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RECONSTRUCTING NIBBĀNA AS A SOCIAL IDEAL

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I. Introduction: The Social Context of Buddhist Ideals

Many years ago I was struck by the following passage written by the late Venerable Walpola Rahula:

> Those who think that Buddhism is interested only in lofty ideals, high moral and philosophical thought, and that it ignores the social and economic welfare of people, are wrong. The Buddha was interested in the happiness of men....The Buddha did not take life out of the context of its social and economic background; he looked at it as a whole, in all its social, economic and political aspects.[1]

I think Venerable Rahula was profoundly right in saying this. The Buddha had no intention of founding a religious tradition that ignores or tries to escape from the social dimensions of human life. Quite the opposite is the case: human life, as the Buddha saw it, is so thoroughly social that even religious dimensions of meaning arise out of and impact the social context. But if we grant all this, then we should be quite confused by the treatment of Buddhist ideals at the hands of many, if not most, interpreters (East as well as West). Many scholars of Buddhism describe the highest

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[1] Ven. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught,* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1959) p. 81.

religious achievements in terms of social escapism or social apathy, as a "going beyond" social concerns.

This is particularly true of the descriptions one finds of the highest ideal in Buddhism, namely, *nibbāna* (more commonly known by its Sanskrit form: *nirvana*). Nibbāna is most often described as the solitary achievement of an individual who rises to a transcendental plane of blissful existence; a plane that is disconnected from, if not opposed to, the sphere of human social activity. Furthermore, these interpretations of nibbāna confirm a false stereotype of Buddhism as a kind of mysticism that turns its back on the natural and social worlds where people actually live. On my view, such treatments of nibbāna have done great harm to our understanding of Buddhist traditions and have formed a hindrance to the application of Buddhist ideals to contemporary social problems.

In this essay, I will argue against those interpretations of Buddhism which construe nibbāna as a mystical achievement of a higher plane of reality that transcends social affairs. Concisely expressed, my thesis is as follows:

> **Nibbāna, as conceived within early Buddhism, the Buddhism of the Pāli Nikāyas, is a radically transformed way of living *in this world*—a world that is largely *social* in meaning for human beings. Nibbāna is the fruit of living a life of heightened ethical engagement with the world, not an "other-worldly" withdrawal to a higher plane of existence. In short, nibbāna is a socially ideal way of living.**

On my view, it is a considerable distortion of Buddhism to interpret its highest goal as an escape into a mystical realm of transcendental being that ignores the concerns of humankind in this world. As I will argue here, *nibbāna* has everything to do with the perfection of human possibilities in this world and nothing to do with a transcendent reality (if there is such a reality—and I have serious doubts that there is any such thing). It is a strange irony, bordering on paradox, that all Buddhist scholars acknowledge that the Buddha warned against fruitless metaphysical speculation, but then many of these same scholars conceptualize the highest goal of Buddhism in terms of mystical or transcendental metaphysics. Of course, some of the

disagreement among scholars may simply be over semantics. "Transcendence" is a philosophically loaded word. And it is surely the case that nibbāna is "transcendent" in the sense of rising above normal unenlightened experience of the world—that is so by definition.

There are certain passages in the Canon–most famously a few lines from the Udāna—that seem to suggest to some scholars a metaphysically transcendental interpretation of nibbāna. Those lines read that nibbāna is "unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned."[2] The use of such passages will be discussed further below. However, in this essay I will be arguing that nibbāna is *psychological* transcendence (or better yet, to avoid misunderstanding, "psychological transformation"), a radical change in the mind or experience of the person, rather than a transcendent reality. In particular, it is the interpretation of nibbāna as metaphysically transcendent —that nibbāna removes a person from the natural and social worlds—that I object to. Far from being a transcendent reality in the metaphysical sense, I will try to show that nibbāna is best understood as the perfection of living in and by means of the social dimensions of human life—very much a "this-worldly" phenomenon, if we allow that even an enlightened person lives in *this* world of dynamic change.

The thesis of the essay has important practical implications. The widely held interpretation of nibbāna as a metaphysically transcendent and antisocial goal of the religious life flies directly in the face of recent movements to give Buddhism a social direction—what is commonly referred to as "engaged Buddhism." If nibbāna is given a metaphysically transcendent interpretation, it is hard to see why a Buddhist would have any concern for the social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions of human life, since the goal would be an attempt to escape all of these. Is showing compassion and kindness toward another human being just a stepping stone to escape from the social plane of existence? Isn't the social dimension of human existence the only place where compassion and kindness seem possible? To argue for a conception of nibbāna that undermines or dispenses with Buddhism's most cherished values seems difficult to accept

[2] *Udāna* 8:3/80.

prima facie. "Engaged Buddhism" would be an oxymoron if transcendence of the social dimensions of life were the right conception of Buddhism's highest ideal. So one significant implication of this essay is that a socially reconstructed conception of nibbāna (based as it is on the early canonical literature) supports the contemporary practices of engaged Buddhism.

One further point needs to be made by way of setting the context of this essay. The essay is meant to be an exercise in *philosophy*, rather than in intellectual history. What I mean is that I am not making the strictly historical claim that the Buddha held precisely the interpretation of nibbāna I argue for in this essay. The canonical literature allows for a range of possible interpretations of nibbāna. And we can never know for certain which interpretation comes closest to the Buddha's own view of the matter. So, from the point of view of intellectual history, the conception of nibbāna will always be underdetermined by the textual evidence. But this is no reason not to reconstruct a conception of nibbāna that is textually viable and adds something valuable to our current philosophical discussions. Therein, I believe, lies the difference between intellectual history and philosophy. The philosopher aims not at a definitive interpretation of what the Buddha himself thought, but fashions out of the viable interpretations (always remaining faithful to the texts) a reconstructed understanding of a doctrine or concept that can be put to best use in contemporary philosophical discourse. To suggest that such a philosophical approach is illegitimate would be like saying that we have no right to use an ancient cutting tool for our contemporary purposes, no matter how useful it is to us now, simply because we don't exactly know how the ancients themselves used the tool. In just this way, I justify the following attempt to reconstruct nibbāna for our contemporary philosophical purposes.

II. Revisiting the basic understanding of "nibbāna" from the Pāli texts

Despite nibbāna's central place within the Buddhist tradition, scholarly accounts of nibbāna remain widely divergent on key issues. For this reason, it is useful to start with a brief review of what is relatively uncontroversial about the term—and what should be familiar to anyone who has studied early Buddhism.

As a religious goal, nibbāna is the aim of both the Buddhist layperson and the *bhikkhu*, although there are many Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia who believe it is beyond the reach of any but the most spiritually advanced *bhikkhu*. The word "nibbāna" has a Sanskrit etymology which means "to blow out", such as blowing out a flame. It is also commonly thought that the flame referred to is the flame of desire, of craving, that keeps a person bound to an unsatisfactory existence (*dukkha*).[3] The *Saṃyutta Nikāya* relates that nibbāna is "the complete fading away and extinction of craving [for a permanent self and sensual pleasures], its forsaking and giving up, liberation and detachment from it."[4] At another place in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, it is referred to as "the extinction of greed, hatred and delusion."[3] In other words, nibbāna is described in the Pāli texts as a state of moral purification based on the elimination of the defiling characteristics of the mind. The canonical sources indicate that nibbāna is synonymous with "liberation," "peace," "calm" (literally "cooled" (*sītibhūta*)), and "tranquility." It is often used to refer to freedom, a state of stability, a state without fear, and a state of stable happiness. On these points, most scholars seem to agree. It is important to note further that none of these terms requires a *metaphysically* transcendent interpretation.

III. Some Common Misinterpretations of Nibbāna

From various scholarly discussions of nibbāna I have created a list of six common misinterpretations of the term/concept. These misinterpretations do not form one theory of nibbāna, but they do sometimes overlap. Nibbāna is said to be:

1. a transcendent metaphysical reality, an absolute, behind or above the mundane, changing world

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[3] The fire image associated with nibbāna derives from the Buddha's famous third sermon, "The Fire Sermon" (*Vinaya* 1. 34-35), in which the Buddha relates that everything in unenlightened human experience is on fire. See Richard Gombrich's *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009, p. 111ff) for further elaboration of the centrality of fire as a metaphor in early Buddhism.

[4] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 4. 251.

2. a higher kind of knowledge or mystical intuition of the absolute
3. ineffable, beyond any form of conceptualization or logical thinking
4. the extinction of life, an escape from the cycle of suffering which is equivalent to annihilation
5. an "other-worldly" or "life denying" goal—e.g., Heinz Bechert writes that it is a "release *from* the world"[5]
6. an individual attainment that has neither social dimensions nor social ramifications—e.g., Max Weber wrote that for Buddhism "Salvation is an absolutely personal performance of the self-reliant individual."[6]

Before taking a closer look at a social reconstruction of nibbāna, let me briefly set aside the more obvious misinterpretations among these six chracterizations. Most scholars agree that nibbāna is not the extinction of *the person* but only the extinction of *the flames of craving* that corrupt a person's character and lead to suffering—thus the fourth interpretation is fairly easy to eliminate. But one of the main reasons many scholars consider *nibbāna* as a world-denying, anti-social, ideal is the interpretation of it as a mystical and metaphysical concept, as the achievement of a transcendental reality. As a first response, I would argue that such an interpretation seems to not only defy the prevailing spirit of Pāli Buddhism, but also misrepresents the scriptural record. As I mentioned earlier, the distinguishing feature of Pāli Buddhism is its avoidance of speculative metaphysics and its attempt to demystify the spiritual life. This is clearly seen in the Buddha's refusal to commit himself to the metaphysically speculative positions taken up by his contemporaries.[7] For example, he refused to speculate about such matters as the creation of the world, the finitude of the world, and about the state of a Buddha after death. The

[5] Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich, *The World of Buddhism* (London: Thames Hudson, 1991).

[6] Max Weber, *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Munshram Manoharlal, Ltd., 2000).

[7] See for example, the "Discourse to Vacchagotta on Fire" *Majjima Nikāya* 1. 483-488.

enlightenment experience of the Buddha was never formulated in the Pāli Nikāyas as consisting of an insight into an underlying, transcendent, reality. That would be the Brahmanism of the Upanishads, not Buddhism. The insight that was the catalyst for the Buddha's enlightenment consisted in his realization that this world of change *is reality* (or at least it is our human reality, which amounts to the same thing in early Buddhism). Thus, at least as far as the Pāli Nikāyas are concerned, nibbāna does not refer to a kind of reality, nor to a higher mode of knowledge (even such as the supersensory modes of knowledge, called *abhiññā)* nor to a meditative trance (such as the *jhānas*).

IV. Reconstructing nibbāna from the Pāli sources

The first thing to keep in mind, if I read the early suttas right, is that *nibbāna* is the solution to the fundamental human problem: the unsatisfactoriness of life (*dukkha*) on psychological and religious levels. The samsaric cycle of life, death, and rebirth as it is described in the twelvefold formula of dependent arising (*paticcasamuppāda*) is the proper context in which to consider nibbāna. The Buddha's diagnosis of the human condition affirmed that an unenlightened person is afflicted by the fires of passion, of selfishness, and that these could be traced to the defilements of greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).

In response to such corruptions of the human personality, the Buddha offers a spiritual therapy that takes a psychological form. He recommends a radical transformation of mental attitudes and dispositions that is aimed at eliminating lust, hatred, and delusion. In the texts we read: "The removal of desire and passion for pleasant things, seen, heard or cognized, is the sure path for the realization of nibbāna."[8] The Buddha outlined a specific regimen for accomplishing this, namely, the threefold training (*tisikkhā*): moral conduct (*sīlā*), mental concentration (*samādhi*), and the development of wisdom (*paññā*). Nibbāna, in this context, stands for the freedom that is attainable by a person here and now from unsatisfactory conditions by

[8] *Sutta Nipāta* 1086.

eliminating the causes. The moral and psychological transformation of the individual is tantamount to a total elimination of unwholesome mental traits and the cultivation of wholesome mental traits

The Pāli Canon has numerous passages supportive of this conception of nibbāna, for example:

> Herein, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu is a worthy one who has destroyed the defiling impulses, lived the [higher] life, done what has to be done, laid aside the burden, achieved the noble goal, destroyed the fetters of existence, and is freed through wisdom. He retains his five senses, through which, as they are not yet destroyed, he experiences pleasant and unpleasant sensations and feels pleasure and pain. His cessation of craving, hatred, and confusion is nibbāna in this life.[9]

In the *Sutta Nipāta* we also find a description of the state of mind of the person who has achieved nibbāna; such a person is "unshaken when hit by the vicissitudes of life, griefless, attachmentless and secure."[10] Such passages demonstrate that nibbāna is a radical change in lived experience, not the extinction of life or the achievement of a plane of existence different from this very world of change. It is a radical transformation of the total person—one begins to live and experience nibbānically. I suggest that it might clear matters up quite a bit, if we turn nibbāna from a noun into an adverb. So nibbāna may aptly be described as the ideal *quality* of life lived by a freed person (an *arahant*). Thus the difference between the person who has achieved nibbāna and the normal person is not a difference in reality, but a difference in the way reality is perceived and its effects on the person's actions and character.

I fully recognize that there are passages in the Pāli Canon that seem to offer a different interpretation of nibbāna. Bhikkhu Bodhi, for example, puts great emphasis on these few passages. In the introduction to his translation of the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, he writes that "the more sophisticated

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[9] *Itivuttaka* 38.

[10] *Sutta Nipāta* 268.

view that Nibbāna is merely the destruction of the defilements... cannot hold up under scrutiny."[11] He cites the aforementioned Udāna passage as conclusive evidence of the fact that nibbāna is a transcendent or supramundane reality that is much more than a kind of moral perfection that can be achieved in natural human existence.

I had the good fortune to discuss just these matters with Bhikkhu Bodhi at his hermitage in Sri Lanka some years ago. Although I remain very careful about disagreements I have with a *bhikkhu* over the understanding of *Dhamma*, I think that one must understand nibbāna in the broader context of the Buddha's life and teachings instead of basing one's interpretation of such a critical concept so narrowly on a few isolated passages of the Canon. In broad terms, the Buddha attempted to demystify religious experience and he taught that the search for a mysterious reality behind the changing world (as in Brahmanism) is a mistake. The religious quest is not transcendental insight, but ethical and psychological transformation that makes living in this world free from suffering, and by so doing greatly amplifies the meanings in a person's life. Thus, I think it prudent to try to reconcile any philosophical interpretation of nibbāna with these central themes rather than to give so much weight to one or two passages that seem to go against the grain of the teachings.

V. Nibbāna as a Social Ideal

With these preliminary points about nibbāna in mind, let us now turn to my central thesis: that nibbāna should be viewed as intrinsically connected to the social dimensions of human life. The case for this view rests on a consilience of three themes: the life of the Buddha, nibbāna as the perfected practice of moral conduct, and the social impact of nibbānic living.

A. The Life of the Buddha: A Life of Social Involvement

My first point of reference is the life of the Buddha himself—a fairly

[11] Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, translators, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995) p. 31.

obvious starting point, one might assume, but one very often passed over by scholars. Despite doubts that we could ever construct a complete account of the life of the Buddha from the early sources, it is reasonable to say that the Buddha lived a fairly long life beyond his enlightenment experience and that he concerned himself with the welfare of others. In other words, rather than retiring completely from society, he lived a life of social involvement. It seems reasonable to me, therefore, that the Buddha's life ranks highly as a basis for reconstructing nibbāna as a social ideal. More boldly, I would argue that where interpretations of the textual and doctrinal materials conflict, a reference to the life of the Buddha is a reasonable way to try to determine the stronger position.

Because many interpreters take nibbāna to be a kind of spiritual insight, they view the Buddha's flash of insight under the Bo tree as his nibbāna. I disagree with this interpretation. I would rather suggest that the insight at the time of the Buddha's awakening, his profound understanding of dependent arising, was the **catalyst** for a nibbānic life. The forty-five years of the Buddha's ministry that followed his experience under the Bo tree was his nibbāna. Following this suggestion, we see just how socially-engaged nibbāna can be. The Buddha's life was one of service, of profound involvement with the social and political struggles of his time. The canonical texts are clear about this: the Buddha is depicted as stopping wars, attending to the sick, advising the distraught. In short, the Buddha's life stands for compassionate living and self-emptying service—his life is a textbook on socially-engaged action.

The goal of Buddhism is to live the best possible human life—even a perfected life. But all human life is an unfolding, a developing process of actions and undergoings in the broader context of experience—it is protracted over time and space. Living is not contained in a small slice of time, no matter how intense that slice might be—for example the moment of the Buddha's awakening under the Bo tree. The best possible human life is still the lived experience in this world of change. From a Buddhist perspective, humans are existentially bound to such world, and it seems almost too obvious to ask "where else is one going to go?" And, if nibbāna is the term for what the Buddha saw as the quality of the best possible human life, then it is the way that he lived his life that provides the best

model for our understanding of nibbāna—and that life was profoundly social.

The life of the Buddha offers an opportunity to reflect on one further aspect of nibbāna—the statement found in many places in the common that call nibbāna "deathless." Surely, the promise of nibbaña is not the promise of immortality, since the Buddha himself obviously did not escape death. But that is what the interpreters who regard nibbāna as transcendent seem to hint at. And it seems to be what frightened mortals who turn to religion want to hear. But if nibbāna isn't the promise of immortality—there would have to be an ātman or a soul or a psyche for that, and we know that such things are utterly rejected by the Buddha—then what can it mean to say the nibbāna is deathless? I suggest that nibbāna is "deathless" in the sense that the enlightened person is no longer terrorized by death; that the realization that one is mortal can be looked square in the eye, not ignored and avoided as we usually do, and fearlessly see our existence and our inevitable decease for exactly what they are. In short, nibbāna is deathless because, in nibbānic experience, death is no longer a source of suffering.

B. Nibbāna as Practice of Moral Conduct

While training in moral conduct (*sīlā*) is one of the prerequisites for higher achievements on the religious path, moral conduct should not be construed as merely a means to an end, but also as an intrinsic part of the nibbānic life. That nibbāna and the moral path are intrinsically connected is clearly indicated by the following passage from the *Dīgha Nikāya:*

> Again, the Exalted One has well-explained to his disciples the moral practice (*patipadā*) leading to nibbāna, and they coalesce, nibbāna and moral practice, just as the waters of the Ganges and the Yamuna coalesce and flow on together.[12]

Here we see that it is a misinterpretation of nibbāna to think of it as the *result* of the threefold training (moral conduct, mental culture, and wisdom/insight). If my interpretation of nibbāna being more of an adverb

[12] *Dīgha Nikāya* 2. 223.

than a noun seems reasonable, then it must be the case that nibbāna *just **is*** the skillful practice of the threefold training, not some result outside of them—and if that is right, then in the case of moral conduct (especially) the social dimension is essential—notably, the Buddha in the *Discourse to the Layman Sigāla* shows that the moral duties of the layperson are built out the reciprocal relationships between people in a social context (e.g., between husband and wife, child and parents, student and teacher, and between friends). Please note that I am not denying the obvious point that nibbāna is an individual achievement. It seems clear the Buddha taught that each of us must work out our own salvation as the Buddha famously said in his parting words to the *bhikkhus*.[13] But there's no reason to think that this implies a kind of hyper-individualism that denies the social dimension of human life—after all, the Buddha recognized that each individual personality is at least partly a social construct.[14]

The nibbānic life of an *arahant* or a Buddha manifests at its core the highest achievements of moral conduct. In Pāli Buddhism these are called the *brahmāviharas;* they are: compassion (*karunā*), loving kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*mudithā*), and equanimity (*upekhā*). We should note that the first three of these moral ideals requires involvement with other people. They simply cannot be divorced from a social context. For instance, loving kindness requires another person or being to be lovingly kind towards. The practice of the *brahmāviharas*, therefore, is a kind of self-emptying service to others. I say "self-emptying" because quite literally they are a means of undoing the selfishness and attachment that are the very source of human existential problems. The highest ideals of Buddhism thus involve a profound commitment to the welfare of other people—this is a key *social* dimension to all Buddhist ethics.

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[13] *Dīgha Nikāya* 2.156.

[14] In the "*Discourse to the Layman Sigāla*" one's social relations are critical to the advancement of moral conduct—or consider the Sangha, where community life is not a mere aggregation of entirely distinct individuals, but a social context in which the fullness of our individuality is achieved in seeking common purpose.

Very often scholars refer to the description of nibbāna as "*lokuttara*" to defend a transcendental interpretation of the term. "Lokuttara" is typically translated as "transcendental" or "beyond the world." But in the context of Pāli Buddhism, the freed person stands "***above*** the world" in an *ethical* sense, rather than "***beyond*** the world" in a transcendental sense. An arahant is one who cannot be touched by the barbs of lust, hatred and delusions, and thus he or she stands above the moral tangles of the world, while at the same time living *in* the world. In common parlance we might say that the arahant is "in" the world but not "of" it. Thus, *lokuttara* is surely a metaphor, and probably a metaphor that has an ethical, rather than a metaphysical, meaning. Buddhist scholars who are familiar with the canonical literature—and certainly anyone who is familiar with the Oxford scholar Richard Gombrich's account of the Pāli texts—know that metaphors abound in the suttas. Just like one might say to a friend that seeking revenge is "**beneath**" him/her, or one might say that one is not "**above**" swearing. Now, we know for sure that the arahants are not hovering above the earth in outer space. So the only issue seems to be whether the metaphor should be taken metaphysically or ethically. The whole tenor of early Buddhism is to shift away from the metaphysical to the ethical, therefore I see no reason not to understand the meaning of *lokuttara* as an ethical metaphor for rising above a morally tainted existence.

In the texts we commonly see the metaphor "crossed over" or "gone to the other shore" used to describe nibbāna. But this must be taken as having an ethical rather than a metaphysical or transcendental meaning. In the *Sutta Nipāta* the Buddha made this explicit: "those who are mindful have attained the tranquility of complete nibbāna in this very life...they have crossed over *attachment* to this world."[15] Note also that the lotus, the Buddhist symbol of transcendence, still has its roots in the mud; it thrives in the murky pond, and at the same time remains pristine in its purity.

I certainly do not want to leave the reader with the impression that the interpretation of nibbāna as a mystical state of consciousness has no support at all in the Pāli Canon. After all, the texts do not present an

[15] *Sutta Nipāta* 1087.

entirely consistent view of any of the major Buddhist doctrines. But very often when such purportedly mystical descriptions of nibbāna do occur, they are at the end of a long passage that recounts the progressive achievement of the *four jhānas* (higher meditative states). I am really not sure what to make of these passages, because the canonical sources unambiguously say that nibbāna is not a *jhāna*, and that nibbāna can be achieved without the *jhānas*. What is clear from the Pāli Nikāyas is that the mental development represented by the *jhānas* should follow mastery of moral conduct (*sīlā*), for without moral conduct, one might misuse such powers of mental concentration.

I would like to make one last point regarding my claim that nibbānic living is intrinsically moral living and thereby social. If I am right to argue that nibbāna derives from the social contexts of human life, then we should consider the Sangha more than a temporary waystation for religious development. The Sangha was instituted by the Buddha to provide a practical social context for religious life—in other words, the Sangha *is* the religious life in practice, rather than a mere social platform for reaching beyond the social realm.

C. The Social Impact of Nibbānic Living

As the Pāli scriptures suggest, the bulk of human suffering has roots in both social and psychological conditions. The Buddha emphasized the reciprocity between moral ills in the individual and social ills. Needless to say it remains true today that immoral actions often have social roots: violence, war, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc., are but a few glaring examples of social evils of the contemporary world. According to the Buddhist analysis, the egofulness that is the root of immorality derives from misguided social values—the need to be an important somebody to others, the social pressures to be a self.

In this context, nibbāna as moral practice is the elimination of these social pressures, hence it is the removal of some of those causes from which unwholesome acts derive. As the Sri Lankan scholar, P.D. Premasiri, put it, "if it is agreed that human depravity, consisting of unchecked greed and hatred fed by ignorance, is the universal cause of social conflict and moral

evil, then one cannot deny the social relevance of the Buddhist concept of the supreme goal of *nibbāna.*"[16]

From the perspective of the Pāli scriptures, a person who is overcome by lust, hatred, and delusion has the tendency to commit deeds which cause suffering to oneself and others as well as to encourage others also to behave in improper ways. The social theory presented in the Pāli canon—especially in the *Vinaya* and the discourses on society and kingship in the *Dīgha Nikāya*—stresses over and over again that social conflict can be eliminated in society only to the extent that people transform their minds both ethically and spiritually. So, nibbāna is not only the cure of socially induced ills for an individual, but once nibbāna has been achieved by an individual, that person has a positive moral effect on broader society; in other words, the *nibbānic* life also promotes the creation and maintenance of a righteous social order. According to the Buddha, the arahant who is free from sensuous intoxication and negligent behavior, established in patience and gentle demeanor, one who is restrained from evil, having cultivated peace and tranquility within him/herself plays a vital role in society, and gives it moral direction and guidance.

I conclude by reiterating my earlier statement, that to interpret nibbāna, the ultimate goal of Buddhism, as lacking social dimension is to grossly misrepresent it. I am not claiming, of course, that my bolder thesis—that nibbāna is essentially social in nature—is the only position that is supported by the Pāli texts. But I do think that this interpretation has the best fit within the wider understanding of essential Buddhist doctrines and has a further pragmatic justification in terms of serving as a foundation for engaged Buddhist practice. According to Buddhism, a morally good person, a person whose mind is free from lust, hatred and delusion will feel social concern and will do what is right as a matter of course. If this is true, then from a Buddhist perspective the proper basis for socially committed action is spiritual development, ideally, nibbāna.

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[16] P.D. Premasiri, "The Social Relevance of the Nibbāna Ideal" in *Buddhist Thought and Ritual*, edited by David Kalupahana (New York: Paragon House, 1991) p. 51.

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LANGUAGE AND TRUTH IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

Somrudi Wisadavet[*]

"…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.

BUDDHIST MONKS AND PERSONAL PROPERTY*

*Danai Preechapoemprasit***

The decision to become a monk, whether in the Buddha's time or today, is essentially influenced by the desire to leave behind worldly goods and happiness and purify oneself to such a degree that one can reach nirvana/*nibbāna*. The only possessions that monks in the Buddha's time were allowed to have were three yellow robes and a few other necessary items. Under the Buddhist code of monastic discipline (*Vinaya* Code), monks are not allowed to accumulate wealth as the practice will interfere with the religious pursuit. Yet, today a large number of monks are known to own personal property, and Thai society seems to take it for granted. No study has been made to explore whether such accumulation of wealth violates the Code. Thus, one does not hear much from the academic circle and society about the situation. If it violates the Code, studies should be conducted to assess why and how the practice is acceptable. Who should set the criteria on the extent to which monks are allowed to own personal possessions? So far, no leading authority has come forward to do so.

Another issue to explore is what to do if having worldly possession is against the *Vinaya*. How should the monk institutions deal with the matter to ensure that the monks conduct themselves without breaking the Code? If society in general agrees that monks should be allowed to own

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property, a practice that goes against the monastic discipline, will such condoning affect other *Vinaya* regulations? All these considerations have a strong impact on Buddhist practice in Thailand and, therefore, are worth studying.

1. Property in the Pali Canon or *Tipiṭaka*

1.1 Meaning of property

There are several mentions of "property" in the Pali Canon and its commentaries. The Thai dictionary defines property as "money, possessions, and other tangible objects", while asset is taken to mean "both tangible and intangible objects which may carry some price and can be owned. Houses and land are examples of tangible objects, while copyrights and patents are examples of intangible ones" (Royal Institute Dictionary, 2003: 503). The *Abhidhānvannā* scripture touches upon the issue of property in 8 chapters – *Dhana, Sa, Dabba, Sāpateyya, Vasu, Attha,* and *Vibhava* (Phra Maha Sompong Mudito, 1999: 598). The Thai word "Sap" or property is close to the Pali "*Dabba*", while wealth could be best rendered into *Sāpateyya*. The word *Dabba* derives from "*Du Gatiyaṃ + Abba*", meaning property. In Pali, the expression "*Dunatīti Dabbaṃ*" means "on-going property". *Sāpateyya*, on the other hand, comes from "*Sapati + Neyya*", meaning asset. The Pali expression "*Sassa Dhanassa Pati, Tasmiṃ Sadhu Sapateyyaṃ*" means "the owner of the asset is called *Sapati*, while good assets found in the owner are named *Sāpateyya*" (Phra Maha Sompong Mudito, 1999: 598). In other words, property is "something owned by someone or related to the owner".

1.2 Types of property

According to the commentary to *Ratana-Sutta*, there are two kinds of property: living property, e.g. elephants and people, and non-living property, e.g. gold and money (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *Khuddakanikāya Khuddakapāṭha* Vol. 1, 1994: 243). The commentary to *Nidhikanda-Sutta*, on the other hand, mentions four types of property as follows:

1. Unmovable property (*Thavaranidhi*), e.g. rice farm and land.
2. Movable property (*Jaṅgamanidhi)*, e.g. serfs, elephants, and horses.

3. Property that always accompanies oneself (*Aṅgasamanidhi)*, e.g. knowledge and art.
4. Property that always accompanies oneself everywhere (*Anugāmi-kanidhi*), i.e., merit due to giving (*Dāna)*, practising moral precepts (*Sīla*), and meditation (*Bhāvanā*).
   (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *Khuddakanikāya Khuddakapāṭha* Vol. 1, 1994: 306-307)

Nevertheless, the present study classifies property into two categories: worldly property and *Dhamma* property. Types 1-3 of property above are in this respect worldly property, while the fourth type is *Dhamma* property. In addition, the Buddha also mentioned both types of property in *Ugga-Sutta*. He states that worldly property will eventually decline because of fire, water, monarchs, thieves and unloved descendants, while *Dhamma* property will not suffer the same fate (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *Aṅguttaranikāya Sattaka-Aṭṭhaka-Navakanipata* Vol. 4, 1993:14). Hence, it can be averred from the Buddha's words that there are two types of property:

1. Worldly property, i.e. material wealth that is subject to change due to various factors. Some examples are money, gold, rice fields and plantations.
2. *Dhamma* property, which is abstract and not subject to change, e.g. goodness.

1.3 Possessions that the Buddha allows:

The Buddha allowed the Bhikku or monks to possess some items necessary for a life of recluse. These items must be comparable to the eight requisites in the *Vinayapiṭaka* where only alms bowl and robes are allowed (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 359-360). Thus, the bowl and robes are the monks' only fundamental possessions. After passing the ordination vow, the novice monk is required to observe a life of dependence on four basic necessities: living on food offerings received, wearing robes given at a cremation, living in a natural abode – in a cave or under a tree – and taking medicine when needed, even if it is urine (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 361).

Sometime later, the Buddha allowed other requisites. These are "the three robes, alms bowl, razor, needle, girdle, and water strainer necessary for the Bikkhu's daily living" (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Part 1, 1993: 769). Delving further into the *Vinayapiṭaka*, one finds that there are still other items allowed, for example, a fan with a handle, palm-leaf fan, stick to keep mosquitoes away, umbrella, tooth-cleaning pick, metal tool except that used for killing purposes, water pot, broom, foot-cleaning material made of stone, gravel or tile, sponge stone, knife, needle, strainer, girdle, robe-cutting knife, knife with a handle, razor, razor-sharpening stone, razor sheath, razor cloth wrap, all head-shaving implements, ear picks, wooden pins for robe stitching, needle box, box for storing sewing items and thread-woven strings, pouch to put away socks, water-straining cloth, water-straining cylinder, stick to swab medication on the eyes, knee-wrap, girdle cloth, buttons and buttonholes, and toothpick (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 48-63). Medicinally-related items that the monks are allowed to keep are medicinal substance, thread-woven strings (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 26), stone grinding container, grinding stone, mortar, pestle, medicine grinder, medicine straining cloth, eye-medicine box made from bone, ivory, horn, reed, bamboo, wood, rubber, metal and conch shell (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 5, *Mahāvagga* Part 2, 1994: 62-67).

To be more precise, the Buddha allows all these possessions in order to facilitate a life of virtue that the monks are supposed to follow. In this regard, all their possessions are designed to do away with hardships and problems that might prevent such a pursuit. It is inevitable that more items have been allowed since the Buddha's time. They are geared toward the same goal of helping the monks end suffering and reach *Nibbāna*. The Buddha also sets the limit for the possession – the topic of the next section.

1.4 Time-bound possessions

In the *Vinayapiṭaka* a time limit is set for monks to possess their belongings starting from the food in the alms bowl. The time limit is called

"*Kālika*" which means time-bound. A monk is allowed to receive, keep and eat food within a certain time. There are four such periods:

1. *Yāvakālika*: The monk is allowed to temporarily receive and eat the food sometime in the morning to noon on the same day, e.g. rice, fish, meat, vegetables, fruits, and sweets.
2. *Yāmakālika*: The monk is allowed to receive and eat the offerings for one day and one night, i.e., before the dawn of the following day. The offerings are beverages made from a number of fruits allowed by the Buddha.
3. *Sattāhakālika*: The monk is allowed to receive and eat the offerings within 7 days. These are the five kinds of medicine.
4. *Yāvaciivīka*: After receiving, the monk can take the offerings without time constraints. These are medicinal substances except for the three types of *Kālika* above (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 6).

All the above evidence from the Pali Canon shows that there are a large number of possessions that the monks are allowed to have although they are subject to certain rules and regulations regarding time and amount. The *Vinaya* code is enforced to ensure that the monks can own something and yet nothing at the same time.

1.5 Criteria to decide whether property is collectively or individually owned

Various commentaries clearly differentiate various possessions between an individual monk and the collective *Saṅgha*:

1. Whether items are offered to the *Saṅgha* or an individual monk. If they are offered to the former, they are collectively owned. If they are offered to an individual monk, consideration must be made whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code.
2. Whether items offered are large or small. Larger items are deemed to be collective, while smaller items have to undergo consideration as to whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code.

3. Whether items offered are of much or little value. Valuable articles belong to the collective, while less valuable ones have to undergo consideration whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code.
4. Consideration is also given to whether or not the items offered are weapons. If they are weapons, it does not matter whether they are collectively or individually owned. They all need to undergo consideration whether or not they comply with the *Vinaya* code (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 221-223).

Thus, large and valuable offerings must be collectively owned by the saṅgha, while smaller and less valuable objects can be individually owned, depending on the *Vinaya* consideration. The *Parivāra* scripture makes the following observation:

> There are four requisites: those that should be maintained and considered to be ours to use, those that should be maintained but not considered ours to use; those that should be maintained but not considered ours and not to be used; and those that should not be maintained, not considered ours and not to be used.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 8, *Parivāra*, 1994: 477)

The scripture goes on to explain each category of requisite as follows:

> In considering the four categories of requisites, there are those owned by an individual monk, those owned by the *Saṅgha*, those for the *Cetiya*, and those from the laymen. The requisites from the laymen are something that is offered for personal use such as alms bowls, robes, repaired items, and medicine. The monk can keep them and put them under lock and key.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 8, *Parivāra*, 1994: 543)

The *Parivāra* scripture thus provides some criteria for the monks to hold possessions as follows:

a. Requisites that an individual monk owns and should be kept and used are personal belongings.
b. Requisites that the *Saṅgha* owns and should be kept and used are not personal belongings.
c. Requisites for the *Cetiya* that should be kept and not be used are not personal belongings.
d. Requisites that belong to the laymen and should not be kept, protected and used are not personal belongings.

Such explanation clarifies how and what requisites should or should not be used or maintained. Therefore, property that belongs to the *wat* and that is kept by the monks cannot be considered anyone's personal belonging. If the monks today understand this principle and can differentiate between individual and collective property, their conduct will be more in line with the *Vinaya* code, especially when it comes to the issue of money, as will be discussed next.

2. Money and the monks

Before touching on the disciplinary rule observed by the monks, the researcher wants to talk about the discipline for the novices or samanera, the spiritual saplings (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 333) that will grow to become monks. The novices observe 10 disciplinary rules, the tenth being to refrain from receiving gold and money (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 285). In other words, they are not allowed to receive money and gold.

2.1 Money in the *Vinayapiṭaka*

Certainly, monks are obliged to observe more rules. In *Kosiyavagga Vinayapiṭaka* scripture, there is a rule forbidding the monks to receive money and gold. The Venerable Upanandasākyaputra was reputed to give rise to the rule. The story goes like this.

A man approached Upanandasākyaputra, paid respect, and sat in an appropriate place beside him. He said, "Your Reverend, yesterday evening I obtained some meat, part of which I intended to offer to you. However, early in the morning there was this boy who kept asking me for it. Eventually, I gave him your share of meat. Should I offer you something instead? One Kahāpana. Yes. Upanandasākyaputra then asked whether he intended to give him the money.

Man: Yes.

U: Then, you give me one Kahāpana.

The man then gave the monk the money and went out to tell others that the Buddhist monk of the Sākya clan received money just like others. Other Buddhist monks heard the story. Those who lived a life of frugality and solitude felt ashamed, while those who adhered to the disciplinary rules began to blame the monk in question. The story was then told to the Buddha.

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 938-939)

The Buddha held a meeting with the monks to inquire about the incident. Upanandasākyaputra admitted receiving one Kahāpana for the meat worth the same amount. The Buddha admonished the monk and put in place a rule forbidding monks to receive money and gold. The incident goes as follows:

The Blessed One admonished thus, "You, misguided man, your conduct was inappropriate and unbecoming for a recluse. It wasn't right. You should not have done it. Why did you receive the money? Your action would not instill confidence in people who do not yet have faith or more confidence in those who already do. On the other hand, your act would win no confidence from those who do not yet have faith and lead astray others who already do." The Blessed One admonished

> Upanandasākyaputra in the following terms. He explained the negative consequences of when a person was difficult to train and nurture and when he was greedy, immodest and lazy. He cited the positive consequences of when a person was easy to train and nurture, when he was not greedy and when he was modest and tried to refine himself in every way. The Buddha then gave a discourse on the subject, saying to the monks, "Bhikku, this is a disciplinary rule for you to uphold. Any monk who receives or asks to receive gold or money or is willing for others to keep it for him has committed an offence entailing expiation and forfeiture (*Nissaggiyapācittiya*)."
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahavibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 939-940)

This disciplinary rule is quite explicit in forbidding the monks from receiving or having another person receive money and gold from others. It even forbids them from taking delight in having others keeping it for them. The disciplinary rules of *Vibhaṅga* spell out several instances and nuances, including the meaning of gold and money, receiving it or having another person receive it for the monk:

> By gold, it is pure gold. Money includes Kahāpana and Māsaka made of metal, wood and lac – monetary units used for transaction purposes. If the monk receives the money himself, he commits an offence of *Nissaggiya*. If he has another person to receive it for him, he also commits an offence of *Nissaggiya*. If he is happy that somebody else keeps it for him or is happy when he is told that this belongs to him, he also commits an offence of *Nissaggiya*. Gold and money which are considered *Nissaggiya* must be sacrificed among the sangha.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 941-942)

It is clear from the disciplinary rule and its explanation that monks are not allowed to receive gold and money whether in person or through

another. It is even an offense to take delight in having it. Money and gold, thus received, will have to be sacrificed to the *Saṅgha* as an act of expiation. Such offense is, therefore, called *Nissaggiyapācittiya* or *Nissaggiyavatthu* which means an act of sacrifice and expiation. The guilty monks are required to renounce it before the confession and engage in subsequent atonement (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 128). Nevertheless, a question may arise about what is meant by gold and money. Does it include currency? A commentary to the *Vibhaṅga* has this to say:

> The disciplinary rule includes any Kahāpana used in transaction. In the section on *Rajataṃ* mention is made of Kahāpana and metal Māsaka. Kahāpana can be made of gold or gold or of ordinary kind. They are all Kahāpana. Māsaka can be made of copper. It is metal Māsaka. It can be made of wood, bamboo joint, palm leaf, lac, or resin. In *Ye voharaṃ gachanti*, all Māsaka can be used in business transactions in rural areas and can take any form including bone, hide, vegetable or seeds. Some have a clear form, while others do not. There are four kinds: money, gold, silver and gold Māsaka. They are all *Nissaggiyavatthu*. There are also others, including pearl, gems, cat's eye, conch, stone, coral, ruby, yellow sapphire, seven kinds of rice, male and female slaves, rice fields and farms, flower gardens and orchards. On the other hand, there are objects that are suitable for monks to keep: thread, spade, cotton cloth, cotton, all kinds of beans, and medicine including soft butter, hard butter, honey and sugarcane juice. These are *Kappiyavatthu*.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 and 2, 1994: 945-946)

Thus, it is evident that monks cannot receive or possess money and gold as well as other objects that have certain transactional value or possess characteristics of money and gold. In modern terms, Kahāpana and Māsaka can be compared to banknotes, coins, checks, cash cards, ATM cards, debit cards, credit cards and other such things that have transactional values. The

commentary also lists a number of reasons why monks can and cannot receive money and gold as well as the related offenses as follows:

> Monks should receive neither *Nissaggiyavatthu* nor *Dukkaṭavatthu* whether for themselves, groups and *Cetiya*. It is an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya* for monks who do so for themselves. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks who do so for others. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks to do so even for the good of others. It is no offense, however, for monks to receive *Piyavatthu*.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 946)

In summary, (1) if the monk receives money and gold for personal use, he is said to commit an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya*.

(2) If the monk receives them for others, whether the *Saṅgha*, a group of people, or *Cetiya*, it is an ecclesiastical offense.

(3) If the monk receives any kind of *Dukkaṭavatthu* like pearls, gems, cat's eye, conch, stone, coral, ruby, yellow sapphire, seven kinds of rice, male and female slaves, rice fields and farms, flower gardens and orchards for himself or for others, it is an ecclesiastical offense.

(4) If the monk receives such *kappiyavatthu* as thread, spade, cotton cloth, cotton, all kinds of beans, and medicine including soft butter, hard butter, honey and sugarcane juice, it is not an ecclesiastical offense.

In other words, receiving money and gold for whatever purpose is a violation of the *Vinaya* code. The monk who does so is said to commit an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya*. The monk should not be involved with something called "*Anāmās*" or something that he should not lay hands on such as female body, female clothes, money and gold, and weapons (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 368). The commentary goes on to conclude that the only way the monk can receive money and gold without breaching the *Vinaya* code is to let *Kappiyakāraka* or his attendant carry such money and gold and turn it into the four suitable basic necessities. In this case, the monk will not commit an ecclesiastical offense. The monk should have no part in dealing with money and gold. He cannot even tell others where to put it. In

addition, an offense is said to have taken place if the monk is involved in its management, even the management of the basic necessities. It does not become the monk (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 797-948).

2.2 Money and gold in the *Suttantapiṭaka*

Besides the *Vinayapiṭaka*, the *Suttantapiṭaka* provides a wide perspective on the subject. In *Caṅkī-Sutta* mention is made of how Prince Siddhatha renounced all the possessions to live the life of a holy man:

> Behold, Noble men, we have heard that Gotama renounced so much money and gold on land and in the sky when He entered monkhood ... He was only a young man with black hair and in the prime of life...When His parents implored Him in tears not to do so, He cut off his hair, shaved his beard and put on a saffron robe, signifying a life of a religious person.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Majjhimanakāya*, *Majjhimapaṇṇasaka* Vol. 2 Part 2, 1993: 343-344)

Other *Suttas* also mention the renunciation of money, gold and property by monks before and during monkhood. In *Sundarī Therī Gāthā*, there is a passage about Bukkhunī Sundarī:

> Look here, Sundarī, your father has renounced elephants, horses, oxen, precious stones, wealth and other worldly possessions to go into monkhood. You'd better take over all the property and become heir to the family wealth …Mother, my father was overwhelmed by the loss of his son and decided to renounce the elephants, horses, oxen, precious stones, wealth and worldly possessions. I am also overwhelmed by such a feeling and want to become religious as well.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya, Therī Gāthā* Vol. 2 Part 4, 1993: 400)

Likewise, the Venerable Kassapa mentioned how he too renounced money, gold, and wealth to enter monkhood in *Mahā Kāssapa Padāna*:

> I had moral property in my last life. I was born in a Brahmin family with so much wealth. I renounced ten millions of wealth and decided to lead a religious life. I have such wonderful virtues as *Paṭisambhidā* 4, *Vimokha* 8, and *Abhiññā* 6. I have understood them all. I have understood the Buddha's teachings.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya, Apadāna* Vol. 8 Part 1, 1995: 514)

What the Buddha, senior monk and nun said in the *Suttantapiṭaka* points to the same thing that a person who wishes to enter monkhood must renounce all property including money and gold and must observe the rule before and during monkhood. The Buddha has this to say in *Attantapa-Sutta*:

> When a person thus enters monkhood…he will not receive gold and money…he will not receive male or female slaves…he will not receive goats and sheep…he will not receive chickens and pigs…he will not receive elephants, horses, oxen and donkeys…he will not receive farms and land…he will not participate in buying and selling.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Aṅguttaranikāya, Catukkanipāta* Vol. 2, 1994: 515-516)

There are other *Suttas* that touch on the monk's lack of pleasure in receiving money and gold, e.g. *Manicūḷka-Sutta*. The Buddha said that His monks do not take pleasure in gold and money. Those who do are involved in the five sensual pleasures and cannot thus be considered Buddhist monks:

> The Blessed One said, "Good, Mr. Gāmanī, when you predict thus, it is in line with what I said. You do not refer to Us with false words but say things that fellow *Dhamma*-farers can go along with. Gold and money are not appropriate with Buddhist monks who do not take delight in them. They are not allowed to possess gems, gold and money. Look here, Mr. Gāmanī, those to whom gold and silver are appropriate take delight in the five sensual pleasures. The sensual pleasures do not become Buddhist monks. They are not what Buddhist

> monks adhere to. I say this to you. Those who want grass will seek for grass. Those who want wood will seek for wood. Those who want a wagon will seek for a wagon. Those who want masculinity will seek for masculinity. We say thus that Buddhist monks do not take pleasure in gold and money at all.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Saṃyuttianikāya, Saḷa-yatanavagga* Vol. 4, Part 2, 1993: 213)

The religious verse of Nun Subhākammāradhidātherī re-affirms that entering monkhood entails renunciation of money and gold. It is not appropriate, therefore, for monks to return to such possessions. Monks should take no pleasure in them:

> I have given up relatives, slaves, workers, home, land, wealth and entertainment that people so much enjoy. I have left behind quite a large amount of property in order to live a religious life and follow the Buddha's teachings. It is not right for me to return to money and gold after I have given them up. I want a life without care. How can a person rise among the pundits if after renouncing gold and money he returns to them? Gold and money cannot bring him peace and solitude. They are not worthy of a Buddhist monk. They are not noble treasure. On the contrary, they give rise to greed, delusion, and addiction, bringing danger and bitter feelings. They are not permanent at all. Many people are made unhappy by them. They cause enemies, quarrels, murder, corporal punishments, imprisonment, degradation, sadness, and destruction. This is what people stuck in karma suffer.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Saṃyuttianikāya, Saḷa-yatanavagga* Vol. 4, Part 2, 1993: 415-416)

Thus, the *Tipiṭaka* and commentaries all point to the same thing that it is not acceptable for monks and novices to take pleasure in receiving gold and money. They are no longer laypersons who take delight in sensual activities. The Buddha gives several discourses on the danger of sense-

desire. The subject of monks receiving gold and money was also an important reason for the second Rehearsal of Scriptures (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 530-558). Thus, the subject has played an important part in the security of Buddhism.

3. Monks' property today

Based on the documentation and interviews, monks' personal property could be classified as follows:

1. Monthly food allowances: They vary according to positions as well as ecclesiastical titles and rank, e.g. abbot and Chaokhun.
2. Teaching fees for monks who teach at various education institutions, e.g. Pali schools, religious schools, and monk universities.
3. Money received when invited to perform certain activities, e.g. funeral, cremation, and making merit for house-warming.
4. Money from special religious activities, e.g. ceremonies offering robes and other necessary items to monks (Tot Pha Pa) and ceremonies offering robes to monks at the end of the Buddhist Lent (Tot Kathin).

From the interviews conducted, an abbot receives a monthly food allowance of 1,500 baht. The allowance will increase if he also teaches. Usually monks receive a wide range of money when requested to perform special activities at various functions. All this is their personal income which can be turned into property of some kind – something that may or may not go against the *Vinaya* code. As far as a wat is concerned, its income and sources of income depend on the number of activities organized and on popular faith. The amount of the wat property more or less corresponds with the document registering its wealth.

Personal expenditure of the monks can be classified as follows:

(a) Personal expenditure, e.g. water and electricity bills, telephone bills, travel expenses, and money sent to support their relatives
(b) Charity expenditure, e.g. contributions to merit-making events at various places

(c) Educational expenditure, e.g. textbooks and other pedagogical equipment.

The *wat* expenditure, on the other hand, revolves around material construction and monk dwellings (Ruangrit Prasanrak, 1997: 4-46). In light of the interviews, personal expenditure varies from monk to monk. Those who are more educationally-minded will pay more on educational material. Those who have to support their family or disciples will see their money go toward that direction.

With regard to property management, the interviews reveal that most wat tend to follow the rules and regulations of the *Saṅgha*, while there is no clear practice regarding personal property since there exists no law governing the issue. The following are some of the common practices:

(a) Monks put the money in the wat account.
(b) They open a personal bank account.
(c) They do not open an account but keep the money in the donation boxes or in the abbot's dwelling.

For money that belongs to the wat, usually there are three people involved in its management: two laypersons and an abbot. Some wat that undergo construction depend on a friendly loan agreement. For personal money, on the other hand, each monk can do whatever he pleases depending on the situation. However, the interviews shed light on various attitudes of the monks toward money today:

3.1 That money is just make-believe.

A number of monks today think that (1) money is a necessary make-believe imposed by the external world and that (2) money in the past was more valuable than that today. The money today comes in the form of banknotes with no real inherent value, whereas gold and money in the past were worth something by themselves.

3.2 That money is a personal matter.

A number of monks believe that (1) if money is given to a monk it is his to keep, but if money is meant for a collective good, e.g. Kathin or Pha

Pa, it belongs to the wat, (2) it is crucial that money is a personal matter because some monks have to support their relatives, and (3) it is true that a monk has no property, but if it is given to him he can use it, for example, to support his family, to buy something he needs, or even to pay off debt.

3.3 That money should come under strict *Vinaya* code.

A number of monks think that (1) monks cannot have money of their own because the Buddha does not allow them to get involved in it, (2) if monks want to get involved there must be *Veyyāvaccakara* and wat committee members who work in a transparent manner, and (3) money is make-believe that leads to worldly involvement and it is not a basic necessity or requisite for monks.

3.4 That the *Vinaya* code should be made more flexible.

A number of monks think that (1) as the present age is unlike the Buddha's time, the *Vinaya* code should be more flexible in that the Buddha allows some rules to be changed, (2) the consideration whether the use of money is appropriate should be based on the intention, and (3) in view of the change of social contexts the use of money has become an everyday part of life because several activities entail the use of money which the disciples have no control over.

4. Issue of monks' property

The possession of personal property has led to innumerable problems. The researcher wishes to quote ecclesiastical rules in the Code of the Three Great Seals. In the reign of King Rama I there was concern that the monks' involvement with money could result in unsuitable behaviors and practices. Section 5 prohibits laypeople from presenting offerings unfit for monks such as money, gold and other precious stones:

> Formerly, laypeople offered a spoonful of rice to the monks, and the merit was made. Monks who received such offering were pure. The laypersons did not include money as part of the offering in line with the Buddha's instructions. Both parties were honest and felt good. Today, however, monks and

> novices have gone astray. They want and ask for money from laypeople. Some claim to be able to do all sorts of things including masseurs, pharmacists, fortune tellers, and healers, asking money for those services. This is so inappropriate… Monks today do not follow the *Vinaya* Code. They live an aberrant life, wanting to be well fed like cattle. They do not seek spiritual fulfillment and do not deserve to be called Buddhist monks. Likewise, the laypeople have no idea that such offerings would do no one any good. They would give money, thinking that it would be good for them in return. The inappropriate money they give to the monks would only lead to more greed, which is against the Buddha's teaching. Such laypeople can be said to encourage ill-behaved monks to inadvertently destroy the religion. The act of giving that leads to such destruction will come to nothing.
>
> (Royal Institute, 2007: 1015-1016)

The researcher wishes to quote the Buddha's words in *Mahādukkhakkhandha-Sutta* in support of the belief that monetary problems have much to do with *Kama* or sense-desires as follows:

> Bikkhus, there is also an issue of *Kāma*. *Kāma* is the cause, the origin, and the driving force. Because of *Kāma*, several princes or rajas quarrel. Monarchs get into dispute. Brahmins are in contention with each other. Wealthy people do not see eye to eye. Mothers fight against their children and vice versa. Fathers fight against their children and vice versa. Siblings are against each other. Friends vie with each other. People quarrel with each other and hurt each other with hands, dirt, wood or weapon. Some are killed, others seriously injured. Bikkhus, all this is the consequence of *Kāma*. *Kāma* is the cause, the origin, and the driving force. It is all due to *Kāma*.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Majjhimanakāya, Mūlapaṇṇāsaka* Vol. 1 Part 2, 1999: 117)

One can see for oneself, therefore, whether the monks' behavior with regard to money goes against the Buddha's word. The interviews reveal that most monks have personal possessions to a degree. Money can be turned into all kinds of assets. In addition, lax behaviors regarding the *Vinaya* have resulted in a host of other problems, including fraud in the wat assets, inappropriate collection taking, crime, and fake monks. The researcher wishes to deal with them one by one:

4.1 Fraud in the wat assets

The fraud case here is based on the incident at Wat Sichum, Lampang province. It started with a conflict between a group of *Veyyāvaccakara* and abbots over the wat's enormous wealth. Eventually the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Lampang had to intervene, issuing an order that every monk and novice staying at Wat Sichum return to their original wat and that every *Veyyāvaccakara* and committee member be relieved of their duties effective 25 June 2007 (*Khon Muang Nua* Newspaper, 2007: 1). The incident took place after eight committee members of Wat Sichum led by Mr. Bandan Klaphachon accused Abbot Chaleo Sakukkayano of taking arbitrary action without the approval from the *Veyyāvaccakara* and committee. For instance, the wat's original account of about 2.4 million baht dwindled to 0.5 million baht, and the abbot opened another account with Krung Thai Bank in the name of Wat Sichum to which money from the Lampang Buddhism Office was transferred. This was done without the knowledge of the wat committee. The abbot kept all the account books and personally carried out all transactions. The Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Lampang set up an investigation committee asking the abbot for clarification. The monk in question could answer some of the queries, while the opening of the secret account remained shrouded in secrecy. He admitted, however, that there was only five baht left in the account.

4.2 Taking collections

The issue of taking collections was a frequent occurrence. For example, on 20 May 2008, Pol. Lt. Manu Pinchai, an officer on duty at a provincial police station in Pichit province, received a call from Mr. Paisan Tirachusak, a wealthy businessman and chairman of Pichit Business Group,

that he could no longer tolerate the behaviors of ill-behaved monks asking for collections on a daily basis without intervention from any wat or authority. In return they would give away a small yellow plastic container. Money and other objects of donation were shared among the bad people. A team of police officers were dispatched and found Monk Bunlai Koedliam, aged 30 years, of No. 62 Mu 2, Kosampi village, Kosampi district, Kamphaengpet province, asking for collection. The monk together with other two women and three strong men were taken to the police station for inquiry. It was found that these people used a black Nissan pickup, with a registration plate number Bo Bo 7071 Nakhon Sawan province, for the activity. The monk had a certificate showing that he belonged to Wat Dongchoi, Wang Pikun sub-district, Wang Thong district, Phitsanulok province. The yellow plastic containers, on the other hand, belong to Wat Nong Bot. The police also found other collection notes from several provinces in the Central Region used by a group of bad monks for illicit activities. They were fined and told to go back to their original wats and not to return to Pichit without proper authorization (Sitthipot Kebui, 2008).

4.3 Deception and stealing of monks' property

On 13 December 2007, at 1100 hours, Pol. Sen. Sgt. Maj. Udom Waewkham, Pol. Sgt. Maj. Manit Trutdi and Pol. Sgt. Maj. Chalong Phaobang, all patrol police for Bang Phongphang Police Station, received a call from a good citizen that a group of people arrested a bad guy trying to steal property in a monk dwelling at Wat Khlongphum, Rama III Road, Soi 46, Bang Phongphang sub-district, Yannawa district, Bangkok. The three police officers went to inspect the crime scene and found a man being attacked by a group of people. They intervened and arrested the man whose name was Mr. Phirom Laothong, aged 26 years and whose address was No. 117/38 Soi Wat Chong Lom, Bang Phongphang subdistrict, Yannawa district. On the man were found 42,000 baht in cash and a screwdriver. He was later sent for further interrogation with Pol. Sub-Lt. Phonchai Phengrungruangwong at Bang Phongphang Police Station and was charged with theft. The abbot of Wat Khlongphum explained that at 9 o'clock he was requested to perform a house-warming ceremony and lunch at Soi Kamnan Maen 19, Thonburi. Eight taxis came to collect all 15 monks from

the wat to the scene. On arrival there was nothing to be found. When the taxis took them back, they saw that a monk dwelling was broken into. On entering, they found the bad guy ransacking the place and taking donation money. So, they asked the people nearby to stop the man (*Thai Rat* Newspaper, 2006: 12).

4.4 Crime

A famous development monk and preacher, Monk Kraison Manunyo, aged 51, director of Thammasathan Sutthiwong Monk Sancturary at Ban Thung Lung, Mu 2, Patong sub-district, Hat Yai district, Songkhla province, was inexplicably found dead. The police could not conclude whether the death was suicidal or criminally related. There was a lot of talk and criticism that the monk had a huge amount of property, donated by disciples in Thailand and other countries, including Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia. The donation was intended for the establishment of a foundation for sick monks and for other charitable causes. After the unresolved death his property was divided among relatives and others. His dwelling was opened to the public all night, and some of the money was lost. A group of foreign disciples lodged a complaint to the Thai Embassy in Singapore and traveled to Thailand to complain to other Thai authorities (*Thai Rat* Newspaper, 2008: 19).

4.5 Fake monks

There are numerous cases in which men put on saffron robes to make money. The National Office of Buddhism organized a seminar on "Phra Winyathikan" or "Police Monks" to deter ill-behaved monks at Wat Samian Nari, Chatuchak district, Bangkok. It was attended by 200 police monks and other officials concerned. Phra Thamsuthi (his rank at the time), Ecclesiastical Governor of Bangkok, presided over the meeting, saying at one point:

> The economic situation today has led to the phenomenon of fake monks because people believe that monks are in a good position to obtain money. You simply have your head shaved and put on saffron robes. This is gravely detrimental

> to Buddhism. Recently, police monks in Bangkok told the police to arrest a group of fake monks. It was found that they all came from a sub-district in Chaiyaphum province. They were rice farmers. After the farming season they would come as a group to Bangkok posing as monks to take collections. It seems to be the practice of this sub-district…Police monks also received complaints from the Priest Hospital that some monks come to take advantage of the situation at the hospital where people are more than willing to donate money for charitable causes, especially if the patient beds are situated near the door. Some monks will do everything to occupy such beds and stay at the hospital as long as possible. Some take a lot of sugar to ensure that their blood sugar level is high. The hospital had to inform the police monks so that the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor will take action
>
> (*Khao Sot* Newspaper, 2008: 14).

There are cases in which deception is carried out by the entire family. The father will pose as a monk, mother as a nun, and their son as a novice. The topic has been much talked about with no solution in sight. The law is too lenient, so people are not afraid. Venerable Teacher Monk Santi Chanthawimon, abbot of Wat Sa Kaew, Nai Muang sub-district, Muang district, Chaiyaphum province, commented that there are many fake monks and bad guys wearing saffron robes today but the problem continues unchecked. A fake monk can collect as much as several thousand baht but when he is caught he is required to pay a fine of 500 baht. So, it is worth the risk. He will certainly do it again. Some monks like drinking and have sex with women. These are real monks. Not long after they are caught and defrocked, they will ask to be ordained again. Mr. Saeng Chanthabutsa, chief of Nong Kham sub-district, said that it is difficult to catch all the fake monks in the locality, because most villagers have gone to work abroad. Monitoring cannot be carried out as often as it was. He agreed that the law should be amended with harsher penalties. Some fake monks from Thailand went to Malaysia to deceive people. When they were caught and repatriated, they were fined 400-500 baht and imprisoned for not more

than seven days. These people will go back and do the same thing and give Chaiyaphum province a bad name (*Khom Chat Luek* Newspaper, 2008: 32).

In the researcher's view, if monkhood is not well respected by people, there will be fewer problems, whether the issue of fake monks or fraud. The problems may not all be due to the fact that monks own personal property but to the fact that wat assets are managed by the monks concerned. Fraud occurs because monks want to have them as their own. If they are not allowed to own personal property, the problem will be less serious.

5. Analysis of monks and personal property

In this section the researcher wishes to analyze the monks' attitudes based on the interviews and existing problems against the *Vinaya* Code. For a monk to have an income, whether personal or collective, is against the code in any case. When a monk comes into possession of money and turns it into other assets, this act also violates the code because it involves transactions. With regard to personal expenditure, this may include something for personal use, charitable causes, and education. The amount will vary from monk to monk. Those who are more educationally-inclined will pay more on educational material. Those who have to support their family or disciples will see their money go toward that direction. Such expenditure, unless supervised by *Veyyāvaccakara*, will still be considered a breach of discipline. There are no clear legal provisions on the management of the monks' personal property; as a result, a number of practices are open. Some have their account incorporated as part of the wat account. Others may have their own personal account. Still, others do not open an account but keep the money in such places as donation boxes and abbot dwelling. Unless supervised by the *Veyyāvaccakara*, such practice is an ecclesiastical offense.

From the interviews there are several attitudes on money. One is that money is just make-believe and that money is just a piece of paper used for transactional purposes with no real inherent value compared to the money and gold in the Buddha's time. Therefore, monks can use banknotes. This is in violation of the *Vinaya* code. The Buddha forbids not only money and gold but also resin, bones, hide and fruit seeds that can be used as money as well:

> The disciplinary rule includes any Kahāpana used in transaction. In the section on *Rajataṃ* mention is made of Kahāpana and metal Māsaka. Kahāpana can be made of gold or gold or of ordinary kind. They are all Kahāpana. Māsaka can be made of copper. It is metal Māsaka. It can be made of wood, bamboo joint, palm leaf, lac, or resin. In *Ye voharaṃ gachanti*, all Māsaka can be used in business transaction in the rural area and can take any form including bone, hide, vegetable or seeds. Some have a clear form, others no clear form. There are four kinds: money, gold, silver and gold Māsaka. They are all *Nissaggiyavatthu*. There are also others, including pearl, gems, cat's eye, conch, stone, coral, ruby, yellow sapphire, seven kinds of rice, male and female slaves, rice fields and farms, flower gardens and orchards. On the other hand, there are objects that are suitable for monks to keep are: thread, spade, cotton cloth, cotton, all kinds of beans, and medicine including soft butter, hard butter, honey and sugarcane juice. These are *kappiyavatthu*.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 and 2, 1994: 945-946)

Thus, a claim that money is just a piece of paper and can be used is against the code. Besides, if money is just a piece of paper as claimed, one will not see such problems as fraud, inappropriate collection and fake monks. A claim that it is make-believe goes contrary to the Buddha's saying in the *Ahiddammapiṭaka* that money comes from the Earth element which by itself has no inherent value. One should not get attached to it and not use it at all. Interestingly, monks today say, contrary to the Buddha, that money is make-believe and therefore can be used.

Some say that the Buddha does not allow monks to carry money because it is unsafe to do so. They can be robbed or physically assaulted. Today money is just a make-believe piece of paper and does not have the same worth as gold. One has often heard, however, of monks being murdered, deceived and robbed all for that said piece of paper. *Mahājanok-Jātaka* mentions that those who possess money can be killed:

> I have seen a mango tree bear fruit outside the palace wall, within which there is much music, singing and dancing. I have left the tree whose fruit are so desired by people for another. Soon the tree with fruit is barren without leaves and stems, while the other remains green and pleasant. Our enemies want to kill free people like us just as people want to rid a mango tree of its fruit. A tiger is killed for its hide, an elephant for its tusks, and a person for his money. Who wants to kill a person without home and without desire? I have learnt the lesson from the two mango trees, one without fruit and the other with fruit.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya, Jātaka* Vol. 4 Part 2, 1995: 88-89)

Thus, if monks have no property, the crime rate against monks will be much reduced. Therefore, the claim that money is only a make-believe item carries no weight. The evidence from the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and the situation today prove otherwise.

We come to another claim that money can be personal property if a layperson specifically offers it to a particular monk. This is in violation of the *Vinaya* which says that receiving money and gold is an ecclesiastical offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya*. The monk has to renounce it before he can be cleared of it. The more money he has, the more serious the offense. Therefore, receiving money, whether for personal or collective purposes, is an offense:

> Monks should receive neither *Nissaggiyavatthu* nor *Dukkaṭavatthu* whether for themselves, groups and *Chetiya*. It is an offense of *Nissaggiyapācittiya* for monks who do so for themselves. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks who do so for others. It is an offense of *Dukkaṭavatthu* for monks do so even for the good of others. It is no offense, however, for monks to receive *Piyavatthu*.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 946)

The claim that if money is specifically offered to a monk it becomes his personal property is against the *Vinaya* rule. Money is not one of the eight requisites for monks. It is neither basic nor additional property allowed by the Buddha. Even the four basic necessities allowed by the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, if derived from the money received by monks, should not be consumed by the monks concerned in any case (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, *the Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 948-950). In addition, money is *Anāmās*, something that should not be touched in the same way as female body and female clothes, gold and weapons should not be handled (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 368). The claim that a layman specifically wants the monk to keep mobet is not right. Monks who thus claim are negligent of their duties to educate the laypersons what is right and wrong according to the *Vinaya* rule. Laypersons should not act out of ignorance. The Venerable Yasakākaṇaḍakkaputra taught the people of Vajjī that Buddhist monks cannot receive money and gold during the second Rehearsal of the *Tipiṭaka* (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 530-558).

Besides, a person who makes an offering to an unspecified monk or to monks in general is said to make greater merit than if he singled out a particular one. This is supported by the Buddha's talk to Queen Mahaprajāpati in *Dagsiṇāvibhanga-Sutta* (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Majjhimanakāya, Uparipaṇṇāsaka* Vol. 3 Part 2, 1993: 391). So, it is not right if the monk claims that he is obliged to keep money as his personal property as the presenter so wishes. Instead, it is his duty to refer to the Buddha's saying, explaining why the offering should be made to no specific monk or monks in general because the merit is greater. Another claim is that some monks have to support their family. Admittedly, the *Vinaya* code allows monks to support their parents to a certain extent. The commentary says that regarding the question who the alms food should go, it is first to the monk's mother and father. If the offering has a price in terms of Kahapaṇā, the practice still stands" (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 2, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Part 1, 1994: 436). Another place in the *Vinayapiṭaka* says that the monk is allowed to sacrifice robes to his mother and father (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 5, *Mahāvagga* Part 2, 1994: 294). In the commentary to *Sālikedāra-Jātika* there are similar

statements that the monk can take care of his parents (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya-Jātaka* Vol. 3 Part 6, 1994: 352).

Although the *Tipiṭaka* and commentary say the same thing that monks can look after their parents, the support can only take the form of four basic necessities only, like food and water. The texts do not say anything about money and gold. At any rate it is an offense for a monk to receive them. He has no choice but to renounce them and cannot say who they should be given to. He cannot renounce them in favor of his parents, for that would constitute a breach of the *Vinaya*. An offense will not occur if he does not mention who the money and gold should go to (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 3, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Parts 1 & 2, 1994: 942-951).

When monks are allowed to possess money as personal property, untoward incidents may occur, e.g. money collection and fraud of wat property, because of greed and desire to become someone influential. Crimes can be committed for money, as already described by the researcher. Possession of money can lead to all four major offenses, e.g. having sexual intercourse with a person of the same or opposite sex, simply because a person has a lot of money and can use it as sexual favors. Even stealing more than five Māsaka is considered a fraud. An influential person with a lot of money can be involved in murder cases. Some monks can even claim to have supernatural powers in the attempt to raise more money and favors for themselves. In *Appaka-Sutta* the Buddha gives a discourse explaining that most wealthy people tend to engage in immoral acts (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Saṃyuttianikāya Sagāthavagga* Vol. 1, Part 1, 1993: 431).

There are several reasons cited that the *Dhamma-Vinaya* should be made more in tune with the present age. For instance, if monks use money for the good of Buddhism and not for personal gains or pleasure, the practice should not be considered wrong. Such an attitude is not right, because the only people responsible for handling money for monks according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and monk law are *Kappiyakāraka* or *Veyyāvaccakara*. The term "*Kappiyakāraka*" means people who make things suitable for monks, who find food for monks to eat, and who attend to monks" (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 9). The word "*Veyyāvaccakara*", on the other hand, means people who do things on behalf of the monks who help run errands, and who serve monks" (P.A. Payutto, 1995: 289). Another claim is that one

should look at the intention of the monk who uses money. The Buddha says clearly that all activities involving money and gold are not in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya* regardless of whether or not the monk receiving money is happy.

Another common attitude used to support the monks' lax behaviors is that the present age is different from the Buddha's time. One should not use the standard of one age to compare with that of another. This claim is counter to the *Mahāpadesa 4* which are used as criteria against which monks' behaviors are judged outside what the Buddha has said. The principles of *Mahāpadesa 4* are always up to date and flexible. If a monk does something like a layperson, e.g. opening a bank account, using a credit or debit card, such practice may not be mentioned in the *Vinaya*. Such monetary transactions correspond to a principle of *Mahāpadesa 4* that says "whatever has not been objected to as not allowable, if it fits in with what is not allowable and goes against what is allowable, is not allowable". Therefore, the Buddha may not say anything against the use of credit card and so on, but He forbids the acceptance of money and gold. Such things as credit cards fit in with money and gold that He forbids, so they are not allowable. Without *Mahāpadesa 4* monks may come up with other excuses that encourage them to behave contrary to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. If this is allowed to continue, eventually there will be no difference between a monk and a layman, and that will spell the end of monkhood in Buddhism.

Nevertheless, the Buddha has already made it clear that it is not right for monks to receive money and gold. There is no need to take recourse to *Mahāpadesa 4*. Similarly, the claim that the *Dhamma-Vinaya* should be reviewed to be in line with the modern way of life is not correct either. The *Dhamma-Vinaya* has already spelled out the practice of receiving money and gold. There is no need for any further review or revision. On the contrary, it is against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* to review itself. Such practice would devalue the scripture, as it means that the Buddha's teaching is merely ephemeral, and, therefore not the permanent truth. Such thinking shows disrespect for the Buddha Himself. The *Dhamma-Vinaya* was created by Him. Not respecting it is paramount to not respecting the Buddha and will lead to the degradation of Buddhism, as mentioned in *Kimbila-Sutta*

(Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Aṅguttaranikāya, Pañcaka* and *Chakkanipāta* Vol. 3, 1994: 446)

Some claim that the Buddha allows for some minor disciplinary rules to be amended, hence the attitude that receiving money is a minor matter that can also be revised. Monks can no longer observe the rule governing money. Admittedly, before the Buddha passed away, He said, "Ānanda, if monks wish to repeal some minor disciplinary rules, let it be" (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Dīkanikaya Mahāvagga* Vol. 2, Part 1, 1993: 321). At the same time, He also said to the Bhikku thus:

> Bikkhu, you shall not set disciplinary rules that I have not made. Nor shall you revoke those that I have established. You shall conduct yourselves at all times according to the disciplinary rules as I have made. Monks who look for development will not fall into degeneration.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Dīkanikaya Mahāvagga* Vol. 2, Part 1, 1993: 240).

The Buddha's word led the Venerable Kassapa who presided over the first Rehearsal into deciding together with 500 other Arahanta to keep all the disciplinary rules. Not a single one was left out. This was done to ensure the continuity of Buddhism. Otherwise, there might be some lax monks who would remove the rules one by one down to four major offenses of *Pārājika* on pretext that those rules are minor. This would naturally lead to instability of religious life and eventual degradation of Buddhism. Besides, the commentaries state that "the *Vinaya* will be as old as Buddhism. When the *Vinaya* stays, Buddhism also stays" (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 1 Part 1, *Mahāvibhaṅga* Part 1 1993: 34). The Venerable Kassapa knew full well how closely the existence of Buddhism was associated with the *Vinaya*. He also did not want to see laypersons accuse monks of behaving themselves only when the Buddha was alive (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 7, *Cullavagga* Part 2, 1994: 517).

Theravāda Buddhism has accepted the decision of the Rehearsal assembly presided over by the Venerable Kassapa. No disciplinary rule was omitted. So, the claim that monks can use money as part of the action

to revise the disciplinary rule is not valid. In *Milindapañhā* scripture there is an explanation why the Buddha mentions the possibility of some minor amendments. The Buddha's real intention is to ensure that the monks observe all rules just as a dying king of a vast empire tells his heir that if the latter wants to reduce the empire to a lesser extent he can do so. The real intention of the monarch, of course, is not what is said but to maintain the existence of the empire (Venerable Tipiṭakaculābhaya, 1996: 162-165).

Another view is that many monks say that it is very difficult to observe all the disciplinary rules. They, therefore, apply the rules as far as it is convenient to them or even change the rules as they see fit. This is against the word of the Buddha in *Sikkha-Sutta* in which mention is made of Bikkhu and Bikkhunī whose blameworthy behaviors caused them to leave monkhood as opposed to those who the Buddha praises for their purer existence thus:

> Bikkhu, although some Bikkhu and Bikkhunī are inflicted with suffering and in tears, they always practice a pure religious life and are praiseworthy for five righteous conducts: *Saddhā* (faith), *Hiri* (moral shame), *Ottapa* (moral fear), diligence, and *Paññā* (wisdom). Behold, Bikkhu, although some Bikkhu and Bikkhunī are inflicted with suffering and in tears, they always practice a pure religious life and are praiseworthy for such five righteous conducts
>
> (Venerable Tipiṭakaculābhaya, 1996: 8).

The Buddha also talks about the wonders of Buddhism in *Uposatha-Sutta* that His disciples will never violate the disciplinary rules even in the face of death (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya, Udāna* Vol. 1 Part 3, 1993: 526). So, the claim that it is difficult for monks to observe the rules about money simply shows that such monks are not praiseworthy. They breach the rule simply because it is difficult not to use money today, especially when such difficulty does not lead to tears or death. They seem to be ready to break the rule. There is another attitude about monks who hold administrative positions such as abbots, Ecclesiastical Sub-district Governors and so on. They are entitled to monthly allowances for their jobs. This claim is contrary to the *Dhamma-Vinaya* on beng a monk as opposed

to being a civil servant. Part of the confusion arises from the Act on the *Saṅgha* B.E. 2505 (1962) and its amendment B.E. 2535 (1992). Section 31 of Chapter 5 of the act says that a wat has a status of juristic person represented by the abbot in general administration (Administrative *Saṅgha* Handbook: 9), while according to Section 46 monks who are appointed with administrative responsibilities and *Veyyāvaccakara* are competent officials as specified in the Criminal Code (Administrative *Saṅgha* Handbook: 4).

The crucial issue is that an abbot is a competent official under the law and is therefore entitled to an allowance like a salary given to a civil servant. Such act is against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* which forbids the ordaining of civil or royal servants (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Vinayapiṭaka* Vol. 4, *Mahāvagga* Part 1, 1993: 245). Yet, the law cited above goes the opposite direction. When a monk stays long enough to become an abbot or governor monk, he then becomes a competent government official with an allowance or salary. This is contrary to the *Dhamma-Vinaya* even it is allowed by the Act of the *Saṅgha*. The Proverbial Verse of Buddhist Nun Subhākammaradhitā confirms that to enter monkhood entails a renunciation of money and gold; it is, therefore, inappropriate for monks to re-possess them again (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya, Therī Gāthā* Vol. 2 Part 4, 1993: 371). So, it is against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* for a monk to possess money. Monks should pay no heed to money.

Thus, there are numerous arguments against the claims made above on the basis of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and facts. The best course of action is to adhere to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, for it is wrong for monks to possess money and gold.

6. Suggested solutions

6.1 Promote the quality of monks according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*

This is one of the most important approaches. Monks that do not know the tenets of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* will not be able to practice them. The adherence of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* will have an impact on the study, practice, dissemination and continuity of Buddhism (Danai Preechapoemprasit, 2003: 38-95).

1) Instilling the ideology of ordination into monkhood

This is fundamental. If a person entering monkhood understands the objective of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, the problem of monks possessing and accumulating money will be minimized. A person with a religious life should renounce it. The Buddha explains in *Attantapa-Sutta* how a religious person understands the danger of *Kāma* before entering monkhood and is freed from the worldly entanglements:

> A wealthy person, his son, and other members of the family listened to the *Dhamma* and had faith in me. They realized how limited the life of a layperson was. Monkhood would provide a clearer and freer path. It was not easy for a layperson to live a holy and chaste life like a polished conch shell. "Why don't you cut your hair shave your beard, wear a saffron robe and enter monkhood?" Later on, they renounced all wealth, left their family, cut their hair, shaved their beard, wore saffron robes and became monks.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Aṅguttaranikāya, Chakkanipāta* Vol. 2, 1994: 515)

If monks are instilled with such ideology and realize that monkhood entails renunciation of possessions in order to achieve complete freedom, the researcher believes that they will not want to accumulate money and other possessions. A concrete method is to train candidates for ordination or ordinands, their friends and relatives. Training may take place before ordination regardless of how long one intends to stay in monkhood.

2) Studying the *Dhamma-Vinaya*

Several *Suttas* contain the teachings of the Buddha and His disciples concerning money and possessions. For instance, in *Paṭisalalana-Sutta* "Buddhist monks should not try to commit general sins, be the servants of other people, and give a *Dhamma* discourse to get money" (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya, Udāna* Vol. 1 Part 3, 1993: 599). Their sole purpose is to obtain *Dhamma* from within. In *Soṅaka-Jataka* the Buddha explains how Buddhist monks who have no possessions and live a secure life can advance in the path of *Dhamma*:

> [One] Monks who have no possession or home always advance. No possession or rice husks will go into their barns, pots and baskets. Monks who seek food already prepared have a graceful routine life. They manage to live on the given alms food. Two, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They consume harmless alms food, and no *Kilesa* or impurities will fall upon them. Three, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They consume alms food without desire, and no *Kilesa* or impurities will attack them. Four, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They are absolutely free and travel to places without concern. Five, monks who have no possession or home always advance. When the city is on fire, whatever the monks have will not be burnt. Six, monks who have no possession or home always advance. When bandits plunder a place, whatever the monks possess will not be lost. Seven, monks who have no possession or home always advance. They have a graceful routine behavior with alms in their hands, wearing robes. Even when they go through places guarded by bandits or to other dangerous paths, they will fare safely. Eight, monks who have no possession or home always advance. In whatever direction they take there is no concern.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Khuddakanikāya-Jātaka* Vol. 4 Part 1, 1994: 121-122)

A study of the Buddha's sayings will make the monks aware of how they should behave toward money and property. A practical way is that after pre-ordination training that helps ordinands in their transition to monkhood they should be required to study the *Dhamma-Vinaya* on a regular basis no matter how long they intend to stay. The *Saṅgha* authority will need to put in place measures that require wat to follow, providing budgetary support and quality training personnel. Training programs should appropriately correspond with the length of the monks' intended stay. For a short stay in monkhood a training program could be for 7 days, 15 days,

one month, or 3 months. The training curriculum should provide adequate and correct understanding of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

For a longer stay in monkhood a more serious program should be instituted. For instance, a Buddhist-monk university may have a non-diploma curriculum on *Tipiṭaka*. The course may consist of the *Vinayapiṭaka*, the *Suttantapiṭaka*, the *Abhidammapiṭaka*, and *Suddhāvisesa* focusing on learning the Pali grammar. Further sub-divisions based on the *Dhamma-Vinaya* are also possible (Danai Preechapoemprasit, 2002: 176-182). The objective is to enhance the quality standard of monks, paving the way for further selection of those who intend to live a permanent religious life.

3) Observing the *Dhamma-Vinaya*

Another effective way to solve disciplinary problems is to observe the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. In a nutshell, the observation of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā* will lead to renunciation of money and possessions and to higher *Dhamma*. Monks should practice *Satipaṭṭhana* to reduce a material desire. In *Salaḷāgara-Sutta* the Buddha says that monks who practice *Satipaṭṭhana* will not leave monkhood for possessions. Therefore, if monks practice *Satipaṭṭhana* well, they will not accumulate wealth or take pleasure in money and property while leading a religious life. This is supported by the following:

> All the elderly people, kings, grand royal courtiers, their friends, relatives and children will persuade monks who practice *Satipaṭṭhana 4* well to take pleasure in wealth, saying "Noble men, come away. Why do you want to wear these saffron robes? Why do you stay head-shaven, carrying an alms bowl? Leave the monkhood. Come and enjoy wealth and do other goods." It is not possible for monks who practice *Satipaṭṭhana 4* to leave monkhood. Why? Because the mind that inclines and moves toward *Viveka* (solitude) long enough will not make it possible to leave monkhood.
>
> (Mahāmakuṭarājavidyālaya, the *Saṃyuttianikāya, Mahā-vāravagga* Vol. 5, Part 2, 1994: 198-199)

The practice of *Satipaṭṭhana* and *Maraṇānussati* will help let go of the desire and egoism. If the monks follow this path, the researcher is

confident that they will be less attached to money and property as taught by the Buddha. However, *Dhamma* alone may not resolve the issue altogether, the researcher thinks that it should be complemented by a structural solution.

6.2 Systematic solution by the State

1) Development of a quality screening system for monks

Based on the interviews the issue of monks possessing money and property could be resolved by the following methods:

a) A more effective screening of candidates for monkhood should be put in place.
b) Harsh penalties should be imposed on fake monks as a deterrent measure.
c) A monk database should be developed to keep track of monks with bad records and to prevent their repeated ordination as well as attempted ordination of fake monks.

2) Property management and provision of four basic necessities

A structural approach to the problem can be summarized as follows:

a) A wat fund should be set up as the central funding source for monks to use. It should be managed by the wat.
b) The State should provide a budgetary support for all wat expenses under legal provisions on supervising the property of the wat and individual monks.
c) The *Saṅgha* structure should be modified in such a way that accounting audit can be made transparent at every level. Separate accounts should be kept for personal and wat property.

Based on the information obtained, it seems that the State's effort to patronize and look after Buddhism has met with much resistance. Much of the resistance is due to conflicts of interest. Some well-to-do wat are afraid that they might lose their property, while others think that their attempts to produce amulets might lead to the State's confiscation if they come under the State's supervision. All this clearly reflects to what extent monks are attached to property.

3) Others views

The following are some of the views suggested that may help solve the money-monk problem:

a) Set up an organization made of up the social sector and Buddhist council consisting of the State, the *Saṅgha* and people to manage Buddhist affairs and to patronize monks
b) Set up a Buddhist bank acting as a *Veyyāvaccakara* managing financial affairs for the monks
c) Return to the original *Dhamma-Vinaya* in which an honest *Veyyāvaccakara* system manages the financial affairs for the wat.

6.3 Summary of the suggested solutions to the problems of monks and personal property

1) Problems at an individual level can be solves by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* + *Veyyāvaccakara.*

2) Problems at the wat level can be solved by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* + *Veyyāvaccakara* + support and monitoring by the wat and community and auditing by a central authority.

3) Problems at the *Saṅgha* level can be solved by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* + the Buddhist Bank or Buddhism Property Office (*Veyyāvaccakara*) + auditing system (the *Saṅgha* laws + State control).

The researcher believes that at an individual level the solution is by observing the *Dhamma-Vinaya* with the support of a system of honest *Veyyāvaccakara*, as found in such wat as Suan Mok and other Wat Pa (forest monasteries) including Wat Pa along the line of Venerable Luang Po Cha and Wat Chakdaeng. At a wat level the solution lies in observing the *Dhamma-Vinaya* with *Veyyāvaccakara* of the wat looking after financial management. For this to work properly, the wat and the community need to provide support to ensure transparency. Auditing must be conducted by the central authority, possibly the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council or National Office for Buddhism. The management of the *Saṅgha* property, on the other hand, needs the government support, especially budgetary support, through the National Office for Buddhism or the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council. Other financial support may come from donation or Buddhist Bank. The Buddhist

Bank should act as *Veyyāvaccakara* managing the *Saṅgha* affairs, which is not in violation of the *Dhamma-Vinaya* subject to a transparent auditing system from the *Saṅgha* and the government. It is evident that the system will consist of 3 elements:

a. Veyyāvaccakara
b. the *Dhamma-Vinaya*
c. Transparent auditing.

The solution will not be possible without a quality *Veyyāvaccakara* system. The researcher believes that the National Office for Buddhism should put in place central *Veyyāvaccakara* officials to look after the monks' financial affairs in every wat. These are salaried positions with clear job descriptions regarding the monks' financial management and offerings given by others in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. This should be the best possible option. So, there needs to be a screening system for selecting suitable candidates for *Veyyāvaccakara* positions to prevent fraud and corruption. The information of wat's income and expenditure should also be made available and subject to auditing by the people sector, *Saṅgha* and government. The State needs to pass necessary legislation in support of these activities and in line with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

All the suggested solutions and approach need to be based on the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. This makes it imperative for monks to study and follow the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, e.g. the principle of solitude. The outcomes will be beneficent for all concerned including the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and Thai society. If the monks do not behave themselves according to the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, no system will solve the perennial problem of monks' personal property.

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