The first five supernatural powers can be acquired by one who practices deep concentration, but the sixth supernatural power is only attainable when one has attained Arahatsip.

**Tenfold meritorious cause of action:** (1) Do not kill; (2) Do not steal; (3) Do not engage in sexual misconduct; (4) Do not tell lies; (5) Do not slander; (6) Do not engage in frivolous speech; (7) Do not engage in harsh speech; (8) Do not bear greed; (9) Do not bear hatred; and (10) Do not stay deluded.

**Three lower realms:** The three lower realms refer to hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals; as opposed to the three upper realms of humans, asuras, and heavenly beings. See also Six realms of cyclic existence.

**Three obstacles:** The three obstacles refer to afflictions (klesavarana), karmic deeds (karmavarana), and karmic retribution (vipakavarana). These obstruct our learning of the Dharma.

**Three periods:** The past, present, and future.

**Three poisons:** See Defilements.

**Three worlds of existence:** The World of Sensuous Desires, the World of Form, and the Formless World. All beings in the six realms of cyclic existence can be found in the World of Sensuous Desires as these beings are plagued by various sensuous desires. Beings in the World of Form have abandoned sensuous desires but still cling on to physical forms, while beings in the Formless World have even relinquished the physical forms and exist only in mental states.

**Trayastrimsat Heaven:** Also known as the Thirty-Three Heavens. It is the second of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

**Triple Gem:** The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

**Tusita Heaven:** This is the fourth of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. Maitreya Bodhisattva is currently residing in this heaven, awaiting for the cause and conditions to ripen for him to descend to the human realm and become the next Buddha to save and liberate all sentient beings. See also Three worlds of existence.

**Wheel Turning Monarch:** Also known as Chakravartin. A universal emperor and protector of Buddhism. It is a term used for an ideal universal ruler, who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world. Wheel turning literally means whose chariot is rolling or whose Dharmachakra (Wheel of the Dharma) is turning everywhere without obstruction.

**Yama Heaven:** This is the third of the six heavens in the World of Sensuous Desires. See also Three worlds of existence.

## **About this series**

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