

Parable of the Log
Questions & Answers



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Foreword

When the Venerable Chanmyay Sayadaw was visiting England as part of his World Tour teaching Dhamma, the Venerable Dr. Saddhatissa Mahanayaka Thera requested him to give an address at the Memorial Service that was being held for the Venerable Sumathipāla and the Venerable Sīvali at the London Buddhist Vihāra on 25th July 1982. He gave such an inspiring discourse that the devotees in London, requested the Sayadaw to allow a transcript of the talk to be printed in their journal, “Buddhist Forum”.

With the Sayadaw’s permission we copied the talk from the journal and reprint it.

Parable of the Log

Namo Tassa Baghavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa

It is a great pleasure for me to deliver this Dhamma talk in commemoration of those two well-known meditation teachers, the Venerable Sumathipāla Maha Thera and Venerable Sīvali Thera. I was on very friendly terms with the Venerable Sumathipāla Maha Thera and I knew Sīvali Thera very well. We all very much regret that they have passed away. It is a great loss to the Buddhasāna.

On this significant occasion I would like to deal with a discourse of the Omniscient Buddha recorded in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. It is the Darukkhandhopama Sutta, the Parable of the Log.

The Discourse

Once the Omniscient Buddha was sitting under a tree on the bank of the river Gaṅga (Ganges in English, but we pronounce it Gaṅga in Pāli) near the city of Kosambi. Five hundred bhikkhus accompanied him. The Lord Buddha saw a very big log being carried down the river by the current.

He pointed to the log and said, “Oh bhikkhus, do you see that big log which is being carried along by the current of the river?” The bhikkhus replied, “Yes Venerable sir, we see it”.

The Lord Buddha continued,

“If that log is not caught on the near bank, it will reach the ocean.

If it is not caught on the far bank it will reach the ocean.

If it is not submerged under water, it will reach the ocean.

If it does not land on a small island in the middle of the river, it will reach the ocean.

If it is not taken away by a human being, it will reach the ocean.

If it is not taken away by a deity, it will reach the ocean.

If it does not sink into a whirlpool, it will reach the ocean.

If it does not become rotten, it will reach the ocean”.

Here the Omniscient Buddha points out that if there is not any of these eight faults, the log will reach the ocean. Then, the Buddha said, “Why will this log reach the ocean? It is because the current of the river inclines towards the ocean. It will, therefore, reach the ocean if it has none of these eight faults.

“In the same way, bhikkhus, you will reach *nibbāna* if you have none of these eight faults. Why? Because right understanding (*sammā-dīṭṭhi*) inclines towards *nibbāna*, the cessation of *dukkha*. However, bhikkhus, this is just a simile”.

Then, one of the monks requested the Lord Buddha to explain the simile, which the Buddha did in this way.

The words **near bank** refer to the six sense doors—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind.

The words **far bank** refer to the six sense objects—visible objects, sound or voice, smell or scents, taste, tangible things and mind objects.

Submerged under water means being attached to any sentient being or inanimate thing.

Landing on a small island in the middle of the river means conceit, pride or haughtiness.

Taken away by a human being means that a bhikkhu lives mingling improperly with laity.

Taken away by a deity means doing good deeds for the purpose of being reborn in heaven—the realm of Devas or Brahmas.

Sinking into a whirlpool means indulgence in the five kinds of sensual pleasures.

Becoming rotten means pretending to be virtuous when one is not actually virtuous.

The Exposition

Although the Omniscient Buddha addressed this discourse to bhikkhus, it is for everybody, irrespective of race and religion. Anyone who has none of the eight faults can reach the ocean. When he has reached the ocean he has got free from the round of existence and got rid of suffering (*dukkha*).

In some discourse of the Omniscient Buddha the ocean refers to the cycle of rebirths (*samsāra*) and in the others to *nibbāna*, the cessation of suffering. In this discourse, what the Buddha refers to with the word “ocean” is *nibbāna*.

Sense-Doors and Sense-Objects

Then, what does the Buddha mean when he compares the near bank with six sense-doors and the far bank with six sense-objects?

Here I would like to say a few words about the word “mind”. In the psychology of Buddhism “*citta*”, which knows the object, does not last even for the blinking of an eye. Herein the word “mind” is used in the sense of *citta* that knows the object and very instantly passes away. Cognition of the object does not last for even one millionth of a second. Occasionally we use the word “consciousness” which may be better than the word “mind”.

Consciousness or the mind knows the object, but the eye does not know it. With the help of the eye, one of the six sense-doors, consciousness sees the object. For example you see a brand new Rolls Royce car. In this case there is a visible object and there is the eye that helps the mind or consciousness see the object. If you see that Rolls Royce you may feel how good it would be to own one. If it is your own car it will give you much pleasure. You are attached to it because you see it and take it to be a very nice car of yours. You do not regard it as just a natural process of material phenomena. Then, you are caught on the far bank—the car, and the near bank—the eye, because your attachment arises dependant on the car—the visible object and the eye—one of the six sense-doors.

The eye is one of the six sense-doors. When the eye contacts the color or the form of the car, there arises consciousness that sees the car but consciousness of seeing does not stop there. It goes further. It thinks, “Yes, it is my car, a very good car, a new car. I bought it yesterday; it cost a lot of money”. In this way, you become attached to that Rolls Royce. That means that you are attached to a non-living thing because of its color and form—a visible object—and because of the eye. So you are attached to the car.

Suppose you park it on the side of the road and a person carelessly drives his car past yours and scratches the door of your car. Then you feel angry because it is your car that is scratched. It means that you have attachment (*lobha*) and anger (*dosa*). Do *lobha* and *dosa* bring you happiness? No, they bring you unhappiness, *dukkha*. And why do you have this *dukkha*? Your suffering or unhappiness arises because you yourself are stuck on the near bank as well as on the far bank. That attachment arises dependant on the visible object, the car, with the help of the eye consciousness that keeps you stranded on the near bank, If you are attached to the car with the help of your eyes, you will not reach the ocean, Nibbāna. You will be clinging to the far bank as well as the near bank; you won't reach the ocean.

The log is compared with the *khandhas* or a human being. *Khandhas* mean the five aggregates of mental and physical phenomena. Because you do not see the five aggregates as five aggregates of mentality and physicality, you take them to be a person, a being, a self or a soul and as a result you are attached to them; so you won't reach the ocean. If, however, you see the five aggregates as the five aggregates of mentality and physicality, you won't take them for a person etc. Then you will not be attached to them, and so you will reach the ocean. That Rolls Royce you bought yesterday, which was so expensive, if you see it as a Rolls Royce, then you are attached to it; but if you see it as a material process or *rūpakkhandha*—the aggregate of materiality, you won't be attached to it. Then you won't be unhappy when it is scratched because you don't take it as a valuable Rolls Royce. You are caught on neither of the two banks.

Attachment and Conceit

What the Lord Buddha means by “submerged under water” is attachment, desire, craving, lust, love. If you are attached to any living being or inanimate object, you won't be able to reach the ocean. You are submerged under water.

Then, “landing on a small island” means conceit, pride or haughtiness. If you are proud of or conceited about your work, your rank or your success in your business, you are landing on a small island. That conceit delays you in your attainment of Nibbāna. If you are conceited, you are unable to realize the mental and physical processes in their true nature and you will take your bodily and mental processes to be a person, a being, an *atta* or a you. Then, there will arise many others defilement such as anger, lust, greed hatred and so on. So, you, landing on a small island, won't be able to reach the ocean because you are not able to realize natural process as a natural process, or the five aggregates as just a natural process.

Improper Association

If the log is taken away by a human being it won't reach the ocean. This refers to bhikkhus. Supposing a bhikkhu does not do his work of learning scriptures, practising meditation, delivering sermons, leading his disciples on the right path and encouraging them to meditate for their emancipation; instead, he mixes with the laity in an improper way. Such a bhikkhu is taken away by a human being. He will be unable to reach the ocean. He will be attached to these people whom he is improperly associating with. He will be so attached to worldly affairs that he won't be able to realize the three characteristics of mental and physical phenomena, that is *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*—impermanence, suffering and no-soul, no-self or non-ego. If he is unable to realize these three basic facts of existence, he will be so strongly attached to worldly things that he won't want to reach the ocean.

Desire for Better Existence

If the log is taken away by a deva, it won't reach the ocean. This means that if you perform any wholesome or meritorious deeds such as giving or charity (*dhana*), observing moral precepts (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*) with a view to rebirth in the realm of Devas or Brahmas, then you will be taken away by them to their realm. If this happens you won't reach the ocean. You may achieve your aim of a better rebirth because of the good you have done. You will be reborn as a shining one, a deva but you won't be able to reach the ocean.

Deva means a deity, one who shines. If you become deva, you will be very attached to yourself because you are shiny and very beautiful. Then, you won't be able to reach the ocean.

Sensual Pleasure

If the log sinks into a whirlpool, it won't reach the ocean. This means, that if you are indulging in sensual pleasure, you won't reach the ocean. This is attachment. If you are attached to what you see, what you hear, what you smell, what you taste, what you touch, and what you think about, then you become caught in a very big whirlpool. You won't be able to reach the ocean. Because the doctrine of the Buddha is so very rational, logical and natural, I am sure that you agree with him on this point.

Attachment to any sensual pleasure leads you to repeated rebirths in the cycle of existence; it does not lead you to Nibbāna, the ocean.

Dishonesty

Then, the last one, is becoming rotten. If the log becomes rotten, it won't reach the ocean. That means that if you pretend to be a very virtuous person when you are not, you become rotten and will not reach the ocean. You won't reach Nibbāna.

The Way out of Suffering

The Omniscient Buddha said, "If you have none of these eight kinds of faults, you are certain to reach the ocean because you will be carried by the Middle Current of the river". The Middle Current is the Noble Eightfold Path. If you develop the Noble Eightfold Path, you are not kept on the near bank or the far bank, you are not submerged under the water, you won't land on a small island, you won't be taken away by human beings or devas, you won't be caught in a whirlpool, you won't become rotten. Then you are certain to reach the ocean of Nibbāna.

You must strive to develop the Noble Eightfold Path so that you do not have any of these eightfold faults. What should you

do to develop this Noble Eightfold Path? *sīla* (morality) is the foundation, the basic requirement. *Samādhi* (concentration) is built on the foundation of *sīla* and *paññā* (insight and enlightenment) and comes with the proper application of concentration. It is very easy to develop this Noble Eightfold Path which consists of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. Observe yourself or just observe your bodily and mental processes as they really are. That is all.

Watch any action or movement of your body and mind as it occurs without analysing it, without thinking about it. Just pay bare attention to what is happening to your body and mind as it really is. That is all. If you use any intellectual knowledge or preconceptions in this awareness of your bodily and mental processes, you go astray and your mind is not well concentrated, you will not be able to realize bodily and mental phenomena as they really are.

Purification of Mind

When you observe any activity of body and mind as they really occur, then gradually your mind becomes concentrated on any process that is observed. Then concentration becomes deeper and stronger. Your mind is purified from *nīvaraṇa* (hindrances) such as *kāmacchanda*, *vyāpāda*, *Thīna-middha*, *uddhaccā-kukkuccā* and *vicikicchā*.

Kāmacchanda means sensual desire. *Vyāpāda* means ill-will. *Thīna-middha* means restlessness and worry or remorse. *Vicikicchā* means sceptical doubt.

If you have one of these five hindrances in your mind, your mind is defiled. It is not pure. When your mind is not pure your insight is not penetrating. Only when the mind is purified of these five hindrances, can your insight knowledge become penetrating. When it is penetrating, you will be able to realize bodily and mental processes first in their specific characteristics and second in their general or common characteristics.

Realization at these two levels is called right understanding (*sammā-dīṭṭhi*) in the course of *vipassanā* meditation. When it has reached its climax you attain to Nibbāna, the cessation of suffering, through the first enlightenment (*sotāpattimagga*) which realizes the Four Noble Truths. You have reached the ocean.

However, it is only through deep concentration, when you are mindful of bodily and mental phenomena, that you are able to realize them with the three levels of Right Understanding.

Right Understanding

The first level of Right Understanding is the realization of the specific characteristics of materiality and mentality. The second is the realization of general or common characteristic of materiality and mentality. The third is the realization of the four Noble Truths—*dukkha*, the origin of *dukkha*, the cessation of *dukkha* and the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.

So, to purify the mind we need the Noble Eightfold Path. To realize mental and physical processes in their specific and general characteristics, we need the Noble Eightfold Path. To realize the Four Noble Truths we need the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the middle current of the river.

The Way to Freedom

On the night when the Omniscient Buddha was about to pass away, he was reclining on a bed prepared for him in Kusināra Park. In the first watch of the night Subhadda, a mendicant, came to him and said, “Venerable Gotama Buddha I followed various doctrines taught to me by various teachers. They all say that they know all and that they are Arahants. Is what they say true?”

The Omniscient Buddha left the questions unanswered and admonished Subhadda; “Subhadda, whether they know all or not does not matter; it is not concerned with your deliverance;

so I won't answer this question. My time is approaching. I will teach you what is important for your emancipation. Listen to me attentively”.

The Criterion

Then the Buddha said, “Subhadha, in any doctrine in which the Noble Eightfold Path is not found, there will not be any *samaṇa*”. Here *samaṇa* means one who is calm as he has destroyed all defilement. It means that if there is no Noble Eightfold Path in a doctrine, then there is no one who has destroyed all defilements by following it.

If there is Noble Eightfold Path in a doctrine, there will be someone who has destroyed the defilement by following it and got rid of suffering. So, if you follow any doctrine in which you do not have to develop the Noble Eightfold Path you are certain not to destroy the defilements and get rid of suffering.

Here, the Omniscient Buddha points out the criterion of the true Dhamma.

The Lord Buddha said; “Subhadda, only in my doctrine or in my *sāsana* is there the Noble Eightfold Path to develop. Therefore, only in my doctrine there are *samaṇas*”. This discourse expounded by the Omniscient Buddha to Subhadda fits in with “The Parable of the Log” because a person who does not develop the Noble Eightfold Path will not reach the ocean of Nibbāna. If he develops the Noble Eightfold Path, he is certain to reach the ocean of Nibbāna as he will not be kept on the far bank or the near bank, etc. The Omniscient Buddha taught us the way to develop this Noble Eightfold Path. That is the technique of Mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness Meditation

The Omniscient Buddha taught us the way of mindfulness when he expounded the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta). He teaches us to be mindful of bodily processes, sensation, consciousness and mind-objects as they really occur. So, the principle of mindfulness meditation is to observe, to be mindful of, to be aware of, whatever arises in our body and mind as it really occurs. Even unpleasant sensations of pain, aching, stiffening, itching and the like must be mindful of as they really are.

When you feel pain in your back or in your knee, you must observe it as it really is, You must not try to make it go away. You must not make it disappear because the pain helps you to attain Nibbāna. In other words pain is the key to the door of Nibbāna. So, if you feel a painful sensation you are very lucky. It will lead you to the cessation of suffering because it is one of the five aggregates to be thoroughly realized.

It is the aggregate of sensation, which is the truth of suffering and must be thoroughly understood. If we realize this painful sensation in its true nature—in its specific as well as in its general characteristics—we see it as just a natural process, arising and passing away from moment to moment. It does not last for even a second. And through the realization of this pain, or aggregate of sensation, you can attain to enlightenment by which you can destroy defilement and get rid of suffering. That is why I say that if you feel a painful sensation, you are very lucky. Why? Because you have a mental process together with the physical process to watch, to observe and to realize. That pain gives you a very good opportunity to realize its true nature and so lead you to the cessation of *dukkha*, Nibbāna.

Specific and General Characteristics

It is here needed to explain the specific characteristics of mentality and physically and their general or common characteristics.

Every mental or physical process has its own distinctive features that have nothing in common with any other mental or physical process. You know *lobha* (greed, craving, desire, lust and attachment are all encompassed). *lobha* has its own characteristic that does not belong to any other mental or physical process. If you have love or desire for that Rolls Royce you will become proud, possessive or covetous. You become attached to it. So the specific characteristic of *lobha* is clinging.

dosa (anger) is different. It has the characteristic of rudeness. Whereas *lobha* draws things towards it, *dosa* is aversion; it repels.

The Six Elements

Physical and mental processes, which constitute a so called person, are *pathavi-dhātu*, *āpo-dhātu*, *tejo-dhātu*, *vāyo-dhātu*, *ākāsa-dhātu*, and *viññāṇa-dhātu*. These six elements are those of earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness.

Pathavi-dhātu, the element of earth, has hardness and softness as its characteristic. This characteristic belongs only to the earth element and to no other; it is, therefore, the specific characteristic of the earth element, while *āpo-dhātu*, the water element, has fluidity and cohesion as its specific characteristic; heat and cold are the specific characteristic of *tejo-dhātu*, the fire element.

When a meditator has gained deep concentration of mind, his mind is purified. Then he begins to realize the specific characteristics of mental and physical processes. When you observe your abdomen rise and fall—a physical process—and your concentration becomes deep enough, you begin to realize the rising and falling movements very clearly in their true nature. Move-

ment or motion is the specific characteristic of the wind or air element. When you rightly understand the true nature of the rising movement or falling movement very clearly, you are not aware of the form of your body or abdomen. What you are realizing at that moment, is just the movement—outward movement and inward movement. Then you begin to realize the specific characteristic of the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*).

The general characteristics of material and mental phenomena are *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*—impermanence, suffering and no-soul, no-self nature. Every mental state, emotional state and physical process has these three characteristics in common. They are called common characteristics because they belong to every mental and emotional state and physical process.

After you have passed two stages of insight knowledge—the knowledge of differentiating between materiality and mentality and that of cause and effect—you come to realize these three general characteristics of psychophysical phenomena. This insight knowledge is known as knowledge of comprehension, which comprehends all these general characteristics of material and mental phenomena.

When a meditator's insight knowledge becomes mature on account of diligent practise with continuous and constant mindfulness and deeper concentration growing naturally, he is certain to pass through all the stages of insight with his personal experience of them. His bodily and mental processes—the bodily process that is noted and the mental process that notes it—cease to exist. Then, he attains to Nibbāna, the cessation of compounded things (*saṅkhāra*).

An End of Suffering

There, at that moment, he gets into the state of the cessation of all *saṅkhāra* (compounded things). He has abandoned attachment, the cause of suffering, because he has rightly and perfectly

understood *dukkha*. So, the Truth of Suffering has been perfectly understood. The cause of suffering is abandoned at that moment. The Truth of the way leading to the Cessation of suffering (The Noble Eightfold Path) has been developed. He has reached the cessation of compounded things (*saṅkhāra*). Here he has attained the third level of right understanding, that is, Enlightenment, by realizing the Four Noble Truths. Then he reaches the ocean because he has been carried away by the middle current, the Noble Eightfold Path. He is not kept on the near bank nor the far bank. He is not submerged under the water. He is not stranded on an island. So, he has reached the ocean.

The Lord Buddha, sitting under a tree on bank of the river Gaṅga, delivered this discourse. A cowherd named Nanda, who listened to the discourse, was so much inspired by it that he wanted to be carried away by middle current. So he approached the Lord Buddha and requested ordination as a bhikkhu: “Venerable sir, I am afraid of being caught on the near bank or the far bank or submerged into the river. I want to be carried away by the middle current and reach the ocean. Please ordain me a bhikkhu so that I can develop the Noble Eightfold Path, the middle current”.

The Omniscient Buddha said, “Boy, you are a cowherd. First you have a duty to drive your cows back home. You should entrust them to their owner. Unless you do that, I cannot ordain you”.

So the cowherd did as the Omniscient Buddha urged. Then he returned, to be ordained a bhikkhu. Bhikkhu Nanda went into the forest to a secluded place and developed the Noble Eightfold Path by being aware of all mental and physical phenomena that were arising from moment to moment. Because he was willing to be carried away by the middle current, he meditated diligently. In a very short time, he was carried away by the middle current and reached the ocean of Nibbāna. He reached the ocean of Nibbāna because he had none of those eightfold faults and was

carried away by the middle current of the Noble Eightfold Path that runs towards the ocean, Nibbāna.

The Lord Buddha repeatedly said: “Be mindful of what is happening at this moment as it really is, or be aware of whatever arises in your body and mind as it really is. Then all of you will be carried away by the middle current and attain Nibbāna, the ocean”.

Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu!

Questions and Answers

The Venerable Sayadaw Ashin Janakabhivamsa conducted four *vipassanā* meditation retreats in Australia in 1990. One of them was conducted at a camp near Canberra City.

It is the Sayadaw's procedure in every retreat that a questions and answers session is arranged on the last day of retreats.

So these are the Sayadaw's answers to the questions raised by his meditators at the Canberra retreat in January 1990.

Motivating Force

QUESTION: Venerable Sayadaw, today at lunch while chewing a mouthful of food I suddenly lost the desire to eat and the chewing motion stopped. With no desire, there was no movement. This I also noticed with other movements. It seems that the desire is the primary motivating force behind any kind of movement, action, deed, behaviour, etc. Could this be true? From what I understand from your teaching, desire is a defilement. So what is the motivating force?

SAYADAW: Let us take the last point first: "From what I understand from your teaching desire is a defilement". Yes, desire is a defilement. Because I teach you so? Is that right? No? Then why is desire called a de-

filement? When desire arises the mind gets defiled, the mind is defiled by desire. It is, therefore, called a defilement. The mind becomes impure because of desire; so desire is called a defilement. It is not because I teach you so.

“While chewing a mouthful of food I suddenly lost the desire to eat”. Good! Very good! You see you are mindful of whatever arises in your mind and body in order that you may remove desire, or attachment, because desire, or attachment, is the cause of suffering. You know that. Say, you feel a desire for food at about ten o’clock but you have to take it at eleven. Then you feel hungry. Because of that desire you feel suffering. What kind of suffering? The suffering of hunger. Hunger, the desire for food, makes you suffer.

“When the desire to eat stopped the chewing motion stopped”. The first point is that you suddenly lost the desire for food. That is the purpose of mindfulness. What we are doing while we are taking a meal is practising mindfulness. The purpose is to remove desire for, attachment to, food. Now she (the questioner) achieved this. Why did the desire stop? Because she was mindful of chewing, she was constantly making a mental note: “chewing ... chewing ... chewing”.

When she is not making such mental notes and is not watching the act of chewing, any kind of tastes, sweet, sour, salt or any other, will be manifested on her tongue. If she likes sweetness she will be attached to that taste, the sweet. Here attachment arises. Then she will feel a greater desire for food because of the sweetness. Thus more defilements arise. Why? Because she does not observe it continuously. When continuous and powerful mindful-

ness overpowers the chewing movement as well as the taste, there is no taste at all. As she did not feel the taste of the food any more, she lost the desire for it. She has destroyed her attachment to it. But she has no aversion to it and continues to eat mindfully. That's her success. That is the purpose of mindfulness while we are taking food.

I will explain to you more about the purpose of mindfulness in the act of taking food, so that you can clarify your understanding of meditation and be more mindful of your actions during the act of taking food tomorrow at breakfast. She said that the chewing motion stopped because the desire stopped. If there is a desire there will be a chewing motion. She thinks that to act, to commit any action or deed, or any behaviour, the motivating force is desire. It is desire that causes any action, any deed, any behaviour to arise, so perhaps it is desire that is the cause of all action, deed or behaviour. Then she also said: "from what I understand from your teaching, desire is a defilement". Every action, deed or behaviour is caused by defilement. What she said amounts to saying that, but she could not judge if that was correct. So she asks: "What is the motivating force?" How shall I answer this question? It is a very difficult one. Actually the desire is not the immediate cause of the action. If you desire to run away from this retreat you will have the intention to walk away. The desire is the cause, the intention is the effect. First you intend to walk, then you walk away. Therefore the intention is the immediate cause of the action. But it is the effect of desire.

Desire is not the immediate cause of an action. The immediate cause of an action is the intention. From the point of view of Buddhist philosophy intention

is known as *chanda* in Pāli. *Chanda* is usually translated as will or wish. When you feel the desire to take food, you acquire the wish to stretch out your arm, the wish to touch the food, the wish to grasp it, the wish to bring it to your mouth. That wish is called intention. We call it *chanda*. *Chanda* is one mental state, desire is another. Desire is called *taṇhā*, for example *taṇhā* for food. Because of *taṇhā*, you have the *chanda* to do, to act, to go, to run, to see and so on. The arising of *chanda* is dependent on desire.

But sometimes desire is not the cause of the arising of *chanda*. Suppose you want to give something to a poor man, you want to give him a piece of cloth. Because you want to give, there arises the *chanda* to give. The *chanda* to give is the will or the intention to commit the act of giving. In that case the arising of *chanda* is dependent on your good *cetanā*. Or we could call it your good volition—a motive. The good motive or volition is the cause of *chanda*, intention or will. It is the cause of your giving the cloth to the poor man. Here there is no room for desire to arise. In some cases desire may be, let us say, the remote cause of the action, not the immediate cause. But in some cases it does not arise as a cause. Here, let us say that you are a Buddhist. When you bow down before a statue of the Buddha you will have in mind the virtuous qualities of the Enlightened One, so you think of the Buddha as one worthy of salutation or bowing down. With that good volition you bow down. So between the volition and the act of bowing down there is a mental process—that is intention or will, *chanda*. So *chanda* or intention or will is the immediate cause of the action or deed or behaviour. In this case there is no room for desire.

In short, if you do wholesome deeds, good volition is the cause of the *chanda* or intention and *chanda* or intention is the cause of the action or deed. But when you do unwholesome deeds, evil deeds, the cause is desire. Desire causes the intention or *chanda* to arise and then intention causes the act, the evil deed. So, in the case of evil deeds, desire is the cause of action.

Desire and Dissatisfaction

QUESTION: If the state of desire is the cause of dissatisfaction with the existing reality and should be avoided, how can we go on acting in our lives? If there is no desire to act in life, are we really living?

SAYADAW: Yes, the state of desire is the cause of dissatisfaction. The Buddha spoke of this in his first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, where he classified all kinds of *dukkha*, suffering. He said, “Birth is *dukkha*, decay is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, worry is *dukkha*, lamentation is *dukkha*, grief is *dukkha*, despair is *dukkha*”. After that he continued, “What one wants to get but does not get is *dukkha*”. Do you follow? When one does not get what one desires, it is *dukkha*. To put it in another way, what one desires but does not get is *dukkha*. Here desire is the cause, dissatisfaction is the effect. So the state of desire is the cause of the dissatisfaction. That is why the Buddha said desire or attachment is the cause of suffering. Should we avoid it? Yes. Desire should be avoided, it must be eliminated. It is the cause of suffering.

The second part of this question is similar to the first question. “If there is no desire to act in life, are we

really alive?" I've already explained to you about action that is not the result of desire but of intention or will, so this part of the question has been answered.

Rebirth, Kamma and Anattā

(Sayadaw responded to the following four questions in one detailed answer.)

QUESTION: Venerable Sayadaw, please tell us what the Buddha taught about how the experiences and *kamma* of a being are transferred from incarnation to incarnation. Also I would like to know the other way the Buddha told one of his disciples to stay awake after he had been walking through the forest for seven days.

QUESTION: Please explain: What is rebirth? When the mind arises and passes away, what is rebirth?

QUESTION: If there is no self, I, being, person or soul, how does reincarnation and *kamma* from past lives work?

QUESTION: Venerable Sayadaw, please talk about the principle of co-dependent origination if there is no-soul, how can one talk of a person's previous life. If there is no soul, what is there that connects you to a previous life?

SAYADAW: All these questions are in fact just one question: if there is *anatta*, if there is no-soul or permanent life force, how can one talk of a person, a previous life? What is it that can connect you to a previous life? This question is universally asked. Almost every one who does not have enough knowledge of Buddhism, especially with regard to rebirth, and who also has not had much experience in the practise of meditation, asks this question. One who has experienced

the arising and the passing away of the mental and physical processes which are observed during meditation, will be able to understand. He doesn't need to think about it.

All these questions are based on the idea of a self or soul which is taken to be everlasting and indestructible. Many of those who do not study Buddhism, almost all of them, have the idea that to be reborn again and again there must be something which transmigrates from one existence to another, and that thing must be everlasting. Unless it is everlasting it cannot transmigrate to another existence. In other words, there must be an everlasting soul to reincarnate in another body; unless there is an everlasting entity there won't be another existence because there will be no connection between the first existence and the second one. That is what many people think.

First of all we should consider the mental process and the physical process. How do they work? Before this question and answer session you may have been worrying about leaving this retreat tomorrow; you may have been worrying about your daily life and worrying about worldly affairs. And some of you may have been experiencing pleasure now. Do you have that worry now? No. Do you have that pleasure now? No. Where did it all go? Did someone take away that pleasure, happiness or worry? Who took it away? Nobody. Then, where did that happiness go? Considering that you don't have that pleasure or worry, we can say that the pleasure or worry has stopped, it has disappeared. But after that pleasure or worry has stopped you have another mind. Let us say another mind after the disappearance of the pleasure or worry. You have been listening to

the Dhamma and to the questions and answers. Unless you had a mind or a consciousness you could not have listened to the Dhamma.

If you do not have any mind or consciousness, what would you be? You would be unconscious, perhaps even dying. After the disappearance of happiness, pleasure or worry, if you don't have any mental state, you will only have the physical process. And you would be lying down without moving. But now you are not lying down, you are sitting and listening to the questions and answers. Therefore it is evident that you have a mind or consciousness after that happiness, worry or pleasure has disappeared. You have a mind—is that mind the same one that experienced the pleasure or happiness? No. If it were the same happiness or pleasure you would always be happy. Now you may be happy, not because you are getting back to your family, but because you are listening to the questions and answers. So this mental state is different from that mental state of pleasure, happiness or worry that you felt previously.

We know that when one of the mental states has disappeared another mental state arises. Why? Because the other mental state has disappeared; that's the reason. Say that we have a manager or administrator in this place. If that manager dies, there won't be a manager here any more. Is that true? No. Then what will happen? Another manager will come. Why? Because the other one has disappeared. So the disappearing or passing away of the previous one is the cause, the appearing of the following one is the effect. It is a natural law, the law of cause and effect. You cannot create it, the Buddha cannot create it, you cannot change it; it is a natural law, the law of cause and effect or depen-

dent origination. The following mental state arises because the previous one has disappeared or passed away. This is the law of cause and effect: it cannot be changed, it cannot be destroyed.

Suppose someone has died. When he is dead does he have any mental state? No. And any physical process? Yes. Where does that mind go when he dies? Please consider the law of cause and effect. When a person dies the last consciousness of this existence has disappeared. Every moment the mind appears and disappears, arises and passes away. When you note: “intention, lifting; intention, pushing; intention, dropping” during walking meditation what you know is that with one intention, one movement arises. Then another intention and another movement arise. In that way within a millionth of a second over one hundred thousand mental states arise. If your concentration is good enough you will be able to realize that any consciousness or mental state does not last even a millionth of a second. It arises and instantly passes away. If you note any movement, the mind that notes it instantly passes away. When you note the following movement it is not the same mind that noted the previous movement. A different mind notes the following movement. You will be able to realize this when your concentration is good enough.

It is very clear that when a person is dead his mental state or consciousness has disappeared. Which mental state has disappeared? The last consciousness of the present life has disappeared. What happens when the previous one has disappeared? Another one has to arise according to the law of cause and effect. So, after the last consciousness of an existence has disappeared, another consciousness

arises. That is the law of cause and effect. The passing away of the previous one is the cause, the arising of the following one is the effect. After the last consciousness of an existence has disappeared there arises another consciousness. Can that new consciousness be said to be the previous existence? No, that consciousness is another existence. This, then, is rebirth. Very easy to understand.

But you need to practise meditation so that you can realize the arising and passing away of mental states very swiftly one after another. Then you can understand: “Ah, this is so!” Then do you need any everlasting entity to transmigrate to another existence? You don’t. The whole existing world is dependent on the law of cause and effect. The Buddha very clearly explained this law of cause and effect in his doctrine. Do I need to explain further? No. Because you are very intelligent and bright, you have understood. There is no-soul or self which is an everlasting entity to transmigrate to another existence, to reincarnate in another body.

We have answered one question. Then there is another one, about *kamma*. “How does *kamma* produce results in another existence if there is nothing to transmigrate?” You have not met your friend for about ten years. By chance you meet him on the road. You’re very happy, so you say that you are very happy to meet him. What is that? That is loving-kindness (*mettā*). He feels: “My friend loves me”. He feels that. Then you go your way, he goes his way. But when he lies down to sleep at night he happens to think about you who love him. What does he feel? Is he happy or unhappy? He is happy. Why does that happiness arise? Is there an everlasting connection between that happiness and the loving-kindness he

felt earlier that evening? No. But though there is no connection between the two mental states, the mental state of loving-kindness has produced the mental state of happiness. So do we need any connection for any cause to produce any effect? No.

When a person commits an action or deed, he is moved to do it by the force of volition or motive. The consciousness, with which that volition or motive arises, and the event itself, pass away, but the force of the volition doesn't disappear and remains in the process of the following consciousnesses.

When the time and circumstances are ripe for producing an effect, an effect is produced. There will be no perceptible connection between the cause and the effect. In the case of reincarnation or rebirth we don't have anything which is everlasting, transmigrating from one existence to another, but the two existences are related in a certain way. Thus good *kamma* or wholesome actions, or bad *kamma* or unwholesome actions are manifested; wholesome actions guide the current of consciousness to arise in a good existence. Unwholesome actions guide the consciousness to arise in a bad existence. And so we go on.

Then we come to another question about *anatta*, "no-soul". *anatta* means there is no-soul that is an everlasting entity apart from physical and mental processes. That is what the Buddha said. In 1979 when I was conducting a meditation retreat in a hotel in Switzerland with the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, one of the meditators, a young German, about twenty-four years old, came to me for an interview. He said: "I cannot meditate. I feel despair". I asked him why. The technique is very easy, very simple to practise, no complications. Just

observe things as they are, that's all. He said: "Because of your Dhamma talk". "Very well, what do you find in my Dhamma talk?" He said: "No, it is not in your Dhamma talk, it is in Mahasi Sayadaw's Dhamma talk: '*anatta*, no-soul, no-soul'. That talk about no-soul hit me in the chest. I couldn't stand it". Then I said: "Did you find the words no-soul, no-self in my Dhamma talk?" "No, I didn't find any of that in your Dhamma talk". "Well, the Venerable Sayadaw does not teach you meditation. What he is doing is just giving a discourse on Dhamma. I teach you meditation and I don't say anything about no-soul. You should just practise". Then he was satisfied: "I'll do", he said and continued the practise. The next morning he came again for the interview. He seemed to be very unhappy. I asked: "What did you experience?" He said he could not practise—"Why?"—"Last night Mahasi Sayadaw talked about no-self. I couldn't stand it. I couldn't practise meditation". Well, that could not be helped. Mahasi Sayadaw had to deliver a discourse every night because he had been invited by the meditators to teach meditation; and to do that he had to deliver the teachings of the Buddha to the meditators. In the teachings of the Buddha, *anatta*, no-self, is repeatedly mentioned. The Venerable Sayadaw could not avoid talking about it. But I could avoid it because I delivered the Dhamma talk like this, impromptu. I did not talk about *anatta*, no-self so that he would not get upset. But he went away.

When a Buddhist meditation retreat is conducted, those who cannot stand the *anatta* doctrine go away because the Buddhist doctrine is based on the idea of no-soul, no-self. In the Buddha's own experience and the experience of all the other Arahants, they

did not find anything that was everlasting. What they discovered was that every mental and physical phenomenon is impermanent. It arises and passes away at each instant. If you continue meditation for a month or two you are also sure to realize the impermanence of every mental or physical process. Then you will not find anything that is everlasting or permanent. Then you will judge that there is no soul or self that is taken to be everlasting, and that there is ever changing phenomena of mentality and physicality. Therefore there is no everlasting entity such as a soul or self to transmigrate to a next existence. Life is just the processes of mental and physical phenomena. Passing away of the phenomena in the previous existence gives rise to another phenomenon in the present existence. The cause in the previous life produces its effect in the present life. The only connection between the two existences is cause and effect. There is no connection of any everlasting entity such as soul, self or any other thing.

Monk's Life

QUESTION: Is a monk's life in the monastery composed of constant practise of *vipassanā*?

SAYADAW: If a monk's life in a monastery were devoted only to the constant practise of *vipassanā* I would not be here. I would have to be practising *vipassanā* constantly. In the Buddha's *sāsana* there are two things for a monk to do: firstly, learning the scriptures and teaching the disciples; Secondly, practising the Dhamma. We have to do both. If a monk's life were devoted solely to practising *vipassanā* he would reach the fourth stage of enlightenment, be-

come an Arahant and then pass away. After the monk had passed away, nothing would remain of the doctrines of Buddhism as there would be no monk left to teach those doctrines to any disciple. So what should we do? Practise the Dhamma while learning the scriptures and teaching disciples—hence my presence here teaching this course to Australians. If I were just to live in my monastery and practise the Dhamma, I could not have come here and would never have gained the opportunity of teaching you the Dhamma. And you would not have had the chance to practise *vipassanā* by being mindful of all daily activities as you now do. So there are two things: to study and teach the Dhamma, and to practise the Dhamma.

Teach Both

QUESTION: What can be done about the apparent division between groups purporting to teach the *vipassanā* and *samatha* forms of meditation?

SAYADAW: The purpose of *samatha* meditation is to attain higher concentration of the mind. For this the *samatha* meditator has to take a single subject as the object of his meditation. When the mind wanders away he brings it back to the object. In this way, after practising for one, two or three months, he can attain the higher concentration of the mind. The single subject he takes as the object of meditation can be respiration or some other device. Whenever the mind goes out he must not follow it or observe it. He must bring the mind back to the object and focus it on the object.

In the technique of the *vipassanā* meditation, which you have practised for about ten days, how many objects do you have? One or two? In fact you have many different objects of mental and physical phenomena. Then, what is the purpose of *vipassanā* meditation? It is to realize the mental and physical processes as they really are with some degree of concentration. That is the difference. Having observed these processes you gain the realization of both their general and specific characteristics. This means that when the mind wanders there is no need to bring it back. Why? Because the mind itself has to be observed and realized. It has to be observed as it is. The purpose of the observation is to realize it in its true nature. The aim is not to make it go away or disappear. Painful sensations too have to be observed, not with the aim of making them disappear, but rather to realize their true nature. What is that true nature? It is general and specific characteristics. This is the difference between the two types of meditation. You can judge it for yourself. The two groups should practise both *samatha* and *vipassanā* and teach both. Then meditators will gain more benefit out of the two types of meditation.

How we can Help Others

QUESTION: How can one reconcile the path of service to others through social work and the path of the full-time meditator? In other words which comes first, one's own personal salvation or the salvation of others?

SAYADAW: As a full-time meditator you are not in a position to do service to others as you are always en-

gaged in meditation. But if you constantly render service to others you cannot meditate. So which should come first, one's own personal salvation or the salvation of others? It depends on you, but I can give you an answer from the Buddha's point of view. Two friends went off on a journey on foot and by chance they entered a quagmire, they got stuck in the mud up to their waists. One friend decided to save the other, and to do this he had to struggle to free himself from the mud.

Having done that he could look for a wooden plank or plant to help his friend out of the mud. So which came first? Obviously his own salvation, and this accords with the Buddha's doctrine. The Omniscient Buddha said that once one is free from all manner of suffering then can one try to free others from similar suffering.

Nibbāna

QUESTION: What is Nibbāna?

SAYADAW: The word Nibbāna is made up literally of “*ni*”—“absence”, and “*vana*”—“attachment”, that makes “absence of attachment”. When you have attachment you experience *dukkha*, suffering. When you have no attachment you do not experience suffering at all. Absence of attachment causes the *dukkha* to cease. From where does *dukkha* arise? From the sky or the bushes? Only from attachment. When the attachment has been destroyed there ceases to arise any suffering linked to mental state or physical process. That is the state of an Arahant.

In Buddhism we have two stages of Nibbāna. The first of these is to be attained in this existence. It

is attained by an Arahant when he has completely eliminated all attachment through the fourth enlightenment. Since then he has no longer experienced any mental suffering. However, his psychophysical processes continue to arise and pass away. So there may be some physical suffering at times, but he does not take it to be unpleasant; he sees it as just a process or phenomenon. When he has destroyed all attachment to living beings or inanimate objects he has no desire to be reborn. When he dies, all mental and physical phenomena cease to exist. They do not continue since all motivation, desire and attachment have been destroyed. That state of Nibbāna is the second stage.

What you should remember is the first stage, which can be attained through the destruction or overcoming of attachment. It is desirable, and you should have *chanda* to attain it.

Sexual Misconduct

QUESTION: Please define sexual misconduct.

SAYADAW: If a husband or wife commits adultery, that is sexual misconduct or illegal sexual conduct. However, the precept to avoid it does not cover all situations in the East and West. For instance in Burmese villages there are no offices where marriages are registered. When they marry and society recognizes that, then they are considered husband and wife. If either the husband or wife commits adultery, that is sexual misconduct though they are not legally married.

In this regard there is an interesting story in the scriptures. I shall tell you. It is somewhat long. The

story took place before the time of the Lord Buddha. There was a very pretty and very virtuous prostitute who observed all the five precepts. A man came to her and gave her a thousand coins to spend a night with her, saying: "Madam, since I am very busy today I cannot come. Maybe I'll come to you tomorrow or the day after". The prostitute agreed and the man went away. He did not come the following day or the day after. In a month he did not come. Although many men came to woman and offered her money, she rejected them. She would accept money from no one until the first man had come to her because she had first taken his thousand coins. Had she accepted money from others for her favours she knew she would have been guilty of violating the third precept, which prohibits sexual misconduct. After three years had passed and the man still had not come, her money was exhausted and she was on the point of dying from starvation.

So she went to the court and asked for the judgement of the judge. He considered all the facts of the case and passed his judgement: "You have waited three years for this man and he has not come. You have, therefore, discharged your duty, it is now finished, and you may henceforth accept the offerings of others". As she was leaving the court another man came up to her and offered her a thousand coins. However, she felt a sense of guilt about accepting the offer even though the judge had ruled in favour of her doing so. At that moment the man who gave her a thousand coins three years previously, suddenly appeared and she refused the offer of the second man. It was only when the first man absolved her from her obligation, saying he had no connection with her any more, that she accepted

the offerings of others. In this way in ancient times even such a lady observed the third precept. That is the moral of the story.

In short a man must refrain from making a sex with a woman under the guardianship of a person or an organization. A woman must refrain from having a sex with a man who is recognized as a husband of someone else by society.

Condition of Sleep

QUESTION: How does one go to sleep or rest mindfully? Does watching the rising and falling of the abdomen condition the mind to fall asleep?

SAYADAW: Yes, when you are about to sleep you should observe the rising and falling superficially and lightly. That means you concentrate your mind to a certain degree without thinking about anything that makes you worry or feel sorry, simply by the power of holding mindfulness to the rising and falling. Because that form of concentration is not deep or attentive, it gradually slips into sloth and torpor and you fall asleep: a very good medicine for insomnia! But be careful not to observe attentively.

Teacher not Needed

QUESTION: At what stage of the meditation process does a person no longer need a teacher?

SAYADAW: When a meditator has reached the eleventh stage of meditational experience he needs no teacher. He can proceed by himself. This is the eleventh stage of insight knowledge, just below the twelfth and final stage.

Enlightenment

QUESTION: Is the experience of enlightenment permanent? Does it arise and then pass away? Is it sustained in life by *samādhi*?

SAYADAW: Because it is a mental state the experience of enlightenment is not permanent. It arises and passes away, but it can be sustained by *samādhi*. When we attain any stage of enlightenment the consciousness of enlightenment is only a moment long. It arises and then passes away. But there remains the result of that enlightenment and that is called the fruition knowledge, attainable by means of *samādhi*. When your *samādhi* is good enough you can enter the fruition state (*phalasangāpatti*) repeatedly and also for very long periods. So you need a good *samādhi* even though you have attained enlightenment.

Impermanence

QUESTION: The concept of impermanence is stressed in Buddhism. Is there also a concept of permanence? If so, what is there that is permanent? Since cause and effect are basic to the Buddhist teachings, what is the cause of permanence and what is its effect?

SAYADAW: All these questions can be answered in a single sentence: there is no concept of permanence in the Buddhist doctrine. Everything is impermanent.

Theoretical Knowledge

QUESTION: I am aware that theoretical knowledge gained from books can be a hindrance to meditational

progress. What part, if any, should reading play in the continuation of practise at home?

SAYADAW: Yes, theoretical knowledge gained from books is sometimes a hindrance to progress in your meditation. This is because we cannot help comparing our own experiences with the knowledge gained from books. It leads us to think about analysis and criticism, and we then lose mindfulness of the experience. If you know that this thinking, analysing, criticizing, logical reasoning and philosophizing are hindrances to your concentration as well as your gaining of insight knowledge, then you must observe them, note them, watch them—and, having done so, the hindrances will go away. Because you understand the nature of these hindrances, you make up your mind not to think about any experience or technique. With that determination, you practise *vipassanā* meditation; though these things come up in your mind you can easily overcome them simply by noting them. The danger lies in not understanding that these are hindrances to your progress. If you do not realize that you must watch it when it comes up in your mind, then it becomes a hindrance. If you understand that it is a hindrance and refuse to accept it, whenever it arises you will observe it and then it will disappear. So there is no problem in continuing your *vipassanā* meditation at home. You must continue to practise at home as much as possible. The authentic knowledge you gained from books is inspiring but you should not apply it to the practise during your meditation. When you are not engaged in meditative practise you should consult your meditative experience with your book knowledge.

Aggregates

QUESTION: Of the five aggregates, what are the specific characteristics of perception, *saññā*, and of mental formation, *saṅkhāra*? Volition seems to operate separately from thought. Thought can lead volition, and volition can lead the thought. Do volition and thought belong to the same group? Or, put a different way, how do *saññā* and *saṅkhāra* interrelate, or how are they distinguished?

SAYADAW: There are five aggregates in every living being. The first is the aggregate of physical process, *rūpa*. The second is the aggregate of feeling or sensation, *vedāna*. The third is the aggregate of perception, *saññā*. The fourth is the aggregate of mental formations, *saṅkhāra*. The fifth is the aggregate of consciousness, *viññāṇa*. Of these five aggregates, the specific characteristic of perception is recognizing the object; that of mental formation is of a different nature. Because the aggregate of mental formation is comprised of fifty mental states, each of these has its own specific characteristics. It would be very difficult to explain all these to you in just an hour.

As to your point that volition seems to operate separately from thought, in fact volition is not separate from thought: it is included in thought. Thought can lead to volition and volition can lead to thought. “Do both volition and thought belong to a single group?” Yes, they belong to the aggregate of mental formation, *saṅkhāra*.

“How do *saññā* and *saṅkhāra* interrelate? How are they distinguished?” When you recognize something, say a beautiful flower there arises an attachment to get the flower, that attachment is *saṅkhāra*.

Recognizing the flower is *saññā*. In this way *saññā* and *sañkhāra* are interrelated.

True Path

QUESTION: There have been a number of claims for omniscience. Some individual pronouncements about the nature of reality have subsequently been shown to be false. For example, Christian and Buddhist cosmology or Christian theory of creation. Why should I or anybody else follow a path that generates much pain though it promises a peaceful conclusion? It seems that different practises lead to different experiences of reality. How can one distinguish the real from the false?

SAYADAW: It is natural that pronouncements on the nature of reality will subsequently be shown to be false or seriously flawed if the path is not the right one. As to Buddhist and Christian cosmology and the Christian theory of creation, Buddhism does not include ideas on creation; only the Christians have a theory of creation. Nor did the Buddha give any discourse on cosmology. What he stressed was the Four Noble Truths, that was all.

“Why should I follow a path that generates much pain though it promises a peaceful conclusion?” I hardly need to answer it, because, although the path gives much pain in the beginning, there will be peace at the conclusion. Let us suppose that you are surrounded here by a bush fire. You know that if you stay here the fire will overwhelm you and you will die. What must you do? You must run through the fire. While you are in the fire you may get burnt but you will not die. You have to suffer this little

burning by running through the fire so that you will not be overwhelmed by the big fire and die. Having come out of the fire, you will be safe and sound.

Another example: you have studied from primary school until university. During that time you went through a lot of suffering, learning, memorizing, calculating and so on. Why did you do that? You wanted to get a degree and after that you wanted to get a well paid job. Anticipating those benefits you suffered fourteen years at school. You suffered very happily because you were anticipating a good job. It is very clear.

Now the matter of different practises leading to different experiences of reality, each claiming to be valid. If there is such a thing as the absolute truth, how can we distinguish the real from the false? If you have followed any system or doctrine fully, not just a quarter or a half, but practised it in full, and if you find peace and happiness at the end of the practise, then that is reality. But if you practise only half of a doctrine or system, you cannot judge whether it is the right practise. You will not enjoy any benefit that expresses reality. You have to undertake the full practise, the whole course. Then you will benefit from it. Then, by considering the benefit, you can judge whether it is real or false. If the benefit is happiness and peace, it is real. If the benefit is suffering, it is false. But before you finish the practise you cannot judge. You must bring the practise to an end.

