

## **THE SIMILE OF THE VIPERS** **by Sayalay Susila**

A very important sutta, especially for those who want to know the practice of insight meditation fully, is “The Simile of the Vipers” from the *Samyutta Nikāya*. This sutta starts with the following story:

A man had committed an offense. The king wanted to put him in jail but could not find any evidence. So the king assigned him the job of looking after four poisonous snakes. Every day this man had to take care of the snakes. From time to time, the snakes had to be fed, to be picked up and put down, to be bathed, and to be put to sleep. The man thought this task was a reward given by the king, and very happily he did his duties.

But one day, a wise friend approached the man and told him that if one or another of the vipers ever became angry with him, the man would meet his death or experience deadly suffering. So, he should let go of the snakes and run. So the man, now afraid of the four vipers full of fierce heat and deadly venom, fled first in one direction and then in another.

The ministers reported to the king that the man had fled. Then the king sent five murderers with raised swords to chase after the man. The man’s wise friend appeared again and told the man that five murderers were pursuing him, wanting to take his life on the spot if they found him, and that the man should run as fast as possible. So the man, afraid of the four poisonous snakes and the five murderers, fled first in one direction and then in another.

When the king found out that the snakes and the murderers could not kill the man, he spoke to his ministers thus: “First, when he was pursued by the vipers, he fled here and there, tricking them. Now, when pursued by five murderers, he flees even more swiftly. We have not been able to catch him, but perhaps by trickery we can. Therefore, send as a murderer an intimate companion from his youth, one who used to eat and drink with him. Because this person has been his intimate companion, the man will not be aware that he has an evil intention.” The ministers then sought out such a companion and sent him to murder the man. Luckily the man’s wise friend appeared again and revealed the truth to the man. He told the man to be wary and run away as fast as possible.

Now the man was afraid of the four snakes, the five murderers, and another murderer who pretended to be his intimate companion. He fled further and reached an empty village that had only six houses. Whichever house he entered was void, deserted, empty. Whatever cooking pot he lifted up was void, hollow, empty.

The man thought it was time for him to rest and that he would remain in the deserted village for a while. But the man’s wise friend appeared and told him that the village had just been raided by six robbers, who may return, so the man should not stay there and should leave immediately. Without resting, the man continued to flee until he came to a great expanse of water where the current was swift. The man realized the near shore was frightening and full of dangers--the four snakes, the five murderers with drawn swords, the sixth murderer who was the intimate companion, and the six robbers--but that the far shore was safe and free of dangers. However, there was no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over from the near shore to the far shore.

Then the man thought, “Let me collect grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bind them together into a raft, so that by means of that raft, making an effort with my hands and feet, I can get safely across to the far shore.” So he collected grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bound them

together into a raft. By means of that raft, making an effort with his hands and feet, he safely crossed to the far shore. After crossing over and going beyond, the man stood on high ground.

### **Summary of the Metaphors**

What are the four poisonous snakes? They are the four elements. Who are the five murderers? They are the five aggregates of clinging. Who pretends to be an intimate friend but is actually an enemy? This is craving. To what does the village with six empty houses refer? The reference is to the six sense-bases. Who are the six attacking robbers? They are the six sense-objects. What is the great expanse of water? This represents the four floods of sensuality, existence, becoming, and ignorance.

The near shore, which is dangerous and frightening, is a designation for identity view. The raft that helps the man cross to the other shore is the Noble Eightfold Path. Making effort with one's hands and feet is a designation for the arousing of the fourfold right effort; one has to walk the path by way of one's own effort. The other shore is Nirvana. Crossing over, going beyond, and standing on high ground is a designation for the arahant.

The four elements, five aggregates of clinging, craving, six sense-bases and six sense-objects, identity view, the four floods of sensuality, existence, becoming, and ignorance, the Noble Eightfold Path, the fourfold right effort, and Nirvana are all dharmas that should be known by one pursuing the path.

### **The Four Elements**

Why are the four elements represented by four poisonous snakes in the sutta? To understand this point, we have to train in the four-elements meditation. This particular subject of meditation is undertaken to understand the reality of the body as it actually is. The Lord Buddha taught the four-elements meditation in two ways: one is the detailed way and the other is the brief way.

The Buddha taught the brief way in the discourse on Four Foundations of Mindfulness to the Kuru people, who were very sharp and quick to understand. The Buddha stated, "A recluse reviews this very body, however it is positioned or placed, as consisting of just elements thus: 'There are in this body just the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the wind element'" (Majjhima Nikāya [MN] 10). Such concise instruction is beyond the comprehension of most of us.

What of those who have sluggish wisdom? For them the Buddha taught this subject in detail in the discourses "Exhorting Rahula" (MN 62) and "Analysis of the Elements" (MN 140). In these two middle-length discourses, he skilfully used conventional truth to bring about the realization of ultimate truth. In reference to the earth element, his instruction is as follows: "Monastics, what is earth element? It can be either internal or external. What is internal? Whatever is taken as belonging to oneself that is solid, substantial, and clung to--head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces--or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solidified, substantial, and clung to, this is called the 'internal' earth element."

This body, which is seen in conventional truth as an undivided unit, is composed in ultimate truth of the four elements: earth element (*pathavi dhātu*), water element (*āpo dhātu*), fire element (*tejo dhātu*), and wind element (*vāyo dhātu*). The Pali word *dhātu*, translated as "element," is an ultimate property or characteristic. Each of the four elements has its own particular characteristic.

What is the characteristic of the earth element? When we see the earth, what strikes the mind? Hardness. Hardness is the characteristic of the earth element. Its function is to act as a foundation

(for the other primary elements), and it manifests as receiving the other three elements. The earth element has six aspects that exist in relation to each other:

- (1 and 2) Hardness versus softness
- (3 and 4) Roughness versus smoothness
- (5 and 6) Heaviness versus lightness.

Hardness and softness cannot exist together but are relative to each other. When something is not so hard, it is soft. The same relation exists in the other two pairs. When something is not so rough, it is smooth. When it is not so heavy, it is light. Understanding these relations is fundamental to discerning the earth element.

How does one start the practice of four-elements meditation? One starts by reciting the 20 parts of the body that have the earth element as the predominant factor: *head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces and brain*. As the parts are recited one by one, gradually the hardness becomes clear. To help make the characteristic clear, you can bite down or clench the teeth to feel the hardness. Then, move your awareness from the top of the head down to the sole of the foot to discern hardness in the body. When hardness becomes clear throughout the body, you can start to discern roughness. You can rub your skin to feel the roughness, and move your awareness from the top of the head down to the sole of the foot to discern roughness. Move your awareness in the same way to discern softness, smoothness, heaviness, and lightness.

The second element is the water element. What is the water element? When you see water, what characteristic appears to the mind? Flowing. The water element has flowing as its characteristic. How can the water element be discerned in the body? There are 12 parts of the body that have the water element as the predominant factor: *bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, joint oil, urine*.

When you think of sweat, blood, tears, or urine, the characteristic of flowing will become clear to the mind. According to the *Abhidhamma*, the water element cannot be sensed by way of touch, as it is not a tangible object. The water element can only be discerned by the mind. If you touch water, you may feel pressure, but pressure is an aspect of the wind element. You may feel cold when touching water, but coldness (temperature) is an aspect of the fire element. You may feel the softness of the water, but softness is an aspect of the earth element. You cannot feel the flowing of the water; flowing cannot be discerned by way of touch.

Another aspect of the water element is cohesion, or binding, and this is the force that binds the body together. All of our organs are bound together because of the water element. Without the water element, the organs and limbs would scatter, and there would be no shape. In meditation, sometimes one feels tightness within the body; this is the cohesion of the water element.

The third element is the fire element. What is the fire element? Heat, or temperature, is the characteristic of the fire element. There are four aspects of the fire element in the body. The first type is the heat that warms up the body; you feel hot because this heat is flowing well, and you feel cold when it is not. This heat is neither you nor I; it is only the function of the fire element. The second aspect is the heat that matures or ages the body. For example, your hair turns grey with age because of this aspect of the fire element. Those who have excessive fire element in the body have hair that turns grey easily. The third type is digestive heat which digests what you consume, what you have eaten or drunk. This digestive heat is produced by our past karma. Because of some unwholesome past karma in this life, one may have poor digestive fire. The fourth type is the heat

of fever.

The fourth element is the wind element. It has pushing, supporting, and moving as its characteristics. The supporting action of the wind element keeps the body straight, and pushing makes the body bend and the hands flex and move.

The body is made of these four elements. The earth element serves as the foundation for the other three elements. The body has coherence because of the water element, is maintained by the fire element, and is supported by the wind element. The body is only a group of elements. This is the reality of this body. Because of not knowing this truth as it really is, we regard the body as “I,” “mine,” and “myself.” Thus, one clings to the idea of a permanent body that can be relied upon. To develop knowledge of the body as it really is, keep contemplating the four elements, either through the detailed way or the brief way, one after another from the top of the head down to the soles repeatedly. When you feel the hardness of the whole body, know that it is the earth element. When you feel that the body has coherence, know that it is the water element. When you feel the bodily temperature, know it is the fire element. When you feel the supporting force that maintains your posture, know that is the wind element. Hardness, cohesion, heat, and supporting are just characteristics of their respective elements, not “I,” not “myself.” Without contemplating the body in this way, it is difficult to realize the non-self nature of the body. You need to discern four elements repeatedly until knowledge arises.

When concentration deepens, the body turns out to be bubbling, with no solidity at all. Some meditators, through the power of concentration and by seeing the four elements again and again throughout the body, see the elements break into millions of particles, vibrating, arising, and passing away incessantly. On repeatedly seeing the uncontrollable phenomena of this arising and passing away, one realizes the solidity of the body is just an illusion.

Previously one was so enchanted with the body, thinking that it is real, fit, and beautiful. Now, through the correct seeing, one is awakened, and the body is seen as just particles coming together and falling apart repeatedly. How can the view of the body as “I,” “mine,” “myself” arise? Because of this direct experience, one knows there is nothing in the body one can hold on to. One starts to let go of the belief that the body can be relied upon for happiness. Letting go has to be achieved by seeing rightly, grounded upon one’s practical experience.

From time to time, the elements go out of balance. At these times, the four elements are like four poisonous snakes. Earth element can be compared to an earth snake. If the hardness in the body becomes excessive, we feel stiff and rigid, and mobility becomes difficult. At that time, we feel like we have been bitten by the earth snake. Excessive hardness can cause death as well. We have to take care of this poisonous snake by exercising the body.

If the water element is in excess, what will happen to the body? Excessive water element may cause swelling and diarrhea. At that moment one is bitten by the water snake.

When the body is overheated, or when one has a fever, one is attacked by the fire snake. This fire snake is very dangerous and may cause death. It is important to take care of the fire snake properly.

If the wind element is not enough in the body, one may get a stroke and the body cannot move well. Excessive wind causes belching and bloating in the stomach. At these times, the wind snake is furious. Thus, the Buddha compared the four elements to four dangerous poisonous snakes.

It is important to learn what causes imbalance of the body. There are four causes: food,

temperature, karma, and mind. When extremely spicy food is swallowed, the heat of the body becomes excessive. One has to balance it by taking more cooling food. When the weather is too hot or too cold, the body also loses its balance.

Negativity of mind also can cause imbalance of the elements. For example, when one gets angry, excessive heat will be produced in the body, causing the fire element to go out of balance. When the body is ill, most people cling to the body and think, "I am sick." Owing to the grasping, the illness becomes even worse. But if one can cultivate equanimity toward whatever happens in the body, even if the body is sick, the mind is unmoved. The state of equanimity produces pure energy that heals the body. This is what we call matter born of mind.

Our past karma will also affect the body. The Buddha many times was afflicted with back pain; this was because, in one of his past lives, he was a wrestler. He used to break the opponent's back bones. Because of this bad karma, the Buddha had to suffer back pain as a kammic result.

Whatever pain arises in the body, just know it as an imbalance of the elements. Don't cling to the pain as "my pain." See hardness, heat, vibration, stiffness, etc., as elements; they are not "my hardness," "my heat," vibration as "I." etc. This way of contemplation helps one to let go of the clinging and helps to remove the perception of self. All suffering comes from clinging to the self, which is just an illusion. When one dis-identifies self from the body, one's mind becomes at ease and free.

One should also extend the knowledge of the four elements to the external body; thus one can contemplate, for example, the body of one's beloved or of a person one hates. People are attracted to their loved ones and dislike those they hate because they do not understand that their bodies are also just a group of elements. We have to contemplate internally as well as externally to get rid of likes and dislikes. How do we discern externally? When we realize that our body is composed of impersonal four elements, we can project this understanding to the external person, especially to those one hates or loves. Which elements do you hate or love? Earth, water, fire, or wind? By investigating in this way, one loses the perception of a "being" or a "person." Finding that no one is there, one further abandons the obsessive emotions of lust and aversion.

If you have craving for and are clinging to inanimate things, such as cars, jewelry, a big house, clothing, etc., contemplate them as the four elements to depersonalize them. In this way you can stop clinging to them. They are in fact composed of four elements, right? Practice in this way to develop detachment to people and things. All suffering comes from clinging and self-identification. When suffering arises, investigate the causes of your suffering. Work to remove the cause; when the cause is removed, the effect--suffering--will cease.

Just by seeing the four elements in the body internally and externally, without an abider, maker, experiencer, and actor, a yogi is immersed in voidness.

### **The Five Aggregates**

Now we come to the five murderers. Who are the five murderers? They are the five aggregates of clinging. What are the five aggregates of clinging? They are the materiality aggregate of clinging, the feeling aggregate of clinging, the perception aggregate of clinging, the formation aggregate of clinging, and the consciousness aggregate of clinging.

What is the materiality aggregate of clinging? There are four primary elements and 24 types of derived materiality (four elements times six senses). The 24 types of derived materiality include the sensitivity of eye, ear, nose, tongue, mind, and body with their respective objects of visible object,

sound, smell, taste, mental objects and tangible objects. The materiality aggregate (*Rupukkhanda*) is the body in the conventional sense.

The second aggregate is the feeling aggregate (*vedanukkhanda*). The word “feeling” in the context of the aggregates means only the mental feeling of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Emotions belong to the fourth aggregate (discussed below).

We cling to feelings even more so than to the body. When the eyes see a sensually enticing object, pleasant eye contact occurs and a pleasant feeling arises. If one is not aware of that pleasant feeling and does not understand its impermanence, craving is sure to follow. When the visible object is unpleasant, unpleasant feeling arises, which activates the latent tendency of aversion. Feelings arise beyond our control. We cannot prevent a feeling from arising, but we can be aware of it. Feeling is just a mental state, and it is conditional. It comes and goes. What is conditional and changing cannot be regarded as a permanent self. Without awareness of what is happening at the moment of sense contact--that feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) are born of the six contacts of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind--the mind is beset by greed, hatred, and delusion, and there is no way to liberation.

Craving follows after pleasant feeling. If that craving is left unchecked, the force intensifies and becomes clinging. Thus, it is said that dependent on craving, grasping comes to be. Grasping means holding on tightly to what one desires. At this point, the mind becomes very agitated and enslaved because of the sensual urge. In order to satiate the intense craving, the body has to act. That action, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome, is called karma process becoming, because it paves the way to rebirth. Thus dependent on clinging, karma process becoming arises. When that particular karma ripens, rebirth arises. Dependent on birth, there arises aging, sickness, and death. Thus arises the whole mass of suffering. Therefore, the feeling aggregate is like a murderer who triggers the vicious reactions that keep going the cycle of rebirths. It's very important to stop feeling before it turns to craving. Because craving arises owing to feeling, we have to learn to be aware of feeling first. Since feelings arise all the time, mindfulness is to be extended throughout the day.

When pleasant feeling arises, we first become aware of its presence, then understand its characteristic of being felt, its function of experiencing the desirable aspect of the agreeable object, its manifestation of relishing the object and thrilling both mind and body. By understanding a feeling's individual essence, one does not grasp that feeling as myself. Further one contemplates pleasant feeling as a formed, conditional, and dependently arisen state. Look upon the arising feeling dispassionately. One can see the feeling as fleeting, as foreign, as a third party, as empty or devoid of self. The Buddha repeatedly said: “Whatever feeling [one has] is impermanent and subject to destruction.” If we have this understanding, feelings lose their power to activate the underlying tendency of craving.

The sense contact causes pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling to arise. Since sense contact occurs all the time, feelings also are there all the time, but our sluggish mindfulness is relatively slow, and we become entangled and tenaciously hold on to feeling. Even if we remember to be aware of feeling, identity view immediately identifies feeling as “I,” as “myself.” This enhances the ego illusion. If feeling were actually ours, we could exercise controlling power to have only pleasant feelings. But feeling does not succumb to our command.

Feeling is a mental state that has the function of experiencing the desirable and undesirable taste of an object at the very moment of sense contact, and it immediately falls away and re-arises. To rise and fall incessantly is the nature of compounded phenomena. When, due to ignorance, we are unable to break down the compactness of continuity through alert mindfulness and wisdom, we

assume that feeling is a unity, that it has a core, or that it is an entity within its experiencer. But feeling is not “I” or “myself”; seeing feeling as such is the correct seeing.

The third aggregate is the perception aggregate (*sannakkhandā*). Perception perceives the qualities of an object and makes a sign regarding those qualities so these qualities can be recognized or perceived again in the future. For example, the first time an elephant is seen, one notices a prehensile trunk, long curved ivory tusks, and large ears. The trunk, long curved ivory tusks, and large ears become conditions for recognizing an elephant when it is seen again.

The experience of the six cords of sensual pleasure leaves its happy impression on the heart. Because that happy impression is noted or memorized by perception, we long for the enjoyment of the five (or six?) cords of sensual pleasure again. But, in fact, every experience is new. If perception perceives the misery and the danger of sensual pleasure, the mind will not long for the enjoyment of sensual pleasure. It is common that when one perceives, the mind starts to proliferate and to become engaged. Perception also takes what is wrong to be right. Owing to perverted or distorted perception, humans perceive phenomena that arise to be permanent, to be happiness, and to be a self. Once a phenomenon is perceived in a distorted manner, the misperception is imprinted deeply in the mind and becomes very difficult to correct. Perverted perception causes wrong thinking. Wrong thinking causes grasping.

The fourth aggregate is the aggregate of formations (*sankhārakkhandhā*). Its characteristic is the forming, fabricating, and constructing that accumulate karmas. For example, when one practices mindfulness of breathing, the mind becomes interested and engaged in the breath. This forms a wholesome mental formation because at that time the mind is secluded from sensual clinging. However, such good karma still leads to becoming. Why is it so? It is because the latent defilement of ignorance blinds us to think that the mind which is aware of the breath is a self; moreover, the latent defilement of craving delights in the existence of both breath and self (knowing mind).

The formation aggregate includes many of our emotions, such as jealousy, happiness, sorrow, faith, shame, lust, aversion, conceit, covetousness, conscience, etc. The untrained mind simply takes these emotions as “I” and “mine” and gets caught in ego illusion. We perform various wholesome and unwholesome karmas to feed the ego constantly until it becomes as stable as if it were a permanent and enduring self. When this self becomes unmanageable like an entangled ball of thread, to disentangle it becomes extremely difficult.

In short, formation aggregate is responsible for all karmas performed. Wholesome and unwholesome formations, once in existence, leave behind a karmic tendency that will produce a new birth when it meets with favorable conditions. Where there is birth, aging and death follow. Thus formation aggregate is also a murderer with a raised sword [Sister—check detail of raised sword] who kills us in the cycle of death and rebirth.

The fifth aggregate is the aggregate of consciousness (*viññānakkhandā*). There are six types of consciousness--eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The characteristic of consciousness is to know or cognize the object. With the arising of an object, consciousness arises almost immediately and cognizes the object. This occurs at a tremendous speed and with seeming continuity. During this process, it seems as if an enduring being is experiencing phenomena. The truth of impermanence is hidden by the compactness of this apparent continuity. Consciousness is actually arising and passing away very rapidly in succession, but we are unable to break down the seeming continuity of consciousness and we mistake it for an enduring self.

When the eye comes into contact with visible objects, eye-consciousness arises, seeing form. If

we are unable to understand the causal relationship of eye, visible object, and eye-consciousness, we think it is “I” who sees. If eye-consciousness were “I,” when the eye-sensitivity and the visible objects vanish, the so-called “I” also vanishes. From seeing, mind consciousness starts to recollect, ponder, and examine what has been seen. We further cling to and identify with what we recollect, ponder, and examine as mine and myself, and thus fall prey to craving and identity view. Thought is empty by itself; it is projected by our past perception and view. If the mind stays always in the now—the present moment—we can easily see thought arising and passing without entity. It is through our holding on to thought that it seems real and substantial. Empty the mind of both view and craving of self, and the mind will perceive the imperceptible.

These five aggregates of clinging are the truth of suffering. They are like five murderers waiting for the chance to cut off our life if we are not aware of their danger and cling to them. The danger of the five aggregates is that they are impermanent, transient, and not a self. This must be thoroughly known, so that letting go of clinging to them becomes possible. If these five aggregates are wrongly grasped by consciousness as permanent, as happiness, and as self, consciousness becomes dependent on them. When consciousness becomes dependent, the future five aggregates are built up. When the future five aggregates are built up, aging, sickness, death, lamentation, sorrow, pain, and despair follow. One is not free from suffering.

## **Craving**

The sixth murderer is our intimate companion. Who is the intimate companion who stays with us all the time? It is craving—the enemy who pretends to be a friend. Craving is always with us in our daily life—whether we are eating, bathing, seeing an agreeable object, listening to music, engaging in sport, laughing, touching a loved one, thinking, or fantasizing. We eat not only to ease hunger but to satiate craving. If this were not so, obesity would not have become a syndrome of modern society. Craving is the incentive for all our doings. Without the element of craving, what we do seems monotonous and lifeless. Craving is a motivator that keeps us running from one sensual object to the other without weariness.

We crave not only for pleasing and delightful sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations, but also for wealth, social status, companionship, recognition, gain and fame. And we spend our entire life running here and there to pursue them, thinking they are intimate friends providing us real security and happiness. Our limited mind regards them as the only happiness worth pursuing. Nothing else can give us happiness. Because the mind is so engrossed in acquiring this type of happiness, we forget that there is another type of happiness—happiness of not having, happiness of contentment. When there is gain, there is loss. By calling nothing one’s own, one achieves the freedom of the heart.

Furthermore, craving is insatiable. The more you get, the more you want. It is the origin of all sufferings. Craving pretends to be a good friend, pleasing us in every aspect. But it is really an enemy with a raised sword who inflicts pain on us and cuts off our life when we get intimate with him.

Craving is stimulated by pleasant feelings, and pleasant feelings are derived from agreeable and delightful sense contacts. Our senses are open to the impingement of sense contact as long as we are conscious. The Buddha likened the experience of contact to the plight of a flayed cow. Wherever it stands, it is nibbled at by the creatures dwelling there, whether against a wall, against a tree, or in water (SN 12.63). We are nearly as helpless as we stand exposed to constant excitation by the six kinds of contact burdening us with agitation and restlessness.

The pleasing and agreeable sense contact is called a thorn in Buddha's discipline. Suppose you

enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of you, thorns behind you, thorns to your left, thorns to your right, thorns below you, and thorns above you. How can you protect yourself so as not to be pricked by a thorn? You would probably go forward mindfully and go back mindfully, thinking, “May no thorn prick me!”

Another type of craving is the underlying tendency of craving for life that brings us to this world. Because in past lives our craving for a future life deluded us into thinking that life is joyful, we performed skillful and unskillful actions. Those actions left behind karmic energy following our mental stream. We are born here as a result of the maturing of that particular karma. In the present life, owing to the element of craving, we continue to long for future rebirth, regardless of life’s painful experiences.

### **Six Sense-Bases and Six Sense-Objects**

In the sutta, the man reaches an empty village with only six houses, and whatever house he enters is void, deserted, empty. The houses are the designation for the six sense-bases. If a wise, competent, intelligent person examines the eye, the eye appears to be void, hollow, empty. The same is true for the other five sense-bases. So long as the six external sense objects do not impinge on the six sense-bases, they remain empty and void, unable to function.

The village-attacking robbers represent the six external sense objects: forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects. The six sense objects are reckoned as the six village-attacking robbers because they raid the six sense-bases, resulting in like and dislike, greed and hate. When an agreeable or sensually enticing form impinges on the eye, the body and mind become excited and thrilled with sensual lust. At this point, the village-attacking robber has raided our peace and composure, inflaming us with the fire of lust. If this sensual lust is unfulfilled, one becomes very agitated and restless.

However, when a disagreeable form impinges on the eye, the mind becomes dismayed and feels rejected, and the body becomes hot and agitated. Again, the village-attacking robber has raided our peace and composure, inflaming us with the fire of aversion. We feel horrible as if we were being punished by our unskillful thought.

When a neutral form impinges on the eyes, neutral feeling arises. Again, the village-attacking robber has raided our peace and composure, inflaming us with the fire of ignorance. One wrongly thinks that one has no feeling at all and ends up in confusion and bewilderment.

We react in the same manner throughout life whenever agreeable, disagreeable and neutral sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects impinge on the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The village-attacking robbers raid the peace of our mind through the six sense-bases. How does one avoid the assault of these robbers? Only with restraint of the senses by way of mindfulness can one be free from the assault of these village-attacking robbers. Mindfulness, like a gatekeeper, protects the mind so that defilements cannot enter through the six sense-doors. However, it is important to bear in mind that neither the six sense-objects nor the six sense-bases are each other’s fetters; rather, the latent tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion are the fetters of the sense-objects and sense-bases.

### **Identity View**

After fleeing in one direction and then in another, the man in the sutta comes to a great expanse of water. The near shore is dangerous and frightening, and the farther shore is safe and free from danger. The near shore is identity view. This view wrongly regards the five aggregates as a

permanent, unchanging soul. How does identity view originate? It originates when one assumes that either one or all of the five aggregates are the self, that the self possesses five aggregates, that the five aggregates are in the self, or that the self is in the five aggregates. In other words, identity view regards the five aggregates as “mine,” “I,” and “my permanent self.” With this identity view, one cannot free oneself from suffering.

One way to free oneself from identity view is to investigate dependently arising states. Nothing arises without causes. On investigating the causes of each arising state, the non-self nature of states becomes evident.

Identity view is the main culprit responsible for throwing us into woeful states. As long as identity view is not permanently uprooted from our mental stream, our lives will always tend to move toward rebirth in the four woeful states. Thus identity view is considered to be the dangerous and frightening near shore where one is chased by poisonous snakes, six murderers, and six village-attacking robbers. To escape from being constantly chased by these opponents, one must free oneself from identity view.

### **Four Floods**

What is the great expanse of water that is so difficult for the man to cross? This is the flood (*Ogha*). There are four types of floods: the flood of sensuality, the flood of existence, the flood of view, and the flood of ignorance. They are floods because they are very difficult to cross over and because they send beings to the ocean of *samsara*, the round of rebirth, again and again.

First is the flood of sensuality. Usually sensuality refers to the enjoyment of the six external objects--pleasant visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental objects--together with the six internal bases. This sensuality becomes a flood because it is very difficult to cross. I would like to give an example from “The Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving” (*Culatanhasankhaya Sutta*) (MN 37).

One day, Sakka—ruler of the Heaven of thirty-three gods, who is a *sotapanna* (stream enterer), went to the Buddha and after paying homage to the Buddha, he stood at one side and asked, “Venerable Sir, how in brief, is a bhikkhu liberated in the destruction of craving, one who has reached the ultimate end, the ultimate security from bondage, the ultimate holy life?” Buddha gave a short and brief answer. He said, “When a bhikkhu has heard that nothing is worth adhering to, he directly knows everything. Having directly known everything, then he fully understands everything. Having fully understood everything, then whatever feeling he feels, pleasant or painful or neither painful nor pleasant, he abides contemplating impermanence in those feelings, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, contemplating relinquishment. Contemplating thus, he does not cling to anything in the world. When he does not cling, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he presently attains Nibbāna.”

Then Sakka, ruler of gods, delighting and rejoicing in the Blessed One’s words, paid homage to the Blessed One, and he vanished at once.

Venerable Moggallāna, who was sitting not far from the Blessed One, considered whether Sakka had penetrated the meaning of the Blessed One’s words when he rejoiced. Intending to find out the answer, Venerable Moggallāna, who was foremost in supernatural power, vanished from this world and appeared among the gods ruled by Sakka. Now, on that occasion, Sakka was furnished and endowed a hundredfold with the five kinds of heavenly music, and he was enjoying it in the Pleasure Park. When he saw the Venerable Moggallāna coming in the distance, he dismissed the music, and welcomed him. Venerable Moggallāna asked Sakka to repeat what he had just learned

from the Buddha so that he might also get to hear that statement.

Sakka felt very embarrassed because he could not remember, although he tried hard to recall what the Buddha had said. Sakka tried to avoid answering the question by showing Venerable Moggallāna the grandeur of his palace. Sakka boasted that it was owing to his great merit that he was able to build such a magnificent palace. Then the Venerable Moggallāna considered thus: “This spirit is living much too negligently. What if I stirred up a sense of urgency in him?” Then the Venerable Moggallāna performed a feat of supernormal power; by pointing his toe he made the palace shake. Sakka was stirred to a sense of urgency, with his hair standing on end, and the memory suddenly came back to him. He repeated what the Buddha had said to him.

The experience of Sakka shows that the flood of sensuality makes beings negligent. Once indulging in sensual pleasure, one easily forgets all wholesomeness. Even Sakka, who is a stream-enterer, can forget the dhamma personally preached by the Lord Buddha. How much easier would it be for an ordinary person to forget? One must be careful of the flood of sensual pleasures, which is hard to cross.

The second flood is the flood of existence or becoming. As a result of the craving for life, many people want to come to this world again and again. For example, in my monastery in Burma, I had interviewed many yogis regarding their past life experiences. In their past lives, most yogis had offered food to monastics and wished to become a monk or a nun in future life. This inclination toward another life or the thought of conceiving “I shall be” is the flood of becoming. There are five factors for rebirth—ignorance, craving, clinging, formation, and karma. For example, one who offers food to the monks prays to be born as a female in a Buddhist country in the next life. In this case, the offering is wholesome formation. When this wholesome formation passes away, it leaves behind a kammic potency. Praying to be reborn as a female is craving for female life. “I shall be” is conceiving. Conceiving is a disease, a dart, and a cancer, as the mind inclines towards a future existence. When the mind inclines towards a future existence, the new five aggregates are built up. Ignorance is not knowing that “female” is just a heap of five aggregates in the ultimate sense. Wrong understanding causes strong craving (clinging) to female life. When this karma matures, it brings forth another life. So in this lifetime one becomes what one prayed for. All of us, including non-returners (*anagami*), find the flood of existence difficult to cross. Even a non-returner may remain wishful to be reborn in a material or immaterial world.

The third flood is the flood of view. There are many wrong views, such as wrong view of self, eternalism, annihilation, etc. In this world, many people engage in the wrong view of eternalism (*sassata-ditthi*) and the wrong view of annihilation (*ucched-ditthi*). Why do these two views arise in the mind? Eternalism maintains that the entirety of personal existence exists forever. Annihilationists claim that after death, the entirety of personal existence perishes.

Most Asians do not entertain the view of annihilation because they strongly believe in karma and rebirth. But many of them hold to the view of eternalism, wrongly believing that the same soul transmigrates from one life to another life, that it is the same person who takes rebirth. Why do we have this type of view? It is because we do not see with right understanding the constant cessation of formations dependent on conditions. We see only the arising—of the four elements, of feeling, perception, formations and consciousness—without seeing their constant destruction, cessation, or passing away. Thus the view of eternalism arises.

Annihilationism claims that all mind and matter permanently cease at the time of death and have no continuation whatsoever in a new life. This view denies rebirth. A person who believes in the view of annihilation does not see with right understanding the constant arising of formations produced by causes. When we do not see the constant arising of phenomena, we think that after

death everything is annihilated.

The Buddha said that these two views are too extreme. We should avoid these two views and walk on the middle path. What is the middle path? One understands that, dependent on ignorance, karmic formation arises. Dependent on karmic formations, consciousness arises. Dependent on consciousness, mind and matter arise. The 12 links of dependent origination are merely the process of causality. No one undergoes the process in the ultimate sense; this is right view. To thoroughly understand that there is no one undergoing the cycle of rebirth is extremely difficult, as we greatly attach to the concept of a permanent self.

Another wrong view is not believing that any action can produce a result. One does not believe that good begets good, and bad begets bad. One denies the working of karma. What would happen to one who does not believe in the working of karma? That person would not be afraid of doing evil deeds and will not try to do good either. Most Asians start the practice with an understanding of the right view of karma. The right view of karma says that one's own karma is one's own heritage, one's own property. With this belief, we try to avoid evil, cultivate the good, and purify the mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha.

The fourth flood is the flood of ignorance. What is ignorance (*avijjā*)? Ignorance means mental blindness or unknowing. Unknowing of what? Unknowing of the Four Noble Truths—the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha said that because of not knowing or penetrating these Four Noble Truths, we remain wandering repeatedly in the rounds of rebirth.

### **The Four Noble Truths**

**The first noble truth is the noble truth of suffering.** What is the noble truth of suffering? The five aggregates of clinging are the truth of suffering. **Craving or desire (lust) for the five aggregates is the second noble truth**, the cause or origin of the truth of suffering. A person actually consists of five aggregates, but because we do not see this truth clearly, we are bound to conventional truth. To say the words “a person” is the conventional truth. Ultimately, there is no person or being, but five aggregates. The five aggregates are an ultimate truth. We use “she,” “her,” “he,” “his” just for the sake of convenience. Why do the five aggregates arise again and again extending up to the future life? Because we crave for them; in delusion, we think they provide happiness. They do, but it is a transient and fleeting happiness. Unable to let go of desire for the five aggregates, we are bound. When the mind is bound with craving, the five aggregates reappear again.

The five aggregates are bound with suffering. Why suffering? There is suffering because the aggregates do not yield to our wishes. They are beyond our control because they share the universal characteristic of impermanence. For example, we may want to have pleasant feelings all the time. However, unpleasant feelings creep in very often, even though the unpleasant feelings are not the feelings we wish for. We may wish that the body will be healthy always, but health often deteriorates. We want to cherish only positive thoughts; however, we find ourselves entangled in negative emotions of agitation, worry, depression, fear, and doubt most of the time. We feel weary of what is beyond our control, which provides no guarantee of happiness.

What we wish cannot be fulfilled. That's why it is called suffering.

**The third noble truth is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering—Nibbāna.** It is the cessation of the same cravings that bring forth rebirth. **The fourth truth, the path leading to the**

**end of suffering, is the Noble Eightfold Path.** We will discuss this later.

In the sutta, the man has now come to the near shore. In order to cross the great expanse of water and reach the far shore, he has to make a raft. This raft is the vehicle that will help him reach the safe place. What is this raft? The raft is the Noble Eightfold Path. What is the Noble Eightfold Path?

### **The Noble Eightfold Path**

**The first factor** in the Noble Eightfold Path is right view (*samma diṭṭhi*). What is right view? There are two types of right view: mundane vipassanā right view and supra-mundane path right view. Mundane vipassanā right view is repeatedly seeing the five aggregates as impermanent, subject to change, and subject to destruction and fading away. Being constantly oppressed by arising and passing away, the five aggregates are painful and terrifying. What is impermanent and painful cannot be regarded as a permanent self. But what is impermanent, painful, not-self, is not something to delight in; and what is not something to delight in is not something to arouse greed for; consequently, when the five aggregates both internally and externally are seen as impermanent, painful, not-self, then one *becomes dispassionate, one does not delight; one causes fading away of greed, one does not inflame it*. When one does not inflame greed thus, one *causes cessation* of greed momentarily. This is mundane vipassanā right view.

As one progresses by seeing the unsatisfactoriness of what is formed again and again, one inclines one's mind towards Nibbāna, which is the opposite of the formed. When insight reaches its culmination, the supra-mundane path of stream-entry arises making Nibbāna its object. At this point, right view removes the ignorance that covers the Four Noble Truths. Thus, for the first time, one knows and sees the Four Noble Truths as they really are--the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering, which is the Noble Eightfold Path.

**The second factor** is right thought. Right thought means applying or directing thought correctly to thoughts of renunciation, non-ill will, and non-cruelty. We not only contemplate the danger of sensual pleasure to develop thoughts of renunciation, but we also try to “renounce” the concept that there is an “I” enjoying sensual pleasure. Renunciation also means letting go of ideas of who we are, what others think of us or what we want to achieve. My house, my car, my loved one, my job, my high pay, my social status, such ideas--grasping the “mine”--enhance the attachment to sensual pleasure even more.

Entering jhāna is also seen as one of the thoughts of renunciation because when the mind is absorbed in jhāna, the thought of sensual pleasure is abandoned. As the Buddha said: “When concentration is developed, mind is developed; when mind is developed, passion is removed.”

To remove thoughts of ill-will, we contemplate thoughts of loving-kindness. Because thoughts of ill-will and thoughts of loving kindness are opposite in nature, they cannot arise at the same time. When thoughts of ill-will arise in the mind, one immediately loses one's happiness. All beings spend their life seeking happiness and avoiding suffering. However most of them think happiness comes from without. The path to real happiness seems to be lost. The wise know happiness and suffering come from within—within the mind of conditional love for others.

To cultivate the right thought of non-cruelty, one contemplates the thought of compassion towards all sentient beings. Compassion makes the heart “quiver” when one sees others in pain and misery. The desire arises to alleviate their pain. The thought of compassion is very powerful as it works only on the benefits of others and helps one to forget oneself. When the mind is not grounded

on the ego-centre, it becomes fearless.

These first two factors—right view and right thought—constitute wisdom training.

**The third factor** is right speech. There are four aspects to right speech: abstaining from false speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from backbiting, and abstaining from useless speech. If you abstain from these four, you have right speech.

**The fourth factor** is right action, which consists of abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. We abstain from these three actions not only to nurture a good mind but also because of understanding of the law of karma. The law of karma says every action has its reaction. The reaction directly comes back to the actor itself. For example, the action of killing results in one having a short life.

**The fifth factor** is right livelihood. For lay persons, there are only five livelihoods to abstain from: one should not deal in weapons, deal in intoxicants, deal in animals for slaughter, deal in poison, or deal in selling of humans, or slavery.

We abstain from misconduct to protect ourselves. Our ultimate protection is our own morality, which is our internal protection. Only when we abstain from all unwholesome deeds do we protect our own life as well as the lives of others. Morality training is basic humanity.

Right speech, right actions, right livelihood constitute morality training. This training helps us overcome our gross physical and verbal actions. The cause for the perfection of morality training lies in one's loving kindness and compassion for others. Morality training is the base for concentration training. Those who have morality training become fearless, free from self-reproach and remorse, and free from the reproach of others. They have self-confidence and serenity of mind. This is conducive to developing concentration.

**The sixth factor** is right effort. Many people think that right effort consists of sitting in meditation for a long time and enduring pain without changing posture. But that is only physical right effort. There are four types of right effort: effort to prevent unarisen evil from arising, effort to discard evil that has arisen, effort to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen, and effort to bring to perfection wholesome states that have already arisen.

The most effective way to prevent evil from arising is to guard the sense doors. All defilements come through the sense doors of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Sensually enticing objects mostly come through the eye door. Abusive words or praise come through the ear door. Sweet tastes come through the tongue door, pleasant touch through the body door, etc. How does one guard the sense doors? This is done either by fixing one's mind on a concentration object—such as one's breath or whatever technique one follows—or by being mindful of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, sensing, and thinking. Mindfulness not only cuts down discursive thoughts regarding the present objects, but also either prevents the mind from falling into past pleasant sensual experiences or longing for pleasant sensual experiences that have not yet occurred. Mindfulness takes in the actual characteristics of the cognized objects and allows the wisdom to understand the impermanence of all phenomena.

If evil thoughts have arisen, it is very important at that time to have right effort to discard them. Most people do not have this type of effort. They allow the negative emotions of anger, lust, fear craving, jealousy, cruelty, etc. to overwhelm them. Being overwhelmed by these unskillful mental states, they act compulsively, either finding fault in others or beating themselves up. They become the victims of their defilements. Any such action will only hurt oneself and others. Later, when

those negative emotions have gone, they may feel remorse over their actions to the extent of developing self-hatred. The vicious circle goes on when one has no right effort to discard evil that has arisen.

Buddha, when still an unenlightened Bodhisatta, related how he subdued the arising fear and dread through right effort. He said: “While I walked, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither stood nor sat nor lay down till I had subdued that fear and dread. While I stood, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither walked nor sat nor lay down till I had subdued that fear and dread. While I sat, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither walked nor stood nor lay down till I had subdued that fear and dread. While I lay down, the fear and dread came upon me; I neither walked nor stood nor sat down till I had subdued that fear and dread” (MN 4).

Without right effort, one cannot free oneself from suffering. Therefore, effort to discard, dispel, and remove evil thoughts that have arisen in the mind at the very moment they arise is crucial. When the defilements are left unchecked and uncontrolled, the defilements gain momentum and become extremely difficult to overcome. The force is further reinforced and becomes our second nature.

In the discourse of “The Removal of Distracting Thoughts” (MN 20), the Buddha describes five ways to remove evil thoughts that have already arisen:

1. When unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hate, and delusion arise, one should give attention to the opposite mental state, connected with the wholesome. For example, when thoughts of hatred arise toward persons whom we do not like, a traditional way is to replace anger with thoughts of loving-kindness, wishing others to be well, happy, and peaceful, until the thought of anger subsides. This may prove difficult for many people, because of the strong tendency to cling to the state of anger rather than the person who made us angry.

If that fails, there are other ways to overcome anger. One can try to contemplate separating the object of anger into 32 parts. How? When one is angry with someone, what is it one is angry with? Is it the person’s head hairs one is angry with? Or bones or snot? Or is it the person’s feces one is angry with? Alternatively, one can develop understanding of the body of the enemy as composed of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. Is it the earth element in his body that one is angry with, or the water element, or the fire element, or the wind element? If one can resolve the object of one’s anger in terms of the 32 parts or the four elements, and see that the object is not a being or a person, one’s anger gains no foothold, like a painting in the air.

2. If, however, one fails to achieve the objective by using this method, and unwholesome thoughts connected with greed, hatred, and delusion are still present in the mind, one can examine the danger in these thoughts: “These thoughts are unwholesome, they are reprehensible, and are productive of painful results for uncountable lifetimes according to the law of karma.” For example, when getting angry, one should reproach oneself thus: “By getting angry, am I not like a man who wants to hit another and instead picks up a burning ember or piece of excrement and by doing so first burns himself or makes himself stink?” Or when the mind tenaciously grasps the sensually enticing form, one tries to remember what the Buddha said: “For if mind should stand tied to gratification in the delightful sign of form, and if one should die on that occasion, it is possible that one will go to hell or the animal realm.”

3. If unwholesome thoughts continue to dominate the mind, one can try to forget and ignore these thoughts and not pay any attention to them by diverting one’s attention to another matter. In meditation, sometimes we ignore discursive thoughts, and even physical pain can be ignored if we can focus on the breath intensively. By doing so, discursive unwholesome thoughts will not bother

us.

4. If, however, unwholesome thoughts still do not subside, one can inquire into the cause of those unwholesome thoughts. For example, when abusive words contact your ear, you feel angry. After the abusive words subside, you still hold the bitter feeling although there is no more ear-contact. Why is it so? If you can inquire into the cause, you will realize it is because we cling to and identify with the unpleasant feeling as “I” or “myself.” Then, let go of that cause of suffering—clinging and identification.

5. If unwholesome thoughts still linger in the mind, the Buddha gave the following advice: with teeth clenched and the tongue pressed against the roof of the mouth, one should beat down, constrain, and crush the unwholesome mind with the wholesome mind.

If one still fails to remove distracting thoughts of lust or hate, here I would suggest that you be mindful of or mentally note your mental states, seeing “a mind affected by anger as a mind affected by anger,” “a mind affected by lust as a mind affected by lust.” Do this a thousand times to the extent necessary for you to see that “there is only mind” without the perception of self. The clinging to and the identification with the defilements as “myself” is the greatest suffering that binds us.

Let us return to the third type of right effort, the effort to arouse a wholesome state that is not yet arisen. Those who have not undertaken morality training should arouse the effort to do so by understanding its value. One also must arouse effort to practice concentration if one has not yet made any initial effort. Similarly one should arouse effort to practice insight if you haven’t yet attempted to do so.

The fourth type of right effort is the effort to develop and bring to perfection a wholesome state that has already arisen. This final effort is necessary to perfect our morality, to attain jhāna, and to experience different stages of insight, especially to see the arising and passing away of the five aggregates until the mind becomes disenchanted and finally liberated by not clinging to them.

**The seventh factor is right mindfulness.** It is remembering or not forgetting to practice the four foundations of mindfulness: contemplation of the body, contemplation of the different types of feelings (pleasant, unpleasant and neutral), contemplation of different states of the mind (such as lustful mind, angry mind, contracted mind, distracted mind, etc.), and contemplation of mental qualities (dhamma) such as the five hindrances, the four noble truths, the seven factors of enlightenment, etc. Body, feeling, mind, and mental qualities serve as the foundations for the establishment of mindfulness which arouses in us the wisdom to know body as body, feeling as feeling, mind as mind, and mental-qualities as mental-qualities. No abider, maker, originator, or experiencer can be found in them, only the ongoing process of cognition. And this process of cognition arises with causes and ceases with causes.

**The eighth factor** is right concentration. It is collecting or unifying the mind, which means cultivating a state where all mental factors are brought together and intensified by directing them onto one particular object, such as the breath, continuously for a designated period of time. At this time, the mind is quite secluded from sensual pleasures and secluded from the five hindrances and is accompanied by applied and sustained application of mind, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion; this is abiding in the first jhāna. Right concentration means the first, second, third, and fourth jhānas. To attain second jhāna, one removes applied and sustained application of mind, with rapture and pleasure born of concentration. To reach third jhāna, one does away with rapture, leaving happiness and one-pointedness. Finally, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, one enters the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

Concentration makes the mind wieldy, malleable and luminous. At such a time, if one directs one's mind to see one's five aggregates as well as external five aggregates, the nature of the five aggregates will appear as arising and vanishing constantly; being oppressed by constant rise and fall, one feels weary, and gets disenchanted by the whole process. One further understands the voidness of the process. How can the process of constant rise and fall have an enduring self?

Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly said: "Develop concentration; one with concentration sees things as they really are."

Right effort, mindfulness, and concentration together are known as the concentration training. While practicing mindfulness of breathing, one puts forth effort to be mindful of one's breath. When attention lapses, one tries to bring the mind back to the breath again and again. Because of repeated effort, the mind constantly stays with the breath. One does not forget the breath. Without forgetting the breath, mindfulness "sinks" into it. With application of effort and mindfulness in this way, one's mind gradually anchors and unifies on the breath and attains deep concentration. Therefore, right effort, mindfulness, and concentration together are called concentration training.

These three trainings—training in morality, concentration, and wisdom—are the same as the Noble Eightfold Path. This Noble Eightfold Path is the raft that can help you cross the great expanse of water and reach the far shore—Nibbāna. Although this path is fulfilling, for most people the journey is very painful, like that of a snake shedding its dead skin. This is because the path of these three trainings goes against our habitual pattern of behaviour ingrained in us for a long time. It is the path of always letting go of our belief, value, culture, view, craving, aversion, vanity, cleverness, etc.

Therefore, having found the raft, one still needs to apply effort to row the raft. In the sutta, the man, by means of that raft and making an effort with his hands and feet, safely crossed to the far shore. Making effort with hands and feet--this is a designation for the arousing of energy. The energy includes initial energy, intermediate energy, and persistent energy until the goal is achieved.

The story of Venerable Tissa will make clear these three types of energy. Tissa, the head of a family at Savatthi, after listening to the teaching of the Buddha, made use of initial energy to renounce his immense wealth and became a homeless one. He dwelled in the forest, practicing meditation relentlessly in solitude. This was his intermediate energy. His sister-in-law, worried that he might disrobe and take back the wealth, sent a robber band of 500 to kill him.

The robbers, after entering the forest and searching for the elder, in due course came to the place in which he lived and sat around him. The elder spoke thus: "Lay disciples, why have you come?" They replied: "To kill you." Then the elder said: "On a security, give me my life for just this one night." Said the robbers: "O recluse, who will stand surety for you in a place like this?" The elder, thereupon, took a big stone and broke the bones of his legs. Enduring his pain, he said: "Lay disciples, is the security of value?" They, inspired by the elder's courage, leaving him alone, went to the end of the ambulatory and, lighting a fire, lay on the ground.

The elder contemplated on the purity of his conduct, arousing tireless energy. After suppressing his pain, persistent in his contemplation of the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self, he attained Arahantship at dawn, having fulfilled the recluse's duty in the three watches of the night. This was his persistent energy. Giving expression to his feelings, he said:

"A surety let me raise breaking both my legs:

To die with lustful mind I loathe and shrink.  
Having thought thus I saw things as they are,  
And with the dawn I reached the Arahant's domain.'

Coming back to the sutta, the man crosses the great expanse of water, and going beyond, he stands on high ground. Standing on high ground represents attainment of Arahantship. Arahant denotes the killer of all defilements. Having killed all his defilements, the Arahant has nothing to fear. Now he feels safe and secure forever.

This is the end of the talk.  
Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Below is the original sutta from the *Samyutta Nikāya*, The Book of the Six Sense Bases.

### *The Simile of the Vipers*

"Bhikkhus, suppose there were four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom. Then a man would come along wanting to live, not wanting to die, desiring happiness and averse to suffering. They would tell him: 'Good man, these four vipers are of fierce heat and deadly venom. From time to time they must be lifted up; from time to time they must be bathed; from time to time they must be fed; from time to time they must be laid to rest. But if one or another of these vipers ever becomes angry with you, then, good man, you will meet death or deadly suffering. Do whatever has to be done, good man!'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, that man would flee in one direction or another. They would tell him: 'Good man, five murderous enemies are pursuing you, thinking, "Wherever we see him, we will take his life right on the spot." Do whatever has to be done, good man!'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, and of the five murderous enemies, that man would flee in one direction or another. They would tell him: 'Good man, a sixth murderer, an intimate companion, is pursuing you with drawn sword, thinking, "Wherever I see him I will cut off his head right on the spot." Do whatever has to be done, good man!'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, and of the five murderous enemies, and of the sixth murderer, the intimate companion with drawn sword, that man would flee in one direction or another. He would see an empty village. Whatever house he enters is void, deserted, empty. Whatever pot he takes hold of is void, hollow, empty. They would tell him: 'Good man, just now village-attacking dacoits will raid this empty village. Do whatever has to be done, good man!'

"Then, bhikkhus, afraid of the four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom, and of the five murderous enemies, and of the sixth murderer—the intimate companion with drawn sword—and of the village-attacking dacoits, that man would flee in one direction or another. He would see a great expanse of water whose near shore was dangerous and fearful, and whose further shore was safe and free from danger, but there would be no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over from the near shore to the far shore.

"Then the man would think: 'There is this great expanse of water whose near shore is dangerous and fearful, and whose further shore is safe and free from danger, but there is no ferryboat or bridge for crossing over. Let me collect grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bind them together into a raft, so that by means of that raft, making an effort with my hands and feet, I can get safely across to the far shore.'

"Then the man would collect grass, twigs, branches, and foliage, and bind them together into a raft, so that by means of that raft, making an effort with his hands and feet, he would get safely across to the far shore. Crossed over, gone beyond, the Brahmin stands on high ground.

"I have made up this simile, bhikkhus, in order to convey a meaning. This is the meaning here: 'The four vipers of fierce heat and deadly venom': this is a designation for the four great elements—the earth element, the water element, the heat element, the air element.

"The five murderous enemies': this is a designation for the five aggregates subject to clinging; that is, the material form aggregate subject to clinging, the feeling aggregate subject to clinging, the perception aggregate subject to clinging, the volitional formations aggregate subject to clinging, the consciousness aggregate subject to clinging.

"The sixth murderer, the intimate companion with drawn sword': this is a designation for delight and lust.

"The empty village': this is a designation for the six internal sense bases. If, bhikkhus, a wise, competent, intelligent person examines them by way of the eye, they appear to be void, hollow, empty. If he examines them by way of the ear . . . by way of the mind, they appear to be void, hollow, empty.

"Village-attacking dacoits': this is a designation for the six external sense bases. The eye, bhikkhus, is attacked by agreeable and disagreeable forms. The ear . . . The nose . . . The tongue . . . The body . . . The mind is attacked by agreeable and disagreeable mental phenomena.

"The great expanse of water': this is a designation for the four floods: the flood of sensuality, the flood of existence, the flood of views, and the flood of ignorance.

"The near shore, which is dangerous and fearful': this is a designation for identity.

"The further shore, which is safe and free from danger': this is a designation for Nibbana.

"The raft': this is a designation for the Noble Eightfold Path;

that is, right view . . . right concentration.

"Making effort with hands and feet': this is a designation for the arousing of energy.

"Crossed over, gone beyond, the Brahmin stands on high ground': this is a designation for the Arahant."