# LANGUAGE AND TRUTH IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

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***"…These (selves) are then worldly names, worldly languages, worldly speech, and worldly concepts which the Thus-come (Tathāgata) says but does not cling to."***[1]

The above saying of the Buddha reveals that he is well aware of the illusion of language. This has inspired the researcher to study his view of language in order to attempt to answer questions such as "What is the status of language in Buddhism?," "What is the Buddhist theory of meaning?," and "What is the actual relationship between language and Truth[2]?"

The relationship between language and Truth is the core teaching of the Abhidhamma. The Abhidhamma concentrates on the detailed explanation of ultimate truth (paramatthasacca), and the distinction between the ultimate and concepts (paññatti), in short, between Truth and language. The Suttanta, on the other hand, emphasizes on ways to extinguish suffering (dukkha), and says almost nothing on the ultimate.

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[1] Department of Religious Affairs, department. *TheTripiṭaka. A Royal Thai Version.* Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs Press. 3rd ed., 1978. Vol. 9, number 312, p. 320. From now on references to the volume, number, and page of The *Tripiṭaka*, will be written shortly for the sake of convenience as, for example, "*The Tripiṭaka*, 9/312/320".

[2] Using the capital "T", the researcher wants to differentiate "Truth" which possesses the ontological ultimacy from "truth" in ordinary usage. Also, the researcher wishes to distinguish Truth from reality.

This research is mainly guided by the teachings in the Abhidhamma. In analyzing the Buddhist theory of meaning, the researcher focuses only on particular kinds of words, namely, nouns and pronouns, because they usually lead us into misunderstanding and clinging to the idea of a self (attā).

This research is divided into three parts: the first part examines the ultimate truth, which is fourfold: consciousness (citta), mental factors (cetasika), matter (rūpa), and nibbāna. It also attempts to explain the characteristics, functions, and relations of these four. Nibbāna has been found to have two meanings: one as the state of mind which is purified from defilements (kilesas), and the other as Truth which is ultimately real. The researcher tries to unify these two meanings, and proposes a new interpretation of nibbāna as ultimate truth – as the real nature of the relationship between consciousness, mental factors, and matter, which form the basic structure of human experience. Moreover, in order to prevent the problem of dualism which can arise from the classification of ultimate truth into the conditioned (saṅkhata) and the unconditioned (asaṅkhata), a revised meaning of the ultimate which is applicable to both the conditioned and the unconditioned is suggested. It contends that Truth in Buddhism is Truth about human experience which centers on men. It is not an absolute truth which can be separated from, or entirely independent of, men, hence the distinction from 'reality' as used in the Western traditions.

The second part investigates "language," which is conventional truth (sammuttisacca). The researcher uses concepts from the philosophy of language in the analysis, and proposes a theory of meaning for Theravada Buddhism. Language is analyzed on two levels: worldly and ultimate. It finds that the true meaning of language on both levels is the same, that is, only and always concepts. The only difference is that concept which is the meaning of the ultimate is much more complex than that of the worldly one, and therefore it oftentimes becomes a trap for an ignorant person.

The final part focuses on the relationship between language and Truth, which, the researcher believes, clearly illustrates the Buddhist "Middle Way" of thinking about language, knowledge and Truth.

## I

In India at the time of the Buddha, there were two different major schools of thought concerning reality: Eternalism (Sassatadiṭṭhi) and Annihilationism (Ucchedadiṭṭhi). Eternalism believes that the world and men have as their substances selves or souls which are real, constant, permanent, and changeless. A man's self will always be reborn after death, and can never be destroyed. Annihilationism also believes that there is a real self, but that it only exists in this world, not after death. When a man dies, his self is dissolved along with his body. The Buddha rejects both views because they admit the existence of a real self, according to his statement about the three kinds of teachers:

> *"... The kind of teacher who accepts that there is a real and persistent self both in the present and future lives is called an Eternalist. The kind of teacher who accepts that there is a real and persistent self in the present life but not in the future is called an Annihilationist. The teacher who does not accept that there is a self either in this life nor the life to come is called a Fully-Enlightened One (Sammāsambuddha)."*[3]

This statement shows that the rejection of a real self is the key difference between the Buddha and the other two teachers. The Buddha calls himself "sammāsambuddha", meaning the kind of teacher who declares that there is no real and persistent self, both in this world and in other worlds to come.

Though the Buddha does not accept the existence of a real self, he accepts the existence of something real in the ultimate sense. What then is ultimately real in Theravada Buddhism? The Buddha calls it "***the ultimate***" (paramatthadhamma). It is fourfold: consciousness, mental factors, matter, and nibbāna. When discussing the ultimate in Buddhism, most people would think of the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca 4) which are suffering (dukkha), the origin of suffering (samudaya), the extinguishment of suffering (nirodha), and the path leading to the extinguishment (magga). However, this is not

[3] *The Tripiṭaka*, 37/188/99.

the case. The Four Noble Truths are not the said "ultimate," although the cessation of suffering, which is one of these four, shares the meaning with nibbāna.

The Four Noble Truths which the Buddha discovered in his enlightenment represents very well the special characteristic of knowledge in Eastern philosophy. For Eastern thinkers, knowledge is not only a product of human curiosity, but also something to live by. Real knowledge is the highest good and the ideal life to be attained. The Four Noble Truths therefore are the answer to both questions of knowledge and of the good life. In philosophical terms, the Four Noble Truths answer to both epistemological and ethical questions, while the ultimate answers to the metaphysical or ontological questions. The Four Noble Truths emphasize practice, the conduct of life for reaching nibbāna. The ultimate, on the other hand, is purely theoretical and academic, emphasizing the knowledge of the nature of Truth. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the knowledge of the highest good presumes the knowledge of the ultimate.

The Buddha searches for the way to remove universal human suffering, both mental and physical, caused by birth, aging, illness, and death. "*Suffering*" then is a crucial concept in understanding the Buddhist teaching of salvation. Truth in Buddhism must be understood within the context of human suffering, not as an absolute truth separated from men and their sufferings. Whether there is such truth or not, the Buddha does not give an answer because it is not relevant to the extinguishment of suffering. Human experience comes through five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, bodily contact) and mind. To understand suffering, we have to understand both our external and internal experiences. The Buddha made a very thorough and profound analysis of human experience, such as what it consists of, what is necessary to all experiences, and what is not necessary but only man's formation through ignorance. He analyzes human experience into elements until he reaches the final one which gives him the answer in the form of a true knowledge concerning suffering – that of the birth and decease of suffering. The word "final" here does not refer to the element which is not analyzable, for it may be analyzed further. Instead, it refers to the last element with respect to the problem of human suffering. The final is the fourfold ultimate. Therefore the ultimate is Truth about human

experience which has man as center. It is not the absolute truth in itself and by itself, which is the usual meaning of "reality" in Western philosophy.

In the academic circle of Thai Buddhists, the word "paramatthadhamma" is mostly used to refer to Truth in the highest sense. But if the distinction between ultimate truth and conventional truth is to be emphasized, the words "paramatthasacca" and "sammutisacca", or "paramattha" and "paññatti" – shortened forms of the words "paramatthadhamma" and "paññattidhamma" – are being used.

The distinction between ultimate and conventional truths is supremely important. Conventional truth misleads us into believing in the real existence of self, and clinging to the delusion of what does not really exist. It needs to be remarked that the Buddha does not himself explicitly divide truth into the ultimate and the conventional. The words "paramatthasacca" or "sacchikatthaparamattha" appeared for the first time in the Abhidhamma, Kathāvatthu Pakorana, Puggalakathā. This treatise is compiled in a polemical format between Sakavādī and Paravādī, arguing about the real existence of a person or a self. Sakavādī represents the Theravada's view, while Paravādī represents the opposing view, that of the Puggalavāda. Puggalavāda believes that man has a real, permanent, enduring, and unchanging self as his substance. Sakavādī attempts to argue that there is no such "person" or "self". If such self really existed, it must be able to be known in the sense of the ultimate. And if the self can be known in that sense, Paravādī must be able to tell which fact is ultimately real, and also that the self is known in the very same way as that fact. But since Paravādī cannot do so, his assertion that there is a real self is logically problematic[4] in that he denies the consequent while affirming the antecedent.

The word "sammutisacca" also appears for the first time in the same treatise of the Abhidhamma, but in Sammutiñaṇakatha as an exchange between Sakavādī and Paravādī. The opponent here, however, represents the Andhaka's view. Both Theravada and Andhaka admit that the insight developed in meditation practice, such as by way of earth artifice, is knowledge, and this knowledge is conventional truth. In Andhaka's view,

[4] *The Tripiṭaka*, 37/1/1-2.

all insights are discriminating (pattisambhidā) and supramundane (lokuttara), therefore he does believe that we should separate conventional truth which gives supramundane knowledge from ultimate truth. Sakavādī argues, nevertheless, that conventional truth does not give insight or knowledge of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way to the cessation. Therefore the distinction between ultimate truth and conventional truth should be made.[5] Consequently, although the Buddha does not explicitly divide truth into the ultimate and the conventional, he clearly expresses the difference between the two by using knowledge of the arising and the ceasing of suffering as standard.

*The Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*[6] says that it is written in the Abhidhamma that ultimate truth is what really exists when the conventional has been set aside. It is called "ultimate" because it is Truth known by highest insight.[7]

Ultimate truth is said to exist by reason of its own intrinsic nature without creator. It is the truth involved in the cause and cessation of human suffering. It is not conventional truth derived from words. However, it is not an absolute truth constantly persisting through all the times as a self, or as reality which can exist separately and independently of human experience, or as the first cause of all things in the world. Ultimate truth is an indispensible condition of human experience. Without it, human experience is not possible. The highest truth in Buddhism therefore must always be related to and embedded in experience.

Conventional truth is truth by worldly speech. They are words or languages invented to have meaning for communicative purposes, and are not essentially or ultimately real. In our daily life we need to communicate, we then create words with meanings to refer to things for our convenience. As time passes, we forget how words came to have their meanings and tend

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[5] *The Tripiṭaka*, 37/1062-1064/441-442.

[6] *The Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* is a commentary of Abhidhamma written in the medieval time by Ācāriya Anuruddha, who summarizes and arranges the essentials of the abstruseness of the Abhidhamma in a new format for easy comprehension.

[7] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī and the Sub-Commentary of Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī.* Thai version. Bangkok: Mahā Makut University Press. 1971. P. 19.

to believe that what those words refer to have their own external lives. For instance, we the white liquid substance coming from a cow "milk," "curd," "butter," and "ghee" successively according to their sequential modes. When we use each word, we seem to believe that only the mode referred to by that word exists and not the others. For example, when we use the word "milk" to call the substance, it seems like only the milk to which the word refers really exists, but curd, butter, ghee do not. And when we use the word "curd" to call the same substance which actually comes from milk, we come to believe that only curd exists and not milk[8], and so on. As such, "milk," "curd," "butter," "ghee" are only names invented by people for their convenience in talking about the order of the continual process. We interrupt the continuity on purpose and give a different name to each interruption as if it can exist separately by its own. In fact, only changing, continuous substances exist. There is no constant thing which each name refers to really existing through all the changes. Similarly with the words "infant," "child," "teen," and "adult". They do not refer to what actually exist externally as commonly understood.

Although the Buddha distinguishes between the conventional and the ultimate, it should not be understood that he asserts the existence of two Truths. There is only one Truth, i.e., ultimate truth. But this Truth results from the thorough analysis of conventional truth. Therefore, conventional truth essentially is ultimate truth, and has the ultimate as its origin. It is perhaps for this reason that the Buddha does not clearly distinguish between the two.

In his analysis of the nature of human experience, the Buddha considers suffering as a central concept. If the analysis is reduced to any element which is not involved in the cause or cessation of suffering, he will discontinue the analysis although that element is indeed further analyzable. This is because he thinks that knowledge which results from such analysis is not "useful" in the sense of being capable of helping to dissolve the problem of suffering or to deliver man from suffering. He cites an analogy of a man being shot by a poisoned arrow[9] as a lesson.

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[8] *The Tripiṭaka*, 9/312/319-320.

[9] *The Tripiṭaka*, 13/150/135.

The fourfold ultimate truth which is not analyzed further by the Buddha consists of consciousness, mental factors, matter, and nibbana. Ultimate truth is subdivided into two, namely, the conditioned and the unconditioned. The conditioned are the first three: consciousness, mental factors, and matter. The conditioned has three qualifications (saṅkhatalakkhaṇa): rising, deteriorating, and being with change.[10] We can see the same qualifications of the conditioned in the Abhidhamma.[11] The unconditioned is nibbāna. Nibbāna has opposite qualifications from the conditioned. It is without rising, deteriorating, and changing.[12]

**Consciousness** (citta). The literary meaning of that which is called "consciousness" is "to think, that is, to be conscious of an object (ārammaṇa)".[13] The word "*ārammaṇa*" means an object of thought; like food for thought. It is what consciousness and mental factors cannot lack and must adhere to.[14]

To say that consciousness is being conscious of an object may lead to the misunderstanding that consciousness is a "thing" or a "self" which exists as a thinking entity, a knower, or a thinker. The Buddha rejects consciousness in this meaning. We should not define consciousness as a thing which acts or as an actor. We should instead define it in terms of action, i.e., as a process of thought or a process of knowing the object. This will prevent us from thinking that consciousness can exist separately from the action. To define consciousness as the process of knowing the object is a definition by function. Consciousness is the continuous knowing process throughout the life of a person both in sleep and when awake. Consciousness arises then deceases; it does not always exist.

Each moment of consciousness can have only one and not more than one object. Objects of consciousness can be objects of sense or objects of

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[10] *The Tripiṭaka*, 20/486/179.

[11] *The Tripiṭaka*, 37/175/88.

[12] *The Tripiṭaka*, 37/175/89.

[13] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī*. Thai version. p. 20.

[14] Bunmee Metangkoon and Wannasit Waitayasevee. *Manuals of Abhidhamatthasaṅgaha.* Bangkok: Naeb Mahaneeranont Foundation. 1974. Chapter 3. P. 54.

thought. Consciousness has to use a "door" (dvāra) as the channel through which it interacts with objects. Sometimes the word "twelve spheres of perception" (āyatana) is used instead. There are six doors by which consciousness acts upon objects: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, bodily contact, and mind. The objects of consciousness perceived through the first five doors are collectively called the fivefold object of sense (panjārammaṇa); namely shape (color), noise, smell, taste, and tangibility. Unlike the five-sense-door, mind is not material but mental, called the mind-door (manodvāra). The object conceived through the mind-door is called the object of thought (dhammārammana). It is sixfold: consciousness, mental formations, nibbāna, sensitive matter (pasādarūpa), subtle matter which cannot be seen or touched (sukhumarūpa), and concepts. The five objects of sense and the sixfold object of thought are together called the six objects of consciousness (six ārammaṇas).

The fivefold object of sense is material; the sixfold object of thought may be material, mental, or conceptual (paññattidhamma). Consciousness, mental factors, and nibbāna are mental. Sensitive matter and subtle matter are material. Concepts are neither material nor mental, but only conceptual.

The threefold conditioned ultimate includes consciousness, mental factors, and matter. They have Three Common Characteristics called "tilakkhaṇa", i.e. impermanence (aniccatā), physical and mental suffering (dukkhatā), and non-self (anattatā). Because they have these characteristics, consciousness appears and disappears alternately and continuously like an endless running stream. The duration of each conscious existence which appears and disappears is called a "moment" or "life". Caution must be applied in calling it "life" since it might lead to a misunderstanding that consciousness, which is mental, is material. In each "moment" consciousness is further sub-divided into three little instants: becoming, existing (including changing), and deceasing. Each life of consciousness passes in rapid succession; one begins to appear, then disappears, and a new one re-appears and re-disappears continuously both in sleep and wake. It arises and deceases alternately between subliminal consciousness (bhavangacitta) and thought (vithīcitta) until it becomes the dying consciousness of a Perfect One (arahant). Subliminal consciousness is consciousness in the absence of any doors. It functions like life continuum, preserving the present state of

consciousness or the resultant consciousness (vipāka) from existence to existence, and preserving the body which results from consciousness to remain in the normal state. Thought (vithīcitta) is consciousness which appears and disappears in the process of the external perception.

The perception of the outside world ends when a man becomes asleep. In sleep consciousness appears and deceases in the life continuum to preserve the present state of existence. During awakening, subliminal consciousness always alternates with consciousness of the external world, but the life duration of the subliminal is not as long as that of sleeping time. A complete process of cognition of each consciousness requires seventeen moments. In the process of seventeen moments, only fourteen are conscious, the other three are subconscious.

**Mental Factors** (cetasika). The meaning of mental factors belongs to consciousness and functions concomitantly with consciousness.[15] Mental factors have to depend on consciousness in arising. It appears and disappears together with consciousness, having the same object and the same base as consciousness. Both consciousness and mental factors are mental, so they are completely in harmony with each other. The nature of consciousness is to think of the object, while the nature of mental factors is to associate specific characteristics to the object of consciousness. But it must be admitted that consciousness is primary because it gives rise to mental factors and their activities. Mental factors have Three Common Qualifications as well as consciousness. "Consciousness and all mental factors appear to the Perfect One to be non-self ... they can be destroyed."[16] And when "the Buddha realizes the state of complete nibbāna, consciousness and all other mental factors will not exist anymore."[17]

There are fifty-two mental factors according to the fifty-two characteristics of mental factors. The fifty-two mental factors can be classified into three categories:

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[15] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī*. Thai version. p. 21.

[16] *The Tripiṭaka*, 37/1137/479.

[17] *The Tripiṭaka*, 26/393/389.

1. The ethically variable factors (aññasamānācetasika): these are the mental factors which are common to all other consciousnesses. "Other" in relation to the beautiful consciousness is the non-beautiful, and in relation to the non-beautiful is the beautiful. The ethically variable factors can be associated to both the beautiful and unwholesome consciousnesses. In the beautiful consciousness they become beautiful, and in the unwholesome consciousness, they become unwholesome. They vary according to the characteristic of consciousness to which they associate.
2. The unwholesome factors (akusalacetasika): the characteristics of this mental factor are unwholesome, immoral, and not wise.
3. The beautiful factors (sobhaṇacetasika): these are lofty mental factors which are beautiful, shining, neutral, and tranquil.

The mental factors which are important to our understanding of the relationship between language and Truth belong to the first category. The ethically variable factors may be sub-divided into two groups, namely "the universals" (sabbacittasāthāraṇacetasika) which are common to all types of consciousness, and "the occasionals" (pakiṇṇakacetasika) which are the characteristics found in particular types of consciousness.

Universal mental factors are common to every consciousness without exception. They are the unavoidable nature of human consciousness. In this respect, it may be said that all types of human consciousness are formed under the same condition. This is the reason why men experience things in the same or in similar ways, which enable them to communicate.

*The universals*: the seven universals are contact (phassa), sensation (vedāna), perception (saññā), mental formations or sometimes volition (sankhāra or sometimes cetanā), one-pointedness (ekaggatā), life faculty (jīvitindriya), and attention (manasikāra).

Most of the mental factors in this category are well known. The researcher gives special interest to *perception* (saññā). The function of perception is to recognize an object it has already been conscious of before, and to give it a sign for remembering it in the next conscious encounter of it. *Making a sign* for remembering is the characteristic of perception, and it is *conception*. A concept then is a sign which perception

makes for recognizing that an object which is appearing to sense is the same as the one encountered previously.

We shall see that some mental factors in this group, namely perception, sensation, and mental formations, are constituents of the five aggregates, the real elements of all men and animals. This is because such mental factors are mental properties common to all men and animals. But contact is not included in the five aggregates though it is universal. The reason might be that contact alone does not cause consciousness to cling to the delusion, while the other three mental factors have important roles in grasping the five aggregates as self, or causing the five aggregate of clinging.

There are the wholesome and unwholesome mental factors. The important unwholesome factors are delusion (moha), greed (lobha), and wrong view (diṭṭhi). Delusion is a synonym for ignorance (avijjā), which is not-knowing the nature of objects as they really are. Greed is an attachment, longing, and all desires. Wrong view is not to know things as they really are; it is opposite to wisdom (paññā).

The most significant beautiful mental factor is the faculty of wisdom (paññindrīya or paññā). It is knowledge according to the real nature of things. Where there is wisdom, there will be real knowledge of all; the wholesome and the unwholesome, the good and the bad. The function of wisdom is to clarify objects of consciousness. Wisdom can vary from mundane (lokiya) to supramundane (lokuttara): from knowing that beings have their own deeds (kammas), penetrating the five aggregates, the sphere of perception, Three Common Characteristics until realizing the Four Noble Truths. Supramundane wisdom is the wisdom which knows the Four Noble Truths and nibbāna. Therefore, this beautiful mental factor can help deliver man from ignorance which is the cause of suffering.

**Matter** (rūpa): The word "rūpa" literally means that which can be altered or destroyed by cold and heat.[18] Matter can be separated from consciousness. There are twenty-eight types of matter, classified into two broad categories:

[18] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī.* Thai version. p. 21.

1. The Four Great Essentials (mahābhūtarūpas): these are primary and concrete material elements. They are earth (paṭavī), water (āpo), fire (tejo), and air (vāyo).
2. The Derived Matter (upādāyarūpa): this is the material phenomena dependent upon the four great essentials. They are, for example, sensitive material phenomena (pasādarūpa), material phenomena of sex (bhāvarūpa), and intimating material phenomena (viññattirūpa).

These twenty-eight types of matter can be alternatively divided into two general categories. They are:

1. The Real Ultimate Matter: this is matter possessing its own intrinsic nature which remains constantly the same through all time, not depending on meanings given by men or on human existence. They are the four great essentials.
2. The Non-Real Ultimate Matter: this is not real but relates to the real by ways of being characteristics or marks of the real matter. It originates from human deeds or human production of words with meaning.

"Matter" which is one of the fourfold ultimate does not have the same meaning as "matter" which is one constituent of the five aggregates, or one part of man and animal, i.e., bodily part. This kind of matter is analyzable to the four great essentials which exist by reason of their own nature without depending upon human consciousness. In this respect it may be said that the ultimate matter can exist separately from consciousness. The characteristics of earth, water, fire, and air are not conditioned by consciousness, or not derived from consciousness having defilement and craving. Therefore the ultimate matter is not the cause of suffering. The Buddha thus stops his analysis of matter at the four great essentials.

**Nibbāna:** The word "nibbāna" is Pāli, Sanskrit is "nirvāna". It is etymologically derived from a verb "nibbāti"[19], meaning "to be extinguished". The word "extinguish" at the Buddha time generally signified

[19] Bhikkhu Bodhi (editor). *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999. P. 259.

the extinguishing of fire. Nibbāna thus means the extinguishing of fire of defilements, namely greed, hatred, and delusion. After extinguishment, the mind becomes serene and peaceful. The extinguishing of fire, or nibbāna, is from within oneself, not from without such as water or wind. Commentators prefer to use "nibbāna" as departure from craving called "vāna", that is, deliverance from the cycle of rebirth and death (saṁsāravaṭṭa). They analyze "nibbāna" into two words: "ni + vāna". "Ni" means delivering from, and "vāna" means the entanglement or binding small and big states of existence together.[20] Combining these two meanings together the word signifies deliverance from the entanglement or craving.

Nibbāna is an object of thought, it can occur only through the mind-door process. Nibbāna cannot be realized through the sensory sphere, or perceived through the senses. It is also different from the other objects of thought in that it is unknown by reason. Nibbāna must be felt or directly experienced.

Although Theravāda Buddhism, Mahāyana Buddhism, including the sub-sects of the two, may not agree with each other especially about the nature of nibbāna, causing unending debates between them, they all agree about the following characteristics of nibbāna:

1. Nibbāna is the ideal of life which is supremely good.
2. Nibbāna must be directly experienced or seen for oneself; it is possible only when defilements and craving are completely extinguished.
3. Nibbāna is ultimate truth which is inexpressible.
4. Nibbāna is timeless (kālavimutti); has no beginning, change, and ending.
5. Nibbāna is a tranquil state, the end of all sufferings.

Nibbāna is an individual realization, a special experience seen by highest insight. It is supramundane, not having any qualities of worldly things. So it cannot be directly and correctly expressed in words, it would rather be described indirectly. To describe nibbāna, negative descriptions

[20] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī.* Thai version. p. 22-23.

or comparisons between nibbāna and things in the world are used instead for comprehensibility.

Characteristics of nibbāna which are often declared in the Suttanta and the Abhidhamma are for example,

In the *Suttanta*:

1. The extinguishment of the five aggregates. (the *Tripiṭaka* 31/735/454-8)
2. Void of itself. (31/203/92).
3. The deliverance from the Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), from the cycle of rebirth, the extinguishment of world, the complete extinguishment of existence. (16/44-46/91-93, 16/165/81, 16/187/89, 25/222/232)
4. A supramundane state. (31/620/385)
5. Nature which is not-born, not-become, not-made, not-conditioned. (25/160/176)
6. The extinguishing of greed, hatred, and delusion. (18/497/310, 25/222/231)
7. The cessation of defilement (āsava). (14/26/20)
8. Non-craving. (25/148/166, 25/159/176)
9. The supreme happiness without defilements, anxiety, desire, and sin. (25/25/35)
10. Serenity, departure from suffering, peace of all compound things. (19/228/57, 25/221/230, 30/392/174, 30/659/294)
11. A sphere which exists but cannot be located. (25/158/175)
12. The real which cannot be disappeared according to its nature. (25/405/428-9)
13. A smooth region. (17/197/116)
14. A pleasant and safe place. (18/316/228)
15. An empty house. (25/35/55)
16. The opposite shore of the river of cycle. (25/443/497)

In the *Abhidhamma*:

1. The extinguishing of defilements. (37/761/345)
2. A supramundane state. (34/911/383, 35/1103/622)
3. The constant, permanent, enduring, changeless. (37/323/175)

4. The uncompounded. (37/174/87; 1779/801; 1785-6/807)
5. A state without objects. (37/1788/809)
6. Ultimate truth. (*Abhidhamatthasaṅgaha*, chapter (pariccheda) 6)
7. The only one state without qualifications. (*Abhidhamatthasaṅgaha*, chapter 6)
8. Peace, departure from suffering, deliverance from the cycle of rebirth. (*Abhidhamatthasaṅgaha*, chapter 6)

If we analyze the above descriptions of nibbāna, excluding the instances 13 to 16 in the Suttanta where nibbāna is metaphorically expressed, we can classify nibbāna into two broad characteristics:

1. The extinguishing of defilement and craving.
2. Supramundane truth or ultimate truth.

The former characteristic is nibbāna which is emphasized in the Suttanta, while the latter is nibbāna as emphasized in the Abhidhamma. Although nibbāna in the Suttanta is said to be supramundane or real, there is not much else said about this description. The word "ultimate truth" never appears in the Suttanta.

One popular description is that "nibbāna is the supreme happiness" (nibbānav paramaṅ sukhaṅ). Of what or whose is this happiness? Does it belong to the ultimate? It is not possible that nibbāna as ultimate truth without consciousness should be happy. Happiness and suffering are mental factors which arise and decease together with consciousness. Therefore, in saying that nibbāna is the supreme happiness, the said happiness should not belong to nibbāna, the ultimate. It would rather belong to the mind which attains nibbāna. But this happiness is not sensation. It does not arise from being conscious of objects but from extinguishing all worries, defilements, and anxieties. Only calmness which is called "peace" exists.

The *Tripiṭaka*, volume 31, numbers 203-210, describes the three aspects of one who reaches nibbāna as follows:

1. Signless (animitta), which means freeing from the signs of matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, act of consciousness, age (jarā), death (maraṇa), from all components.

2. Desireless (appaṇihita), which means departure from all cravings.
3. Void (suññata), which means void of grasping of self, seeing nibbāna as void of self. It should be interpreted to include clinging to the word "self" too.

The above characteristics of the Noble One are consistent with the statement, "nibbāna is the supreme happiness". Once a person's craving is blown out, he will certainly be freed from all worries and grasping of self. He realizes that there is no self, self is only a mental construction. Therefore, his mind becomes peaceful, happy, and without worry. Other characteristics of nibbāna include constancy, permanence, endurance, changelessness, and supramundane. These are completely different from the extinguishment of craving and cannot be regarded as the characteristics of consciousness, because consciousness has Three Common Qualifications. It arises, changes and ceases. So those properties would rather belong to nibbāna which is the ultimate. This means that the meaning of nibbāna in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma are not the same, or nibbāna has two senses, which are:

1. *an individual's conscious state which realizes the ultimate* – This meaning describes the characteristics of an individual's consciousness which has reached nibbāna. It may be said to be the subjective meaning of nibbāna. It does not describe the ultimate, but describes consciousness that realizes the ultimate. Therefore nibbāna according to this meaning exists on account of consciousness which experiences the ultimate, that is, the particular consciousness of a Perfect One. His experience is special, directly known only to himself, therefore, it is inexpressible. This characterization of nibbāna is often found in the Suttanta.

2. *the ultimate* – Nibbāna in this sense says nothing about the individual conscious state attaining ultimate truth. It emphasizes nibbāna as the real existent and the supramundane. Even if there were no Buddha who is fully enlightened, this truth would still remain the same. It is without creator; it has no origin, change, and dissolution. It does not have the Three Common Qualifications, and is timeless. This may be considered as the objective meaning of nibbāna. Nibbāna according to this meaning exists by reason of its own nature, unlike in the first meaning. This meaning is emphasized in the Abhidhamma.

To avoid confusion, we should carefully consider which meaning of nibbāna is being used. If it is the first meaning, it will then have to be involved with the individual, in other words, with particular consciousness. This sense of the word is concerned with the transformation from the state of consciousness full of defilements and cravings into the peaceful state free from any defilement. Nibbāna in this sense is involved with practice, that is, practice of insight development (vipassanākammaṭṭhān). But if it is the other meaning, it will be purely about the nature of the ultimate which is separable from practice. The former sense is not as difficult to understand as the latter, because it concerns the real nature of nibbana which is inexpressible. This leads to the debates of what nibbāna really is, besides being the ultimate truth.

No matter which meaning of nibbāna is used, the description of nibbāna is always negative. We compare the characteristics of nibbāna to some properties of worldly things, then refuse that nibbāna has such properties. For example, all things in the world can exist only for a definite time; they change and decay. But nibbāna is constant, persisting, not deceasing, and unchanging. Everything has origin, age, decay, and death, but nibbāna does not.[21] All things are suffering, but nibbāna is not and is happiness. In other words, nibbāna is supramundane; it is beyond the world.

Why is nibbāna in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma not used in the same sense? From the researcher's view, this may be due to the Eastern philosophers' way of thinking about reality. They believe that one knows the truth not only for the sake of wisdom, but also for pragmatic purpose. Knowledge of Truth is also the supreme goal of life. Truth, knowledge, and conducting life according to the known Truth are inseparable. One who knows Truth is not separated from the Truth known. In other words, an individual who realizes nibbana is not separated from nibbana, the ultimate realized. Moreover, the nature of consciousness is to think of an object, there cannot be consciousness without an object. Consciousness and the object of consciousness must simultaneously occur, like a two-sided coin. One side is a conscious mind; the other is the object of the conscious mind.

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[21] *The Tripiṭaka*, 12/315/261.

Therefore, the same Truth can be viewed from two sides, depending on which side is chosen to be viewed.

To have an experience, consciousness, mental factors, and matter must be related to one another. The relationship between these three is basic and natural, existing on account of the nature of each without the need of mental formations. It is the condition of all experience. Since those three are ultimate truth, their relationship must also be ultimate. Basically this relationship happens without the "knower" and the "thing" known. Both the "*knower*" and the "*thing*" known actually are mental formations associated to the ultimate consciousness and then matter. The natural and unconditioned relationship is objectively real, not dependent on the mind. It has a real existence. If unconditioned relationship is not possible, the conditioned relationship by various causes is not possible either. To be conditioned shows that the original is not conditioned. As the Buddha says in *Udāna* :

> "*There is a not-born, not-become, not-made, not-conditioned. If there were no not-born, not-become, not-made, not-conditioned, there would be no emancipation from what is born, become, made, and conditioned.*"[22]

This statement confirms that consciousness can emancipate from the conditioned states of defilements and cravings because its original state is not conditioned with defilements. One whose wisdom experiences the original unborn, unconditioned relationship will realize nibbāna. Thus the researcher proposes a new interpretation of "nibbāna", the ultimate, as *the original relationship which is not born, not become, not conditioned, between consciousness, mental factors, and matter*. This relationship is the natural and basic structure of human experience. According to this interpretation, consciousness which can discern the real nature of this relationship is "nibbāna" in the other meaning, i.e., the conscious state which realizes Truth. In fact, it is one and the same relation viewed from two different aspects: of the knowing consciousness and of the object of

[22] *The Tripiṭaka*, 25/160/176.

consciousness. Both aspects must always exist simultaneously as the nature of consciousness is to be conscious of the object.

As the original and unconditioned relationship, nibbāna is then void of self as well as consciousness, mental factors, and matter. In outer perception, man generally creates the object of consciousness which originally is only the ultimate matter into a material thing (rūpakhandha). He changes it from the original state which is not yet imposed by the concept of self so that it becomes a "person", "cat", "tree", etc. Then he clings to the delusion of these created selves as if they really exist. This causes him suffering. This shows that the original relationship between consciousness, mental factors, and matter do not in themselves cause suffering. Suffering then is not the "indispensible structure" of human experience. Man can have experience without suffering, or he can free himself from suffering if he sees through the deception.

**Meaning of "Ultimate Truth"** The classification of ultimate truth into the conditioned and the unconditioned may be misinterpreted that Buddhism accepts two Truths: one is Truth which is conditioned, not constant, and is suffering; the other is Truth which is not conditioned, constant, and is happiness. This will lead to a dualistic interpretation of Buddhism which the Buddha rejects. One way to avoid the misinterpretation is to find a new meaning of the ultimate; a meaning which is applicable to both the conditioned and unconditioned.

The word "*saccikatthaparamattha"* from which the word "*paramatthasacca*" (ultimate truth) is derived is translated into "*a real and ultimate fact"*[23] in the English translation of the Kathā-Vatthu by the Pāli Text Society. The word "real" is supposed to mean "not taken as an effect of magic or mirage, actual", and "ultimate" to mean "highest sense, not taken from tradition, or hearsay". Moreover, it is said in the appendix that "ultimate" (paramattha) and "real" (saccikattha) are synonymous, meaning "*something existent*".[24] The word "existent" here means existing at

[23] *Points of Controversy* (Kathā-Vatthu). trans. by Shwe Zan Aung , revised and edited by Mrs. Rhys Davids. Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993. p. 8.
[24] Ibid, p. 371.

present, not in the past or the future. The present existence seems to be the most significant meaning of the word "ultimate", which literally means "something perceived now" or "evidently perceived to exist now". The English translation of the Kathā-Vatthu commentary also provides us with the same interpretation. Something is "*real*" because it exists as such, not taken as hearsay or from tradition, and is "*ultimate*" because it is directly perceived.[25] There is no sense of evaluation to the meaning of the word "ultimate" in this translation.

From the researcher's view, the explanation added in the appendix should provide us with the clue to our revised meaning of "ultimate truth", especially the explanation that the real and ultimate fact is "57 states composed of 5 aggregates, 12 sense-organs and objects, 18 elements (dhātu), and 22 controlling powers (indriyasas). It confirms that the real and ultimate fact does not exist in the same way as self, because the five aggregates, sense-organs and objects, etc., are changeable and destructible. When we combine all the above meanings together, we may conclude that the meaning of the "real and ultimate fact" or "ultimate truth" is something existent in the sense of *that which we immediately perceive at present and cannot deny its present existence as such.*

How can this meaning prevent the misinterpretation of dualism? In Buddhism, to say that something "*exists*", does not mean existing purely on its own or by a creator. It means, however, to exist in the sense of having a cause according to the principle of causal relation (itappajjayatā) or "the Dependent Origination" (paticcasamuppāda). "To exist" according to this rule have two meanings: positive and negative. The positive meaning is that there is something arising, changing, and ceasing in accord with the principle: "when this comes, that comes; because this occurs, that will occur." The negative meaning is that there is nothing arising, changing, and ceasing according to the principle: "when this does not come, that will not come; because this is extinguished, that too will be extinguished." The former meaning is the existence of consciousness, mental factors, and

[25] *The Debates Commentary* (Kathāvatthuppakarana-Atthakathā), trans. by Bimala Churn Law. Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1989. p. 11.

matter, which bring suffering. The latter is the existence of the extinguishing of suffering of mind and matter, which is the meaning of nibbāna.

This means that when something comes to happen, or to exist in the ontological sense, only consciousness, mental factors, and matter exist. But nibbāna does not exist in the same way as the conditioned. Nibbāna is unborn, i.e. does not increase the number of things in this world. The world is still composed of the fifty-seven states that arise, change, and deteriorate as usual. Yet the existence of nibbāna has two meanings. One is the individual's conscious state which is transformed from ignorance to enlightenment. In this respect, it may be said that the existence of nibbāna is produced, but in a special way. Consciousness that has realized nibbāna will not return to the state of defilements again, i.e., will never again be conditioned by the twelve causes. Nibbāna is not within the cycle of the twelve causes. Its existence is then opposite to the conditioned things which are born, deteriorate, and change, i.e., it is the unconditioned. Regarding nibbāna in the ultimate sense or in the sense of an original unformed relationship between consciousness, mental factors, and matter, we may see that this relationship is permanent, not born, not deteriorating, and not changing. It is the characteristic of the unconditioned.

The deliverance of consciousness from the cycle of rebirth is not contrary to the principle of the Dependent Origination, or is not beyond the law of causation which is the natural order (dhammaniyām). The word "unconditioned" or "unformed" here does not mean without cause, or not following the rule of causal relation. It only means that nibbāna is the conscious state which cannot be conditioned to suffer again because the causes and factors which bring suffering are completely extinguished. Where there is no cause, there will be no effect. This instead strengthens the law of nature concerning the causation. The word "conditioned" or "unconditioned" must, therefore, always be considered within the context of suffering.

The word "*suffering*" in Buddhism also has two meanings: suffering as one of Three Common Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa), and suffering as one of the Four Noble Truths. The former suffering is the characteristic of all things, both living and non-living. It means to be forced to change, to not remain the same. The latter suffering, however, belongs only to human beings, it usually means force or physical and mental pain which is opposite

to pleasure or happiness. The word "conditioned" too has two meanings relating to both meanings of suffering. The first meaning of "conditioned" is the characteristic of both living and non-living things. "Conditioned" in this sense has the same meaning with inconstancy, impermanence,[26] i.e., to be born or produced, changing, and deteriorating. It can be physical or mental property. The second meaning of "conditioned" is mental formations or volition, one of the twelve factors in the principle of the Dependent Origination which causes suffering. Everything which is non-human or unconscious must be "conditioned" in the first meaning in the same way as conscious things, although it must not be "conditioned" in the second meaning. But every conscious thing which is conditioned in the latter meaning must be conditioned in the former as well.

Since "conditioned" has two meanings, "unconditioned" which is its opposite must have two meanings too. The unconditioned quality in the first meaning means to not be born or not produced, not changing, not deteriorating. Everything in the world which has Three Common Characteristics is not unconditioned in this sense. But nibbāna as ultimate truth is the contrary: it is the unconditioned. Consciousness (mental factors) and matter must exist simultaneously as it is their nature. Their relationship is natural; it is not produced, not changing, and not ceasing even though consciousness and matter are destructible. "Unconditioned" in the second meaning means not to be conditioned by volition according to the twelve factors in the causal law. This is the meaning of nibbāna as the conscious state which realizes the ultimate and completely delivers from all defilements.

When we combine all the above meanings together, that is, the meaning of "a real and ultimate fact", the meaning of "to exist", and the two meanings of "conditioned" and "unconditioned", we will have the revised meaning of "ultimate truth" which is applicable to both the conditioned and the unconditioned. Ultimate truth according to this new meaning means Truth which exists by reason of its own nature, not

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[26] Bhadantcariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. by Bhikkhu Amaramolī. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975. Chapter XX. 17. P. 710.

depending upon concepts and concerned with the arising and the deceasing of suffering. This truth can be considered from two opposite sides; one which causes suffering and the other which ceases suffering. On the causing side is consciousness, mental factors, and matter. They are the conditioned, and conduct under the rule of Three Common Characteristics. Casting away all mental construction, we will see that the three conditioned relate to one another by nature. Their original relationship is unformed, unconditioned. To see this fact is actually seeing the opposite side, i.e., the cessation. The cessation of suffering is nibbāna. Nibbāna therefore is the unconditioned.

The revised meaning may accord well with the meaning of the "ultimate" in the Abhidhamma that it is a real and ultimate fact which exists at the present time by reason of its own nature. This fact is undeniable, no matter whether it is the conditioned or the unconditioned.

When we say that ultimate truth is Truth which has its own nature, we must be very cautious with the words "*own nature*" (*sabhāva* in Pāli or *savabhāva* in Sanskrit), since they are important and should be correctly understood. Failing to do so may lead to a misunderstanding of the nature of the ultimate in Buddhism. To say that the ultimate exists by reason of its own nature does not mean that it can exist on its own, independently of human experience in the same way as an absolute "self". The word "sabhāva" is translated as "own nature" or "individual essence", meaning the generality, or the characteristic common to all things of the same kind. Bhikkhu Amaramolī remarks that the word "sabhāva" is rarely found in the Tripiṭakas, it appears once in the Abhidhamma, Vibhaṅgapakaraṇa. Instead, it is often found in the commentaries and sub-commentaries. For example, this word is used in *The Path of Purification* to explain the nature of the ultimate. It is said to correspond roughly to the word "dhātu" (element) or "lakkhaṇa" (characteristic). In the sub-commentary of the Abhidhammatthasavgaha, the word "dhātu"[27] is explained to be an existence belonging to its individual essence, consisting in suffering within the cycle, because it is beyond control. The "own nature" which is common to all conditioned things is the three moments of their existence: arising, presence, and

[27] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī.* Thai version. P. 352.

dissolution.[28] Strictly speaking, the words "own nature" must be used only with three moments of existence of the conditioned things as they are and can be perceived by us. This nature comes from nowhere and goes to nowhere. This means that it had no existence before it comes to exist at present, and when it does not exist, it will completely be destroyed. In this respect, nibbāna is considered to exist without its individual essence. It is different from other things because its existence is beyond the three moments which are the characteristics of all worldly things. If nibbāna is taken to have its own nature, its nature must be distinctive from all other things. It is the extinguishing of greed, hatred, and delusion. Therefore, nibbāna cannot be the *object* of consciousness of a person who has not yet delivered himself from suffering.

A.K. Warder[29] says that the word "own nature" appears for the first time in the treatise of Theravada Buddhism written in the Buddha's time called *Peṭakopadesa*. This treatise is thought to appear before the commentary. Some Buddhists in some countries treat it as the Tripiṭaka. When discussing causes and conditions, the treatise gives the meaning of "cause" as own nature, and of "condition" as other nature which is not its own. The words "own nature" here mean the characteristic of a thing which naturally tends to happen in one situation. And "other nature" means other things which are the conditions of the occurring of the first thing. Own nature is internal, and other nature is external. This means that something which exists by reason of its own nature is changeable, impermanent. Therefore, the meaning of "own nature" does not correspond or is opposite to what generally understood.

Thus, the meaning of "Truth" in Buddhism is distinctive and perhaps contrary to "truth" in Western thoughts. For them, "truth" has the sense of reality which usually means that which can exist in and by its own entirely apart from human beings, and being the origin of the existence and development of all things. But Truth in Buddhism is not the cause of the

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[28] Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosā, *The Path of Purification*. p. 318. n. 68.

[29] *The Path of Discrimination* (Patisambhidāmagga), trans. by Bhikkhu Amaramolī. Oxford: The Pali Text Society. 1991. Introduction. P. xvii.

existence of worldly things. It is the truth concerning human experience which is the cause of suffering, the truth that answers to the problem of how to cease suffering. It is therefore the truth which has man as its center, and cannot be separated from man, unlike the Christian God, Plato's World of Form, or Kant's noumena.

## II

Hinduism reveres the Vedic teachings as direct sayings of God, not as man's compilation. The Vedas are therefore the absolutely perfect teachings without defect. The words and language in the Vedas are regarded to be the manifestations of God or Brahman, the universal changeless Absolute. The Upanisads say that the Vedas comes out of Brahman, that is, from the breath of Brahman.[30] Spoken language then is treated to have a much higher status than the written one. The ancient Indian grammarians and thinkers view the Vedic language as a mirror representing the highest truth. Knowledge derived from it is regarded to be the real knowledge of Brahman. It will destroy ignorance (avijjā), and lead man to salvation (mokṣa), delivering him from all sufferings.

The Buddha rejects the ancient Indian thoughts that the Vedic teachings are God's voice or are the same thing with Brahman. He thinks that there is no so-called Brahman which is the Self. Language is only a convention accepted by people in a particular society for the sake of communicative convenience. In Buddhism, therefore, language is not an instrument to extinguish ignorance. It is not divine revelation; it is instead ignorance or illusion.

It is plausible to believe that man is able to think without language. But thinking without language can only be simple, ordinary, and not profound. It cannot cover too many the subjects because of the limitation of human memories. When man thinks, he must always think of something. Using the Buddhist vocabulary, "to think" is to be conscious of an object (āramaṇa). Consciousness and its object must always happen simultaneously.

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[30] Suntorn Na Rangsi, *Indian Philosophy: History and Philosophy*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press. 1987. P. 30.

The first object we are conscious of is the object of sense coming through five senses, i.e. sight, sound, smell, taste, and tangibility.

In being conscious of objects, consciousness is naturally inclined to compare a new object with the previous one, or to compare two or more earlier objects together to see whether they are the same. Then it composes some objects into a synthesis for forming a "thing" or a "kind of thing" and clings to the composite thing associated to it as if really exists. It is true that man is able to compare many ideas in the mind even without language. In this respect, it may be said that thought arises before language. But without language or sign associated to the ideas, men would forget or confuse the ideas, and become unable to communicate. Therefore, although language is useful, it at the same time brings about some consequences. Language helps us to recall the ideas formed by mental factors until we are in the habit of thinking and interpreting objects within the frame of language, in other words, to think in language. Language then affects our thought and the way we understand truth.

Language provides us with names for calling the entire composites formed by consciousness and mental factors. By having names, those things become meaningful to us. We can recognize and remember the differences between them easier. Thought and language create things called "I," "we," "he," together with "things" in our "world", and also the delusion that there is an independent existence. Names render us to be able to differentiate between objects of awareness, and recognize them as this or that which mean something to us or become parts of our world. Names cause us to cling to the delusion of selves. The meaning of "nāma-rūpa" besides mind and matter, or mind and body, is name and form.[31] This meaning makes possible the expressions such as "*we* are in the *house*", "*I* feel that the *weather* is cold". The words, "we", "I", "house", "weather", are names or words which we call the composite of objects of our awareness, the composite which we make up by ourselves. But the result of giving names leads us to a misunderstanding that such names-and-forms can exist independently apart from us. Therefore, language has a power to create a

[31] Hamilton, Sue, *Early Buddhism: A New Approach*. Surrey: Curzon Press. 2000. p. 150.

world. If we cannot see through the delusion of language, we will cling to it. We will forget that it is only an instrument. This instrument helps us to remember things and recall them in our memory easier for a better and safer living.

The word "attā" or "self" in our communicative language may make us cling to the wrong view that the thing referred to as "self" really exists, both my "self" and the world's "self". The Buddha holds that this delusion is a kind of attachment[32] called the "*attachment to the self theory*" (attavādupādāna), which is a kind of ignorance (avijjā). If we are able to destroy this attachment together with other attachments, we will be able to reach nibbāna.

It should be noticed that the translation and the explanation of the word "attavādupādāna" in the *Tripiṭaka* and other references of Buddhism are not clear. "Vāda" sometimes means word or speech and sometimes means theory. For example, the Suttanta[33] discusses the incorrect view of attavāda and lokavāda as the view that clings to the word "self" and "world". This shows that "vāda" here means word, not theory. In the Abhidhamma, *Vipaṅka*, number 963, the word "attavādupādāna" is explained as a belief that matter is self or self has matter, matter in self or self in matter, and so forth. This explanation says that the word "vāda" means theory, not word. In *Buddhadhamma*, "attavādupādāna" means clinging only to the word "self".[34] Here, "vāda" clearly means "*word*", not theory. It agrees with the translation of "attavādupādāna" given in *A Dictionary of Buddhism* as *clinging to the word "self"*.[35] But the subsequent explanation in the dictionary is not congruent with this translation. This clinging is explained as clinging to something as self. So it is not clear whether it is clinging to the idea of self (attasaññā) or to the word "self". Also *Buddhadhamma* says that if we fully express this attachment, it will be the attachment to the

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[32] There are four attachments, namely, kāmupādāna (attachment to sensuality), diṭṭhupādāna (attachment to views), sīlappatupādāna (attachment to mere rule and ritual), and attavādupādāna.

[33] *The Tripiṭaka*, 12/100-101/60.

[34] Phra Debvedī, *Buddhadhamma*: Revised and Extended. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. 5th ed. 1989. P. 386. note 2.

[35] Phra Debvedī, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*: *Terms and Concepts*. Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. 1990. P. 308.

word "self". "Attachment to self" is only a short saying of "attachment to the word "self" for the sake of convenience, because there is no self to be attached to. The said self here merely means the idea or the delusion of self created. These examples show that "vāda" which is part of the word "attavāda" or "attavādupādāna" has not been carefully considered. *The Pali-English Dictionary* of the Pali Text Society gives the meaning of "attavāda" as the theory of soul. It is said that "vāda" is in relation to the root "vac", which is equivalent in meaning with "vad" and generally means speak or say. But if it is used as a technical term, it will develop a distinctive meaning as assertion or doctrine.[36]

The word "attavādupādāna" is a combination between "atta + vāda + upādāna". The meaning of "vāda" here might be specific and differentiate this attachment from diṭṭhupādāna, which is the attachment to the theory or wrong view called sakkāyadiṭṭhi. Sakkāyadiṭṭhi is the belief that one or another of five aggregates is the self. This is then clinging to the theory of self. If the meaning of the word "vāda" is word and not theory, the whole meaning would be the attachment to the *word* "self", not to the *theory* of self. Though a word is a mirror of belief and is closely related to it, they are not the same thing. The precise meaning of "attachment to the utterance of self" should be *attachment to the word "self" which is conventional truth* or concept, a worldly speech. This will be consistent with the Buddha's warning that "*these (selves) are worldly names, worldly languages, worldly speech, and worldly concepts that the Thus-come says but does not cling to*."[37]

In the researcher's view, the attachment called "attavādupādāna" is significant. It shows that the Buddha is a great linguist and has a great vision of how important language is in influencing our thinking and conduct of life. Surprisingly, the delusion of language has been revealed by the Buddha for more than two thousands and five hundred years ago. His profound wisdom should be merited and announced to the world.

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[36] T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary.* London: The Pali Text Society. 1972. P. 608.

[37] *The Tripiṭaka*, 9/312/320.

To penetrate through the delusion of language, the distinction between language which is human convention and the real truth is required. We have already mentioned ultimate truth, and hence are moving on to the discussion of conventional truth, or shortly, "concept".

**Concepts** (paññatti). Only thing which exists by its own nature is called ultimate truth. All other things besides this are concepts. *The Pali-English Dictionary* of The Pali Text Society gives the meaning of the word "paññatti" as "*making known, description, designation, name, idea, notion, and concept.*"[38]

Generally the meaning of the word "idea" is narrower than the meaning of "concept". An idea is the mental image when we think of the previous thing directly perceived. Ideas then are taken to be copies of the qualities we already perceive through senses. They may be simple qualities such as shape, taste, smell, sound, tangibility, or complex qualities which compose of many simple qualities such as the idea of our bedroom furnished with bed, lamp, wardrobe, etc. Ideas are thought to represent actual particular things in the world. Those things must exist at some time and some place. On the other hand, concepts may or may not be images. We can have no mental images of something such as business, real estate property, or love. But we think that we can understand those concepts as well as ideas, although it is still problematic whether concepts really represent the external world as ideas. Concepts are universal; they can represent more than one particular thing at the same time. What they represent is the quality common to all particular things of the same kind. This common property does not belong to any particular thing. For example, the concept of "person" must not have properties of being a woman, a man, a child, an adult; or being fat, thin, tall, short, dark, and white; or being any particular person. It must represent the properties which all of them – whether they are children, adult, fat, thin, tall or short – have in common as persons. Therefore these common properties cannot be directly perceived through our senses. They are properties which can simultaneously be of all men, women, and children, whether they are fat or thin, and so

[38] Davids and Stede. *The Pali Text Society*, p. 390.

forth. At the same time they cannot be properties of any particular woman, man, child, or adult. So such contradictory properties cannot belong to any particular person which we perceive by the senses. They may exist only in thought or mind.

There are two kinds of concepts as follows:

1. *concept-as-name* (sadda-paññatti): is a sound expressed in word as a name-calling to make the meaning known.[39] It can be also called "namapaññatti" because it is a name or designation, such as "consciousness", "perception", and "woman". A name need not always be in the form of a word. It may be replaced by other signs, for example, a picture.
2. *concept-as-meaning* (attha-paññatti): is a concept which is the content or meaning made known through its correspondence to form, features, movement, and modes of object, thing, event, and the ultimate state. For example, concept made known with respect to the configuration and transformation of elements of land, mountain, and tree; or with respect to the aggregates such as car, house. This kind of concept is not a sound or a word. Meaning-concept may be either an idea or a concept. If it is an idea, it will be a collection of several modes of a previous object which is directly perceived into one thing such as car, horse, and a piece of grain. If it is a concept, it would be only a common characteristic of some particular property such as red, the smell of a roasted chicken, and a sour taste. For the sake of convenience, I will henceforth use the word "concept" in the explanation of both ideas and concepts.

Concept-as-name and concept-as-meaning are relative terms. Concept-as-name makes concept-as-meaning known, and concept-as-meaning makes concept-as-name arise. It means that name makes us think of form or movement of the thing named. For instance, when we hear the word "horse" which is a name-concept, we think of a four-legged, fast

[39] Bunmee and Wannasit. *Manuals of*, Chapter 3. 1974. P. 59.

running animal which people ride from one place to another and so on; these are concepts-as-meanings of "horse". Concept-as-meaning is made known to be "something" by consciousness corresponding to shape, feature, and transition of its object; even when there is not yet a name. If there is a name, however, the name which answers to that meaning will spontaneously arise in our minds. Vice versa, when we perceive features and modes of a thing, for instance, the continuous expansion of the earth, this configuration makes the word "land" spontaneously arise in our minds, answering to that meaning-concept. Therefore, to know a name makes the meaning known, and to know the meaning makes the name arise. These two kinds of concept then are not independent, they depend on one another.[40]

Knowing the name causes the mind to think of its meaning, or thinking of meaning makes the name which answers to that meaning spontaneously arise in the mind. This may be otherwise known as "name" (nāma), which has the sense of name-making, of bending, and of causing to bend.[41] Four immaterial aggregates, i.e., sensation or feeling, perception, mental formations, and act of consciousness, are "names" in the sense of name-making. They make their own names. Their names are different form names of people, animals, or places given by acclamation, such as parents naming their sons or daughters: "let him or her be called ..." These names do not normally make themselves known to the mind, they must be thought of. The word "nibbāna" too is "name." When consciousness is fully enlightened, having nibbāna as its object; the name "nibbāna" which means extinguishing of defilements, peace, and tranquility, will spontaneously arise in the mind.

This is because name (mind) is different from form (matter). Form can reveal itself. We can see or touch it because it can be perceived through the senses, while name is mental and cannot be touched. If the mind reveals itself, it will have to depend on a "name". Therefore "name" means to make itself known, that is to say, making a name.

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[40] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasaṅgahapālī.* P. 403.

[41] Pe Maung Tin (trans.), Davids, Mrs.Rhys (edited and revised). *The Expositor (Atthasālinī)*, London: Luzac & Company, LTD. 1921. vol. II. p. 500.

It may be concluded that *concept-as-name is language*, and *concept-as-meaning is thought*. Both language and thought always coincide. In fact the Buddha realizes that thought may arise independent of language, in other words, thought arises before language in human perception. The Buddha subdivides concept-as-name and concept-as-meaning into many classes, he also explains their origins and meanings. The following is the classification of those concepts:

***Concept-As-Name.*** It is said in the Suttanta and Abhidhamma that there are four ways[42] that name or concept-as-name may be given:

1. Name given on a special occasion, for example, "Mahāsammata" (general consent), "khattiya" (the land-aristocrat). These are names made or denomination.
2. Name given in virtue of a personal quality, for example, the Tathāgata (the Thus-come, the Blessed), the Arahant (the Perfect One, the Supremely Enlightened), the Preacher.
3. Name given by acclamation, for example, name-giving of a first-born baby.
4. Name which has spontaneously arisen, for example, sun, ocean, earth, mountain. The name of this kind is not name-making like name of man, animal, or human invention which is given by acclamation. It is spontaneously arisen, because it is a "name" (nāma).

Concept-as-name is sixfold:[43]

1. Concept of the real (vijjamānapaññatti). It is a name-concept of the ultimate thing. It designates what really exists in the ultimate sense or what is related to ultimate truth, such as "five aggregates," "the Dependent Origination" (paṭiccasamuppāda)," "sense-organs (āyatana)," and "color."

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[42] Davids, Caroline A.F. Rhys, *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics (Dhamma-Saṅgaṇī)*, Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993, p. 316.

[43] Mahā Makut University. *Abhidshammatthasangahapālī.* P. 405-6.

2. Concept of the unreal (avijjamānapaññatti). It is a name-concept of that which does not really exist. It designates what does not exist in the ultimate sense, such as "land," "mountain," "ocean," "man," and "woman."
3. Concept of the unreal by means of the real (vijjamānenā-vijjamānapaññatti). For instance, "a possessor of sixfold direct knowledge (abhiññā 6)," since the sixfold direct knowledge ultimately exists but not the possessor.
4. Concept of the real by means of the unreal (avijjamānenā-vijjamānapaññatti). For instance, "woman's voice," since the sound of the voice exists but not the woman.
5. Concept of the real by means of the real (vijjamānenā-vijjamānapaññatti). For example, "eye-consciousness," since both eye sensitivity (pasāda) and the consciousness that depends on it ultimately exist.
6. Concept of the unreal by means of the unreal (avijjamānenā-vijjamānapaññatti). For example, "a king's son, "a rich man's wife," since neither the king nor the son nor the rich man nor the wife exists in the ultimate sense.

We will see that the third and fourth kinds of concept-as-name is a combination of the first and the second kinds of concept-as-name. The fifth kind combines the first together, while the sixth combines the second kinds together.

***Concept-As-Meaning.*** The meaning concepts usually subdivide into six types.[44] They are:

1. Formal concept (saṇṭhānapaññatti) – a concept made known corresponding to various modes of physical changes combined together as a "thing". These changes naturally extend continuously. For instance, land, mountain, river, ocean, and tree.

[44] Ibid., p. 403-4; Aung, Shwe Zan. *Compendium of Philosophy*. London: Pali Text Society, Luzac & Company, LTD. 1956. P. 198-9.

2. Collective concept (samūhapaññatti) – a concept made known according to a collection or group of construction of materials to have some features. The collection is man-made, not natural, for example, house, car, cart, jar, and piece of cloth.
3. Living concept (sattavapaññatti) – a concept made known on account of the five aggregates. For instance, man, woman, person, and self.
4. Local and Temporal concept (disākālapaññatti) – a concept made known on account of the revolution of the moon to the right of the sun. The direction in which the sun rises is called the East, and in which the sun sets, the West. Also, date, month, year, and season are made known on account of units of time. For example, suriyavara (suriya means the sun, vara means turn) is Sunday, and hemanta-utu (hema = hima or snow, utu means season) is winter.[45]
5. Spatial concept (ākāsapaññatti) – a concept made known corresponding to the void or non-contact between two sides of area or region, for instance, well, tunnel, and cave.
6. Sign concept (nimittapaññatti) – a concept made known on account of sign of different objects of meditation (kasinā) gained by meditative development, for instance, mental image (uggahanimitta), and conceptualized image (paṭibhāganimiita).

From what has been said, we can see that the states of all existing things except ultimate truth are only concepts, and concepts-as-meanings do not really exist in the ultimate sense. To say that concept-as-meaning does not exist also implies the non-existence of concept-as-name. That is to say, if there is no concept-as-meaning, there will be no concept-as-name either. Meaning concepts commonly understood to be land or river which expands continuously do not really exist in the outer world; they are only meanings thought of. Material aggregates which can be further analyzed into the smallest units or a group of the real matter only do exist. The same

[45] Phra Satthammajotika Thammācariya. *Paticcasamuppadadīpanī*. Bangkok: Satthammajoitka Foundation. 3rd ed. 1995. P. 206.

is true for a meaning concept of a person or animal. Ultimately only matter, consciousness, and mental factors which alternately appear and disappear continuously and rapidly exist.

Though concepts-as-meanings do not really exist in the ultimate sense, they are not mentally constructed out of nothing. On the contrary, they are based on the ultimate states. Both naming and meaning concepts originate in sensational qualities. They are direct contacts between ultimate things, that is to say, consciousness and matter. They are special experiences known only to oneself. To know a naming concept is to know a meaning concept. Concept-as-meaning can arise even if there is no name to call this experience. This is because *concept is the mental grasping of modes of object of consciousness into a "thing" as distinguished from other things*, without necessarily knowing what that thing is called. A first-born baby can have concepts even though he hass not yet learned any language. For example, on hearing his mother's voice, he comes to grasp that voice as something for him even though he does not yet know what it is called. This means that the baby already makes known some meaning to that voice, or concept of massiveness (ghaṇapaññatti) arises in his mind. If he grows up and learns a language, he will know how to call this concept by word. The naming concept then arises. Therefore, though the grasping is only a concept in the mind and language is established by convention for recalling those thoughts, both thought and language have the real and ultimate things as their causes. It may be said that concept-as-name and concept-as-meaning are *shadows of the ultimate*.[46] In other words, ultimate truth is an indirect origin of conventional truth.

If we consider the Buddha's statement, "*concept is worldly name, worldly language, worldly speech which the Thus-come does not cling to*," it might seem that the concepts mentioned are only concepts-as-names and do not involve concepts-as-meanings. But it was stated that these two kinds of concepts are dependent on each other. Concept-as-name cannot arise if there is no concept-as-meaning. To be able to see through the deception of concept-as-name, especially of the word "self", we have to penetrate through

[46] Aung, *Compendium*. P. 199; and n. 4.

the deception of concept-as-meaning as well. That is to say, we need to know that our thought and language of "self" are conventional. Self does not really exist in the ultimate sense.

If concepts do not really and ultimately exist and ultimately mislead a person into thinking that they are real, then why do we have to have concepts? We have to admit that concepts are useful; they help us to better remember our past experience. Concepts are required for better lives of man and animal. Without concepts, they will live more difficult lives. They would not know what is edible, or what should be avoided or sought after. Consciousness by its nature is associated with mental factors; they arise together and have the same object with consciousness. A mental factor which influences consciousness and makes concept known is *perception* (saññā). Its function is to make a sign so that one recognizes the same object in the next encounters or perception. It helps us to remember things more efficiently in groups than remembering them separately and as not related to one another. That which is made known by the sign can be anything, from color, smell, or taste at each moment of consciousness, or the same color, smell, to complex perception such as a tree, a person. When perception assigns a sign to anything, consciousness will recognize that particular thing as signed and cling to the sign or concept which it creates.

The function of perception as recognition and making a sign to objects of sensation is common to all types of consciousness of all men. Perception is the universal mental factor which exists primarily in human consciousness, and is not derived from experience. If man does not know that a "thing" is constructed by perception because of his ignorance, he will cling to the delusion of the "thing" which is only a concept. He will grasp it as something real which will bring him suffering. The faculty of wisdom is the mental factor which helps to liberate him from this delusion.

**Origin of Concept.** The question of how concepts are made is a psychological one. It is a matter of fact which the Buddha declares in the Abhidhamma. His analysis of the process of human thought is very profound and thorough. It has already been argued that consciousness arises and ceases alternately like the continual flow of the stream of consciousness until it delivers from the cycle of rebirth. It alternately and continuously

appears and disappears between subliminal consciousness and consciousness of the external world. Concepts are originated in the process of consciousness of sensual pleasure which can be classified into two processes: five-sense-door and mind-door.

The five-door process is a process of thought occurring through the five-sense-door. Five-sense-door adverting consciousness (pañcadvārāvajjanacitta) is the first consciousness that arises when an external object of sense presents itself at one of the five-sense-door after the life-continuum is arrested (bhavaṅguppaccheda).[47] It has the function of turning to the object, either at one of the five-sense-door or at the mind-door. Following the consciousness which performs the function of adverting, the appropriate sense consciousness immediately arises. But the functions of seeing, hearing, smelling, etc., do not clearly identify the object of sight or hearing, smelling etc., as such. There must arise in succession the mind-door which performs the functions of receiving, investigating, determining, apprehending, and taking as object the object in the prior cognitive process. Without these functions of the mind-door, the object cannot be clearly identified to the mind. This does not depend on the vividness of the object. It is the nature of consciousness that the mind-door is needed to function in order to know what its object is. That is to say, all knowledge is accomplished only by the mind.

The mind-door process which relates to concepts is the mind-door of sensual pleasure. It is knowledge arising through mind, so it can have all six objects of consciousness without immediate dependence on any material sense faculty like the five-sense-door knowledge. When an object is cognized by the mind-door process, consciousness can bend itself towards its object solely through the mind-door. The object of mind-door consciousness is not limited only to the present and ultimate state like the object of the

[47] When an object presents itself at the five-sense-door or the mind-door, there occurs a mind-moment called vibration of the life continuum (bhavangacalana). This is followed by another moment called arrest of the life-continuum (bhavaṅgupaccheda), by which the flow of the life-continuum is cut off. Immediately after the cognitive process is completed, the life-continuum occurs and continues until the next cognitive process arises.

five-sense-door. It can be present, past, or future, or independent of time. Concept is a timeless object.

We have said that each conscious moment consists of three successive sub-moments: becoming, existing, and deceasing. One thought moment is the period occupied by any single state of consciousness which takes part in the process of thought as a functional state. Every consciousness and mental factor which arise always have their functions and they are classified by way of function.

There are fourteen functions of consciousness and mental factors:

1. Rebirth (paṭisandhi): its function is to link the new existence to the previous one.
2. Life-continuum (bhavaṅga): its function is to preserve the continuity of the present existence of an individual from rebirth to death. It is the resultant consciousness of the same type as the rebirth but performs a different function.
3. Adverting (āvajjana): its function is to turn to the new object presenting at one of the five-sense-door or at the mind-door.
4. Visual sensation (Seeing): eye-consciousness performs the function of seeing.
5. Hearing: ear-consciousness performs the function of hearing.
6. Smelling: nose-consciousness performs the function of smelling.
7. Tasting: tongue-consciousness performs the function of tasting.
8. Touching: bodily contact performs the function of touching.
9. Receiving (sampaṭicchana)
10. Investigating (santīraṇa)
11. Determining (votthapana)
12. Apprehending (javana)
13. Registration (tadārammaṇa): its function is to take as object the object which has been apprehended.
14. Death (cuti): its function is to mark the exit from the present existence of an individual.

The *simile of the mango*[48] may serve to illustrate the process of consciousness: A man is lying asleep at the foot of a fruitful mango-tree with his head covered. Then a ripe mango falls from its stalk to the ground grazing his ear. Awakened by that sound, he opens his eyes and looks what has awakened him. He stretches out his hand to take it, squeezes it, smells it, and eats it. Herein, the time of his sleeping at the foot of the mango-tree is the same as when we are subliminally alive. The instant of the ripe mango falling from its stalk grazing his ear is like the instant of the object striking the sense organ. The time of awaking through the sound is like that of adverting by the five doors agitating the life-continuum. The time of the man's opening his eyes and looking is like that of accomplishing the function of seeing through visual cognition. The time of stretching out his hand and taking the mango is like that of the resultant mind-element receiving the object. The time of taking it and squeezing it is like that of the resultant element of mind-cognition examining the object. The time of smelling it is like that of the inoperative element of mind-cognition determining the object. The time of eating it is like that of apperception enjoying the taste of the object.

This simile signifies that the man really recognizes the object as a mango only at the time of apperception enjoying the taste of the object. His eating represents a complete conscious process which arises and ceases so rapidly that we do not normally feel each mental moment. We suppose that all seventeen moments are one and the same.

In the mind-door process, consciousness begins its function at the adverting or mind-adverting (no. 3), after the stream of the life continuum or subliminal consciousness ends. The "arrest" (bhavaṅguppaccheda) is the threshold of consciousness. This type of consciousness also performs another function. It is a determining consciousness (no. 11) at the same time, determining or defining the object presenting at the mind-door. It is followed by apprehending (no. 12) and registration (no. 13). In the case of a concept, though it is not objectively real, it has the ultimate as its cause or is the shadow of the ultimate. Therefore, the appropriate mind-door process must not be the process following the mind-door directly. It must

[48] Tin. *The Expositor*, Vol. II. P. 359-360.

be the process which follows the five-door process, which is called the "consequent" (tad-anuvattaka) or the "associated consecutive" (anubandhaka) mind-door process.

In an actual case of outer perception, each five-door process is followed by not less than four classes of the group of "consequent", as mentioned in *Manuals of Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, Chapter 4. They are:

1. Grasping the past (atītaggahaṇavithī): It is a mind-door process following the five-door process, having the ultimate as its object as that of the five-door. But its object is the prior one which we have just perceived. A five-door process, such as eye-consciousness, and the mind-door process may alternate several hundred thousand times when we are looking at something.
2. Synthesis (samūhaggahaṇavithī). It is a mind-door process which forms the entire composite image of the conscious object into a synthesis in order to form a concept later. Its object is still the past as in the process of grasping the past.
3. Grasping-the-meaning (atthaggahaṇavithī). It is a mind-door process which forms a concept of the object or the attributes corresponding to the image formed in the process of synthesis. This process has concept as its object. When its object is concept, consciousness will not perform the function of registration because concept does not really exist. The conscious object is therefore not strong and vivid enough. The object of this process is *concept-as-meaning*.
4. Grasping-the-name (nāmaggahaṇavithī). It is a mind-door process which invents a name to make known a concept formed by the process of grasping-the-meaning. Or if the name is already known, we will think of the name by which such a concept is usually signified, and compare the concept in question with the former one made known by that sign. If they resemble one another, we will make a judgment to employ that name to call it.[49] So this process has *concept-as-name* as its object.

[49] Aung, *Compendium*, p. 33.

Language is words or names (concepts-as-names) we use to call the images formed in the synthesis process to be concepts (concepts-as-meanings). Before concept-as-meaning arises, human experience received through sense organs does not have any meaning whatsoever. It is not even classified into shape, taste, smell, sound, or tangibility. It appears to our senses as one and the same without any distinction. It is only the real ultimate matter which is known by ultimate consciousness. We just know that we know, but know not what it is. There are two stages of perception. The first stage is the perception through the five-sense-door. No meaning occurs at this stage because the process of grasping-the-meaning to be some "thing" which is different from other things does not function yet. There is still no color, shape, smell, and so forth until consciousness forms a concept-as-meaning or until the process of grasping-the-meaning occurs. A concept formed by this process can be merely a simple quality or a collection of qualities up to even a thing, such as "brown," "round," "hard," or a "chestnut."

We come to know the meaning of the object of sense only when the process of grasping-the-meaning takes place. To synthesize the entire component parts together is the task of the collective concept, one type of concepts-as-meaning. The consequent mind-door process following eye-door, nose-door, tongue-door, and bodily contact-door processes, will have the above four processes in succession. But if it is the consequent process which comes after ear-door process, the order of concept-as-name (the process of name grasping) and concept-as-meaning (the process of meaning grasping) are reversed. This is because an utterance makes the mind-door process know the name of that object before its meaning. Generally, the name concept and the meaning concept are known after the process of past grasping or the synthesis. They will not directly follow the ear-door process. But if the spoken word has one syllable such as "cow," "man," the synthesis will not occur because the object of hearing is just one which is already complete by itself. It does not require anymore to be synthesized into a composite. In this case, only three mind-door processes occur. But if the object of hearing is an unfamiliar foreign language, the process of meaning grasping will not occur. There will occur only three processes of grasping-the-past, synthesis (in case there must be synthesizing), and grasping-the-name.

Therefore, every object which we perceive through sense will be realized as knowledge only if it passes the two stages of perception: sense and thought. The process of cognition will end at the mind stage. All meanings are accomplished by mind. "World" or "I" are all the meanings synthesized and formed by the mind. The forming of a concept or the invention of a name to the object of consciousness which is ultimately real occurs for the sake of comparison between the old and the new experiences. Two experiences can be compared to each other only when they have some resemblance. If they do not resemble, it would be impossible and useless to make a comparison. To associate a concept to the unformed ultimate is to find some common characteristic between different experiences occurring at different times for forming a synthesis of "kind". The common property is universal. Since the concept formed by perception is universal in character, the word invented to call it must also be universal.

This shows that when the real ultimate affects the six doors, what we experience is not the physical world as it is, but it is the world to which we give the meaning. Meaning is given through concept formed by mental factors. So what we perceive is the world which we construct, the world which is inseparable from our experience.

Therefore, man creates the world. All things have a relation to man who has a faculty of knowing. It may be said that the world and man are never separable. Where there is a man there is a world, and where there is no man there is no world. The world here means the world to which man gives meaning or makes it up. Man's construction may start from forming a "thing" with name according to the four consequent processes to the world of each individual's creation. Those four processes of cognition are common to all men. This is the reason why normal people can understand universal concepts-as-meanings in a similar way and can really communicate. Most people are ignorant of the deception of concepts of this kind. They do not recognize that concepts are only made up by the mind. This causes them to misunderstand and cling to the wrong view that concepts refer to real selves. Moreover, each person has different sensation and volition; this causes him to create different meanings to the same concept-as-meaning. "My world"

then is the world each man creates.[50] It is not the physical world. In this respect we can say that all men live in different worlds though the world they actually live in physically and ultimately is the same world. When there is "my world" there is "I" at the same time. In fact, the "world" and "I" may be said to be the same thing created from two different points of view. From the point of the object known, it is (my) "world", and from the point of the knowing consciousness, it is "I". Both the "world" and "I" are then inseparable with respect to the nature of consciousness. Man's happiness and suffering therefore arise out of grasping those mental constructions as the "world" and as "I".

***Concept-As-Name***. There are two kinds of concepts, namely, thought or concept and name or language. However, the word "concept", when compared to the ultimate, is often used to refer to language, not thought. That is to say, it rather means concept-as-name, not concept-as-meaning. This might be because thought is internal; it is difficult for other people except its owner to recognize it when it is not expressed into words. It is generally said that language is the representation of thought. Therefore, we have to carefully examine what is referred to by names in our communication in order to penetrate through the deception of language, besides making the distinction between concept and Truth.

What do our ordinary words such as "man", "river", "house", "country", and "rose" refer to? Is it true that "man" is used to talk about someone who is now writing the book? Yes, it is. But this word too is used to refer to several other people who are doing some other things, both women and men at every age. It can also be used to refer to people who passed away from this world and who are not yet born but will be in the future. We will see that the ordinary names have some common feature: they do not specifically refer to a particular person or thing. They are different from the word such as "Thailand" or "Chao Phraya River", which specifically denotes a particular country or a particular river. The word which does not refer to any particular thing and at the same time is applicable to every other thing of the same kind is termed "general". The general term here is a

[50] Wit Wisadavet. *Anattā in Buddhism*. Bangkok: Pipitvittaya Press. 1980. P. 66.

word used to signify a certain class of something in which all things of the class have similar features or common qualities. The common property is "universal". The universal property which is applicable to all members of the class is sometimes called a "universal". Therefore, the general term is a term used to refer to the universal property or a universal.

*General Term*. Actually almost all words in our language are general except proper names. As language has a communicative purpose, if most words are particular with specific meaning, we would then have to have indefinite words beyond the capacity of our memory. And we would hardly be able to communicate through words. But if a general term does not specifically refer to any particular thing, and only signifies common property which is universal, then the question will arise: what is such a universal? Does it really exist? If it does, where is it? It would have to exist in the past, present, and future, not only momentarily.

The Indian grammarians divided the universal property into four groups corresponding to the status of existence of each group. They are:[51]

1. Genus or a class name such as man, tree, cow.
2. Quality such as whiteness, sweetness.
3. Action such as running, cooking.
4. Substance which is something that has attributes or is the owner of attributes.

For example, "A white cow, 'Kao', is eating grass". This sentence consists of four words of four kinds: "white", "cow", "Kao", and "is eating grass". Though these four words talk about the same thing, i.e., the white cow named "Kao", each of these four words does not have the same meaning. The word "cow" is a genus name, cowness, which is common to every member of the class "cow". Cowness does not name a particular cow. It is outside of time, constant, invariable. The Indian thinkers held that cowness which is universal really exists. It is the real nature or the essence of all cows. It is the source and explanation why each of them is

[51] Bhattachārya, Bishnupada. *A Study in Language and Meaning*. Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar. 1962. p. 50-62.

a cow. But "white" is different from "cow", because whiteness is a quality, not a thing. It is not the real nature of thing. It may vary in degrees among all white things; some may be whiter or less white than others. Quality is what we cannot see or know purely by itself. We always have to perceive it as a quality of something, for instance, a white cow, a piece of white paper, a white shirt. But we can see a whole cow itself. "Kao" is a proper name functioning as subject of the sentence. The word "proper name" here presupposes the existence of a substance which is the owner of attributes and makes attributes appear. The phrase "is eating grass" mentions an action. The universal property which is action is different from that which is quality. Action has a special character: it does not completely end like quality, but implies the continuation of time for some period. For example, cooking starts from preparing the ingredients, lighting the gas, putting the pan on the stove, pouring in some oil, putting the ingredients in the pan, frying, tasting, and finally removing the cooked food from the stove. We must have all these processes together to call them cooking. We cannot separate one from the rest and call it cooking.

If we examine the explanation of naming concept and meaning concept in the Abhidhamma, we will see that the Buddha employs a different method from the Indian grammarians in classifying a universal term. He uses movement or features of a thing we are conscious of to represent our concept-as-meaning. But the universal property of concept-as-meaning cannot be taken to be quality. The reason is that most concepts-as-meanings are much closer to class names than qualities, for instance, land, car, woman, well, north, Monday. On the contrary, some concepts-as-names which are names of both living and non-living things may be listed in the quality group, such as the concept of the real, for instance, color, sound, smell, and so on. However, concept-as-name generally is a class name. From the Buddhist view, genus therefore does not mean class in the sense of nature or essence which is universal, or a persisting universal which is the foundation of all things in the class as the Indian grammarians believed. The universal is permanent, unchanging, and not bound to the three durations of time. The Buddha rejects the real existence of universal genus of the Indian thinkers. Genus is only concept-as-meaning constructed by the nature of the mind in

the cognitive process. It does not really exist in the external world. What really exists is only the particular.

Another remark about the universal is that the Buddha does not examine all kinds of words in our language. He does not pay attention to the universal which belongs to the action group. This is because he sees that to consider a problem which is not concerned with suffering or the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation, is useless. It does not help to deliver man from suffering or reach nibbāna. The kind of word which he gives special interest is class name, especially "self", both a person's self and the world's self. It is because this kind of word makes us cling to what the word names and mistake it as something that really exists.

Even though the Buddha rejects the real existence of self which is the owner of qualities and of the universal signified by a universal term, he does not deny self in the sense of the name of an entire composite of qualities.[52] This is the self which occurs *after* our experience of qualities. It is the self which depends upon those qualities, and is inseparable from them. Only when wheel, axle, pole, and etc. are combined together, a "car" arises. If there are no components, there is no "car". This means that the Buddha does not deny a self which is a concept constructed by the mind after having perception, and which is an aggregate of all existing constituents. But this aggregate does not really exist outside. The general term is a class name of this aggregate.

Therefore, the general term is only a word used to refer to a collection of all sensible qualities. These qualities can finally be analyzed into the final, irreducible element which is the real ultimate, i.e., consciousness, mental factors, and matter; in other words, mind and matter. Mind and matter is matter with a name. Having a name causes matter which is originally without name to become matter with a name, differentiated from the original matter and other matters that already have names. Name is therefore what creates a definite thing out of undefined matter or makes

[52] The word "quality" here includes properties, features, movement, transformation, etc. of our experienced objects. Its meaning is not the same as "quality" in the Indian grammarians' group division.

one definite thing different from other definite things. "Thing", "car", "man", or "animal" which is the entire composite of qualities meant by the general term is only mental imagination constructed out of language or name. When we call one collection of qualities a "car", and another a "man", we terminate the independent and momentary existence of each quality, and combine each together into qualities of one and the same thing. These qualities seem to depend inseparably on one another and must always go together as qualities of one thing. Although those qualities ultimately have the real ultimate as their origin, without names there will be no distinct things for us to cling to.

It may be noticed that though the conditioned ultimate can exist only momentarily, the word we use to express it is in the form of a general term, i.e., "consciousness," "mental factors", "matter". The word "consciousness" is applicable to all and every consciousness at every moment. "Mental factors" and "matter" are the same. But this kind of general term is different from ordinary general terms signifying the composite of several qualities such as "car", "man". They do not signify concepts. "Consciousness" names consciousness at the time of knowing an object, that is to say, a particular consciousness existing at a particular moment. "Mental factors," too, is a name denoting particular mental factors which arise together with the particular consciousness at the particular moment of knowing the object, and "matter" names matter which is a particular object of consciousness at the particular conscious moment. Therefore, general terms which name the conditioned ultimate actually are words used to refer to what exists only at the particular moment of consciousness. These terms are names (nama) which spontaneously arise in the mind bending towards the object. They are not names given as usually understood.

In philosophy there are three main theories of the universal. They include:

1. *Nominalism*: This theory holds that universals are mere names. In fact, these universals have no objective foundation, either out of the mind or in the mind. What really exist in the world are only particulars.
2. *Conceptualism*: This theory is similar to nominalism in that it believes that universals do not really exist outside. But it does

not accept that universals are only names or words. According to this view, what universals refer to really exist but only in the mind, they are mental construction. These universals are termed "concepts".

3. *Realism*. This theory is opposite to nominalism. According to realism, general terms refer to the universals, and the universals really exist in the external world. They are not mere names as the nominalists think, and not only concepts existing in the mind as the conceptualists believe. To realists, the universal exists independently of the mind, it is permanent and unchanging whether anybody experiences it or not. An example of this is "genus" in the Indian grammarians' view or Plato's world of forms.

These three views of the universal represent different thoughts concerning three things and their relationship, that is, word or language, concept, and what is meant by word. The nominalists think that only words are real, and not concepts. The conceptualists accept that besides words, there are concepts which are universal but they exist only in the mind. Whereas the realists admit that all those three are real, the universals meant by words are not mere concepts constructed by thought as the conceptualists think. They believe that language is a true mirror of the external world in the same way as the ancient Indian thinkers did. The conceptualists accept that language is a direct representation of the internal world of human mind and indirectly represents the world outside. The nominalists believe that language does not really represent anything, whether it is outside or inside the mind.

If we examine the Buddhist cognitive process as already explained, we would think that Buddhism seems to be similar to conceptualism. This is because Buddhism accepts that general terms which are universal refer to concepts, and concepts are mental constructions existing only in the mind as conceptualists. But Buddhism says that all concepts are shadows of the ultimate, and some concepts-as-names spontaneously arise in the mind, i.e., their names are not invented or are not name-making. Moreover, language is instead ignorance or illusion, not a direct representation of the internal world as conceptualists think. In the researcher's view, we should

create a new name to call the Buddhist theory of the universal, a name which specifically refers to the theory of Theravada Buddhism. This should be *conceptionism (paññattism)*.

*Proper Name*. Besides the general term or universal name, there still is another kind of name, that is, proper name. A proper name is a name generally understood to refer to a particular thing, for instance, "Nāgasena", "Sārīputta", or "Thailand". It is thought to be different from the general name which is understood to refer to the universal property, whose objective existence Buddhism does not accept. A proper name implies the existence of a particular self because a specification would not be possible without a particular to specify. But when the Buddha thoroughly examines proper names, he finds that they do not have a different status from general names. Proper names do not refer to any existing things other than the five aggregates or mind-matter which we can perceive. Therefore, they are composites of qualities as well as general names. There is no person or particular self whom we can experience as the venerable Nāgasena or the venerable Sārīputta actually existing besides qualities.

> *"...it is on account of the hair and the hairs on the body, of the grayish matter in the brain, of matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness combined together, that I come under the name, Nāgasena... but speaking ultimately, there is no self implied in that name."*[53]

This means that there is no such thing as Nāgasena or the self of Nāgasena. There are only successive phenomena which are causally related to one another physically and mentally, that is to say, mind-matter. Both proper names and general names are names calling the composites of sensible qualities. They are not names of anything except those qualities.

The Buddha accepts that by knowing the name, its meaning is known, and knowing the meaning makes name arise. It may then be said that the meaning of name really is description. Names have no other meanings

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[53] *The Questions of King Milinda*, Mahā Makut University's Translation. Bangkok: Mahā Makut University. 3rd ed. 2004. P. 28.

except description. Concept-as-name really is concept-as-meaning. As for knowledge of particulars which may be called direct knowledge not depending on description, Buddhism believes that it must be directly experienced by each individual himself through highest insight which results from practicing meditation. It cannot be known directly through the senses.

According to the Buddhist view, there is only one word which should be taken as a real proper name, namely, "***Nibbāna,***" which designates the unconditioned ultimate truth. But nibbāna has two meanings: nibbāna as a conscious mind which is fully enlightened and nibbāna as the ultimate which exists. The first meaning refers to psychological states which are empty of defilements. This can be treated as the description of mental states, and the description usually consists of more than one general term. Nibbāna according to the first meaning cannot therefore be genuine proper name, but a concept-as-meaning or a description. Nibbāna in the second meaning which is used to name the ultimate directly seen for oneself should not be a description. The term "Nibbāna" here is preserved to be uttered only by a Perfect One who has already attained nibbāna. But the Buddhist proper name is different from what is generally understood. It does not name any ordinary particular. It specifically names the real and unchanging ultimate truth which does not exist only for a moment as ordinary particulars.

The western philosopher who claims that "proper names are usually really descriptions"[54] is Russell. He provides an analysis of ordinary proper names. A proper name does not name a particular thing; it has a sense. It performs a descriptive function, not a referring one, though the description related seems to be definite. If we examine the definite description, we will see that it is constituted of general term which is genus. Sometimes more than one universal term is involved in the description. Therefore, what the proper name is meant to refer to is not the particular but the class.

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[54] Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press. 1952. P. 54.

Another contemporary western philosopher who believes that proper names have some relation to descriptions or characteristics is Searle.[55] Unlike Russell, he thinks that a proper name is not logically equivalent to a definite description. They perform distinct functions. Proper names do not specify any characteristics of the object referred to, though their reference presupposes certain characteristics of that object. Searle thinks that proper names are logically connected with descriptions of the object referred to in the loose way of inclusive disjunction, at least one of those descriptions attributed to the object must be true.

The idea that names make us think of at least one attribute or description of the object named is similar to the Buddhist thought. As already discussed, knowing name makes known the meaning without specifying what description and how many descriptions there should be, except in the case of name bending itself towards its object. For example, the name "Nāgasena" might be described as the great intelligent monk who cleverly discusses religious questions with King Milinda. This description consists of many universal terms, such as "monk", "intelligent", "who discusses religious questions". The word "King Milinda" is a description as well. It may be explained by a reverse description in relation to the venerable Nāgasena. Therefore, proper names in Buddhism are merely names referring to a composite of some characteristics. The composite does not really exist, and those characteristics are only concepts. As concepts, they are not objectively real as the ultimate. They are only constructed by the nature of the mind even though they are shadows of the ultimate.

According to Buddhism, it may then be said that all names, whether universal or proper, are only descriptions constituting of general terms. But there are two kinds of general terms, namely, one which names concept and the other which names the ultimate. The former is not difficult to understand; it is a concept made up in the mind and common to all men. It is thinkable, reasonable. But the ultimate is inexpressible. It is the existent particular which must be directly experienced, not conceptual. So the

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[55] Searle, "Proper Names" in *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*. edited by Charles E. Caton. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1970. p. 158-161.

general term which names the ultimate cannot refer to the ultimate; it only signifies concept-as-meaning which is conceptual.

### The Buddhist Theory of Meaning

According to the theory of Indian Grammar, words, especially nouns, have their meaning because they signify the existing objects such as man, animal, and material thing. The signified things are classes, not the actual particulars. So the meaning of words here is the universal which is thought to really exist. This kind of theory is called the realist theory of meaning. It is similar to the western theory called the referential theory of meaning. The referential theory says that a word has meaning if and only if it refers to a thing outside. Therefore, the meaning of a word is the thing referred to by that word. This theory also accepts that general terms may be used to refer to external things. Although they do not directly refer to particular things like proper names, they have some relation with those things. This kind of referential theory is said to indirectly refer to objects. Therefore, the meaning of words for the referential theory includes both particulars and universals. It is different from the Indian realist theory which does not accept that a particular is the meaning of word.

The Buddha is interested in examining "meaning," and he analyzes the meaning of words. In Buddhism, it may be concluded that the smallest unit of language which has meaning is a word, not a sentence. The Buddha does not seem to agree with the realist theory of meaning. The meaning of a word is not what it refers to. In examining the Buddhist theory of meaning, we have to distinguish between the concept-name and the ultimate-name. The researcher will call language used to talk about the former "worldly language" and about the latter "ultimate language". The Buddha realizes the difficulty of using language to teach ultimate truth. Ultimate language may mislead people into thinking that it can refer to ultimate truth. This will lead to a misinterpretation of his teachings. He then uses ultimate language only when it is necessary, that is to say, when he teaches the ultimate. Therefore, ultimate language is used in the Abhidhamma, while conventional language is chosen to use in the Suttanta.

What, then, is the Buddhist theory of meaning? We cannot give only one inclusive answer, as we know that there are two kinds of language,

namely, worldly language and ultimate language. The Buddha distinguishes between conventional truth and ultimate truth, which is of much significance. It is the clue to the Buddhist theory of meaning. In answering this question, we therefore have to separate between two answers: the theory of meaning of worldly language and the theory of meaning of ultimate language.

***The Theory of Meaning of Worldly Language***. "Worldly language" means words or language generally used in our ordinary life. They are all concepts-as-names and concepts-as-meanings, except for concepts of the real and concepts of the unreal by means of the real because these are names of the real. We know that almost all words in worldly language are general. And proper names actually are not different from general terms because they do not function as genuine names. They have senses or descriptions. Worldly language then is conventional truth signifying concepts in the mind without having objective reference in the external world.

Words in worldly language have meaning if and only if they make ideas or concepts arise in the mind. The theory of meaning which says that the meaning of a word is an idea is called *the ideational theory*. Buddhism believes that ideas or concepts are conventional and they can be analyzed into ultimate truth as the final element. And the ideational theory still runs into difficulty in explaining how we are able to know that ideas are copies of the external world, whereas what we really know are only ideas. If we say that the Buddhist theory of meaning is ideational, it will lead us to misunderstand Buddhist teachings. It would be more appropriate to use the name "*conceptionism*" to call it. The reason is because ideas or concepts actually are concepts-as-meanings formed by the mind, or concepts formed in the process of grasping-the-meaning corresponding to the images of objects of consciousness formed in the process of synthesis.

***The Theory of Meaning of Ultimate Language.*** "Ultimate language" means a name referring to the real existent, i.e. ultimate truth and those related to it, namely, concepts of the real and concepts of the unreal by means of the real, for instance, consciousness, matter, nibbāna, and khandha. We have already said that worldly language has meaning because it causes concepts to occur in the mind, and concepts are the shadows of ultimate truth. So what is imagined in the mind does not come from nothing. In one

respect, we have to admit that both worldly and ultimate languages serve the same purpose, the communicative purpose. They are different only with respect to what they try to communicate to us. Ultimate language tries to communicate the ultimate, not concepts. This purpose seem to make ultimate language refer to ultimate truth which really exists, and the Buddhist theory of meaning of this level would probably be called a referential theory. But ultimate truth is not a "thing". The Buddha rejects a "thing" in both senses of self and concept.

Therefore, if we want to say that ultimate language refers to ultimate truth, the word "refer" here should have a specific meaning distinct from the referential theory as generally understood. It does not "refer to" something in the sense of a relationship between a word and an external thing. It must be the relationship of being one and the same with what is referred to, which is a religious characteristic. But to be one and the same with the supreme goal of life is different from being one and the same with God or Brahman. To "refer to" according to the special meaning of Buddhism means to experience the highest truth directly for oneself, that is, to reach nibbāna by insight. So the special meaning of ultimate language is reserved only for the Perfect One who has already attained nibbāna. For ordinary people, ultimate language cannot be said to have a referential meaning, because they have not yet directly seen nibbāna, the ideal of life and the ultimate for themselves.

Ultimate language is a religious, moral, ethical language, not a worldly one used to discuss experience through the five-sense-door. Though ultimate language aims at communicating ultimate truth, the purpose and the meaning of language are not the same. Basically, the meaning of ultimate language is not to know how to use words in communication like worldly language. Its chief meaning is to remove suffering. The western theory of meaning which accepts that the meaning of a word is its use usually rejects that words have their own meaning. For example, Wittgenstein[56] emphasizes a speaker's intention in using words to communicate to a hearer rather

[56] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*. Trans. by Anscombe, 3rd ed. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1958. P. 11, 16, 17-23, 64-69.

than the fixed meaning of those words. The Buddha might not agree with Wittgenstein that there is no fixed meaning. This is because he accepts the existence of ultimate truth. The ultimate such as nibbāna must have its meaning fixed because it is name (nāma), although it is inexpressible. Therefore, in Buddhism, to know how to use words in communication is not the meaning of words, and certainly not the meaning of ultimate language.

Ultimate language generally does not refer to the ultimate except when it is used by the Buddha and all the Perfect Ones. It is only an instrument employed by the Buddha in order to teach ultimate truth to worldly men as much as language can do. Therefore, the purpose of ultimate language is to metaphorically explain the ultimate, since the ultimate is inexpressible. The metaphor must be understood within the context of the arising and the ceasing of suffering. Moreover, we have to realize that the metaphor is limited and never complete.

Take for example "nibbāna." What does this ultimate word refer to? If we have some knowledge of Buddhism, we would firstly have the idea of extinguishment which is the extinguishing of defilement. Therefore what is in our mind is a concept of extinguishing such as the extinguishing of anger, delusion, greed, etc. These concepts are all concerned with some examples of worldly things and happenings. But we are not satisfied with these examples because nibbana is the entire extinguishing of all defilements. We then continue to create a new concept out of those worldly examples. This new concept will be a general concept of "pure extinguishing" without being mixed with any concepts of worldly things and happenings. It is neither the concept of extinguishing of anger, nor of greed, nor of ignorance, and so forth. It is only a pure, general concept abstracted from all those concepts of worldly extinguishing we have. This new concept is very vague; we cannot describe its characteristic. If we describe it as having any characteristic, it will then be the characteristic of a mundane thing. However, we cling to the pure concept which we do not know as the concept of nibbāna, the supramundane.

Therefore, for one who hass not yet attained nibbāna, the meaning of ultimate term is a pure, unclear, general concept arising in his mind, which he understands to be the concept of nibbāna, the ultimate. Actually, it is only the concept formed by the mind as well as concepts which are the

meaning of worldly language. If we say that the meaning of ultimate language is causing a concept in our mind, then its meaning will not be different from that of the worldly. But ultimate language talks about ultimate truth which is supramundane. The meaning of ultimate language therefore must not be the ordinary concept which is the meaning of worldly language, but should be the concept above all ordinary concepts. The researcher suggests a new name with which to call the theory of meaning of ultimate language, *the theory of ultimate-conceptionism* (paramatthapaññatti), to show that its real meaning cannot transcend concepts even if it is ultimate language.

Though the Buddha distinguishes between conventional truth and ultimate truth, he does not mean that only worldly language is conventional. Ultimate language also is conventional. If it is to be called a language, it must always be conventional whether it refers to concept which does not have external existence or to ultimate truth which really exists. Therefore, *ultimate language is a sort of conventional truth*. To understand the distinction between ultimate language and ultimate truth is very important for the correct understanding of the Buddhist teaching. In other words, we must understand that the meaning of ultimate language or words relating to the ultimate is not the ultimate itself, but concepts which are always related to the world and the meaning of worldly language. The meaning of ultimate word "nibbāna" which we understand is not nibbāna, the ultimate, or the concept of nibbāna because there is no such concept. There are only worldly concepts metaphorically used to describe the characteristics of nibbāna which are supramundane to be intelligible to some degree. Those concepts are all derived from experience through senses.

Therefore, we always have to remind ourselves that we cannot know ultimate truth by using language, either worldly or ultimate, because language is conventional. The meaning of ultimate language for us is only concepts, not the ultimate. We may see the deception of concept which is the meaning of worldly language, but not the other which is the meaning of ultimate language. That is why we assume that ultimate language refers to the ultimate though it only refers to the conventional. We do not recognize that language is a trap. One who can see this trick is said to have a right view (sammādiṭṭhi) which is one of the Eightfold Noble Path. He can remove

linguistic misunderstanding which is a kind of ignorance and gain knowledge of Truth at some levels. This will be useful to the practice of mindfulness for the cessation of suffering later.

The difference between language and Truth can be illustrated as follows:

| LANGUAGE | TRUTH |
|---|---|
| a) Is conventional | a) Is real |
| b) Is concept | b) Is ultimately real, not concept |
| c) Signifies concept | c) Is inexpressible |
| d) Has a common nature | d) Has its own nature |
| e) Has a fixed meaning | e) Is a running stream (the conditioned) |
| f) Is timeless | f) Exists momentarily (the conditioned) |
| g) Is intelligible | g) Is unintelligible |

Language is conventional truth, or concept-as-name signifying concept-as-meaning in the mind. It does not really exist in the external world. But Truth is ultimately real, it is not concept constructed by the nature of mind. In Buddhism, "words", both conventional and ultimate (for one who has not yet attained nibbāna) actually refer to concepts. But the concept which is the meaning of conventional language is different from that of ultimate language. For conventional language, the meaning of a word is concept-as-meaning which is *directly* synthesized into a "thing", such as woman, house, river, I, and you. "Thingness" is created in the mind-door process next to the five-sense-door. It resembles general ideas derived from an abstraction. This leads us to a misunderstanding that the mental constructions have real selves existing independently of the mind. In fact "things" referred to by those words do not really exist. What really exists is only mind-matter which is the fourfold ultimate. The concept which is the meaning of ultimate language is not derived directly from the ultimate, but is only the concept which is constructed out of concepts which are the meaning of worldly language. For example, the concept "to extinguish" (fire) which is the meaning of worldly language is metaphorically employed

to describe the characteristic of nibbāna which is the entire cessation of suffering. Therefore the ultimate concept, "nibbāna," is a pure general concept abstracted from the concept "to extinguish" which is the meaning of worldly language once again. This pure general concept cannot be described as having any characteristics because whatever characteristic is being referred to must always belong to worldly things. What we can then say at most is that it has neither this nor that. But to give it a true description is impossible. This means that the pure general concept abstracted from the concept of things in the world is only obscure, vague, and cannot be clearly specified. Therefore the concept referred to by ultimate language actually is not the concept of the ultimate. Yet we understand that it is the meaning of ultimate language. If we don't see through the deception of language, we will misunderstand that ultimate language refers to ultimate truth, or the concept of ultimate truth.

When the Buddha classifies concept-as-name and concept-as-meaning into subcategories, he never discusses concept-as-meaning which is the mental construction of ultimate truth. He only mentions concept-as-name which is used to refer to the ultimate which really exists. This is because concept-as-meaning is made known on account of the obvious features and physical movement. But the ultimate cannot be perceived through the senses; it must be directly realized by highest insight. It is quite similar to knowledge by acquaintance, not by description. Therefore, there can never be concept-as-meaning of the ultimate, and we can never use any concept-as-meaning to completely describe the ultimate.

Since we use concept which is the meaning of worldly language as a tool to metaphorically describe the ultimate, we cannot stick to its literal sense and take its meaning as the real description of the ultimate. Concepts by their nature are made known, not the ultimate. This is similar to when we compare two things in the world; for example, we say that a teacher is like a ferry. The teacher and the ferry are not identical; we cannot say that what is the quality of the teacher must be that of the ferry, or vice versa. The teacher is a person, a living being with a mind; whereas the ferry is only a man-made vehicle. The similarity between the teacher and the ferry here is that both have the same function in conveying someone towards his destination. Knowledge is the goal that the teacher conveys to his students,

while another port is the destination of the passengers in the ferry. We have to be aware of this fact when we use familiar concepts corresponding to worldly language in comparisons.

Almost every word in our language is universal. The same word can be used to refer to several things which have some common characteristics. A word is fixed with meaning and the meaning is not changed until it is revised or until a new meaning is invented. When the meaning is changed, the new meaning will continue to be fixed to that word. If we compare language with Truth which exists as an endless running stream alternating between appearing and disappearing, we may say that language is at rest, not moving. However, when we say the conditioned ultimate "exists," we mean that it only exists at present when consciousness has not finished its function, not in the past or the future, whereas concepts or language referring to concepts are ideas created in the mind-door, and are timeless. When a word is invented, it will continue to last forever whether it is ever used, being used, or will be used. It will not be destroyed along with the consciousness which makes it. Therefore, the nature of language is the opposite to that of the ultimate (the conditioned). In other words, the ultimate has no characteristic which can be called universal; it has only its individual essence: consciousness, mental factors, matter, or nibbāna is and exists on account of its own nature. So we can never use language to express the true characteristic of the ultimate, although this fact usually does not strike our mind.

Besides the fact that we cannot use language to refer to the ultimate, reason too can never bring us to the ultimate. Reason is something universal. To give a reason or an explanation why something is or should be as it is requires a medium between the explanation and what is to be explained. This medium should be universal too. But the ultimate is something we need to experience directly, not through a medium. So, reason cannot know it. Moreover, according to a rule of logic, one thing either is or is not. Both to be and not to be, or to be neither, are impossible. For example, something must exist or not exist. If it exists, to say that the existing thing does not exist is contradictory. But the ultimate, especially the conditioned, alternates between becoming, existing, and passing away and reappears, re-exists, and so forth all the time. We cannot say that it absolutely exists, or does not

absolutely exist. Therefore, reason cannot render the existence of the ultimate intelligible.

We generally overlook the fact that when we describe the ultimate, what we use to describe is language or words, and what we explain is the "ultimate" which is a word or a concept, not the real nature itself. The nature of the ultimate is inexpressible. For the convenience of understanding, we will use the quotation mark, "—", when speaking about a word, not the real nature. We have to be very careful in using a word to talk about the word itself and in using a word to talk about what is not a word. Consider the following two statements:

a) The "ultimate" is a concept.
b) The ultimate is not a concept.

These two statements seem to be contradictory at first glance; one statement affirms that something is such and such while the other denies that. If one is true, the other must be false. In fact these two are not contradictory, they are both true. Statement (a) talks about the word "ultimate", not about the real state. But the word "ultimate" in statement (b) is used to talk about the ultimate state, not about the word. So this sentence talks about the real state, not the word, i.e. the word "ultimate" is used to talk about something else which is not a word. It is different from the first statement in which the word refers to the word itself. Words are concepts-as-names. To say that the "ultimate" is a concept, therefore, is true as well as saying that the ultimate which ultimately exists is not a concept.

When we realize the difference between language and Truth, we should not cling to words and concepts. We have to know that concepts are only a tool which we employ to render the ultimate intelligible as much as language can do. But language can never give a perfect understanding because Truth is beyond its reach. Concepts are only conventional or made known. They do not exist by reason of their own nature. They are created by reason. Concepts are general ideas abstracted from properties of objects of senses. Whereas the ultimate cannot be known through senses, it must be directly known by acquaintance. Words are only a means to our own religious practice.

In admitting that ultimate truth is inexpressible, we should not doubt what or how the Buddha teaches us. What he teaches is Truth which he himself has been fully enlightened about. So he can explain the character of the ultimate by comparing it to properties of worldly things as much as language can do. But only the teaching itself is not sufficient for us to realize the nature of the ultimate; we have to know it by acquaintance. The knowledge of the ultimate therefore is a special experience directly seen by each individual. This does not mean that the acquainted Truth is subjective. It exists objectively as such.

From the charts above, we may doubt whether the difference between language and Truth covers the unconditioned, i.e., nibbāna, since some characteristics only apply to the conditioned while nibbāna is real, permanent, changeless, and does not exist momentarily as a stream. This would not be a problem because nibbāna is ultimate, not conceptual. It means that there can never be a perfect description for nibbāna. The word "nibbāna" does not refer to the ultimate, because language, whether worldly or ultimate, can refer only to the concept. But the concept derived from ultimate language such as "nibbāna" is not the concept of the ultimate nibbāna, or a perfect notion of nibbāna. If we never reach the real nibbāna, we shall never be able to judge whether our abstracted general idea resembles nibbāna or not, or whether they are similar. What we usually imagine then is not the characteristic of the ultimate, which is supramundane. This is different from the Buddha who has already reached nibbāna. He therefore can have the concept of nibbāna which represents, or is the copy of, nibbāna. The right understanding of this difference is very important, for it will help to clarify several problems under discussion in Buddhism.

A misunderstanding of the difference between concepts and the ultimate will lead us to misunderstand the Buddha's teaching. To destroy ignorance, or to know things as they really are, which is called wisdom, we have to recognize the difference between ultimate truth which really is, and conventional truth which is language as stated in the Abhidhamma. That is, we have to know that one *exists* in the sense of having objective existence, while the other is a mere concept which is formed and exists only in the mind, having no objective existence as generally understood. That which has no real existence cannot guide us to Truth which really exists.

Language by its nature then cannot be used to refer to what is ultimately real. Nor can any kind of word, even proper names, which is understood to specifically refer to a particular thing. Proper name really is a disguised description, as Russell says, and the definite description is mostly composed of general terms which signify universals or common properties. General words may be words referring to concepts or words referring to the ultimate as has been mistakenly understood. No matter what kind of word they refer to, both really are concepts which are conventional. The former kind is *concept* (as-name) *signifying concept* (as-meaning), whereas the latter is *concept* (as-name) *signifying the ultimate*, or conventional truth referring to ultimate truth. The latter kind of word usually misleads and confuses us very much. What it really refers to is only a concept. The Buddha therefore warns us to carefully distinguish between concepts and Truth.

If we consider the concept of the unreal and the concept of the real, we will see that the former does not cause as much of a problem. When we recognize its difference from the ultimate, it is not difficult to be aware of the delusion of its real existence. The latter, however, is much more complex and difficult to guard against, even though we understand their difference. The reason is that the concept of the real seems to not be conventional; and quite different from other general concepts which are made known, or refer to something made known. It has the sense of name-making, i.e. the name spontaneously makes itself known to the mind without being thought. It then seems like it can really refer to what really and ultimately exists. Therefore we are more readily trapped by concept-as-name which is the concept of the real than by the concept of the unreal. The nature of concept-as-name inclines us to think that concept-as-meaning made known is concept-as-meaning of the ultimate. We forget that the ultimate is beyond language and must be realized merely by practice. Knowledge of the ultimate must be knowledge by acquaintance which is direct knowledge, not by means of any concepts or names.

**Language or Truth?** Though language cannot directly refer to the ultimate, it would not be correct to say that it is an obstruction of Truth. This is because language is still useful in making us understand the difference between concepts and Truth, and we need to analyze conventional truth in

order to reach ultimate truth which is its real essence. It is true that there may be someone who can reach nibbana without the assistance of language, though a person of this kind is very rare, such as the Buddha who became fully-enlightened by himself. Ordinary people still need language as a means to understand the ultimate, and lead them to practice to the point that they will be able to directly see Truth for themselves. At the same time, to say that language is not an obstruction would not be true either, because if we do not acknowledge the difference between concepts and Truth, we cannot escape the trap of language. We will understand that language can provide or lead us to Truth. This means that language is *ignorance* (avijjā). Consequently, it is not necessary that we choose one or the other side. Language is like a raft that helps us cross the river to the opposite shore, which is the land of the ultimate. When we reach our destination, the function of language comes to an end. We have to understand its trick and not cling to it. Therefore we should not bring the raft along with us, and should bring it to land or tie it up in the water. As the Buddha says, "I give an analogy of raft for casting it off, not for attaching to it.[57]

If Truth cannot be known through language, then the theory of truth, whether it be the correspondence or the coherence theory, will not be relevant to what really and ultimately exists. Buddhism will not accept that to know Truth is to know that a statement is true. We cannot prove Truth in the same way as we can prove the statement to be true or false. We have to know the limitation of language. And to know Truth in Buddhism is a matter of practice, or to know it directly by insight. It is not a relationship between the statement and the external world, or between statements. If knowledge of Truth is taken to be a relationship, it would probably be the relationship between one who practices and Truth itself. One who knows Truth is one who practices according to that Truth in his conduct. They seem to be one and the same. Therefore nibbāna can be realized only by practice. Language or concepts can never reveal this Truth.

To conclude, Buddhism can be said to be the philosophy of *the Middle Way* in respects of language, knowledge, and Truth. This is because

[57] *The Tripiṭaka*, 12/280/220.

Buddhism is the philosophy of practice. The word "Middle Way" here means not choosing between two sides, or not dividing views into two opposite sides. There usually are two opposite views in philosophy such as Realism and Idealism, Eternalism and Annihilationism. The Buddha considers each side to be an illusion, not truth. When one side is rejected, it does not mean that the other side must be accepted. He then does not choose either. He often says in the *Tripiṭaka* that, "the Thus-come gives the middle way of teaching, not getting close to either of both sides which are extreme". From the analysis of language and Truth, we can conclude that he employs the same principle in answering problems concerning language, knowledge, and truth.

Buddhist philosophy truly is the philosophy of the Middle Way; that is, it does not choose any of the two sides between language and Truth. Someone may be confused whether this attitude is consistent with the Buddha's teaching of the distinction between concepts and the ultimate. This question would not arise if one understands that choosing either side implies that both sides really exist and are opposite to each other. In other words, each side is independent of, or cannot be derived from its opposite. The Buddha's teaching of the distinction between concepts and the ultimate does not imply that both are true or contradictory. If we deny one to be real, we do not have to accept that its opposite is real, and vice versa. In Buddhism, language is not opposite to Truth; it is considered to be truth. It is conventional truth which essentially and ultimately is ultimate truth. Therefore, there is solely one Truth, that is, ultimate truth. We cannot then say that concept is the opposite truth of the ultimate. Since there are no two sides, we do not have to choose either language or Truth.

The Buddha's denial to choose between two sides does not show that he denies one of the traditional three laws of thought called the "*law of excluded middle*".[58] This law states that every proposition is either true or false; it cannot both be true or both be false. The Buddha does not refute this law. As already stated, the reason he does not choose either side is because the two sides do not really exist, that is, they are not really opposite.

[58] The other two laws are the law of identity and the law of contradiction.

Eternalism and Annihilationism are obvious examples. In the Buddha's view, both theories accept the real self: only that one holds that this self is permanent, while the other thinks it can be destroyed. This clarifies that the two views are not really opposite. If they were opposite, one would accept the real self but not the other. So we do not have two sides because there is no self. Therefore the Buddha's denial of those two sides cannot be said to refute this logical principle.