





# **Dependent Origination**

The 12 Links

*Birth (Jati)*

**By Delson Armstrong**

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“Bhikkhus, there are these Four Noble Truths. What four? The noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

**Saccasamyutta Sn 56.13(3) Aggregates**

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# Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to help the earnest seeker to understand the concept and the links of *Dependent Origination*. The Buddha used the term *paṭicca samuppāda*, which is Pāli for dependent origination. This is the most important idea to be understood on the journey to Nibbāna. When one understands Dependent Origination, one understands himself/herself and the world. It is truly the answer to the question of “Who am I?”

This is a 12-part series of small books for each of the 12 links. This is the second book on the 11<sup>th</sup> link of *Jati* or Birth. Later all these booklets will be combined into a larger book or books.

In this book the link of *Jati* or Birth is explained in detail.



## Dependent Origination

Samyutta Nikāya 12.1.1

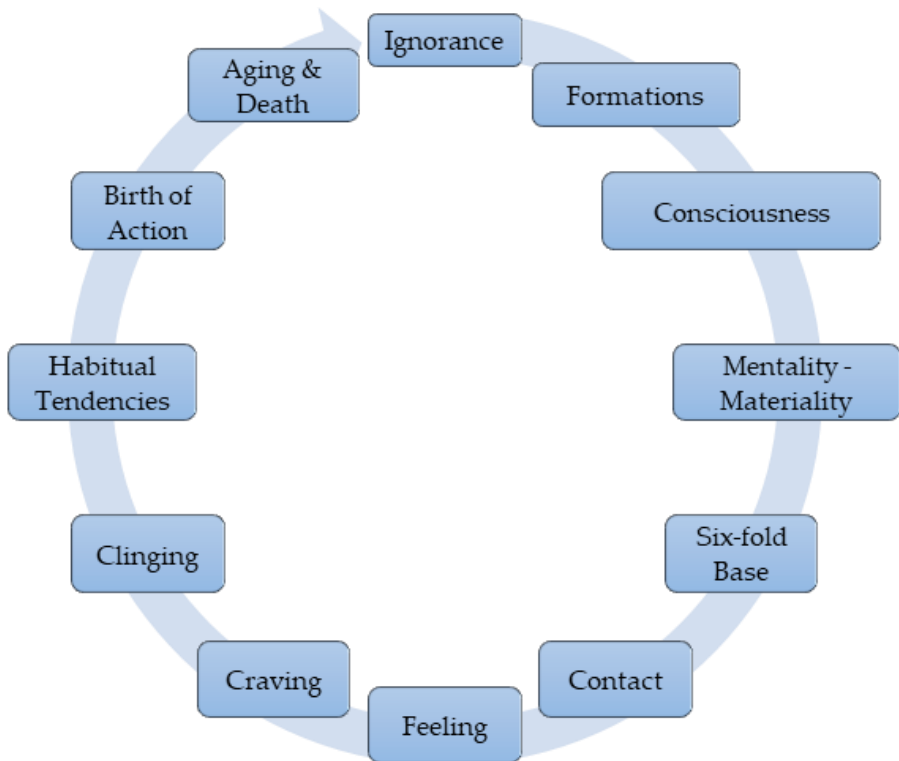
“Monks, I will teach you dependent origination. Listen to that and attend closely, I will speak.”—“Yes, venerable sir,” those monks replied.

The Blessed One said this:

“And what, students, is dependent origination? With ignorance as condition, volitional formations come to be; with volitional formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form; with name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, existence; with existence as condition, birth; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. This, students, is called dependent origination.

“But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance comes cessation of volitional formations; with the cessation of volitional formations, cessation of consciousness; with the cessation of consciousness, cessation of name-and-form; with the cessation of name-and-form, cessation of the six sense bases; with the cessation of the six sense bases, cessation of contact; with the cessation of contact, cessation of feeling; with the cessation of feeling, cessation of craving; with the cessation of craving, cessation of clinging; with the cessation of clinging, cessation of

existence; with the cessation of existence, cessation of birth; with the cessation of birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair cease. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.”



## Jāti (Birth)

*Katamā ca, bhikkhave, jāti? Yā tesam tesam sattānam tamhi tamhi sattanikāye jāti sañjāti okkanti abhinibbatti khandhānam pātubhāvo āyatanānam paṭilābho, ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, jāti.*

*And what, monks, is birth? In whatever beings, of whatever group of beings, there is birth, coming-to-be, coming forth, the appearance of the aggregates, the acquisition of the sense-bases, that, monks, is called birth.*

- DN 22, Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta

If you're reading this then you've already been born. On the larger scale you have already experienced at least one birth by the virtue of your existence here and now. Jāti is a word that, like many of the concepts within Dependent Origination and the larger aspects of the Dhamma, is multi-faceted. Like Sanskrit, Pali is a polysemous language, which is to say that the words, just like in English, can have different interpretations of meaning depending on context and of course wordplay, which can be found scattered throughout the suttas. The understanding of jāti corresponds to understanding Dukkha, since the usual expansion on Dukkha

always starts with jāti, which can be translated as birth and within certain contexts as rebirth.

On the cosmic level, it means the rebirth from one lifetime to another but by no means does this imply a singular consciousness taking rebirth from one life to the next because that is reincarnation. While reincarnation is that one incarnation – the soul or self or consciousness, however one puts it – is always experiencing multiple lifetimes, rebirth, on the other hand, is the arising and passing away of consciousnesses in every moment, to put it in the simplest terms. The question then arises – how is this process translated into the understanding of rebirth on the cosmic or macro scale? We will explore this in detail, along with the different forms of conception, what kind of processes arise from conception, and the types of aggregates and sense bases that appear at every level of rebirth in relation to the three spheres of existence and some of their general karmic catalysts. After having explored the macro level we will then look at the micro or quantum level of rebirth, understanding the arising and passing away of consciousnesses in every moment as well what birth of action means in relation to its precedent links in Dependent Origination and the process of kamma, choice and patterns of thought and behavior.

### *Meaning of Jāti*

The word jāti comes from the Sanskrit jāta, which means to come into existence or to be born. Unfortunately, the word has

been misconstrued as it's passed down from generation to generation, where it devolved into the caste system. On the basis of jāti, as was used to mean a type of person or as a way to classify people in general, one was said to have been a Brahmin or a teacher or priest, Kshatriya or a leader or warrior, Vaishya or a merchant, or Shudra or a servant, broadly speaking. Under these classifications were then further sub-classifications, such as being a potter or a cobbler. The general consensus was if one was born into a family of a particular trade then one would only do that for one's entire lifetime. This concept became further perverted by the idea of untouchability and that some people were greater and "cleaner" than others and therefore the working class and servant classes were "lower" than those of the classes of warriors, kings, and priests. This kind of hierarchy was historically something that crushed the will of the so-called lower classes because of their jāti – their designation in birth – and therefore they were to suffer the consequences of such a birth and be mistreated for it. It was the type of power structure that kept the corrupt in command and was not based on meritocracy. Instead, it was based the concept of power or submission by birth.

In DN 27, Aggañña Sutta, the Buddha overturned this idea. He explained the four main classifications of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras as being a grouping of people according to their proclivities and career choices. Instead, what kamma one produces in the way of their actions and choices gives rise to the birth of new kamma and therefore, through sociological evolution of the planet, these groups became distinctions based on a person's inner tendencies, habits and inclinations. Some are better suited to be leaders, others as workers, others as administrators, merchants, warriors, or scholars. As society evolves, there is corruption of each

individual based on craving and it is by their good and bad actions that they're known a certain way, not by the designation of what kind of family they were born into alone. In this way, the Buddha explains and re-edifies the original meaning of jāti and rejects it as a designation of one's race, caste, gender or looks or based on what others think about them in relation to their so-called place in society, and that there are no untouchables or pariahs.

The Buddha says that there is a fifth caste as well, that of the wanderers. There are beings who leave their homes, careers, families, relationships, and opt out of society and decide to search for a way out of Dukkha. This fifth group consists of a mix of the four groups and is not bound by any career choices or inclination except to develop the Path that leads to the cessation of Dukkha. Therefore, it is clear that jāti is not a classification of one's place in life as a certain type of person, but a designation of their character based on previous deeds that leads them to certain conditions and types of situations in life and therefore on a larger, inter-life scale, one is born into a certain existence based on the formations fettered by cravings rooted in regret or desires from the previous birth. These are also known as abhisāṅkhāras. This is what we will explore in the next section.

## *Cosmic Rebirth*

Say you find yourself in a blackout and there is no electricity. You use your smartphone light to find a matchbox and some candles. You light up the match and then light up one of the

candles. When the match is expended, you use the flame of the candle to light up the rest of the other candles. Did the flame from the match transfer to the candle and did the candle flame transfer to another candle flame? Or was there a new flame in each case? This example will provide some clarity on the idea of rebirth. The secondary flame is neither the same nor is it different from the previous flame. The flame is consciousness that transfers the elements of heat and light that are the formations of one moment to another moment or from one life to a new life. Now if the previous flame died out would that mean the new flame dies out too? No, because it has new fuel to continue, which is the candle itself. Here, the candle is *nāmarupā* through which the processes of contact, feeling, perception, intention and attention – fettered by conceit, craving, and *kamma* – provides that fuel.

Consciousness arises dependent upon formations and transfers them to the next link in the process of quantum Dependent Origination, and the same process on a cosmic level occurs but this time it is between one life and the next. It's not the same consciousness that continues on from one moment to the next or one life to the next, but rather the arising of one consciousness that then passes away and, in its wake, another set of formations give rise to the next consciousness. That first consciousness that arose transferred craving, conceit, or ignorance from one moment or one life to the next by the process of intention, and then transfers the fuel – the *abhisankhāras* or fettered formations – for the next arising of another consciousness.

Let's take an example of a person on their deathbed. Perhaps they're surrounded by family members and friends. Perhaps no one is present to provide them support. In either case, the scenario can have some effect on their mental state. Inwardly, their mind

begins to flashback to different points in their life. They recall the wonderful things they did or have regrets about the things they said to others. They begin to see visions of different beings. These beings could be animals that they loved during their life as pets or had a fascination with or family members and friends they regret not having done something with and missing out on an event that they had promised to them to attend, or even lower beings like petas or hungry ghosts, or other beings in suffering, or higher beings that look angelic stemming from a clear radiant light.

These beings are an indication of the destination of the dying individual. If their reaction to these images are strong with craving, aversion, or identification, then the formations rooted in these fetters arise at the final moment of death and at the end of one consciousness at the dissolution of the aggregates another consciousness arises dependent on those formations, which then links with a set of genomic union that occurs in the animal and human realms, or that consciousness gives rise to a spontaneously created nāmarupā in the lower realms or higher luminous form realms or a nāma in the formless realms.

Because the accumulation of certain tendencies in bhava or existence during one's lifetime are fluid and dependent upon choices rooted in mindfulness or lack of mindfulness, which either strengthens the fetters in formations or weakens them, one's inclinations will continue to change based on those choices. As one's choices become automatic – meaning they aren't given much thought or not at all – one way or another, whether they're wholesome or unwholesome, the inclinations also become automatic and there is a strong degree of certainty that one's future destination will be in alignment with those choices, either in the same life or the next or a subsequent one.



This means that if a person decides to make unwholesome choices on a consistent basis, they will continue to find themselves in situations where those same choices are made yet again without paying heed to them. The same works for one who is consistently wholesome. But as we'll see, this only continues to proliferate the continual cycle of kamma and Dukkha. Even wholesome states of mind have an expiry date, of which will cause vipariṇāma Dukkha, leading to a destination dependent on whatever karmic fuel is available by default and that could be a state of loss and dismay unless one has entered the stream. The motive isn't to rack up good points on the eternal scoreboard of Saṃsāra but to come to a state where the scoreboard is no longer seen as something affecting a player on the field because there comes the realization that there was no eternal player in the first place, leading to the inclination of checking out of the game. The process leading to this realization is the Path and the fruit of it is Nibbāna. The first time leads to locking in one's ticket to full awakening as shutting down the systems – the first three fetters of belief in a personal self, doubt, and attachments to rites and rituals – closes off the possibility of entry into lower realms.

### *Six Classifications of Rebirth*

First, let's understand some of the possible ways in which rebirth arises dependent upon one's kamma and choices. There are six main classifications of how rebirth can arise dependent upon choices and within this are the various planes of existence grouped

into three categories. The three categories here are indicated by the level of subtleties in regard to nāmarupā. They pertain to, in order of lower to higher refined states of existence, kāmadhātu, the planes of sensual experiences; the rupādhātu, still in the realm of form but on a refined and luminous level; and the arupādhātu, where there is no rupā or form and just nāma or mind present here.

The six classifications of rebirth are as follows. One is born into negative conditions and leads an unwholesome life possibly leading to further unwholesome states; one is born into negative conditions but then starts making wholesome choices possibly leading to wholesome states; one is born into negative conditions but abandons all conditions and attains Nibbāna; one is born into positive conditions but falls into unwholesome choices possibly leading to unwholesome states; one is born into positive conditions and continues to make wholesome choices possibly leading to further wholesome states; and one is born into positive conditions but abandons all conditions and attains Nibbāna.

An example of the first classification is of someone having been born in a family that is unable to provide for their physical, emotional, and mental support. They grow up in abject poverty and start to make connections with people who are a bad influence. Perhaps they get into violence or sell drugs to make money and in the process harm themselves and others. Or if they're in a marginalized group or occupied country, they turn to violence to defend themselves and then get embroiled into a war. On the other hand, if one has been born into such conditions, one decides not to enter a path of violence but to uplift oneself. Perhaps one becomes a leader and an inspiration to others in their community and builds wealth through conscientious effort and returns to uplift others. This is an example of being born in negative circumstances but

choosing to become wholesome. In the third case, one may continue to become a greater success but realizes there is more to this life than just what they're doing. Or it could be that in their negative circumstances, they leave and are inspired to find mental peace through seeking and spiritual urgency. They come upon the Dhamma and enter the Path and then attain Nibbāna at which point they enter the stream and become a sotāpanna, a stream-winner. They close off the potential to be born in a lower realm and make further effort towards full awakening.

An example of one who is born in positive conditions but makes unwholesome choices could be one who is born into a wealthy family that can support their upbringing in a wholesome manner. However, they may become swayed away into a life that breaks precepts. Perhaps their family wealth or renown makes them haughty and heedless, causing them to indulge in intoxicants and committing unwholesome deeds. This gives rise to unwholesome situations in the present lifetime and if they continue long enough, by the strength of their fettered formations, this can lead to an unwholesome rebirth in their next life. It can happen that one is born in pleasant conditions and makes good use of their upbringing to bring more renown to their family and to themselves by charitable deeds and their influence helps others to become uplifted. They continue this path, accumulating wholesome tendencies that then give rise to a better or equally wholesome rebirth. In the final case, their positive conditions help them to learn and study, question and assess, and perhaps they may become inquisitive of life and sense the emptiness of sensual pleasures and seek a life born from spiritual urgency, at which point they find the Dhamma, enter the stream after an experience

of Nibbāna, and then work their way towards full awakening, if not in this life, in a subsequent life.

The examples provided are very broad and generalized, but what one has to understand is the power of choice, intention, and behavior. How one perceives every situation will depend upon their forerunning formations and whether they are fettered strongly or lightly, which in turn are dependent upon their previous choices of indulging in some form of Taṇhā or abandoning any identification with a situation and observing and acting from mindfulness. Even if one acts in a wholesome manner, which is the second step in what can be seen as a three-rung approach, there will be identification present in that wholesome thought, speech or action. That three-rung approach is to first step up from the rung of unwholesome states to the rung of wholesome states and then from the rung of wholesome states to step up to a state of neither wholesome nor unwholesome, beyond identification with any of them. Acting in a wholesome manner translates into formations that may not have as much sensual craving or aversion fetters, but still be rooted in the fetters of ignorance and conceit. For this reason, rebirth will still continue both on the micro level – with clinging to the wholesome translating to accumulation of an identity rooted in wholesome tendencies as well as rebirth of wholesome actions that may cause vipariṇāma Dukkha where a negative effect may result from it at some future point – and the macro level – where one may attain a better next life, but it will still be conditioned, impermanent and therefore Dukkha.

It's only when one has completely let go and attained Nirodha that their destiny for exiting Saṃsāra is locked in. Even when one does enter the stream, one still experiences rebirth until one has

destroyed all of the fetters. The once-returner, the *sakadāgāmī*, is one who will return back to the sensual realms one more time before attaining full awakening, which means they are still subject to rebirth. The non-returner, the *anāgāmī*, has one more life albeit beyond the scope of the sensual realms and in the luminous form realms, but still suffers rebirth nonetheless, and therefore is subject to *Dukkha* in the form of conceit and identity. The only one safe, assured no more rebirth and therefore no more *Dukkha*, is the arahant, the one who has destroyed all the taints, fetters, tendencies, clinging, being, and rebirth itself, for it is the arahant who has completed the Path to its inevitable end, which is wisdom born from understanding *Dukkha*, fully abandoning *Taṇhā*, and thereby experiencing total *Nirodha* through the development and perfection of *Magga*.

## *Defining a Sentient Being and the Four Modes of Conception*

*Catasso kho imā, sāriputta, yoniyo. Katamā catasso? Aṇḍajā yoni, jalābujā yoni, saṃsedajā yoni, opapātikā yoni.*

*Sāriputta, there are these four kinds of generation. What are the four? Egg-born generation, womb-born generation, moisture-born, generation, and spontaneous generation.*

- MN 12, Mahāsīhanāda Sutta

Before we understand the four main ways of conception, under which there are sub-categories, let's understand what a being is and what it is not in the Buddha's dispensation. This is crucial because the Buddha refers to rebirth of *beings* in Saṃsāra. These beings are known as *satta* in Pali. In SN 23.2, Satta Sutta, the Venerable Rādhā asks the Buddha –

“*satto, satto’ti, bhante, vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, sattoti vuccatī’ti?*”

“*Venerable sir, it is said, ‘a being, a being.’ In what way, venerable sir, is one called a being?*”

And the Buddha responds with –

*Rūpe kho, rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā, tatra satto, tatra visatto, tasmā sattoti vuccati. Vedanāya kho, rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā, tatra satto, tatra visatto, tasmā sattoti vuccati. Saññāya kho, rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā, tatra satto, tatra visatto, tasmā sattoti vuccati. Saṅkhāresu kho, rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā, tatra satto, tatra visatto, tasmā sattoti vuccati. Viññāṇe kho, rādha, yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā, tatra satto, tatra visatto, tasmā sattoti vuccati.*

“*One is stuck, Rādha, tightly stuck, in desire, lust, delight, and craving for form; therefore, one is called a being. One is stuck, tightly stuck, in desire, lust, delight, and craving for feeling; therefore, one is called a being. One is stuck, tightly stuck, in desire, lust, delight, and craving for perception; therefore, one is called a being. One is stuck, tightly stuck, in desire, lust, delight, and craving for formations; therefore, one is called a being. One is stuck, tightly stuck, in desire, lust, delight, and craving for consciousness; therefore, one is called a being.*”

For the purpose of clarifying what a sentient being is, it’s important to understand the context of the use of the terms, sentient and non-sentient. Non-sentient lifeforms would be those that do not produce kamma, while sentient beings are karmic beings or kamma-producing beings. In the Buddha’s dispensation,

there is the animal realm, and within that includes birds, reptiles, and insects and so on, but nowhere is there mention of bacteria, protozoa, fungi, viruses, and plants and other non-moving forms of life like sponges, corals, and the like. While these are in the realm of the sense spheres, they do not have sentience in the way an animal protecting itself does or a human or deva indulging in pleasure does. In other words, while these lifeforms do grow, adapt and possess form, they do not experience sentience in the way of producing kamma.

In the case of non-sentient lifeforms, they are certainly made up of genetic material, but they do not interact based on any self-clinging or function from any sense of intention. They function based on chromosomic presets. In other words, they run like programs with the software of DNA operating their function – to grow and reproduce in their own way beyond the scope of the four modes of conception (through binary fission, spores, parasitic growth and so on) and nothing more, in the same way the cells in bodies are preprogrammed for certain functions as well for their death. Nevertheless, it's important to note that the Buddha and his students had respect for viable seeds, plants and trees, since other beings depended on them for their sustenance both in terms of lodging and food. Recall it was under the protective shade of the Bodhi tree that the Bodhisatta became the Buddha. Following the example of the Buddha and the Sangha, one should have respect for all lifeforms, whether they are plants, trees, fungi, or animals, and at the same time protect one's body from harmful bacteria, viruses, protozoa and parasites so that it is healthy enough for practicing meditation.

Animals, humans, and devas, on the other hand, are far more complex. They have self-awareness, intention, and urges that they



take personal for their survival, and act from a misperceived sense of self, in some beings far more developed and in others not as much. The question then is – if non-sentient lifeforms do not possess intention and therefore kamma, then wouldn't one consider them arahants? There's an important distinction here. Arahants do possess intention, which is cleansed of all craving and other fetters, and they function dependent upon intention and kamma, but such kamma is rooted in the Path and they are still subject to the effects of kamma produced before full awakening. It doesn't mean that these non-sentient beings don't possess the mental aggregates – they do but their cognition, feeling, and perception are very limited, if at all present, and by no means do they have formations that indicate intention. It's more about the level of complexity in relation to identifying with feeling, perception, cognition and intention and the craving for them that is an indicator of sentience or the capacity to produce kamma that ties beings to Saṃsāra. One should note, based on the parameter of what a being is and isn't according to the Satta Sutta, it would mean the arahant is no longer a being since in their mind there is no longer conceit, craving or ignorance in relation to any of the aggregates.

Now, within the animal realm, we see how complex social structures are created and understood. Animals possess craving for reproduction and food. It may be said that they are programmed for this through their DNA, and it could be said the same of humans as well, however, animals possess some form of intention – to either avoid pain or pursue pleasure for the sense of self, even if that concept of self is rudimentary at best. For example, one can see primates developing social roles and a social structure that enables their survival and they take their roles very seriously,

to the point of fighting and killing for them. Even certain fish have complex mating rituals. The puffer fish is one such being who produces an elaborate art design on the seafloor to attract a mate, displaying the ability for creative intelligence. Animals have knowledge of the seasons, and they plan accordingly, storing up resources for the winter. Birds build nests and transfer information to their young regarding flight and catching food. Peacocks display their feathers as a way to gain mates. Male lions will castrate another competitor as a show of dominance. Insects navigate the world dependent on craving for food and acceptance of a mate – bees, ants, wasps and other insects work as a community to gain favors of their leaders and mates. On the flip side, animals can also display deep bonds of caring and concern to those close to them, whether they are pets, in the wild, or amongst one another, and they are capable of immense empathy and pain as well. They can be playful, overjoyed at the sight of a familiar face and are even capable of responding to other beings on a mental plane. For example, they have been known to respond to someone radiating loving-kindness or compassion in a reciprocal manner through their gestures and sounds as a response. In short, animals possess emotional craving and aversion dependent upon concepts around the aggregates, capable of feeling, perception, intention and cognition.

With the parameters of a sentient being defined as not just possessing the aggregates but also having craving, identification, and intention related to each of them, let's take a look at the four modes of conception or generation of such beings as laid out by the Buddha.

## *Egg-Born Generation*

*Katamā ca, sārīputta, aṇḍajā yoni? Ye kho te, sārīputta, sattā  
aṇḍakosam abhinibbhijja jāyanti— ayaṃ vuccati, sārīputta, aṇḍajā yoni.*

*“What is egg-born generation? There are these beings born by  
breaking out of the shell of an egg; this is called egg-born generation.*

- MN 12, Mahāsīhanāda Sutta

Egg-born generation can happen in two different ways. In the first case, an egg is fertilized internally by the father and laid by the mother and after some time of development, the egg is hatched by the being inside. In the second case, the egg is spawned by the mother and the father fertilizes it after the egg has left the mother. Birds are born after the father has fertilized the eggs internally, after which the mother lays the eggs and cares for them. Most reptiles and most insects and arachnids are born this way as are some fish and all monotremes like echidnas and platypuses. The lifeform inside develops and grows through the nutrients provided by the yolk inside the egg until it grows and is finally ready to

hatch. Most fish and most amphibians are conceived by the mother laying the eggs and then the father fertilizing them after the eggs are laid. In this case, many hundreds of eggs are released and fertilized to provide a better chance of survival of the species. When the life inside develops, fed and nourished by the nutrients of the egg, it is ready to hatch and breaks through the shell. The fertilization process is through which the new evolving consciousness is stationed. There are rare cases when parthenogenesis occurs where the eggs become fertilized by the genetic material of the mother and so there is no father involved. Once the consciousness is stabilized in the new genetic blueprint of the fertilized egg, it dissipates and the process of arising and passing away of consciousnesses continues as the life develops aggregates and sense bases to experience its surroundings. All throughout the development process, the rebirth of consciousnesses arising and passing away in every moment occurs with new formations generated by the growing lifeform's responses inside the egg.

## ***Womb-Born Generation***

*Katamā ca, sārīputta, jalābujā yoni? Ye kho te, sārīputta, sattā  
vatthikosarā abhinibbhijja jāyanti— ayaṃ vuccati, sārīputta, jalābujā  
yoni.*

*What is womb-born generation? There are these beings born by  
breaking out from the caul; this is called womb-born generation.*

- MN 12, Mahāsīhanāda Sutta

Most mammals, some amphibians, some insects, some arachnids, sharks and some reptiles, and all marsupials are born in the womb of the mother. The father fertilizes the ovum of the mother and when there is a joining of their genetic material, the formations transferred by the consciousness gets stationed in there. In the womb generation, there can also be cases where parthenogenesis occurs. The life inside develops within the mother and is either nourished by the mother through an umbilical cord in mammals or a yolk inside the mother in the cases of amphibians, reptiles, and some fish; and in the case of marsupials, the fetus continues to develop in a pouch that provides heat as it suckles from the mother's teats for further nourishment. As the life

evolves, it starts to grow limbs and develops the aggregates and sense bases. All throughout the development process, rebirth of consciousnesses arising and passing away occurs with new formations being generated by the responses of the being inside the womb.

### ***Moisture-Born Generation***

*Katamā ca, sāriputta, saṃsedajā yoni? Ye kho te, sāriputta, sattā pūtimacche vā jāyanti pūtikunape vā pūtikummāse vā candanikāye vā oḷigalle vā jāyanti— ayaṃ vuccati, sāriputta, saṃsedajā yoni.*

*What is moisture-born generation? There are these beings born in a rotten fish, in a rotten corpse, in rotten porridge, in a cesspit, or in a sewer; this is called moisture-born generation.*

- MN 12, Mahāsīhanāda Sutta

Technically, the beings born via moisture are mostly maggots who are yet to become flies and appear from tiny eggs. However,

these eggs are laid in moisture-rich conditions and places of rot and filth. For example, house flies emerge from trash and feces, fruit flies from fermented drinks, rotting food and drains, drain flies from standing water, blow flies from rotting meat, and gnats from moist decaying organic debris. Mosquitos lay their eggs in standing water or other moisture-rich areas and emerge from there.

The beings who take life in these eggs arise either from their fertilization of the father inside the mother or from parthenogenesis, and the consciousness is stationed into the genetic material at the time of conception. They then begin to develop the aggregates and sense bases while inside the egg and the formations continue to further generate the arising and passing away of consciousnesses in these beings.

### ***Spontaneous Generation***

*Katamā ca, sārīputta, opapātikā yoni? Devā, nerayikā, ekacce ca manussā, ekacce ca vinipātikā — ayaṃ vuccati, sārīputta, opapātikā yoni.*

*What is spontaneous generation? There are gods and denizens of hell and certain human beings and some beings in the lower worlds; this is called spontaneous generation.*

- MN 12, Mahāsīhanāda Sutta

Spontaneous generation refers to those beings who appear in the hell realms, hungry ghost realms, deva and brahma realms, or the formless realms. This form of conception, if it can be called that, is more the creation of a fully formed being that just seems to appear out of nothing. In reality, the being spontaneously arises dependent upon the formations from their previous life that are transported to their next life via consciousness, which then dissipates upon generation of nāmarupā or nāma in the next realm. In short it is their kamma that creates another body according to the craving, conceit, and ignorance driving forward the creation. If a being is in fear and regret and starts to see terrible visions of torture and pain, they are bound for niraya, the hell realms and the generation of their body in these realms reflect that kamma. If a being sees beautiful images and are greeted by angelic figures, then the generation of their body will be determined by their good kamma in the heavenly realms. In the following sections we will explore this understanding of kamma and their underlying catalysts for rebirths in the kāmādhātu, rūpādhātu and arupādhātu.



## *General Catalysts for Rebirth in Kāmadhātu*

For the purposes of understanding rebirth and its connection to kamma, choice and intention on a deeper level, it's important to see the sort of choices and actions that can lead a being into certain states of rebirth through various realms. We have to remember that the fuel of Saṃsāra is generated by craving, conceit, aversion, ignorance, and other defilements of mind. These defilements can be consolidated into and umbrellaed under three main kilesas or impure mental states – lobha or greed, dosa or hatred, and moha or delusion. That's why it is essential to understand that while realms of the senses have a spatial existence, they also have corresponding mental states as effects of previous choices rooted in the defilements as well as wholesome intentions. The sixteen defilements are abhijjha-visamalobha or coveting another's property, relationship, or other qualities, byāpāda or ill will and hatred, krodha or anger, upanāha or keeping a grudge, makkha or to disparage another being, palāsa or competitiveness, issā or jealousy, macchāriya or stinginess, māyā or deceit, sātheyya or hypocrisy, thamba or stubbornness, sārāmbha or prone to quarreling, māna or conceit, atimāna or arrogance, mada or self-infatuation, and pamāda or carelessness. Wholesome qualities such as generosity, keeping the five precepts, and practicing kindness and compassion lead to a better rebirth but can still be rooted in ignorance and conceit. That is why the fetters, defilements, taints, and underlying tendencies have to be cut off at the root to completely eradicate rebirth altogether.

Rebirth in the realms lower than the human world are caused in general by the defilements and specifically the first three fetters.

These fetters are sakkāyadiṭṭi or belief in a personal self, vicikicchā or doubt in the Buddha, Sangha, and Dhamma as well as the doubt of what is considered wholesome and unwholesome, and sīlabbata-parāmāso or thinking rites and rituals or just morality alone will lead one to Nibbāna. These fetters won't lead one directly to the hell realms but can open up the portal to them or the other lower realms. It also depends on the intensity of one's unwholesome thoughts, speech and actions and the defilements that are strongly present in mind during death. All of these in conjunction will indicate in which lower realm a being will take birth.

Rebirth in the realms higher than the human world are caused by mixed kamma with a greater amount of wholesome kamma. For example, as we will see, the lower devas are prone to more distress and envy as a result of some effects of defilements while the highest devas reap the benefits of purely wholesome choices and actions done in previous lives but that are still rooted in conceit and some form of sensual craving. Moreover, Māra, while being a resident of the highest heavens, has intentions that are rooted in certain defilements.

Let us now go through each of the five main divisions of the sensual realms – hell, animal, hungry ghost, human, and deva – and the general catalysts for rebirth in them. We will discuss the human realm last within the parameters of kāmadhātu. After a discussion on each level of rebirth, we will understand how to utilize the Path to let go of the defilements and fetters leading to each rebirth.

## *Rebirth in Niraya*

In niraya or the hell realms, there are three categories of beings 1. Yama (not to be confused with a Yāma deva), who is the clerk of these realms, 2. the inflictors of punishment, and 3. those who are to experience the punishment as a result of their unwholesome choices. When a being dies in one life, if they see manifestations of torture and dread, and their mind is filled with fear, anger, and regret, the formations rooted in these unwholesome states will give rise to a consciousness that then transports these karmic formations that spontaneously generate a body with the mentality rooted in unwholesome states. They possess all five aggregates and six sense bases, and their nervous system is enhanced for experiencing a greater level of pain. The new being is escorted by the *nirayapālā*, or the inflictors of punishment, to Yama's station. Yama is not a judge in this case. Instead, he asks the being some questions, as per MN 130, Devadūta Sutta. He asks the being if they saw the *divine messengers* in the form of a helpless infant, an elderly person with signs of aging, a sick person, a person punished in the human realm for their bad deeds by the relevant authorities, and a corpse. In other words, while in the human realms, all are reminded of the impermanence of life and the law of kamma in the form of cause and consequence. Yet, the being responds to Yama first in the negative. Still, when Yama clarifies that these messengers are in the form of the signs of conditioned reality, the being responds in the affirmative. Yama, at each point of questioning, after the being responds in the affirmative, says corresponding to the five signs –

*ambho purisa, tassa te viññussa sato mahallakassa na etadahosi—  
ahampi khomhi jātidhammo, jātirā anatīto. Handāham kalyāṇam karomi  
kāyena vācāya manasā'ti?*

*ambho purisa, tassa te viññussa sato mahallakassa na etadahosi—  
ahampi khomhi jarādhammo, jaram anatīto. Handāham kalyāṇam karomi  
kāyena vācāya manasā'ti?*

*ambho purisa, tassa te viññussa sato mahallakassa na etadahosi—  
ahampi khomhi byādhidhammo, byādhirā anatīto.*

*ambho purisa, tassa te viññussa sato mahallakassa na etadahosi— ye  
kira, bho, pāpakāni kammāni karonti te diṭṭheva dhamme evarūpā vividhā  
kammakāraṇā karīyanti, kimaṅgam pana parattha. Handāham kalyāṇam  
karomi kāyena vācāya manasā'ti?*

## Birth

*ambho purisa, tassa te viññussa sato mahallakassa na etadahosi—  
ahampi khomhi maraṇadhammo, maraṇaṃ anatīto. Handāhaṃ kalyāṇaṃ  
karomi kāyena vācāya manasā'ti?*

Good man, did it never occur to you — an intelligent and mature man — “I too am subject to birth, I am not exempt from birth: surely, I had better do good by body, speech, and mind?”

“Good man, did it never occur to you — an intelligent and mature man — “I, too, am subject to aging. I am not exempt from aging: surely, I had better do good by body, speech, and mind?”

“Good man, did it never occur to you — an intelligent and mature man — “I too am subject to sickness, I am not exempt from sickness: surely, I had better do good by body, speech, and mind?”

“Good man, did it never occur to you — an intelligent and mature man — “Those who do evil actions have such tortures of various kinds inflicted on them here and now; so, what in the hereafter? Surely, I had better do good by body, speech, and mind?”

“Good man, did it never occur to you — an intelligent and mature man — “I too am subject to death, I am not exempt from death: surely, I had better do good by body, speech, and mind?”

After each case, the being will say they were unable to because they were careless and negligent. One way to understand this is while these beings did see these things, they did not pay heed to them to reflect and change their unwholesome ways. Finally, Yama says in each case –

*ambho purisa, pamādatāya na kalyāṇamakāsi kāyena vācāya  
manasā. Taggha tvaṃ, ambho purisa, tathā karissanti yathā taṃ  
pamattaṃ. Taṃ kho pana te etaṃ pāpakammaṃ neva mātaraṃ kataṃ na  
pitarā kataṃ na bhātaraṃ kataṃ na bhaginiyā kataṃ na mittāmaccehi  
kataṃ na ñātisālohitehi kataṃ na samaṇabrāhmaṇehi kataṃ na devatāhi  
kataṃ, tayāvetam pāpakammaṃ kataṃ, tvaññevetassa vipākam  
paṭisaṃvedissasī'ti.*

“Good man, through negligence you have failed to do good by body, speech, and mind. Certainly, they will deal with you according to your negligence. But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother or your father, or by your brother or your sister, or by your friends and companions, or by your kinsmen and relatives, or by recluses and brahmins, or by gods: this evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.”

Yama confirms with this statement that all beings are liable to the effects of their actions, and it is their kamma that will determine their punishment in hell. No one else will be there to inherit their kamma – they themselves will have to suffer the consequences. He then says nothing, not passing any judgment. After this, the nirayapālā will escort the being to their respective place in the hell realms. After every meeting, Yama laments his condition. He is a clerk of the lowest realms while also experiencing the kamma of a deva and wants to be taught the Dhamma in full. This lamentation is from AN 3.36, Devadūta Sutta –

*ye kira, bho, loke pāpakāni kammāni karonti te evarūpā vividhā  
kammakāraṇā karīyanti. Aho vatāhaṃ manussattaṃ labheyyaṃ,  
tathāgato ca loke uppajjeyya arahāṃ sammāsambuddho, tañcāhaṃ  
bhagavantaṃ payirupāseyyaṃ. So, ca me bhagavā dhammaṃ deseyya,  
tassa cāhaṃ bhagavato dhammaṃ ājāneyyaṃ'ti.*

*Those in the world who do evil deeds are punished with such diverse tortures. Oh, that I might attain the human state! That a Tathāgata, Arahant, Perfectly Enlightened One might arise in the world! That I*

*might attend upon that Blessed One! That the Blessed One might teach me the Dhamma, and that I might come to understand his Dhamma!*

Those beings who are designated to the post of Yama have mixed kamma. On one hand, they do not have such kamma as to warrant punishment in the hell realms, but because they had judged beings wrongly or took personal their post of being a judge and inflicted unjust sentences, they are here. With regret and remorse, at death, their formations transport them to the hell realms but because they were morally upright and fatally proud of it, they become Yamas, suffering the boredom of being a clerk and the pain of having to welcome every being destined for punishment and at the same time they are not inflicted with such punishments themselves. In this way, they are shown that there is no central moral judge who inflicts punishments, and one has to let kamma play out for each being without passing self-righteous judgment.

The nirayapālā have their own kamma to deal with. They were torturers in a past life and enjoyed their role as a warden or jailor or some form of prison employee. Because of abusing prisoners and inflicting pain on them, at death they suffer great mental pain and fear, and their formations send them to the hell realms to take on employment there. Another cause for a rebirth as a nirayapālā is dealing in deceit and treachery, leading people astray from the idea of kamma and the teachings of the Buddha. There is very little recourse for a nirayapālā to make good kamma because they enjoy inflicting pain on others, but if they have remorse and show even an inkling of empathy, which is absolutely



rare, that and any good kamma from previous lives will help them leave the hell realms when all negative kamma is exhausted.

As for the beings who come to the hell realms to suffer torture there, their primary actions of ill will, hatred, harsh speech causing violence, and being generally unforgiving and holding a grudge lead them there. Enjoying the act of killing as a butcher and routinely inflicting pain and death on animals and humans or raping and torturing other beings are additional catalysts. The defilements of hatred, anger, proneness to quarreling, stubbornness, hypocrisy, and carelessness can lead a being towards the hell realms. Rejecting Right View or perverting it, so as to lead a life that causes one to continue seeing life as meaningless and therefore not having any interest in keeping precepts or practicing generosity or gratitude can lead one to the hell realms. Having wrong view, in general, can cause rebirth in the hell realms. Falsely accusing pure monastics would be another cause.

It must be stated that for a being to possibly take rebirth in niraya the unwholesome intentions must be intense, which means they are predicated by the bhava – that is to say if the actions are habitually committed, they will strengthen certain underlying tendencies leading to the gradual certainty of a particular rebirth. If a being with habitually wholesome intentions and choices commits unwholesome actions, if they make amends or they experience the effects of such kamma in the present life, then that can be the end of it. Even if a wholesome action was counteracted by unwholesome actions, which doesn't mean it will result taking birth in a lower realm in the very next life – other factors such as bhava, as well as the predominant thoughts present during the death process, come into play to determine the exact location of

one's immediate next birth. The effect of the unwholesome actions may come to fruition in a subsequent life and the degree of that effect may appear minor compared to taking birth in a lower realm. Broadly speaking and for the purpose of illustrating this, take the example of someone having punched another person with intention to harm. This action may not directly result in a lower realm, but the attacker may experience facial pain in another human life or in that very life in some way or another, and thus suffer the consequences without having to take birth in a lower realm. Now, there are five specific unwholesome actions that undoubtedly cause one to take rebirth in the hell realms in the very next life and prevent one from attaining stream-entry. These are intentionally killing one's father or mother, killing an arahant, drawing the blood of a Buddha with malintent, and creating a schism in the Sangha.

### *Abandoning the Factors for Niraya with Right Effort*

The fundamental mental impurity of hatred is a major factor for rebirth in niraya, and it can manifest in a myriad of situations. Anger, ill will, the intention to harm, abusive and harsh speech, attacking others, and intentionally killing can also stem from this one mental impurity. In circumstances where conflicts arise, one must observe one's mindset. Is there any intent to harm or to lash out with terrible and abusive language or is there a motive to resolve the conflict and bring things to balance? Whenever one sees conflict arising, this is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha. One has been born on a quantum level to this situation. One sees that if one

continues to identify with the situation or worsen it with ill will and hatred, this is the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya. If one utilizes the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga to let go of one's attachment to a viewpoint in the conflict, debate, argument, or misunderstanding or any unpleasant situation or negative sensory or mental experience and abandons any intentions of ill will, one enters into the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha, and releases the continual rebirth in those moments of conflict. The more one does this, the easier it becomes to replace hatred with loving-kindness, forgiveness, and compassion and let go of the underlying mental impurity of hatred. Even minor irritations and annoyances can inflame one towards hatred, so it's important to notice if this happens and utilize the 6Rs where one

- ◆ Recognizes the Dukkha in the form of any unpleasant vedanā present or in the form of a conflict, debate, argument, or misunderstanding
- ◆ Release attention away from identification with experiences, thus abandoning Samudaya
- ◆ Relaxes any tension arising from holding onto a viewpoint or aversion, thus experiencing Nirodha
- ◆ Re-smiles if possible as it may not be appropriate in all situations or at the very least inclines the mind towards something wholesome

- ◆ Returns to a more balanced and tranquil mind and with the intention of loving-kindness, compassion, or forgiveness – whatever is appropriate for the situation and an antidote to the manifestations of aversion
- ◆ Repeats anytime the mind becomes irritated again or starts to drift towards intentions of anger and cruelty and thus continues to cultivate Magga

### *Rebirth in Tiracchānāyoni*

The tiracchānāyoni, or the womb of a creature or one that functions horizontally, as it is translated, is fraught with a lot of pain and helplessness. Although the translation is womb for yoni, as we've seen earlier, conception in this birth can happen one of three ways – egg, womb, or moisture. The predominant kilesa for rebirth as an animal is delusion. A being whose primary goal in life is to live merrily without thinking of tomorrow, thus having wrong view, especially the view of nihilism and hedonism, and who doesn't believe in kamma can take birth in this realm. When a being has indulged in sensual craving and especially indulged in sex, intoxicants, sleep, and food, their primary senses of touch and taste become more sensitive at the time of death.

During the process of dying, the being may think about its pets who become objects of deep attachment, which can create formations that carry over into the next life into the genetic material of a being that is the same species of their pets. If there are certain practices, as there used to be in ancient India, where a being acts like a certain animal, the formations rooted in those intentions will give rise to a consciousness that will carry them forward into the genetic material of the animal they kept behaving like. Likewise, if a being commits animal sacrifices, they are more likely to have regret for habitually having done them and at the point of dissolution they can suffer the consequences similar to those of the animals they killed. Indulging in cruelty towards animals, one begets the same circumstances through a rebirth in the realm of the animals. Suppose a person's mind has been beset by the defilements of self-infatuation, deceit, stinginess, and carelessness. In that case, they may suffer rebirth in this realm as animals having to deal with the kamma of being tricked and trapped into servitude or for entertainment. Those who deal in spiritual practices that impair a person's view on kamma, such as astrology, palmistry, and tarot reading, can have the potential for subsequent rebirth in the animal realm for not only possessing wrong view but leading others away from Right View as well. Beings who indulge in idle chatter and gossip can also have the potential for a rebirth in this realm. Depending on the type of animal, certain sense faculties may be sharper in them like the nose and ear faculties in canines, the eye faculties in falcons and eagles, and the touch faculty in snakes and other reptiles, and they will have all aggregates present.

Some who take rebirth here also enjoy some good kamma in that they may have more comfortable lives or better food as pets among people who may even treat them like family members.

There is little an animal can do to make good kamma here and usually it is much likely that there will be repeated rebirths in this realm until all the kamma that causes rebirth here is exhausted or for one to fall to a lower level of existence until all kamma is exhausted there and one can take rebirth in a higher realm. Animals who listen to the Dhamma or pets in households of Dhamma followers may attain good fortune through these associations and may even delight in being among monastics. This can provide them with an opportunity to somehow serve or help such beings following the Dhamma, creating some good kamma to merit a future human life or even a deva life.

### *Abandoning the Factors for Tiracchānayoṇi with Right Effort*

Delusion is the underlying mental factor that leads to the animal realm. Delusion is another word for ignorance – the inability to see the Four Noble Truths at any moment. This branches out into the defilements of arrogance, conceit, self-infatuation, jealousy, deceit, stinginess, and carelessness. All of these can be abandoned utilizing the Path and by seeing the true nature of experiences as Anicca, Dukkha, and Anatta. Whenever one identifies with an experience this is due to ignorance of the tilakkhaṇa and the Four Noble Truths. When one enjoys too much sleep, food, or indulges in sexual activity, the mind is tied into identification with the body. It becomes a habitual tendency that cause one's mind to become dull and inattentive. Partaking of

alcohol and drugs dull the mind, leaving it in a stupor. Participating in idle chatter and gossip leaves the mind restless, dazed, and in a general sense of boredom, making itself feel drained by the end of it. Here the mind is unable to experience the clarity of wisdom and understanding.

When one gets into identifying with the senses and begins indulging them with carelessness to the point of apathy and mind is left in confusion and doubt, this is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha brought on by the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya, which is taking of the experience and the corresponding sense base as personal. If one makes the Right Effort to notice with the 6Rs, utilizing the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga, one experiences the release from doubt and ignorance in that moment, which is the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha and where mind becomes sharp, collected and unified to be able to see clearly and whittle away ignorance. To simplify, one

- ◆ Recognizes the Dukkha of a mind filled with sloth and torpor, apathy, laziness, doubt or confusion
- ◆ Releases the mind's attention from the unwholesome mental state and abandons Samudaya
- ◆ Relaxes mind and body, and thus experiencing Nirodha
- ◆ Re-smiles and uplifts the mind by generating joy and more effort

- ◆ Returns to a balanced state of mind, which revitalizes itself with more joy and observing with complete mindfulness and Attention Rooted in Reality to the tilakkhaṇa – thus generating the awakening factors of joy, energy, and discernment
- ◆ Repeats anytime mind drifts into a state of lethargy and indulgence, thus continuing to cultivate Magga

### *Rebirth in Petaloka*

Birth into petaloka, or the realm of the hungry ghosts, is determined by certain defilements and actions. The predominant kilesa that leads one to this realm is greed. In a previous life, beings who committed acts born from greed as well as the defilements of covetousness, jealousy, stinginess, competitiveness, deceit, disparagement of others, hypocrisy, self-infatuation, conceit, arrogance, stubbornness, and carelessness, and became habituated to thoughts, speech, and actions that developed and strengthened formations rooted in these defilements are liable for rebirth in this realm. Beings in the human realm who gave false promises, never expressed generosity, cheated and told lies, spoke ill of others, used abusive and harsh speech, did business by deception and treachery, bore false witness, took what was not given, and other such deeds in a habitual manner so that they always looked over



their own shoulders and trusted no one are more likely to develop formations suited for the peta realms. These formations will give rise to images of suffering, regret, restlessness, discomfort and deep craving. The being at their deathbed may see hungry ghosts as a sign of their destination and feel terrible hunger or thirst.

At death, the new consciousness then transports the formations of craving and defilements to generate a body of the hungry ghost in the new realm. The hungry ghosts generally look sickly, pale, with disheveled hair, large beady eyes, and have large potbellies and long craning necks that are barely able to fit a morsel of food and mouths as small as the width of a hair. Some appear sticklike and skeletal, and others large and monstrous with titanic bodies, possessing mouths on their heads and eyes sticking out of their heads. Some petas have mixed kamma, which means that during half of the time they suffer the consequences of their past negative actions and the other half they enjoy the fruits of their past positive actions. One such peta is Yama of the hell realms, which is why hungry ghosts will refer to their realm as the realm of Yama. They possess all five aggregates and six sense faculties, and their nervous system is enhanced for experiencing great hunger and thirst. There is minimal possibility of them doing any sort of merit or committing good kamma, but when relatives of theirs from previous lifetimes offer gifts to monastics and dedicate their merit to them, they find some relief and have a possibility of a better rebirth when the effects of the kamma they committed that caused them to come to the peta realm have been exhausted.

## *Abandoning the Factors for Petaloka with Right Effort*

The mental factor associated with this rebirth is greed. All forms of craving that make the mind restless, causing one to seek more than one's fill, to cut corners, and not be mindful of others around them, can create formations that can cause one to take rebirth in the hungry ghost realms. When one desires something someone else possesses, or experiences jealousy towards someone else's fortune, this is rooted in this factor of greed. Whenever the mind desires to take something that is not given, plots against another for the attainment of physical possession or a relationship, backbites about someone else, deals in gossip, or even deals in lying and speaking falsely, this causes restlessness. This hindrance of restlessness becomes a vicious cycle of seeking and not being filled, growing one's appetites for nutriment, expression, and mental pleasures. The mind is left feeling excited, agitated, irritated, and wandering around from thought to thought, which prevents it from becoming collected and tranquil.

Whenever the mind is restless and seeking, searching, dissatisfied, and hungry for attention or nutriment: this is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha. When the mind identifies with this and wants more of something, this is the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya. When mind recognizes this and abandons Samudaya, one experiences the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha by having cultivated the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga. In this way, one

## Birth

- ◆ Recognizes the restlessness, need for attention, jealousy, competitiveness, or other defilements related to the petaloka present in mind as Dukkha
- ◆ Releases attention from these unwholesome qualities and abandons Samudaya
- ◆ Relaxes any mental or physical tension as a manifestation of identification and experiences the relief of Nirodha
- ◆ Re-smiles to uplift mind and bring it into harmony
- ◆ Returns the mind to a more tranquil state and brings up the awakening factors of collectedness, tranquility, and equanimity, or the feeling of empathetic joy
- ◆ Repeats whenever mind grows restless again, thus consistently developing Magga

### *Rebirth in Devaloka*

The devaloka or heavenly realms are diverse and populated by beings that are humanoid but also display some otherworldly features. Certain defilements as well as the fetters of sensual craving and aversion, may still be present for a being, but their formations will be rooted in a majority of wholesome choices. These wholesome choices would be rooted in the pārami or perfections – dāna or generosity, sīla or morality, nekkhamma or renunciation, paññā or wisdom, viriya or energy, khanti or

patience, sacca or honesty, adhiṭṭhāna or resolution, mettā or loving-kindness, and upekkhā or equanimity. At the dissolution of their life, a being's formations rooted mostly in habitually activated wholesome and morally perfect choices will transfer the new consciousness which will become established in a spontaneously generated deva body, which is luminous and still human-like in appearance. As one progresses through the higher deva realms, these bodies become more refined. All of them possess all five aggregates and sense bases, and their nervous system is enhanced to experience greater pleasure and continue to be further refined for celestial pleasures when a being takes rebirth in the celestial realms. The bodies are sensitive to certain emotions, such as anger, and if a deva becomes extremely angry, the energy of that anger can burn out their nervous system and destroy their bodies, leading to their death. A deva can be killed by being beheaded or cut into two, but if their limbs are harmed or cut off, they are able to generate them.

Possessing mostly good kamma rooted in the varying degrees of the perfections, with slight defilements of jealousy, prone to quarreling, self-infatuation, arrogance, conceit, and carelessness can lead a being to the terrestrial deva world, which exists around the mystical mountain of Sineru on Earth, parallel to the human realm. The realm of the four great kings or Cātummahārājika, and the realm of the thirty-three gods, Tāvatiṃsa, are part of the terrestrial deva world, and rebirth here depends on the ratio of defilements to excellent kamma. Having a greater degree of defilements leads to rebirth in the realm of the four great kings, where the asuras also reside. As the ratio changes with more moral perfections being present and habitually exercised than defilements in a being, they will take rebirth in the realm of the

thirty-three gods. Depending on that being's inclinations and their level of generosity, they can take rebirth as a specific deva as part of the thirty-three gods. For example, a being prone to enjoying sensual pleasures, having leadership qualities that they dedicate to the Dhamma, and building monasteries and meditation centers can be bound for the realm of the thirty-three gods and take on the post of Sakka, the king of this realm. Generally, anyone who offers housing to monastics provides them with a monastery, and conducts building projects for the welfare of their society can be reborn here. The current king Sakka in this realm is bound for the pure abodes as an anāgāmī. Kaṇḍaka, the horse who carried the Bodhisatta towards the forest, took rebirth in Tāvatiṃsa after he passed away as soon as the Bodhisatta entered the forest. Kaṇḍaka, as a deva, gained stream-entry after having learned from the Buddha and will continue on to the pure abodes, after which he will take exit Saṃsāra

The greater degree of moral perfections that are present in the actions of a being, the greater their capacity to enter the celestial heavens, which are far above Tāvatiṃsa, and which include the realms of the Yāma devas, Tusita where the current Bodhisatta resides, Nimmānaratī or where the devas enjoy their own creations, and Paranimmita-vasavatti or where the devas enjoy others' creations. Beings who maintain the precepts and continue to feed, clothe, and provide shelter and medicines to the needy as well as monastics and have inclinations of service to their fellow beings are reborn in these realms. Beings who have taken rebirth in these realms have offered food to previous Buddhas, kept all five or eight precepts, and were meditative in their inclinations but had not yet reached any jhāna.

There are also sotāpanna and sakadāgāmī beings who will also have the capacity to take rebirth in these realms. A relative majority of them reside in the higher celestial realms, with the rest in Tāvatiṃsa. Because sensual craving and aversion have not been eradicated in these beings, they will continue with their practice to be able to eradicate it by listening to the Dhamma and applying it. When a being in the human realm recollects the Buddha, Sangha, and Dhamma and rejoices in that, they generate wholesome intentions that further strengthen the wholesome formations, which will give rise to rebirth in a higher deva realm. When they pass on, because of their continual rejoicing in the three jewels, they have a greater propensity to take rebirth in the celestial realms. At the highest realm, Nimmānaratī, due to their good kamma in previous lives and their inclination to develop their Dhamma practice, beings are born with psychic faculties and able to use them for all sorts of purposes.

Most celestial beings are wholesome in inclination, but a few are mischievous and even have unwholesome intentions. Usually, devas are keen on helping monastics and other beings practicing the Path when they're inclined, and for this, they continue to generate wholesome kamma that maintains or elevates their position in subsequent rebirths within the celestial realms, but the majority would rather spend their time immersed in all sorts of sensual pleasures. Taking rebirth in the deva realms doesn't ensure one will continue to be wholesome. One may develop inclinations rooted in defilements and strengthen craving, conceit and ignorance, and if one hasn't attained stream-entry in a previous life or the current deva life, one has the potential to take rebirth in a lower realm of misfortune and pain.

There is one deva who resides in the highest sensual realm, Māra, who continues to generate unwholesome intentions while enjoying the pleasures of his current position in Paranimmitavasavatti. Māra likes to defy the lord of the highest realm and has his own band of rebels who he rules over in a pocket within this realm. A being who has done a lot of good kamma and has mainly wholesome intentions but isn't one inclined towards the spiritual path even though one offers to monastics and practices kindness to all beings, is one, at the dissolution of life, whose formations will result in visions of the highest heavenly pleasures and will die with a smile on their face, at ease and unburdened. Due to their defilements of self-infatuation, conceit, arrogance, carelessness, and the strengthened fetter of craving present in the mind, the formations will be tainted by these qualities and so the being who takes rebirth in the highest heaven will also have a streak of rebelliousness and arrogance. With all of these factors in play, the being who takes rebirth here will more often than not take on the office of Māra.

The current Māra enjoys life here, but he thinks lowly of the cultivation of the Path and especially jhāna practice. He thinks of such practice as a waste of time, and like a child who doesn't eat the cake of wisdom and won't let others eat it too, he goes around the realms harassing meditators by inflicting objects of craving in the form of thoughts of laziness and sensuality. He even tries to bicker with them and blames them for things that they haven't done, all to irritate them and thus make them lose interest in the Path or cultivate more sensual-based formations so that they remain in kāmādhātu. In his mischievousness, he might even frighten them. But one who is mindful and prone to abandon craving recognizes Māra's ways and continues on the Path. Māra

is like the crabs in a pot of boiling water who try to pull down the crabs seeking freedom so that they suffer like the rest who are still trapped. He wants to make sure no beings leave Saṃsāra. Due to his antics, at the end of his tenure, he will succumb to a low realm, and another being will assume the post of Māra.

### *Abandoning the Factors for Devaloka with Right Effort*

Developing, cultivating, and perfecting the moral factors that lead to realms higher than the human plane are beneficial for one's state of mind, and tills the soil of the mind so that it is well-prepared for meditation. In other words, none of the wholesome factors that lead one to the sensual heavens need to be abandoned. It's the remaining defilements that can cause mixed kamma, such as arrogance, conceit, sensual craving, carelessness, being prone to quarreling, jealousy, and any other defilements that might be in mind that need to be rooted out. This can happen through the cultivation of the Path and through deep practice of jhāna. When one attains a jhāna, there is the abandoning of and non-presence and non-arising of any defilements and hindrances. However, jhāna is temporary, and while it helps one to deepen one's insight into seeing how mind works, it isn't going to take one off of the wheel of Saṃsāra. It is also temporary in that while it ensures a rebirth beyond the sensual heavens when the kamma of having attained a jhāna in the corresponding brahmā realm wears off, there is a potential to enter into the sensual realms again dependent upon the formations present at the dissolution of the brahmā body.



Instead, when one attains stream-entry and makes an effort towards full awakening, the exit from the cycle of conditioned reality at some point is guaranteed.

Attaining jhāna one time in a manner that allows one to experience the liberation of the mind from the hindrances, purifies the mental states, and grinds away at the defilements. Coupled with utilizing the Path during daily life, which is to notice when any defilements can arise and then abandoning them to purify formations further, the mind is ripe for understanding and insight that naturally arises. Because mind becomes so pure that it reaches a deep level of clarity and quietude, it attains Nibbāna and in the process cuts off potential rebirth in lower realms. However, one now makes the effort to let go of even the sensual craving and aversion so that one has only one lifetime in the realms of the anāgāmī before becoming an arahant and leaving for good.

Until then, the practice is to use the 6Rs to let go of the unwholesome states and cultivate the wholesome states and along with it to let go of any conceit and identification with the wholesome states. In other words, while it may feel wonderful to be wholesome, there is an inkling of Dukkha present in that in the form of identification and conceit, and because of this, there is the potential for rebirth. One has to let go of these tendencies and notice when arrogance or pride in cultivating these wholesome states arise. It's not the wholesome states themselves one has to abandon, but rather the craving for them, the identification in the way of having a sense of enjoyer of these states. One merely observes the arising of these states and abandons any need to "own" them as self or possessed of a self. And how does one do this? With Attention Rooted in Reality. One essentially understands the wholesome states as impermanent, not worth

holding onto, and impersonal, and therefore one observes with this understanding in mind, by which the mind automatically non-identifies with them. So, whenever identification arises, one

- ◆ Recognizes identification, pride, and conceit present as Dukkha in wholesome states
- ◆ Release attention from the identification and thus abandons Samudaya
- ◆ Relaxes by softening the focus around the wholesome state as “me, mine, I am,” and experiences Nirodha of identity
- ◆ Re-smiles to continue maintaining the wholesome state
- ◆ Returns to the wholesome state by merely observing its arising and passing away in every moment without involvement of self, seeing it as impermanent, not worth holding onto, dependent on causes and conditions, and therefore impersonal
- ◆ Repeats whenever mind’s observation attaches an “I” to the wholesome experience, thus cultivating Magga

## *Rebirth in Manussaloka -Human Realm*

If one truly understood the immeasurable value of being born in manussaloka, the human realm, one wouldn't waste even a second doing anything other than incline mind towards developing the Path. Such a gift is rebirth in the human realm that it allows one to experience release from Dukkha entirely. Having said that, this is not to say this realm doesn't come with its pains, but only if the mind allows the process of identification, craving, and ignorance to take hold. All of Saṃsāra is Dukkha because it is conditioned, but the human life presents the best of these conditions with every opportunity to learn of the Dhamma and then apply it and achieve its fruition, that is Nirodha. The Buddha provides a succinct and visceral simile of the preciousness of the human birth in SN 56.48, Dutiyachiggaḷayuga Sutta –

*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, ayaṃ mahāpathavī ekodakā assa. Tatra puriso ekacchiggaḷaṃ yugaṃ pakkhipeyya. Tameṇaṃ puratthimo vāto pacchimena saṃhareyya, pacchimo vāto puratthimena saṃhareyya, uttaro vāto dakkhiṇena saṃhareyya, dakkhiṇo vāto uttarena saṃhareyya. Tatrassa kāṇo kacchapo. So vassasatassa vassasatassa accayena sakim sakim ummujjeyya. Tam kim maññatha, bhikkhave, api*

*nu kho kāṇo kacchapo vassatassa vassatassa accayena sakim sakim  
ummujjanto amusmim ekacchiggaḷe yuge gīvaṃ paveseyyā”ti?*

*Adhiccamidam, bhante, yaṃ so kāṇo kacchapo vassatassa  
vassatassa accayena sakim sakim ummujjanto amusmim ekacchiggaḷe  
yuge gīvaṃ paveseyyā”ti.*

*Evaṃ adhiccamidam, bhikkhave, yaṃ manussattam labhati. Evaṃ  
adhiccamidam, bhikkhave, yaṃ tathāgato loke uppajjati araham  
sammāsambuddho. Evaṃ adhiccamidam, bhikkhave, yaṃ  
tathāgatappavedito dhammavinayo loke dibbati. Tassidam, bhikkhave,  
manussattam laddham, tathāgato loke uppanno araham  
sammāsambuddho, tathāgatappavedito ca dhammavinayo loke dibbati.*

*“Bhikkhus, suppose that this great earth had become one mass of  
water, and a man would throw a yoke with a single hole upon it. An  
easterly wind would drive it westward; a westerly wind would drive it*

*eastward; a northerly wind would drive it southward; a southerly wind would drive it northward. There was a blind turtle which would come to the surface once every hundred years. What do you think, bhikkhus, would that blind turtle, coming to the surface once every hundred years, insert its neck into that yoke with a single hole?"*

*"It would be by chance, venerable sir, that that blind turtle, coming to the surface once every hundred years, would insert its neck into that yoke with a single hole."*

*"So too, bhikkhus, it is by chance that one obtains the human state; by chance that a Tathāgata, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One arises in the world; by chance that the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata shines in the world. You have obtained that human state, bhikkhus; a Tathāgata, an Arahant, a Perfectly Enlightened One has arisen in the world; the Dhamma and Discipline."*

When the Buddha uses the word "chance" when obtaining the human state, it should not be understood from the philosophical context of coincidence but rather a means of illustration of the rarity of the human life. As Bhikkhu Bodhi says in his note on the use of the word, "The statement has to be taken as rhetorical rather than philosophical in intent. At the doctrinal level, all three occurrences mentioned here come about through precise causes and conditions, not by chance." As we understand the rarity of the human birth, it's rarer to be born during the time of a Buddha's dispensation, and the value of being born on a planet in a world system where the Buddha takes birth shouldn't go unnoticed as well. The human realm is one where there is an opportunity to experience pleasure and pain, and just enough pain to be motivated to relinquish it and therefore make the effort of continually cultivating the Path. In the lower realms, there is

immense pain and suffering and very little recourse but to let the unwholesome kamma exhaust itself, while in the higher realms, there is immense pleasure, and everything comes easily to satisfy one's desires. The usual line of thinking in the deva realms is to enjoy as much as one wants without any care for when the enjoyments will run out, and it is this ignorance and craving for these pleasures that keeps the devas occupied and unable to see Dukkha and their lifespans are so extended that they cannot truly see or understand impermanence. Relatively very few even think of visiting the Buddha for wisdom and a way out of the cycle of Saṃsāra.

Birth in the human realm occurs when the formations from a previous life generate a new consciousness that transports them to a matching set of genetic material, and once that consciousness becomes established there, the life in the womb develops further formations dependent upon the experiences the mother goes through and its own inclinations while in the amniotic sac. Then, after nine months, sometimes less if the being is to take premature birth, the new infant emerges and experiences further karmic ramifications dependent upon the formations from previous lifetimes. The six classifications of rebirth as we'd discussed earlier – unwholesome birth to unwholesome states, unwholesome birth to wholesome states, unwholesome birth to Nibbāna, wholesome birth to unwholesome states, wholesome birth to wholesome states, and wholesome birth to Nibbāna – can all be experienced in the human realm. The experience of birth in the human realm can occur over and over through momentary rebirth facilitated by the process of quantum Dependent Origination, but it also happens on the macro level where rebirth can arise from one human life to the next, the formations rooted in various choices and inclinations

moving from one human life to the next until there is an end to them with the attainment of arahantship.

### *Psychological Manifestations of Other Rebirths in Manussaloka*

The psychological aspects of the other realms can also be experienced at the level of a human birth. Here the different defilements, fetters, underlying tendencies, and the impure mental states, as well as the wholesome qualities and the perfections, and their effects can be experienced all in one life or over a multitude of human lives. Mentally, beings in the human realm can experience hellish pain and suffering but won't experience them to the degree that is felt in niraya. Their defilements may keep them in a loop of violence and torture, and they are blind to expressing remorse, compassion, or forgiveness. An experience of extreme and constant mental torture in the human mind is but an atom compared to the galaxy of torture in the hell realms.

In the case of having animalistic behavior, a being can have sloth and torpor and act out of laziness, can be addicted to drugs and sex and food and go around in an aimless manner, resulting in a dull mindset. They are beholden to others and don't have a steady mind nor steady lives in general. A mind infused with sloth and torpor and doubt is an iota of the experience of an animal being. Whenever the mind obsesses over the physicality of an experience, meaning how good it feels to the senses and loses

awareness to the point of becoming lazy and unmotivated, this is a state akin to the animal realm.

One who is restless and craving for attention, jealous of other people's successes, filled with the need to be seen and not having needs fulfilled feels an inkling of one moment of experience of what a peta feels. Those with uplifted minds and very little defilements are generally kind, generous, and filled with joy. They experience happiness and are positive role models for others. They are naturally filled with creativity, energy, and enthusiasm for their lives. Such a mental feeling is a picosecond and the most atomic fraction of the experience of deva mindsets.

In short, the human realms provide a preview of what could arise as an experience of the different sensual realms on a psychological level. Indeed, even rupādhātu and arupādhātu planes of existence can be experienced in the human mind if it develops their corresponding jhāna, as we'll see in the following section. Even the experience of Māra is felt when one sees the burning of craving arising or sees other hindrances, fetters, and defilements get in the way of one's practice in general, and one starts to backslide and become complacent, preventing them from progressing towards arahantship.

### *Rebirth in Rupādhātu and Arupādhātu*



The rupādhātu or luminous form realms are accessed through the attainment of the jhānas, and the arupādhātu or formless realms are accessed through the attainment of the āyatanas. There are some instances in the suttas where the Buddha mentions that the brahmā realm can also be accessed through the development and cultivation of the four brahmavihārā – mettā or loving-kindness, karuṇā or compassion, muditā or empathetic joy, and upekkhā or equanimity. Through mental development and cultivation of jhāna, a being becomes free of any defilements, hindrances and distractions during that time of jhāna, and to effectively deal with distractions that pull their attention away, they utilize the 6Rs in a manner so as not to suppress them but to abandon them and their karmic effect on the mind. As a being becomes more stabilized in a jhāna or āyatana and is able to gain mastery, their next life is guaranteed in a realm corresponding to that particular jhāna or āyatana. Certain defilements remain present in the beings of the rupādhātu and arupādhātu, namely conceit, arrogance, and carelessness.

### *Rebirth in Brahmā Realm*

If a being attains the first jhāna, they are destined for the brahmā realms. At the dissolution of the body, the being automatically enters into a state of collectedness, and their mind abandons all formations except for those associated with the first jhāna, where there will be some verbal activity in the mind. These formations give rise to an evolving consciousness that then

transfers those formations that build up the body of a brahmā being. If a being has entered that jhāna but may have some difficulty stabilizing mind whenever entering that state, they are destined for the existence of a brahmāpārisajja, or an assemblyperson of brahmā. At the time of death, such a being relaxes and smiles, and with a collected mindset, they automatically incline to the factors of the first jhāna, whereby the formations associated with them give rise to a consciousness that gets established in the nāmarupā of the brahmāpārisajja. If a being has the ability to stay in the first jhāna and stabilize mind in that repeatedly whenever meditating, then at death the formations related to that level of proficiency give rise to a consciousness that establishes into the nāmarupā of a brahmapurohita, a minister of a mahābrahmā of this realm.

If a being is able to master the jhāna to the extent of determining the time the mind will remain immersed in the first jhāna and when it emerges from there, then at death their mind will give rise to formations related to that mastery. These formations will give rise to a consciousness that then transfers those formations into the nāmarupā of a mahābrahmā, a supreme brahmā of this realm. In all three cases, the consciousness will establish into a spontaneously generated brahmā body. In this realm, all five aggregates and the sense faculties of seeing and hearing are present, but their form is very subtle to the point of being invisible to the highest devas in kāmadhātu, and the nervous system is geared for experiencing immense joy and comfort. Their bodies are androgynous with no sexual organs. They appear to have multiple fractal-like patterns that emanate a stable form of soft and gentle light through their bodies. It's as if micro-galaxies are contained in their bodies. Mahābrahmās have an intense light that emanates

from their body and the other lower brahmās have a certain sheen and luminosity to their skin like polished marble. They can appear in any form they wish. Unless they have gained stream-entry after having used Right Effort to remove wrong view and establish Right View, brahmās are liable to fall into the lower realms of misfortune and pain after their kamma is exhausted.

### *Rebirth in the Ābhassara Realm*

The ābhassara realm is the next level of existence, and one who has achieved the second jhāna in one of three levels of proficiency will be born as one of the three categories of beings in this realm. If a being has attained the second jhāna but has some difficulty stabilizing mind in it whenever entering that state, at the dissolution of their body, their minds will be filled with joy and comfort without any verbal activity. The formations rooted in this joy and comfort will give rise to a new consciousness that transports those formations and establishes itself into the nāmarupā of a parittabha being. If a being is able access the second jhāna repeatedly and stabilize the mind in that jhāna, then at death, their formations rooted in that proficiency will give rise to a consciousness that transports those formations and establishes itself in the nāmarupā of an appamāṇābha being. Finally, if a being is able to master the second jhāna to the point that they can determine for how long the mind is in the second jhāna and at what point in time it will emerge from the second jhāna, then at death, the formations rooted in that mastery will give rise to a

consciousness that will transport those formations and establish itself into the nāmarupā of an ābhassara being. These beings are also called parisuddhābha.

In all three cases, they are spontaneously generated beings. In this realm, they possess the five aggregates and the sense faculties of sight and hearing. Their nervous systems are geared to experience intense bliss. Their bodies are iridescent like the surface of a bubble, and light streams throughout and from their being, making them appear like spheres of light glowing like the radiance of a flickering flame. They have no distinguishable features and faculties from each other, except that they experience differing levels of intense joy. Their nervous system is geared for feeling orgasmic bliss – parittabha beings experience bliss that arises and passes away constantly in every moment, while the appamāṇābha beings experience bliss that arises and passes away, but the moments in between one passing away and another arising of bliss are quicker, while the moments between the arising and the passing away are slower. In the case of the ābhassara beings, they feel joy and bliss constantly without an interval of any perceivable pauses.

There is a class of beings lower than the parittabha called the saṃkiliṭṭhābha, who possess some inkling of thought and verbalization by which they think of the joy. They require no sensory comforts because they are so steeped in the joy that they rarely interact with anyone and continue to consume and finally burn out their kamma that merited rebirth here in the first place. These beings are liable to fall into a lower realm of misfortune and pain because they are so absorbed in their joy that they have no interest in anything else, so stream-entry is difficult to attain here. During a time of re-expansion of the universe, they will fall into the

human realm to repopulate it again. An ābhassara being may fall into the brahmā realm and become a mahābrahmā there.

### *Rebirth in the Subhakiṇṇa Realm*

The subhakiṇṇa realm is the third plane of existence in the luminous form realms. Here too there are three categories of beings – the parittasubha, appamānasubha, and subhakiṇṇa – which correspond again to the level of mastery in the third jhāna. Rebirth in this realm occurs dependent upon a particular level of mastery. For a being who attains the third jhāna but whenever entering mind finds it difficult to stabilize that state, but still experiences happiness, comfort, contentment, tranquility, and utter satisfaction, when the body dies, the formations rooted in that attainment automatically give rise to a new consciousness that transports the formations and establishes itself into the nāmarupā of a parittasubha. When one has proficiency of being able enter the third jhāna repeatedly, rebirth can occur at the level of the appamānasubha being in the same manner. Likewise, for rebirth as a subhakiṇṇa being, when one has previously mastered the third jhāna to the point of determining beforehand the time the mind will remain immersed in there and when the mind will emerge from that jhāna. Like the preceding realms of the rupādhātu, the nāmarupā of the beings in this realm possess the five aggregates and the sense faculties of seeing and hearing. They are too immersed in the feeling of happiness to take any actions and instead exhaust that experience for the duration of their lifetime.

Such beings have a nervous system suited for that happiness and a similar breakdown to the ābhassara beings of how that happiness is experienced – the parittasubha beings experience happiness with moments of interruption, the appamānasubha beings experience happiness with the moments of interruption less present and longer durations of happiness, and the subhakiṇṇa beings experience totally uninterrupted happiness. Unlike the ābhassara beings who have energetic bodies of light that radiate like a flickering flame, the subhakiṇṇa possess a body that is like the sheen of gold when you shine light on it. While the ābhassara beings glimmer like diamonds, the subhakiṇṇa shine without any flicker. They have no time to make any merit or learn the Dhamma any further because of their attachment to happiness, and for this reason, there is no chance of stream-entry, and they will reach a lower realm of misfortune and pain after their kamma is exhausted. Only during times of re-expansion of the universe do they fall from this realm and into the ābhassara realms, from where certain beings will fall to the human realms to repopulate the planets.

## *Rebirth in the Vehapphala Realm*

The vehapphala realm corresponds to the attainment of the fourth jhāna. Here too, there are three classifications of beings. If a being attains the fourth jhāna with some difficulty stabilizing the mind in it every time they enter the jhāna, the formations rooted in that attainment automatically will give rise to a new consciousness at the time of death and transfer the formations to create the nāmarupā of an anabhaka being. If a being attains the fourth jhāna with stability so that mind stays there without much interruption, then at death, the formations will give rise to a new consciousness that will establish itself into the nāmarupā of a puññaphala being. If a being is able to master the fourth jhāna by being able to determine for how long mind will be immersed in that jhāna and when it will emerge from it, then at death, the formations rooted in that mastery can give rise to a consciousness that establishes itself into the nāmarupā of a vehapphala being.

Like the inhabitants of rupādhātu below them, who can appear humanoid in features, meaning they have apparent limbs and at the same time can transform into other forms if they wish, the vehapphala group of beings is also capable of taking on various forms. They appear like holograms, seemingly non-solid, with still light forming their luminous bodies. They do not glimmer like diamonds nor reflect like light off of gold. They all possess the five aggregates and the sense faculties of sight and hearing, and their nervous systems are equipped for deep equanimity. The difference between each level of being here is the perception of equanimity. An anabhaka being experiences minute interruptions in their immersion of equanimity, a puññaphala experiences almost no

interruptions with those interruptions being intermittent, and a vehapphala being experiences smooth flows of equanimity with no gaps. Beings here are immersed in equanimity, but because they are not blissed out all the time, they emanate equanimity towards all. They have very little defilements but still deal with conceit and identification with existence. After their kamma is exhausted, they fall into a lower realm of misfortune and pain.

In this realm, there is one more category of beings known as the asaññatasatta. When a being meditates without understanding the Dhamma, meditates to the point of absorption where there is a suppression of hindrances and of consciousness itself, or goes into a state of suspended animation, at the time of their death, they enter into the asaññatasatta realm where the beings are similar in form to the vehapphala beings. However, with only the form aggregate present, the rest of the aggregates are suppressed, and no sense faculties are operational. Whatever thought was last present before the being suppressed consciousness, which thought becomes the impetus for the formations to arise at the end of one's lifespan, which gives rise to a new consciousness in the next rebirth, which will be of misfortune and pain. There is no recourse for anything here, just a long time of unconsciousness. There is one more level of existence in this rupādhātu which we will cover when discussing rebirth for anāgāmīs



## *Rebirth in the Formless Realms*

Beyond the rupādhātu realms are the arupādhātu or formless realms. If a being enters into the āyatanas and constantly develops practice in them, becomes attached to them, then at death, the formations will give rise to a consciousness that can take on the nāma of the corresponding state they become attached to – infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor non-perception. In the case of the being who becomes attached to infinite space, when the body dies, their mind automatically inclines towards expansiveness, and the formations then give rise to a consciousness that establishes into the realm of infinite space. In this realm, there will be feeling, perception, and consciousness of the experience of infinite space, and at the end of a lifetime here, intention will then give rise to formations that will direct the next rebirth. If a being becomes attached to infinite consciousness, at the dissolution of the body, their mind becomes sharp and notices the arising and passing away of individual mind consciousnesses, and the formations rooted in this awareness automatically gives rise to a consciousness that establishes into the realm of infinite consciousness. In this realm, there will be feeling, perception, and consciousness of this experience, and at the end of a lifetime here, intention will then give rise to formations that will direct the next rebirth. If a being becomes attached to nothingness, then at death, their mind automatically turns inward, aware of nothing present, and for this reason, the formations rooted in the awareness of nothing give rise to a consciousness that then establishes into the nāma of realm of nothingness. In this realm, there is the feeling, perception, and consciousness of the experience of nothingness,

and at the end of a lifetime here, intention will then give rise to formations that will direct the next rebirth. If a being constantly enters into neither perception nor-non perception, they will develop formations rooted in attachment to that state. At the dissolution of the body, the mind will automatically become dreamy with no formations that fully form, but it's not that the formations do not form to create a lucid perception. The mind holds onto itself as an "I" that is experiencing this state, and that formation alone gives rise to a consciousness which establishes into nāma of the realm of neither perception nor-non perception. Here only the aggregates of feeling, perception, and consciousness are present but not fully active as only some formations arise that are not fully formed. At the end of a lifetime here, intention will then give rise to formations that will direct the next rebirth.

This is the scope of rebirth within the realms just mentioned but these are only for those who have not had an attainment of awakening. It should be noted that anāgāmīs can exist in all the luminous form and formless realms due to a special condition. The scope of rebirth for the noble ones, those who have reached at least the level of the sotāpanna, as well as the special condition that causes the existence of anāgāmīs in the luminous form and formless realms will be discussed in the section where we will also discuss the suddhāvāsa realms where anāgāmīs and arahants who destroyed the taints in these realms reside.

## *Abandoning the Factors of Rupādhātu and Arupādhātu with Right Effort*

When a being is in any jhāna, the five hindrances are not present. That means there won't be any sensual craving, ill will, restlessness, sloth, and torpor, and doubt present when the mind is immersed in jhāna. For this reason, the defilements related to these hindrances aren't there either, but there are still come defilements related to identification. There is still conceit, arrogance, self-infatuation, and carelessness. That is to say, if a being relishes in the jhāna not only because it feels good but also that it feels good to "me," then their formations tied to the jhāna are rooted in conceit. From this conceit stems the craving for a luminous form realm or a formless realm by virtue of the fact there is craving for a corresponding jhāna state. In the context of the Four Noble Truths, the conceit-based jhāna is the First Noble Truth of Dukkha, the sense of "I am" enjoying or experiencing the jhāna is the Second Noble Truth of Samudaya, the letting go of the "I am" is the Third Noble Truth of Nirodha through the process of relaxation and wisdom via the 6Rs which are the encapsulation of the Fourth Noble Truth of Magga.

And how does one relax the sense of "I am" in terms of jhāna practice? At first, there is an intention to go into a jhāna via mettā, karuṇā, muditā, or upekkhā. If this intention begins with a subtle sense of "I," then that jhāna is already tainted with conceit. Instead, the suggested way to begin is to keep the mind open for a few minutes and see how the mind gravitates around a particular feeling of joy or another factor of jhāna or with one of the brahmavihārā. The mind just observes this, and whenever

attention swerves completely, the 6Rs are implemented. In this way, there is no trying, no “I” based effort, just pure observing without any involvement, as if there’s an awareness of the mind meditating, but that’s all – it should be noted that one should rest in this awareness of meditation and make an effort to 6R only when mind becomes distracted and most importantly not to make this a basis for self either. It’s as if there is a distancing between the factors and experience of the jhāna and the observation itself. When this happens, the mind doesn’t absorb into the jhāna, nor does it identify with it. In this way, one is able to observe in a similar manner like Sāriputta, who observed the factors of a jhāna arising and passing away in MN 111, Anupada Sutta –

*Tyāssa dhammā vīditā uppajjanti, vīditā upatthahanti, vīditā abbattham gacchanti. So evam pajānāti: evam kirame dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā paṭiventī’ti. So tesu dhammesu anupāyo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vip̐pamutto vi̐sam̐yutto vimariyādīkatena cetasā viharati.*

*...these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they*

*disappeared. He understood thus: 'So indeed, these states, not having been, come into being; having been, they vanish.'* Regarding those states, *he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers.*

Here, the mind doesn't try to look for the factors of a jhāna but just notices them without involvement. With this understanding, one sees that anything that can be observed is not self by the very fact that self would mean something intrinsic, inherent, and inwardly abiding. Yet, if the mind does take it personally, one should see this through the lens of the tilakkhaṇa. One sees that these factors and the jhāna itself are impermanent by the very fact that they arose from causes and conditions and are made up of certain conditions, namely the observation and intention arising from the coming together of those conditions and therefore are not worth holding onto and taken personally. What about the observation or sense of observer? One uses the same understanding for observation and understands it through interdependency. There is the object of meditation that is stabilized due to the nutriment of attention. This attention, being consciousness or cognition, is dependent upon the mind meeting with the object of meditation, and thereby, this attention, mindfulness, and collectedness, also dependent upon intention to meditate and observe, are all impermanent, not worth holding onto, and therefore not to be taken personally. The intention to meditate came about through a series of decisions and processes,

each a cause dependent upon a chain of previous causes. Seeing this process through such an understanding, there is only meditation, not the meditator. Moreover, during the process of meditation, it can happen that the mind slips and takes the factors of jhāna or the process itself as personal, for which one uses the 6Rs. One

- ◆ Recognizes the mind identifying with the jhāna or object of meditation – this is Dukkha
- ◆ Releases attention away from the sense of “I” – this is abandoning Samudaya
- ◆ Relaxes the tension as a manifestation of the “I am” conceit and experiences Nirodha as a result
- ◆ Returns mind back to object with the understanding of the tilakkhaṇa applied to the object, the meditation process, and the sense of an observer as well
- ◆ Repeats whenever mind takes the process personally, thus cultivating Magga

## *Rebirth for the Noble Ones*

A noble one has attained at the very least stream-entry and is on their way to full awakening, at which point rebirth will be destroyed. There are four categories of noble ones – sotāpanna or stream-winner, sakadāgāmī or one-returner, anāgāmī or non-returner, and arahant or one worthy of honor. A sotāpanna will take rebirth up to seven times, dependent upon certain conditions, in kāmādhātu while a sakadāgāmī only one time. An anāgāmī will not return to kāmādhātu but take one more rebirth in the suddhāvāsa realms or pure abodes in a traditional route, although there are certain special exceptions. An arahant has completely destroyed all fuel for rebirth to occur. To understand this deeper, we have to explore the samyojanā, the ten fetters that bind a being to the cycle of jāti. They are, as we had mentioned earlier for the purposes of understanding stream-entry - sakkāyadiṭṭi or belief in a personal self, vicikicchā or doubt, sīlabbata-parāmāso or belief in rites and rituals as the way to Nibbāna, as well as kamacchanda or sensual craving, byāpāda or ill will, rupārāgo or craving for existence in rupādhātu, arupārāgo or craving for existence in arupādhātu, māna or conceit, uddhacca or restlessness, and avijjā or ignorance. With these fetters listed, let's understand their importance in the rebirth of each of the noble ones.

## *Rebirth for the Sotāpanna*

As per AN 3.87, Dutiyasikhā Sutta, there are three types of sotāpanna – the sattakkhattu-parama or seven-times-returner, the kolaṅkolo or the family-to-family attainer, and the eka-bījī or the one-seeder. In all three cases, they are all sotāpannas, but the difference is only in the times they will take rebirth in the sensual realms. As a sotāpanna, as we discussed earlier, one has destroyed the first three fetters, and four factors have led them to their entry into the stream. These factors are their three-fold conviction, born from having walked the Path – that is, their faith in the Buddha, in the Dhamma, and in the Sangha. With such faith, the being takes up and continues to maintain the five precepts – not to intentionally kill, not to steal, not to participate in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to partake in intoxicants.

Developing and cultivating sīla or virtue, their mind becomes ripe for samādhi, which culminates into paññā or wisdom. In this way, they have an experience of Nibbāna, destroying the first three fetters. They have greatly attenuated the mental impurities of greed, hatred, and delusion, such that the energy of the remainder of these impurities and defilements present in their mind don't give rise to rebirth in the realms lower than the human plane. For this reason, they can only take rebirth in a human plane or higher. Unless certain conditions, which we will discuss in the section on the rebirth for the anāgāmī, are met, they're bound for a human existence or a deva realm existence at most seven times due to the fact that they haven't yet destroyed the fetters of sensual craving and ill will yet.



In all three classifications of the sotāpanna, such a being is unable to commit six actions – intentionally killing their mother, father, or an arahant, spilling the blood of a Buddha with malintent, creating a schism in the Sangha, or to consider someone teaching another dhamma as their teacher. This is because they have fully established Right View in their mind so that the formations that do arise are situated in that Right View. For the sattakkhattu-parama, they will take rebirth at most seven times in any of the sensual planes from the human onwards in order to work out reducing and finally destroying all the defilements and coming to the state of the arahant in which the conditions for rebirth are fully eradicated. For the kolaṅkolo, they are subject to rebirth two or three times where they take up existences as members of noble families and where all the fruits of generosity and other virtues are experienced – they live a life that is comfortable and conducive to perfecting the Path. For the eka-bījī, they are subject to one more human rebirth since the human rebirth during the time of a Buddha’s dispensation is the best possible condition for full awakening to occur.

### *Rebirth for the Sakadāgāmī*

Unless they progress further to fully destroy the conditions for rebirth in the same life, if one becomes a sakadāgāmī, then they are subject to rebirth in a human or deva plane. The question arises – what is the difference between the once-returner and the one-seeder? It is the degree of craving and aversion present in them. In the case of the eka-bījī sotāpanna, there is still a level of craving and aversion that manifests in expression that can seem like outbursts.

It is quite visible. An eka-bījī may still display anger in a way that causes themselves and may even cause others Dukkha, but they will be immediately remorseful about this and make amends to return to a state of balance. There is a world of difference between the one who hasn't entered the stream and the eka-bījī in that the non-practitioner allows the mind to obsess over craving and aversive thoughts for hours, even days, months, or years, while the eka-bījī does so for an hour or so or even less. It's the purity of their sīla and their adamant faith in the triple gem that makes the eka-bījī realize their wrongs and quickly recover, relatively speaking.

However, the difference between the one-seeder and the once-returner is more than a world of difference – it is a complete quantum leap in evolution. In the case of the sakadāgāmī, they will certainly experience craving and aversion but at the subtlest levels, which is to say they will immediately recognize the arising of craving or aversion and be able to let it go before it manifests in expression of speech or action, thereby returning to a more wholesome mind. So instead of brooding over or holding onto the craving or aversion for an hour or even a few minutes, as can happen in the most advanced of sotāpannas, the sakadāgāmī holds onto it for a few seconds before letting it go because their mindfulness has developed to that extent. Rebirth for the sakadāgāmī is limited to the bounds of kāmādhātu but they will never enter the lower realms of niraya, tiracchānayoṇi, or peta. Dependent upon their choices, the formations in the mind will give rise to a consciousness that then leads them into a wholesome human or deva nāmarupā where the causes and conditions are ripe for them to be able to experience the attainment of the anāgāmī or even arahantship. There are certain conditions for when a

sakadāgāmī may take rebirth in a much higher realm, which we will see in the next section.

### *Rebirth for the Anāgāmī*

When a being attains the state of the anāgāmī, they have completely eradicated the fetters of craving and aversion. For this reason, such a being is a non-returner because they will not return to the worlds bound by sensual craving and hence no longer take rebirth in the realms of kāmadhātu. Instead, there is a possibility of rebirth for them in the realms of the suddhāvāsa, the pure abodes. In AN 7.55, Purisagati Sutta, the Buddha describes seven possibilities of rebirth in the next life for an anāgāmī using similes, but with the outcome of Parinibbāna or full extinguishment as the focal point. The first three possibilities are all the subsets of one process, just described in a different way. With that understanding, it can be said that there are actually five possibilities for an anāgāmī. The first possibility is known as antarāparinibbāyī or the attainer of full extinguishment at the interval. The second possibility is known as upahaccaparinibbāyī or the attainer of full extinguishment upon landing. The third is known as asaṅkhāraparinibbāyī or the attainer of full extinguishment without exertion, the fourth as asaṅkhāraparinibbāyī or the attainer of full extinguishment with exertion, and the fifth as uddhamsota-akaniṭṭha-gāmī or the one bound upstream toward the akaniṭṭha realm. While the first four can describe the process of attaining full awakening within the rebirths of one lifetime as consciousnesses arise and pass away in every moment of one lifetime, with the addition of the fifth, it is generally understood as referring to the full awakening and extinguishment that happens

for the anāgāmī through the process of rebirth between two lifetimes.

*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne papaṭikā nibbattivā nibbāyeyya. Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne papaṭikā nibbattivā uppativā nibbāyeyya. Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne papaṭikā nibbattivā uppativā anupahacca talaṃ nibbāyeyya.*

*For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might fly off and be extinguished. For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might fly off, rise up, and be extinguished. For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might fly off, rise up, and be extinguished just before it lands on the ground.*

- AN 7.55, Purisagati Sutta

In the first case of the attainer of full extinguishment at the interval, the chip that flies off can be likened to a consciousness that arises out of formations. Here, at death, the anāgāmī is aware of death approaching and abandons all identification, existential craving, and ignorance by reflecting with equanimity. One is able

to see the tilakkhaṇa, especially the anatta aspect of the arising and passing away of consciousnesses dependent upon intention. The mind becomes quiet and experiences the links of Dependent Origination without involvement or identification and so the formations that give rise to a new consciousness, as well as that new consciousness, are pure. Because there is no craving, conceit, and ignorance present in the formations or the new consciousness, the mind becomes cool, and the new consciousness dissipates without establishing into a new nāmarupā. It is extinguished in the interval between one life and the potential next in that the last experience of the anāgāmī before total dissolution of the body was seeing Dependent Origination itself and experiencing Nibbāna. That automatically elevates the mind to the state of arahantship, destroying being and rebirth altogether, and thus the potential next life never will come to be. There is full extinguishment without remainder.

*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne  
papaṭikā nibbattitvā uppatitvā upahacca talam nibbāyeyya.*

*For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might be produced and fly up, and upon landing on the ground it would be extinguished.*

- AN 7.55, Purisagati Sutta

In the second case of the attainer of full extinguishment upon landing, the formations are still stained by an inkling of conceit, and there is just enough fuel for a new consciousness to emerge and establish itself in the nāmarupā of a pure abode being, but when it gets established, Nibbāna occurs and the strength of the wisdom of seeing the links influences the next set of formations that are no longer filled with conceit and therefore the being dissipates right then and there after attaining the state of the arahant with no more fuel to burn. Upon spontaneous generation of the aggregates and sense faculties, with no more fuel in the form of ayu saṅkhāra to burn, the new arahant is fully extinguished right then and there.

*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne papatikā nibbattitvā uppatitvā paritte tiṇapuñje vā kaṭṭhapuñje vā nipateyya. Sā tattha aggimpi janeyya, dhūmampi janeyya, aggimpi janetvā dhūmampi janetvā tameva parittaṃ tiṇapuñjaṃ vā kaṭṭhapuñjaṃ vā pariyādiyitvā anāhārā nibbāyeyya.*

*For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might fly off, rise up, and fall on a small pile of straw or sticks. There it would produce a fire and smoke, but when it has exhausted*

*that small pile of straw or sticks, if it gets no more fuel, it would be extinguished.*

- AN 7.55, Purisagati Sutta

In the third case of the attainer of full extinguishment without exertion, here the process is like the second, but because the *nāmarupā* of the spontaneously generated being has enough fuel for the process of existence to continue burning through the five aggregates as the small pile of straw or sticks, the being is already an arahant and will experience total extinguishment upon the completion of the burning of the fuel of the *ayu saṅkhāra* and the dissolution of the five aggregates at the end of the lifespan spent in the pure abodes. In other words, the difference between the second and third cases is that there is enough *ayu saṅkhāra* present for the five aggregates to continue to burn in the latter.

*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne papatīkā nibbattitvā uppatitvā vipule tiṇapuñje vā kaṭṭhapuñje vā nipateyya. Sā tattha aggimpi janeyya, dhūmampi janeyya, aggimpi*

*janetvā dhūmampi janetvā tameva vipulam tiṇapuñjam vā kaṭṭhapuñjam  
vā pariyādiyitvā anāhārā nibbāyeyya.*

*For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might fly off, rise up, and then fall upon a wide pile of straw or sticks. There it would produce a fire and smoke, but when it has exhausted that wide pile of straw or sticks, if it gets no more fuel, it would be extinguished.*

- AN 7.55, Purisagati Sutta

In the fourth case of the attainer of full extinguishment with exertion, at death the anāgāmī hasn't fully let go of the fetters of conceit and ignorance and so there is still some work to be done. When they emerge in the pure abodes, they continue their meditation practice and in little time they extinguish the wide pile of straw or sticks and attain arahantship, with the fuel of the aggregates and ayu saṅkhāras going on until they dissolve at the end of life when there will be Parinibbāna.



*Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, divasaṃsantatte ayokapāle haññamāne papatikā nibbattitvā uppatitvā mahante tiṇapuñje vā kaṭṭhapuñje vā nipateyya. Sā tattha aggimpi janeyya, dhūmampi janeyya, aggimpi janetvā dhūmampi janetvā tameva mahantaṃ tiṇapuñjaṃ vā kaṭṭhapuñjaṃ vā pariyādiyitvā gacchampi daheyya, dāyampi daheyya, gacchampi dahitvā dāyampi dahitvā haritantaṃ vā pathantaṃ vā selantaṃ vā udakantaṃ vā ramaṇīyaṃ vā bhūmibhāgaṃ āgamma anāhārā nibbāyeyya.*

*For example, when an iron bowl has been heated all day and is struck, a chip might fly off, rise up, and then fall upon a large pile of straw or sticks. There it would produce a fire and smoke, and when it has exhausted that large pile of straw or sticks, it would burn up a woods or a grove until it reaches the edge of a field, the edge of a road, the edge of a stone mountain, the edge of water, or some delightful piece of land, and then, if it gets no more fuel, it would be extinguished.*

- AN 7.55, Purisagati Sutta

Let's take the fifth case of the one bound upstream toward the akaniṭṭha realm. At death, the anāgāmī relaxes and smiles and will try to let go of all inclinations in mind. However, because they have the five higher fetters still present, and there may still be the defilements of arrogance, self-infatuation, and very slight carelessness in the mind, they cannot fully let go. These fetters and defilements are like the woods or grove. The formations rooted in these fetters and defilements will give rise to a consciousness that will take root in a spontaneously generated nāmarupā of a suddhāvāsa being at the foot of a tree meditating. They open their eyes to find themselves in a world with immeasurable tranquility and beauty, now bound for arahantship in one or a higher plane up to the akaniṭṭha realm of the pure abodes. The fuel of the aggregates affected by conceit and ignorance continue burning through the edge of a field, road, stone mountain, water, or a delightful piece of land – these five larger fuels being the bhava or existence in, and representing, the five planes of the pure abodes. After some time, dependent upon their effort and insight, they will attain arahantship and enter Parinibbāna at the end of their life in the pure abodes.

Dependent upon the faculty most developed in their mindset before the dissolution of the body, certain formations will give rise to a consciousness influenced by that faculty, which then takes birth in one of the five planes of the pure abodes. If an anāgāmī has developed the faculty of saddhā or faith, joyful and aware of the three recollections of the triple gem, then they are bound for the

aviha plane in the pure abodes. If they have developed viriya or energy and effort to the extent that it is radiant within their mindset and they have a bright mind, then they are bound for the atappa plane. If they have developed sati or mindfulness to the extent of diminishing carelessness to an iota, they are bound for the sudassa plane. If they have developed samādhi or meditation and have mastery of each jhāna and āyatana as well as spend a lot of time in nirodha-samāpatti, then they are bound for the sudassi plane. Finally, if they have developed paññā or insight to the greatest extent possible for an anāgāmī, they are bound for the akaniṭṭha plane.

Each abode is lush with gardens of various colors and jewel-like structures. Everything has a certain luminosity. Because they are the highest point in rupādhātu, touching upon the formless realms, the beings in the pure abodes appear translucent but have distinguishable features, appearing humanoid and beautiful. They experience great joy and comfort here. They possess all five aggregates and the sense faculties of sight and hearing. Their nervous systems are equipped to experience release in every moment, letting go of subtle defilements so that they finally destroy the āsavas or taints and attain arahantship. The pure abode beings are not always immersed in jhāna as a sitting practice since they are also developing their practice towards attaining full awakening through insight during other activities as well. They are uninterested in the affairs of the cosmos below, but they do take certain initiatives in preparing the way for the next Buddha when the time is ripe.

Now, a sotāpanna and a sakadāgāmī can be bound for the state of the anāgāmī even if they haven't attained that state in their present life. Some have called this state as the jhānānāgāmī,

meaning the non-returner through jhāna. It's important to understand this through the distinction between one who attains jhāna as a worldling – one who has not entered the stream – and one who does so as a sotāpanna or a sakadāgāmī. Before we continue, let's understand the context of this with the example of the first jhāna, through AN 4.123, Paṭhamanānākaraṇa Sutta –

*Idha, bhikkhave, ekacco puggalo vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekajaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamam jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. So tadassādeti, taṃ nikāmeti, tena ca vittiṃ āpajjati. Tattha t̥hito tadadhimutto tabbahulavihārī aparihīno kālaṃ kurumāno brahmakāyikānaṃ devānaṃ saḥabyataṃ upapajjati. Brahmakāyikānaṃ, bhikkhave, devānaṃ kappo āyuppamāṇaṃ. Tattha puthujjano yāvataṃyukaṃ t̥hatvā yāvatakaṃ tesam devānaṃ āyuppamāṇaṃ taṃ sabbaṃ khepetvā nirayampi gacchati tiracchānayanimpi gacchati pettivisaṃyampi gacchati. Bhagavato pana sāvako tattha yāvataṃyukaṃ t̥hatvā yāvatakaṃ tesam devānaṃ āyuppamāṇaṃ taṃ sabbaṃ khepetvā tasmim̐yeva bhava parinibbāyati.*

## Birth

*Ayaṃ kho, bhikkhave, viśeso ayaṃ adhippayāso idaṃ nānākaraṇaṃ sutavato ariyasāvakaṃ assutavatā puthujjanaṃ, yaḍidaṃ gatiyā upapattiyā sati.*

*Here, bhikkhus, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, some person enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which consists of rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought and examination. He relishes it, desires it, and finds satisfaction in it. If he is firm in it, focused on it, often dwells in it, and has not lost it when he dies, he is reborn in companionship with the devas of Brahmā's company. The lifespan of the devas of Brahmā's company is an eon. The worldling remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire life span of those devas, he goes to hell, to the animal realm, or to the sphere of afflicted spirits. But the Blessed One's disciple remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire life span of those devas, he attains final Nibbāna in that very same state of existence. This is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble*

*disciple and the uninstructed worldling when there is future destination and rebirth.*

Now, if a being who has not entered the stream develops the practice of jhāna, at death, their mind will automatically incline towards the corresponding rupādhātu realm by the very nature of their formations rooted in that continual practice. However, because they haven't established Right View and thereby haven't destroy the first three fetters, they are liable to fall back down in a subsequent life to a lower realm. Remember that when one is in jhāna, there are none of the five hindrances, and specifically, there is no sensual craving or ill will, which are also the two fetters weakened in the sakadāgāmī and destroyed in the anāgāmī. If the ariyasāvako or noble disciple, which can be a sotāpanna or sakadāgāmī, inclines their mind to jhāna throughout their lifetime in a consistent manner, the formations strengthened by that persistent abiding in jhāna allows for the mind to automatically incline to a jhāna during the process of death, and because none of the five fetters are present in the mind at such a time, they are bound for a realm associated with that jhāna and not liable to return to any realm but attain arahantship at the end of that new existence and enter Parinibbāna. The same applies for the sotāpanna or sakadāgāmī who attains the first three āyatana as mentioned in AN 3.116, Āneñja Sutta –

*Idha, bhikkhave, ekacco puggalo sabbaso rūpasaññānaṃ samatikkamā paṭighasaññānaṃ atthaṅgamā nānattasaññānaṃ amanasikārā 'ananto ākāso'ti ākāsañācāyatanam upasampajja viharati. So tadassādeti taṃ nikāmeti tena ca vittim āpajjati, tatra ṭhito tadadhimutto tabbahulavihārī aparihīno kālam kurumāno ākāsañācāyatanūpagānam devānam saḥabyatam upapajjati. Ākāsañācāyatanūpagānam, bhikkhave, devānam vīsati kappasahassāni āyuppamāṇam. Tattha puthujjano yāvātāyukaṃ ṭhatvā yāvatakaṃ tesam devānam āyuppamāṇam taṃ sabbam khepetvā nirayampi gacchati tiracchānayanimpi gacchati pettavisayampi gacchati. Bhagavato pana sāvako tattha yāvātāyukaṃ ṭhatvā yāvatakaṃ tesam devānam āyuppamāṇam taṃ sabbam khepetvā tasmimyeva bhava parinibbāyati. Ayam kho, bhikkhave, viseso ayam adhippayāso idam nānākaraṇam sutavato ariyasāvokassa assutavatā puthujjanena, yadidaṃ gatiyā upapattiyā.*

*Here, bhikkhus, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of sensory impingement, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, [perceiving] 'space is infinite,' some person enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of space. He relishes it, desires it, and finds satisfaction in it. If he is firm in it, focused on it, often dwells in it, and has not lost it when he dies, he is reborn in companionship with the devas of the base of the infinity of space. The life span of the devas of the base of the infinity of space is 20,000 eons. The worldling remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire life span of those devas, he goes to hell, to the animal realm, or to the sphere of afflicted spirits. But the Blessed One's disciple remains there all his life, and when he has completed the entire life span of those devas, he attains final Nibbāna in that very same state of existence. This is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the instructed noble disciple and the uninstructed worldling, that is when there is future destination and rebirth.*



In regard to the state of neither perception nor non-perception, the Buddha mentions what would happen to the one who attains this state and develops practice in it but hasn't reached stream-entry and to the one who gives up the five lower fetters in AN 4.171, Cetanā Sutta –

*Idha, sāriputta, ekaccassa puggalassa orambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni appahīnāni honti, so diṭṭheva dhamme nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam upasampajja viharati. So tadassādeti, tam nikāmeti, tena ca vittim āpajjati; tattha t̥hito tadadhimutto tabbahulavihārī aparihīno kālam kurumāno nevasaññānāsaññāyatanūpagānam devānam saḥabyatam upapajjati. So tato cuto āgāmī hoti āgantā itthattam.*

*Idha pana, sāriputta, ekaccassa puggalassa orambhāgiyāni saṃyojanāni pahīnāni honti, so diṭṭheva dhamme nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam upasampajja viharati. So tadassādeti, tam nikāmeti, tena ca vittim āpajjati; tattha t̥hito tadadhimutto*

tabbahulavihārī

aparihīno

kālaṃ

kurumāno

*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ upagānaṃ devānaṃ saḥabyataṃ upapajjati. So*

*tato cuto anāgāmī hoti anāgantā itthattaṃ.*

*Here, Sāriputta, some person has not abandoned the lower fetters. In this very life, he enters and dwells in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. He relishes it, desires it, and finds satisfaction in it. If he is firm in it, focused on it, often dwells in it, and has not lost it when he dies, he is reborn in companionship with the devas in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. When he passes away from there, he is a returner who comes back to this state of being.*

*But some [other] person here has abandoned the lower fetters. In this very life he enters and dwells in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. He relishes it, desires it, and finds satisfaction in it. If he is firm in it, focused on it, often dwells in it, and has not lost it when he dies, he is reborn in companionship with the devas in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. When he passes away from there, he is a non-returner who does not come back to this state of being.*

One who hasn't attained stream-entry may develop mastery in the āyatana of neither perception nor non-perception but because they haven't destroyed the first three fetters, attained Nibbāna nor established Right View in their mind beforehand, they are liable for return into a lower realm. Now, one who has abandoned the lower fetters can be a sotāpanna, sakadāgāmī, or anāgāmī,

depending on the number of fetters destroyed. This means that even the sotāpanna or sakadāgāmī, having developed practice in the āyatana of neither perception nor non-perception can become a non-returner by virtue of the fact that they have destroyed the first three fetters and that the fetters of sensual craving and ill will are not present when the mind automatically inclines to that āyatana at death. Due to the formations automatically arising from the continual practice in that state during one's life, at death those formations will give rise to a rebirth in the highest formless realm as an anāgāmī and from there when intention arises again, there will be the destruction of the taints and one will enter Parinibbāna. The reason for this automatic attainment into full awakening whether in a jhāna realm or āyatana realm is due to the fact that all of the defilements are burned up by the wisdom generated by that state and that the mind eradicates all the remaining higher fetters in that realm.

Now for the arahant, there is no return to any state of existence. They have completely destroyed all conditions for future rebirth; therefore, it would not be sensible to even mention rebirth for an arahant. Arahants arise in the human realm, the pure abodes and the rupādhātu and arupādhātu as we've seen under certain conditions. One who becomes an anāgāmī in the deva realms will pass on right then and there and go to the pure abodes, so there is no chance of an arahant arising in the deva realms, except if these realms are visited by one from the other planes of existence.

## *Quantum Rebirth and Abandoning its Factors with Right Effort*

The quantum or micro level of rebirth is a step in the series of Dependent Origination where expression arises. At this level, there is no preventability or reversibility; the action committed as rebirth of action dependent upon preceding links is irrevocable. Rebirth here is like having let go of the arrow from the bow or the bullet from the gun. Now that it's done one is no longer able to call it back. Jāti in this context is the expression of speech and action that cannot be taken back. If it has been conditioned by intention fettered by craving and hindered by ignorance, then it will produce some sort of effect that the mind may take personally in a subsequent moment unless one uses mindfulness in that next moment to let go of the identification process. Birth of action, if it is unfettered and unhindered, will not produce kamma that binds further any Dukkha. Dukkha may still arise due to some reaction from outside in the form of a situation or a person's response, but if the mind sees it as an effect that is not to be held onto, then the effect will process right then and there and dissipate bit by bit, whereby the intensity will reduce to a negligible and finally non-existent level. This can take several cycles depending on the situation and kamma. All the while, the mind sees it without involvement and with understanding using the lens of the tilakkhaṇa.

Say you are at a meeting with a colleague, and you notice they are not exactly in a good mood based on their facial expressions and mannerisms. One can choose to take that personally and thereby cling to an idea around it. Now craving and

clinging have come into play – the former through taking it personally and the latter by starting to proliferate mental stories around it. Perhaps thoughts about the other day when you said something to them come up and you try to analyze what you may have said to them that might have upset them or you go inward and start to feel bad about yourself, thinking they’re right in their judgment via their expression.

Then comes the thought that you should not be treated in this way even though in reality they haven’t said anything yet to confirm such treatment. This is a part of tendencies that emerge with the ideas rooted in conceit and now your frame of mind. Therefore, your habitual tendency to see this person as being mean-spirited or upset colors your perception of reality. You are the victim here, your mind says. This whole process is bhava. Your colleague then asks you, “So did you get that project done?” You then misinterpret their tone by taking that personally, and then react in a rude manner based on personalizing that question, clinging to self-views, and reacting from the habitual tendencies rooted in conceit, aversion and ignorance that are present in the link of bhava. Your mind processes it as – “what are they getting at? Are they taunting me? What gives them the right to ask me that?”

All of this stems from having misperceived their facial expression. In this hypothetical scenario, when you took the vedanā of the sight of them as being irritated or upset you chose to identify with that as something affecting a “you,” that you are somehow responsible for it. This identification is the taṇhā or craving. When you start to think about what is it that could have caused this and start to conceptualize all sorts of ideas about it, this is upādāna or clinging. When you become distraught your state of mind is now rooted in this unpleasant existence and there are now

bubbling up anusāyas or underlying tendencies which make up bhava or being. Now you have a self that is fully worth defending according to this very self, which is made up by bhava.

The next vedanā of the colleague's words have already set a chain reaction because now the formations that arise from contact of hearing those words, conditioned by that bhava, clinging and craving in the previous moment only further strengthens the fetters of craving, conceit and ignorance, giving rise to a consciousness already cognizing with a pair of lenses that seek to confirm the fettered bias, and thus provide the likelihood of the arising of the next set of craving, clinging and bhava. Now there's no mindfulness present for you to be able to stop from reacting. That reaction of saying something rude to them is the birth of action. The result of that is the Dukkha in the form of the colleague reacting negatively.

With this illustration one can see that it's much easier to notice the vedanā without projecting onto it your views of that vedanā than it is to notice the craving, much easier to see the craving of identification arising than to see the clinging where a flurry of thoughts engages the mind, much easier to recognize this flurry in order to stop it than to recognize the mind brooding in the existence of a self that is hurt by the colleague's question, and much easier to pinpoint this identification with that momentary existence as a hurt self than to understand the bubbling up of the expression about to arise as birth of action conditioned by the underlying tendencies. It's impossible, however, to take back the expression of that speech conditioned by unwholesome intentions and thus one suffers the consequences of their actions in the form of rebirth in a new existence where now the colleague sees you as aversive and reacts in a likeminded manner. That consequence is also Dukkha.

All of this happened in a span of microseconds. If one were able to 6R the craving popping up in vedanā itself, one could have returned to a more balanced mind and waited to see what the colleague would do or say before jumping to conclusions. If not at that link, one could 6R at the jumping to conclusions that occurs via clinging, and if not at clinging, one could 6R and let go of the idea of self that is hurt at bhava from where the underlying tendencies arise to launch the birth of action – but it must be noted the easiest level to apply the Path is at the level of vedanā where one can let go of Samudaya and experience release from any identification and thus experience Nirodha.

Perhaps then, drawing out this scenario further, if one didn't take the colleague's expression personally and just let go of any mental identification or aversion present in mind from that expression, then one could clarify the mind so that it doesn't color what the colleague would say. In fact, if one 6R'd to where one imbues mind with loving-kindness, compassion or equanimity and just listens to the question, one could then answer in a reasonable manner and then ask the colleague how they are doing. This prompt may lead the colleague into pouring out their feelings about something and thus confiding in you, which would have never happened had one reacted rudely in the previous scenario. Perhaps they had felt uncomfortable in their own emotional pain and were looking for a way to start a conversation and seek your advice. Thus, this provides one with an opportunity to be generous with expressing empathy, compassion and loving-kindness to the colleague's situation.

This is just a scenario involving a colleague – what about one's close friends and family members? More often than not, the tendency is to see those close to one in a certain light, which

influences the formations to identify with that view to thus give rise to consciousness or cognition tainted by that view, thereby conditioning the factors of nāma. This causes the mind to go on autopilot and not use mindfulness or the 6R process to see how mind takes that view of a friend or family member personally and clings to ideas about them, then congeals those proliferation of views into bhava as a certain identity. For example, in front of a certain friend, the bhava or habitual tendencies that create an identity around what one thinks of themselves in relation to that friend may be an identity of an advisor or confidante, whereas in the case of another friend, the bhava is an existence as someone who looks up to that other friend as their protégé. This can apply to various family members as well. For this reason, one's birth of actions are different depending on who may be in the room, the context, and the views building up from the clinging to the bhava. That is why it's important to notice with mindfulness and be aware of when identification, craving, ignorance, or aversion arises, and immediately let go of it via the process of the 6Rs. So, while one cannot 6R the jāti of action itself, one can let go and abandon the preceding links so that the birth of action is not embedded in fetters but rooted in wisdom, thus preventing the further arising of Dukkha in subsequent choices and moments. Therefore, using the 6R process, one

- ◆ Recognizes any of the links of craving, clinging, or bhava as Dukkha



## Birth

- ◆ Releases attention from them and abandons  
Samudaya
- ◆ Relaxes the tension in mind and body as a manifestation of those links, and thus experiences Nirodha
- ◆ Re-smiles if appropriate for the situation and uplifts the mind with thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, or equanimity
- ◆ Returns to the awareness of a brahmavihārā if appropriate or to the experience of Nirodha after having relaxed
- ◆ Repeats anytime mind drifts towards one of the links of craving, clinging, or bhava, and thus cultivates Magga

There is another level of rebirth that doesn't span microseconds nor occurs from lifetime to lifetime, and although it can be seen as a pattern spanning lifetimes if one were to access past lives it can clearly be seen with careful reflection within one lifetime. This rebirth is the arising and passing away of similar behavioral and situational repetitions in one's life. Even if places, time, and circumstances may be different, a situation that arises may seem to have underlying patterns – one may befriend certain types of beings with likeminded tendencies, or find themselves in

relationships that seem to follow a color-by-numbers structure, or even within one's family one may encounter certain situations of conflict not only dependent upon topics of discussion that ignite the arguments but also because of behavioral tendencies found in bhava that erupt in those moments. In other words, we are now entering into the territory of the proximate cause of jāti, which is bhava, which we will explore further in the next chapter. What's important to consider here is to notice these rebirths of situations and how bhava arises in similar ways at those times to cause them.

This form of rebirth is in the vein of "Doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results," which is a quote in the novel *Sudden Death* by Rita Mae Brown. What one can understand from the context of this quote is that dependent on bhava or existential patterns of thought and behavior, one may seem to approach similar events such as relationships which end up breaking for the same reasons, or where one finds themselves always at the same or similar endpoint of certain situations. These are all examples of rebirth of situations, and while they are not formally under the classification of jāti, they are important to consider as we transition to the next chapter. When one is able to see birth into a similar situation that is dependent upon habitual tendencies in bhava, one would then be able to stop that rebirth from happening again and thus break the continuation of that same kamma instead of perpetuating it by acting from that same bhava. Through the 6Rs, one

- ◆ Recognizes the pattern of a similar situation as Dukkha

## Birth

- ◆ Releases one's attention to it, thus abandoning Samudaya of that
- ◆ Relaxes tension as a manifestation of that bhava, which is actually the cause of that similar situation through habitual tendencies, and then experiences Nirodha in that moment
- ◆ Re-smiles or uplifts the mind to make it collected and more mindful
- ◆ Returns with this new mindfulness to the mind of relaxation and Nirodha and takes action rooted from there, thus breaking the cycle of the same reactions to those situations rooted in fettered bhava, clinging, and craving
- ◆ Repeats whenever one senses the mind starting to access the same patterns of bhava, and thus continues cultivating Magga

With the above understanding of birth, which is dependent upon patterns in bhava, we will explore the preceding link called "Being/Bhava" in the next book in this series.

