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The Maha Mangala Sutta

Life's Highest Blessings

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For brevity's sake, the TOC and lengthy introductory materials been left-out.

2. The Maha Mangala Sutta

i. The Pali Text

Eva.m me suta.m. /⁵ Eka.m samaya.m Bhagavaa/
Saavatthiya.m viharati / Jetavane
Anaathapi.n.dikassa / aaraame. / Atha kho
a~n~nataraa devataa / abhikkantaaya rattiyaa
abhikkantava.n.naa kevalakappa.m Jetavana.m

obhaasetvaa / yena Bhagavaa ten' upasa.mkami /
upasa.mkamitvaa Bhagavanta.m abhivaadetvaa
ekamanta.m a.t.thaasi. / Ekamanta.m .thitaa kho saa
devataa Bhagavanta.m gaathaaya ajjhabhaasi /

I.

Bahuu devaa manussaa ca
ma"ngalaani acintayu.m /
aaka.mkhamaanaa sotthaana.m
bruuhi ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

II.

Asevanaa ca baalaana.m;
pa.n.ditaana~n ca sevanaa /
puujaa ca puujaniiyaana.m
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

III.

Pa.tiruupadesavaaso ca,
pubbe ca kata-pu~n~nataa /
attasammaapa.nidhi ca
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

IV.

Bahusacca~n ca sippa~n ca
vinayo ca susikkhito /
subhaasitaa ca yaa vaacaa

etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

V.

Maataa-pitu upa.t.thaana.m
putta-daarassa sa"ngaho /
anaakulaa ca kammantaa
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

VI.

Daana~n ca dhammacariyaa ca
~naatakaana~n ca sa"ngaho /
anavajjaani kammaani
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

VII.

AArati viratii paapaa
majjapaanaa ca sa~n~namo /
appamaado ca dhammesu
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

VIII.

Gaaravo ca nivaato ca
santu.t.thii ca kata~n~nutaa /
kaalena dhammasavana.m
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

IX.

Khantii ca sovacassataa
sama.naana~n ca dassana.m /
kaalena dhammasaakacchaa
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

X.

Tapo ca brahmacariya~n ca,
ariyasaccaana dassana.m /
nibbaana-sacchikiriya ca
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

XI.

Phu.t.thassa lokadhammehi
citta.m yassa na kampati /
asoka.m viraja.m khema.m
etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

XII.

Etaadisaani katvaana
sabbattham-aparaajitaa /
sabbattha sotthi.m gacchanti
ta.m tesa.m ma"ngalam-uttama.m /

(Mahaama"ngalasutta.m ni.t.thita.m)

ii. Word by Word Rendering

.m (thus) *me* (I) *suta.m* (heard):

Eka.m (one) *samaya.m* (time) *Bhagavaa* (the Blessed One, the Buddha) *Saavatthiya.m* (near Saavatthi) *viharati* (was staying) *Jetavane* (in the Jeta Grove) *Anaathapi.n.dikassa aaraame* (in Anaathapi.n.dika's monastery). *Atha kho* (certainly then) *a~n~nataraa* (a certain) *devataa* (deity, a deva) *abhikkantaaya* (towards, far advanced) *rattiyaa* (night) *abhikkantava.n.naa* (of surpassing brilliance and beauty) *kevalakappa.m* (the entire) *Jetavana.m* (Jeta Grove) *obhaasetvaa* (having illumined) *yena Bhagavaa* (where the Blessed One was) *tena upasa.mkami* (approached that place) *upasa.mkamitvaa* (having reached) *Bhagavanta.m* *abhivaadetvaa* (having offered profound salutations to the Blessed One) *ekamanta.m* (aside) *a.t.thaasi* (stood). *Ekamanta.m thitaa kho* (having stood aside) *saa devataa* (the deity) *Bhagavanta.m* (to the Blessed One) *gaathaaya* (in verse) *ajjhabhaasi* (addressed respectfully).

I.

Bahuu (many) *devaa* (deities) *manussaa ca* (and human beings) *ma"ngalaani* (over blessings) *acintayu.m* (have pondered), *aaka.mkhamaanaa* (hoping for) *sotthaana.m* (safety) *bruuhi* (please

expound) *ma''ngalam-uttama.m* (the Highest Blessing).

II.

Asevanaa (not to associate with) *ca baalaana.m* (the foolish people) *pa.n.ditaana~n ca* (and the wise) *sevanaa* (to associate with) *puujaa ca* (homage) *puujaniiyaana.m* (those worthy of homage) *etam* (this) *ma''ngalam-uttama.m* (the Highest Blessing).

III.

Pa.tiruupa (congenial) *desa* (locality) *vaaso* (for residence) *ca* (and) *pubbe ca* (in the past) *kata-pu~n~nataa* (having made merit) *atta* (one's self) *sammaa* (rightly) *pa.nidhi ca* (directed) *etam ma''ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

IV.

Bahu (ample) *sacca~n* (learning) *ca sippa~n* (and proficiency in crafts) *ca* (and) *vinayo ca* (moral discipline) *susikkhito* (well trained) *subhaasitaa ca* (and well spoken) *yaa vaacaa* (words) *etam ma''ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

V.

Maataapitu (mother and father) *upa.t.thaana.m* (to support) *putta-daarassa* (children and wife) *sa"ngaho* (to cherish) *anaakulaa ca* (and unconflicting) *kammantaa* (types of work) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

VI.

Daana~n (giving) *ca dhammacariyaa* (living by Dhamma) *ca* (and) *~naatakaana~n* (relatives) *ca sa"ngaho* (supporting) *anavajjaani* (blameless) *kammaani* (actions) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

VII.

AArati (avoidance) *virati* (abstinence) *paapaa* (from evil) *majjapaanaa ca* (intoxicating drinks) *sa~n~namo* (to refrain from) *appamaado ca* (and diligence in) *dhammesu* (acts of virtue) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

VIII.

Gaaravo (reverence) *ca* (and) *nivaato* (humility) *ca* (and) *santu.t.thii* (contentment) *ca kata~n~nutaa* (and gratitude) *kaalena* (timely) *dhammasavana.m*

(hearing Dhamma) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

IX.

Khantii (patience) *ca sovacassataa* (and amenability to correction) *sama.naana~n ca* (of monk) *dassana.m* (seeing) *kaalena* (timely) *dhammasaakacchaa* (discussions on the Dhamma) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

X.

Tapo (energetic restraint) *ca brahmacariyaa* (and holy and chaste life) *ca* (and) *ariyassaccaana* (the Noble Truths) *dassana.m* (in-seeing) *Nibbaana-sacchikiriyaa ca* (and realization of Nibbaana) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

XI.

Phu.t.thassa (touched by) *lokadhammehi* (worldly conditions) *citta.m yassa* (whose mind) *na kampati* (is not shaken) *asoka.m* (free from sorrow) *viraja.m* (free from passion) *khema.m* (secure) *etam ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (this, the Highest Blessing).

XII.

Etaadisaani (these things) *katvaana* (having fulfilled) *sabbattha-m-* (everywhere) *aparaajitaa* (unvanquished) *sabbattha* (everywhere) *sotthi.m* (in happiness and safety) *gacchanti* (they go) *ta.m* (that) *tesa.m* (to them) *ma"ngalam-uttama.m* (the Highest Blessing).

Mahaa Mangala Sutta (The Discourse on Great Blessings) *Ni.t.thita.m* (is ended).

iii. Translation

Thus have I heard:

Once, while the Blessed One was staying in the vicinity of Saavatthi, in the Jeta Grove, in Anaathapi.n.dika's monastery, a certain deity, whose surpassing brilliance and beauty illumined the entire Jeta Grove, late one night came to the presence of the Blessed One; having come to him and offered profound salutations, he stood on one side and spoke to him reverently in the following verse:

I

Many deities and human beings
Have pondered what are blessings,

Which they hope will bring them safety:
Declare to them, Sir, the Highest Blessing.

(To this the Blessed One replied):

II

With fools no company keeping.
With the wise ever consorting,
To the worthy homage paying:
This, the Highest Blessing.

III

Congenial place to dwell,
In the past merits making,
One's self directed well:
This, the Highest Blessing.

IV

Ample learning, in crafts ability,
With a well-trained disciplining,
Well-spoken words, civility:
This, the Highest Blessing.

V

Mother, father well supporting,
Wife and children duly cherishing,
Types of work un-conflicting:

This, the Highest Blessing.

VI

Acts of giving, righteous living,
Relatives and kin supporting,
Actions blameless then pursuing:
This, the Highest Blessing.

VII

Avoiding evil and abstaining,
From besotting drinks refraining,
Diligence in Dhamma doing:
This, the Highest Blessing.

VIII

Right reverence and humility
Contentment and a grateful bearing,
Hearing Dhamma when it's timely:
This, the Highest Blessing.

IX

Patience, meekness when corrected,
Seeing monks and then discussing
About the Dhamma when it's timely:
This, the Highest Blessing.

X

Self-restraint and holy life,
All the Noble Truths in-seeing,
Realization of Nibbaana:
This, the Highest Blessing.

XI

Though touched by worldly circumstances,
Never his mind is wavering,
Sorrowless, stainless and secure:
This, the Highest Blessing.

XII

Since by acting in this way,
They are everywhere unvanquished,
And everywhere they go in safety:
Theirs, the Highest Blessings.

Here ends the Discourse on Blessings.

3. Notes and Comments

i. The Title

Mahaa Mangala Sutta:

Discourse on the Highest Blessings, the real omens,
or the most auspicious and "lucky" actions.

ii. Introduction

(A) *Eva.m me sutta.m*:

The suttas of the Buddhist scriptures begin with these words. The history behind this short sentence is as follows. Some three months after the final Nibbaana of the Buddha, when King Ajaatasattu had been on the throne already for about eight years, the First Great Council was held under royal patronage at the Sattapanni Cave in Raajagaha, the capital, where 500 arahants assembled to recite, classify and group together the Teachings of the Master. Venerable Mahaa Kassapa presided, while the Venerables Upaali and AAnanda rehearsed the Vinaya (monastic discipline) and the suttas or discourses respectively. The Council finished its work after seven months during which time they arranged the entire Teachings of the Master, that is, the collections of the Vinaya rules and the suttas.

To the Venerable AAnanda, as he was most learned in the Master's discourses, fell the arduous task of rehearsing the suttas in the Great Council. He prefixed each discourse with the expression "Eva.m me sutta.m" ("Thus have I heard"), thus personally

testifying to the authenticity of the suttas. At that time religious teachings generally were committed to memory, so the Buddha's Teachings too were presented at first in this way. Venerable AAnanda's words "Thus have I heard" were prefixed to the memorized version, which thereafter was passed down from teacher to pupil by oral tradition until it was committed to writing for the first time at Aluvihaare in the central province of Sri Lanka (about 80 B.C. in the reign and under the patronage of King Vattagaamani Abhaya).

The Council was held at the capital of Anuraadhapura with its conclusion, the writing down of the Suttas, Vinaya and Abhidhamma, at Aluvihaare. The Council was necessary for safeguarding the texts from loss through invasions, famines, and the whims of kings; also from serious alterations and interpolations by unscrupulous people. There is a legend that the Tipitaka was inscribed on gold sheets which were said to have been deposited in the rocks at Aluvihaare. Considering the amount of gold which would be needed, this seems very unlikely, though some condensed passages may have been inscribed in this way and enshrined.

As the Venerable AAnanda was a stream-winner⁶ who had seen Dhamma himself, as well as being a devoted attendant of the Buddha, his words "Thus have I heard" prefixed to the Mahaa Mangala Sutta, as to most other suttas, invest these texts with the seal of authenticity.

(B) *Bhagavaa*:

As one of the epithets of the Buddha, it occurs frequently in the scriptures meaning "having good luck" i.e., auspicious, fortunate. It is generally translated as "the Blessed One" or "the Exalted One," though the full meaning of "One who apportions" (the Dhamma) with the knowledge of what is exactly suitable to them, cannot be conveyed in English. The usual formula of homage also has this epithet at the beginning: "*Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammaasambuddhassa*" meaning "Homage to the Blessed One, the Liberated One, the Fully Enlightened One." There are many other titles by which the Buddha is known such as: *Tilokanaatha* (Lord of the Three Worlds), *Dhammaraajaa* (the Lord of Truth), *Tathaagata* (lit. Thus Gone; but more fully meaning, "Gone" in the same way of Enlightenment and Nibbaana as

Buddhas in the past), *Sugata* (the Happy One), *Sakyamuni* (the Saakyan Sage), and Sakyasiha (The Saakyan Lion) and so on. The term "Buddha" itself is not a name but means "the Enlightened One," "the Awakened One" which signifies the zenith of perfection, supreme and final release from all types of existence or being, and the actual attainment of Nibbaana during life. (See also: stanza X on Nibbaana).

(C) *Saavatthi, Jetavana, Anaathapi.n.dika:*

Saavatthi (Sk. Sraavasti) was an ancient city which is identified with the village of Sahet-mahet in the present-day Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It was the capital of the powerful kingdom of Kosala in the 6th century B.C. The great merchant and benefactor Anaathapi.n.dika, whose real name was Sudatta, bought Prince Jeta's pleasure grove in this city for a fabulous price (said to be as much as eighteen crores of gold coins) and built a monastery which he presented to the Buddha. The monastery was called Anaathapi.n.dika AAraama and the grove was known as Jetavana, Prince Jeta's Grove. Here the Buddha stayed for twenty-four rainy seasons and

gave many important discourses. The Mahaa Mangala Sutta is one of them.

(D) *Devataa:*

In Buddhist teachings there are six realms of celestial beings (*devaloka*) superior to the human world, which together comprise the "happy states" in the world of sensual desire or *kaamaloka*. These beings are of greater or lesser splendor and brilliance, and they live very long lives enjoying the happy fruits of their past good kamma. On the expiry of this, however, they gravitate to a rebirth in accordance with their residual merit, for the devas make little new good kamma and can be compared to rich people living on their capital, which will run out sooner or later. And their new rebirth is not necessarily a better one; it may well be worse and even below the human state.

Though short-lived and having a coarse body, man is in a way superior to these celestials, as he can increase his merits by further wholesome actions and can even attain to the highest goal, Nibbaana. That is why even celestial beings look to the Buddha for guidance and to Noble Ones for assistance.

At the time when the Buddha was teaching in India, it is said that not only human beings were divided about what was an omen, what was lucky or auspicious and what were really blessings, but also celestials were confused on the subject. As no one could decide this matter, an assembly of celestials deputed one of their number to visit the Buddha to get his views to clarify their doubts.

There are many stories of heavenly messengers visiting the Buddha. They usually visited him late at night, as the accounts say, "when the night was far spent," or just before dawn. Sometimes, they visited him in human form and at other times, they went in celestial form. Sometimes the designation "*devataa*" is even used for forest-dwelling spirits who also visited the Buddha. In this particular case it was a radiant being from a celestial abode whose presence filled the entire grove with splendor, turning the darkest hour of night into more than the brilliance of day. Materialists may consider such a being to be imagination but there are people with personal experience of such forms of existence.

These heavens have other states superior to them, two more spheres, namely the world of subtle form

(*ruupaloka*) and the formless world (*aruupaloka*). The former have sixteen realms while in the latter the inhabitants are super-celestial and even longer lived, their life span running into thousands of aeons.

Still, they are also subject to change. These celestial and super-celestial regions together with the human realms and the four subhuman planes or the evil states (*duggati*), in all totaling 31 planes of existence, comprise the range of phenomenal existence termed *sa.msara*, literally the "wandering on."⁷ The inhabitants of these planes, whether human or subhuman, celestial or super-celestial, are all alike in this: their existences depend on the different types of good and bad kamma made by them. They are alike too in that all are subject to the same law of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and not-self (*anatta*), the difference being in the quality of their lives, with more or less of happiness and suffering, opportunities for development or lack of them. These are the fruits of kamma made in past and present lives. All these beings, high and low, are bound (by themselves) to the incessantly moving wheel of *sa.msara*. If there were no way out, each individual would go on

forever because of intoxication with greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) and so suffering here, suffering there and suffering everywhere — it would have no end. The way beyond what is marked by impermanence, suffering and non-self was pointed out by the Buddha, who after his supreme awakening to truth, showed the path which leads to the final release of Nibbaana.

Birth as a human being is best according to the Buddha's teachings, for in spite of his frailties, man has adequate personal and environmental conditions for scaling spiritual heights, while he may have seen enough suffering to goad him on.

Thus each human being has the potential to become an arahant or a Buddha: though not everyone, of course, has golden chances and magnificent opportunities, still, all are capable of raising themselves to some extent, and some to heights far above the range of even the highest gods. It depends on how each person avails himself of the *opportunities*. One should always make the greatest effort to turn one's footsteps towards a good heavenly birth or towards Nibbaana, the highest goal; otherwise, evil kamma may rivet chains which

drag one down to sufferings or even into fires of the hells. The Buddha shows the way: the pilgrim has to walk that way himself.

The Buddha is called the "Light of the Three Worlds" and any of their inhabitants, even the gods, may approach him for everyday guidance or spiritual instruction. Usually people go to the gods (or to one of them, God) for guidance, but it is the various gods who came to the Buddha with their problems. In this way, we can understand the significance of the god's visit mentioned in the Mahaa Mangala Sutta.

iii. The Body of the Sutta

Stanza I: "*Many deities and human beings...*"

Here a question is asked to which the subsequent eleven stanzas provide the answer. The question is put by a deva, the accredited spokesman of the deva-world. The deva presents to the Buddha not only the contentions about "blessings" prevalent in the heavens but also those in the human world, thus covering the seven happy planes (*sugati*) of the sensual world (*kaamaloka*), and perhaps more.

The points mentioned or implied are:

1. That the inhabitants of the deva and human worlds desired happiness and safety, which was connected, they thought, with what they considered "auspicious" or "lucky."
2. That many of them had been deeply pondering for a long time what were real blessings, omens or auspices.
3. That their reflection was rooted in a strong desire for personal welfare, safety and subjective happiness.
4. That in spite of their sincere and persistent efforts, they could not agree regarding the real nature of *ma"ngalam-uttama.m*, the Highest Blessings.
5. That only the Buddha, the embodiment of Supreme Wisdom, could throw proper light on the subject.
6. That, therefore, the deva approached the Buddha with the question troubling the human and deva worlds.
7. That the Blessed One was earnestly implored to clearly expound the truth on the subject, for the welfare of gods and men.

From the above, two distinct issues emerge:

1. That happiness in the human and deva worlds leaves much to be desired.
2. That the inhabitants of these planes have an intense desire to attain to perfection of happiness.

In the world of sensual desire, happiness is conditioned by subjective desire, efficiency of the senses and the existence of suitable objects. As all these are subject to incessant change, the consequent happiness of the senses is transient (cf. *sabbe kaamaa anicca*, "all sensual pleasure is impermanent") and, therefore, lacks lasting satisfaction.

Sensual *gratification* is in fact a deception, though if it is understood, this may lead to the path of deliverance. This is the *escape* from sense-desires. But when gratification is not understood, it may intensify desire for sense pleasures, with dissatisfaction, regret or sorrow, which are the *danger* in them, following sooner or later. The Buddha has many times spoken about sense-desire, gratification, danger and escape:

With these clear facts, one must draw the following conclusions:

1. That in the human and deva worlds beings desire to perfect their happiness.
2. That their happiness, when it is rooted in desire for sensual gratification, can never reach perfection.

So happiness in the world of sensual desire is, at best, only relative and, therefore, subject to constant change.

The Buddha immediately realized both the relative and the supramundane importance of this question concerning the acts of blessedness or true omens. He gave a reply in which both these aspects were thoroughly considered. By re-interpretation, the Buddha boldly by-passed the superstitious meaning of the word "*mangala*," looking at auspiciousness from the practical viewpoint. Beginning his answer in a very down-to-earth way, he gradually described in a steadily rising scale blessings or omens leading higher and higher, finally to the supramundane state of Nibbaana.

Stanza II: "*With fools no company keeping...*" 🐦

Sevanaa and *asevanaa* literally mean "service" and the "absence of service." Applied to the nouns "wise man" (*pa.n.dita*) and "fools" (*baala*), the meaning is "association" or "non-association"; thus we get "not associating with fools" and "associating with the wise." The underlying idea is that one must not follow after fools or take them as a standard for conduct or personal guidance, but follow the wise. One waxes or wanes in good qualities according to whom one associates with.

*Pa.n.dita*⁸ means the wise, learned, experienced, and those capable of giving advice which is practical and wholesome.

Baala originally meant "children," and hence weak persons and then foolish and stupid people, the opposite of the wise, people with minds undeveloped, those whose behavior is coarse and rough, trouble-makers who tend to give advice which is unwholesome and evil. They lack discrimination and a sense of judgment, and are heedless of Dhamma, reckless in action and regardless of the consequences. These people are undesirable company. This interpretation of *baala*

does not include children who are on the whole good and graceful.

The emphasis is on keeping away from and not getting entangled with people who, though grown up in years, have none of the graces of children but all their failings and shortcomings; these are the people possessing the characteristics of "fools." Their company can only harm. They certainly are very unfortunate, but association with them is not auspicious and their mental and emotional constitution is such that they do not profit from beneficial guidance. Far from gaining anything themselves, they will rather drag even a good man into trouble and danger. The example usually given from the suttas is that of the Buddha's cousin Devadatta dragging King Ajaatasattu to hell by instigating him to kill his father who was a virtuous king.

The suttas warn one against companionship with bad people in this way: because of bad company one gives ear to evil advice; because of such advice evil reflections occupy the mind; because of such reflections mental confusion prevails and the senses are uncontrolled; as a result of this, actions of body

and speech are faulty and the five hindrances⁹ gain strength holding one to sensual cravings and resulting in sufferings.

On the other hand, through companionship with the wise the sequence is: listening to good advice, rational faith, noble thoughts, clear thinking, self-control, good conduct, conquest of the hindrances, gaining of wisdom and the consequent liberation.

It should be said here that while it is essential for an ordinary person to keep away from bad company, one who is advanced in self-control, full of loving-kindness and compassion and thus immune to the evils of such association, may live in the midst of such persons for the noble purpose of leading them to a better understanding, while all the time on guard against evil influences.

Though his body moves with them, his mind should be beyond their influence. If he is not certain of his own self-control, he should avoid the company of such people. He may associate with them only when he is sure that his good influence is flowing to them, and not their evil influence to him. The advice of the Buddha is that there should not be any entanglement

with fools, from which one can neither extricate oneself nor them.

Puujaa and *puujaniyaana.m* mean "homage" and "those worthy of homage." The examples are the Buddha, monks (bhikkhus), holy persons, parents, teachers — all of whom are of great assistance to us in life.

Some people do not like to show respect, or to express reverence, even when it is quite proper to do so in the presence of those who have greater and purer conduct in mind, speech and body, than they have. Such people suffer from pride, they estimate themselves too highly and do not want to admit that others could have achieved more than themselves. They are, so to speak, "standing in their own light" and they will not be able to see the right way to go. Their pride will only lead them to the strengthening of other defilements of mind, and so they go from bad to worse. They have shut the door in their own faces and can go no further. And how they quarrel with others!

Respectful persons are not like this. They are a pleasure to live and associate with, unlike people

with much pride. They not only "fit" well into whatever society they are in, they also have the ability to learn more since they recognize that others know more than they do. So they have one of the factors necessary for any progress, whether in worldly prosperity or on the Path of Dhamma. We shall see later that humility is another "Blessing." This practice of honoring the honorable is the foundation for humility.

Stanza III: "*Congenial place to dwell...*"

Pa.tiruupa-desa-vaaso means "residence in a suitable and pleasant locality." For life to be pleasant, the dwelling place must be comfortable, secure in construction, tidy and clean in appearance, properly maintained, and, besides, it is helpful if it is in a good neighborhood and inhabited by agreeable people. The commentators amplify the meaning by explaining that a suitable locality should have in it people who practice the Noble Dhamma, the evidence of this being the existence of shrines, monks and monasteries and many good people engaged in meritorious deeds.

Residence in a place inhabited by quarrelsome and trouble-making citizens, where one is bossed about by a dictatorial and corrupt government, where the climate is inimical with frequent ravages by floods, famines, earthquakes and epidemics, where the air is charged with hatred and mutual suspicion, and where freedom of thought and action are reduced to a minimum: in brief, residence in a place having many factors and conditions obstructive to the practice of Dhamma and not conducive to physical, moral and spiritual well-being, is just the opposite of what is meant by a suitable environment.

When selection of a place for residence is considered, a Buddhist bears in mind the advantage of being near a source of Dhamma, besides, of course, more mundane advantages such as nearness to his work place.

Pubbe ca katapu~n~nataa: "merit made in the past." Obviously, it is a blessing to have done meritorious deeds in the past. A Buddhist, unlike others who take existence as beginning with birth in this life, understands the range covered by the term "*pubbe*" (the past) to comprise a vast chain of existences, each life preceded by an earlier one in an unbroken

and unlimited succession. The Buddha has said that the beginning of the round of birth and death is inconceivable, for beings are blinded by ignorance and impelled by their cravings to make more and more kamma, which means the experience of more and more lives.

Action is performed by one's body (*kaaya-kamma*) or by speech (*vaci-kamma*) or by mind (*mano-kamma*). These actions are called kamma when will, intention or volition is involved in the performance of "action." If there were no "will" involved, there would be no results or fruits of kamma. Throughout life, one goes on making kamma and experiencing the results: some kamma bears immediate results, some is delayed in result, whereas another fails to fruit because suitable conditions for this to occur are not found. At death the continuity of the potential results of kamma (*kamma-vipaaka*) in the stream of mind — which includes feeling (*vedanaa*), perception (*sa~n~naa*), mental formations (*sankhaaraa*) and consciousness (*vi~n~naa.na*) — are the only real traces of the individual, his body (*ruupa*) having suffered disintegration. These potential results of kamma must fruit, and the only way that this can happen is through rebirth.

This means the attraction of the mental continuity to a suitable couple who are having sexual intercourse and where conception is possible. This applies among human beings and animals where reproduction involves sexual union. With other kinds of kamma governing the place of birth, existence begins spontaneously without parents, as among all the gods and among all types of subhuman birth with the exception of animals. Where one is born depends generally upon the quality of the past kamma which is ready to fruit, more specifically, it depends upon the last thought in the mind of the dying person.

In the new existence, that individual will experience the fruits of some of the past kamma, while if born as a human being he will make more new kamma to add to the store of potential results. At the end of that new term of life what remains of the individual is again his mental continuity containing his potential results of kamma, and it is this which again determines and conditions his next existence. Thus the cycle goes on, death followed by birth, birth by death, and so on.

The final release from this ocean of "death-birth-death" comes only for a Buddha or arahant whose body is worn out, who has broken the pattern of kamma making and has no potential result to experience. Such a person is freed from the rounds of suffering, incessant change and selfhood, to know and see for himself or herself the highest goal, Nibbaana.

As kamma is varied in nature, so are its results. Kamma may be unwholesome (*akusala-kamma*) or wholesome (*kusala-kamma*), the former being rooted in greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) or delusion (*moha*), while the latter has its roots in generosity (literally, greedlessness, *alobha*), loving-kindness (*adosa* or hatelessness), or wisdom (literally, undeludedness, *amoha*). Wholesome kamma made with these last three roots is also known as merit — those actions which cleanse and purify the mind of the doer.

Each person makes wholesome and unwholesome kamma as well as having a store of resultants from past kamma, some actual and fruiting, while others are potential, so the ingredients vary with each person.

"Whatever kamma a person performs, good or evil, he will be the heir to it," says the Buddha. Thus the influence of past lives of an individual on his present experience can be more or less strong. If he tormented other beings, he may suffer with a disease; if he was habitually angry, he inherits ugliness; while stinginess gives him the heritage of poverty, indolence of illiteracy; envy in the past a low position in this one, and so on.

On the other hand, from wholesome actions one inherits health, beauty, wealth, wisdom, noble birth, and so on. Truly, it is a blessing to have done good deeds in the past! There is no inheritance better than that resulting from good kamma: to be an heir to such an inheritance means that one starts life with an excellent advantage. It is for this reason that the Buddha praised "the merit garnered in the past" and declared it a blessing in this life.

Attasammaapa.nidhi: "one's self rightly directed." This means one must decide on a proper objective in life and set oneself on the right path leading to it.

The emphasis is on "one's own self": one should try to direct oneself to the desired goal by the efforts

one makes.¹⁰ This encourages self-confidence and discourages dependence upon the grace of gods or men. Many people pass their lives in the wrong course, engaged in evil practices of the body, speech and mind. Such people, perhaps we are among them, should cherish right desires and open a new and wholesome direction for their lives. Others, who already consider themselves to have a wholesome way of living, should review their situation, from time to time, not only to avoid lapses but also to progress further in the right direction.

We can understand clearly what is meant by rightly directing oneself, in this comment: The unvirtuous person establishes himself in virtue (the five precepts for instance); the faithless person establishes himself in excellent faith; the avaricious person establishes himself in generosity. Along these lines everyone has something to do.

Stanza IV: "*Ample learning, in crafts ability...*"

Bahusacca~n ca sippa~n ca: "ample learning and proficiency in crafts."

Bahu-sacca.m is read by some as *bahussuta.m*, which means "great learning through hearing." In the

time of the Buddha, education was mostly through oral tradition, written knowledge not being very common. Consequently, one was considered learned according to what one had memorized after having heard learned people talk. This standard of erudition applied particularly to religious learning. Obviously a pupil needed certain abilities such as a good memory, keen desire to learn and to associate with the learned, also a capacity to understand their teachings. Thus *bahusacca.m*, means "much learning through direct contact with the learned." This is a blessing whether the knowledge gained is used for Dhamma-practice, or, restrained by moral conduct, for one's livelihood.

Bahu-sippa.m means "proficiency in some art or handicraft," which implies "practical knowledge of some art, science or handicraft." We understand that the Buddha saw skill in some art or craft as a blessing too. Not only knowledge is praised by him but also manual work, wherever this is not tainted by unwholesome actions. One's "craft" should therefore be in accordance with the precepts when it may be used either for hobby or livelihood. Among bhikkhus too there are "crafts" which it is good to be

skilled in — such as making robes — and such skills are a blessing for one's fellow monks.

Vinayo ca susikkhito: "well-learned discipline."

For one who leads the householder's life this means abstaining from the ten courses of unwholesome action.

The ten that should be abstained from so that one makes no evil kamma are:

- kamma by way of body: killing living beings, taking what is not given, wrong conduct in sexual desires
- kamma by way of speech: false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, gossip
- kamma by way of mind: covetousness, ill will and wrong views

A layman who disciplines himself in these ten is rightly called an excellent person. People like this are sure to make further gains on the path whenever they make efforts. (See also "practice of Dhamma" under stanza VI.)

The moral discipline in the case of a monk is stricter than for a householder; he must train himself not to

fall into the various classes of offenses laid down by the Buddha.

Subhaasitaa ca yaa vaacaa: "well-spoken words of civility."

By this, one would usually understand speech which is devoid of the four defects, as given in the list under "well-learned discipline." And certainly what one speaks and how one speaks it are very important, considering all the words which pour out of our mouths every day. However, the commentary says that "well-spoken words" consist of words used while teaching Dhamma to other people. This must be true for Dhamma is always for one's benefit though of course much depends on how it is taught. Dhamma words can never be ill-spoken words since they:

- are true;
- bring concord;
- are compassionate;
- and meaningful.

In this way they are a blessing both to the speaker and the listener.

Stanza V: "*Mother, father well supporting...*"

Maataa-pitu upa.t.thaana.m means adequately supporting, looking after properly, waiting on patiently and rendering proper service to mother and father.

People these days do not always look after their parents. In western lands they often prefer to get some institution to take care of them as they age. But they do not consider, perhaps, that because they have not given good support or even neglected their old parents, it is likely that they too, as they grow old, will have to suffer the same misfortune. Contrast this with the Buddha's teaching that children's debt to parents is so great that it can never be repaid by only material support. One should certainly give this but the support of Dhamma should also be given them.

Are they stingy? Teach them generosity and its benefits. Perhaps their moral conduct is not good in some way? Then lead them to see the dangers of unwholesome conduct. Or maybe they lack understanding? Open the gates of Dhamma so that they understand good and evil, the causal arising of events, and so on.

Only in this way can parents be repaid by their children. One's parents should be honored — the Buddha has called them God (Brahmaa) and it is surely better to pay homage to them with devoted service and loving-kindness, which will bring them joy in their declining years, than to worship any kind of god unknown to oneself personally.

A good Buddhist thinks and acts in this way towards his parents: "I who was sustained by them, shall sustain them; I shall do their work for them; I shall keep up their family traditions; I shall make myself worthy of my inheritance; I shall make continual offerings for them when they have died." These are the Buddha's words to young Sigaala. Regarding the last, this means the well-known Buddhist practice of giving alms (to bhikkhus and others) on death anniversaries and dedicating the merits to those who have died. In this way parents are supported even beyond this life. This is a blessing for those who are so kind and grateful, as they have the chance to make much good kamma.

Puttadaarassa sa"ngaho: "cherishing one's wife and children."¹¹

Surely everyone knows that this should be done. But one hears also of many cases when they are neglected or abandoned by a husband gone elsewhere. When a man has such commitments, he has the duty to support the wife and help the children.

The Buddha taught young Sigaala that a husband can help his wife in five ways: by cherishing her, by not looking down on her, by not being unfaithful to her, by giving her authority in her sphere of work, and by making presents to her, of such things as ornaments.

Any way of helpfulness which is in accord with the Dhamma is a true blessing because all such actions are good kamma — wholesome and with happy results. If done in the right spirit, "cherishing wife and children" must bring harmony into the home, and just in this life to live at peace with others is a blessing, what to speak of the good results in lives to come?

Anaakulaa kammantaa means activities and livelihood which bring no conflicts and can be attended to peacefully without mental confusion.

Not only should one's work bring no conflicts but one should avoid disturbing others.

The significance of the expression will be much better appreciated by understanding that kamma (in this context meaning work) should be a means to an end (*anta*). The adjective *anaakula* — "unconflicting" — shows how the work (kamma) should be done to reach the end (*anta*).

Life is a state of conflict brought about by the roots of the unwholesome, greed, hatred and delusion, which are the sources of so many actions. The fruits arising from this action are various kinds of sufferings and limitations, further causes for conflict.

The objective in life is not to further complicate conflicts but to act, work and attend to business in a way that leads to the lessening and eventual riddance of conflicts. The emphasis is on making wholesome kamma as a means of achieving noble and desirable objectives. It is not the quality of the objective alone that decides the worth of an activity: it is the objective, taken together with the means to it and related activities which decides final worth.

Thus, the "means" (kamma) have as much importance as the "ends." To sum up this blessing: what is important here is right livelihood — that one's work leads to no harm for oneself or other beings. This kind of work everyone will agree is a blessing.

Stanza VI: "*Acts of giving, righteous living...*"

Daana: charity, liberality, offering of gifts, etc.

The important thing here is not the act as it appears, but the intention behind it. Thus *daana* may be graded as low, medium and superior according to whether the motive is selfish, unselfish or a mixture of these. The results vary accordingly both in quality and quantity.

The mental purity of the recipient and the amount of what is given, though undoubtedly important factors, are subsidiary to the intention motivating the offering.

Apart from the material *daana* visibly given through the body, *daana* may also be practiced by speech and mind: a friendly smile, words of goodwill, a generous nature and a mind full of loving-kindness.

Giving also works in harmony with other good qualities and strengthens them. For instance, a generous person develops both renunciation in being able to give freely, as well as compassion, concern to aid the plight of others. Giving is also related to moral conduct, that one gives gifts which do not conflict with the precepts. And this brings in another relationship with wisdom, for one should give wisely, not unwisely.

Finally, another division of types of giving often seen is into material offerings (such as lay people make to bhikkhus and nuns and so make their lives possible), and the gift of Dhamma (often given by bhikkhus and others who have learned and practiced, to those who want to know). This Dhamma-daana excels all other kinds of gift, since, unlike material gifts, it never wears out, instead becoming stronger with use, as well as being of benefit in future lives, besides the present one. A great blessing!

Dhammacariyaa: practice of Dhamma.

"Living by the Dhamma" means making efforts to maintain and increase one's practice of the ten wholesome paths of kamma. Restraint from their

evil counterparts has already been mentioned under "well-learned discipline." So here they are explained in a positive way.

1. Refraining from killing living beings implies the growth of *loving-kindness* and *compassion* in one's speech and bodily actions.
2. By not stealing (and so on) is meant the presence of *right livelihood*, a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path.
3. Right conduct in sex means that *contentment* with one's partner is strong in the mind.
4. One's speech is *truthful*.
5. It is also *harmonious* and brings people together in concord.
6. And it is *gentle* as well, so that one's words are loved by others.
7. Finally it is *meaningful*, not concerned with stupid trifles but has value for one's listeners.
8. *Renunciation* becomes stronger.
9. While *loving-kindness* is established in the emotions.
10. Finally one understands rightly and clearly about Dhamma and oneself.

In the context of the stanza the term Dhamma has the connotation of "righteousness." This is supported by a commentary which gives as a synonym, *samacariyaa* (*sama*, here means "just").

Anavajjaani kammaani: blameless actions.

The expressions "unconflicting types of work" and "blameless actions" are accepted as synonymous by some authors. They might be so at first glance but they differ in their emphasis.

Thus while the unconflicting types of work lay emphasis on the nature of the activities with which one is occupied, the expression "blameless actions" stresses the making of kamma which will not lead to obstacles and hindrances in the future. One could say that here the intention in the mind is stressed. The Paali commentary bears this out, when under this blessing it suggests, a number of actions which are blameless, such as: keeping the eight precepts on the Uposatha days, social services, planting gardens and groves (for public use), making bridges (again for the benefit of all).

Then, there are the hospitable actions for which Buddhists are famous: the full jar of cool water to

refresh thirsty travelers and the rest house giving shade which anyone may use. All such actions are praiseworthy, irrespective of one's belief — for where is kindness not praised? It is a great blessing wherever many kindly people are found.

Stanza VII: "*Avoid evil and abstaining...*"

AArati viratii paapaa: avoiding and abstaining from evil.

The words "*aarati*" and "*virati*" occur together in several places in the scriptures. Taken together, they mean abstinence, keeping away from, avoiding, etc. Though the two terms have similarity of meaning they are not the same, as we shall see. Both signify effort at detachment from something unwholesome in the range of sensual pleasure, that is, the evil mentioned in the stanza. It is the difference in scope between the two terms that makes them into two distinct blessings in the sutta. Thus the expression "avoiding and abstaining from evil," means *avoiding evil* and *abstaining from evil*.

The commentary explains avoiding evil to mean "mental non-delight" in it, a shrinking away from evil thoughts that have arisen so that they cease,

having run out of fuel to burn. Only when this avoidance is not present in the mind can the fires of greed, aversion and delusion be fueled-up with the persistent flames of evil thoughts.

But abstaining from evil means: "abstinence by way of bodily and verbal actions." Where mental avoidance of evil is present there will be also abstinence from it through body and speech but the presence of the latter does not guarantee the former. Why this is so is explained by the commentary when it says that abstinence may be the result of following custom or tradition. For if people do not steal, let us say, thinking "It would disgrace the family" then they have present only "abstinence as custom." A better reason for abstinence is found in the person who remembers the precepts, thinking, "Oh, I shall break that training rule." This is called "abstinence as undertaking." Best of all is "abstinence as severance" found in the Noble (Ariya) disciple who can abstain quite naturally and without struggle because the power of evil has been weakened in his heart.

The scriptures also teach three kinds of avoiding and abstaining, namely from wrong speech, wrong

(bodily) action and wrong livelihood. This means that both of these blessings are concerned with *siila* or morality.

Concerning this word "evil" (paapa), what does it mean? Why do we say that this or that action is wrong speech, wrong (bodily) action or wrong livelihood? All the actions listed under these headings bring trouble and suffering to oneself and to others. They lead to blame from other people, and for the doer of them, they cause many obstacles and difficulties in the future. Here they are:

- Wrong speech means false speech, malicious speech, harsh speech and gossip.
- Wrong bodily actions are killing living beings, taking what is not given, wrong conduct in sexual desires.
- Wrong livelihood is one that harms others, e.g., trading in arms, slaves, intoxicants and professions involving killing, cheating, astrology or other prognosticating trickery.

Majjapaanaa ca sa~n~namo: "refraining from intoxicating drinks." *Majja*: this is related to our English word "mad" and there is a play on

intoxication and maddening which English cannot reproduce.

However, everyone the world over knows the effects of alcohol and other intoxicants. Though drinks are mentioned here, anything which leads to more delusion of the mind, whether swallowed, injected or smoked should be included. A Buddhist wants a clear mind that can understand easily what is going on in his own mind and body, as well as other actions. But these besotting substances just lead to more and more foolishness.

Thoroughly drunk, a person knows nothing but must suffer when he wakes. Partly drunk a person becomes capable of actions which he would be ashamed to do while sober. And carelessness from intoxication leads to the death or maiming of how many people these days? So those who are intoxicated are rightly blamed by wise men.

The commentary remarks that these people are censured in this life, get themselves an unhappy future life and when finally they return to the human state after long sub-human existences, they are born mad. This seems just enough for they madden

themselves with intoxicants now, so the fruits of such kamma bring madness, for a whole life without understanding. Taking all this into account an earnest follower of the Buddha should abstain completely from all intoxicants.

Appamaado ca dhammesu: "diligence in Dhamma doing." *Pamaada*, like *majja* in the last blessing, is also related linguistically to madness. This is the opposite of what the Buddha taught! He constantly urged people to cultivate *appamaada* or diligence. The word in Paali has the flavor of three good qualities: effort, mindfulness and wisdom. These three go along together in anyone who tries to develop the Dhamma in himself and such a person is *appamatta*, diligent or heedful. Now, here the Buddha is admonishing us to be diligent in cultivating Dhamma — all aspects of it in ourselves.

This means we should try to protect whatever good practices we have already, and make the effort also to develop further in dhamma-qualities or practices. If we find any of the following in our hearts then we are slipping:

- carelessness

- inattentiveness
- heedlessness
- hanging back
- unzealousness
- uninterestedness
- non-repetition (of Dhamma learned by heart)
- non-development
- non-cultivation
- non-resolution
- non-application
- negligence

concerning the development of wholesome dhammas (*Vibhanga* 350). Surely diligence is a blessing!

Stanza VIII: "*Right reverence and humility...*"

Gaaravo: reverence. This includes the proper veneration of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and respect for parents and teachers, wise people, good persons and elders — in fact, a general high regard for everyone.

Even the Buddha after his Enlightenment surveyed the world to try to find a teacher to revere. When he realized that no teacher surpassed his own

attainments, then he proclaimed in verse that he would live revering the Dhamma through which Enlightenment had been discovered.

And the arahant-disciples too had reverence for the Buddha as their guide, for the Dhamma, for other senior bhikkhus and for the way of training.

The further one has gone along the path of Dhamma the more reverence one has for it — and for others who also practice correctly. It is not that reverence grows less as one practices! This is a way of estimating one's own position, for if a lot of pride and conceit can be seen then one has not got very far!

How does one show respect or reverence? The Buddha says that one gives such a person a good seat, stands up to receive them, makes way for them and, for religious teachers, one places one's hands together and bows at their feet. This is a blessing resulting in good future births and harmony in the present life.

Nivaato: humility, means yet another factor which stresses the importance of having no pride. The fact that we encounter a number of "blessings" which

deal with non-pride should make us realize how important humility is for successful practice of Dhamma.

The person who knows it all, who always replies "I know," who has his own theories about Dhamma, or anyone else's theories for that matter, does not have humility. Because of this, he can never train under a good teacher. The Commentary gives the right attitude to have: to be lowly "like a foot-wiping cloth," "like a bull with horns cut off," or "like a snake with fangs extracted." People like this get on with Dhamma. Of course, this does not mean that one is obsequiously "humble" — just another disguise for pride, and a revolting one at that.

But the wise person tries to make displays of self less and less evident. He does not advertise himself; he is not exuberant in body or speech but instead is restrained. It is interesting to note that this humility in Paali is literally "not-wind" which ties up well with such English expressions of conceit and pride as: "puffery," "vaporizing," or more colloquially "hot air" and "gas."

Santu.t.thii: contentment. This implies acceptance of conditions and situations as they arise, with equanimity and without grumbling. This is a quality which bhikkhus must have, as the commentary emphasizes when it does not mention lay people at all here. This is a much needed quality in those parts of the world and among those families where there is affluence.

Contentment spells peace of mind for the person who has it: craving more and more spells out the opposite. What should one be content with? Content with enough clothes, enough food, enough living room and enough medicines.

But then what is enough and what is excess? "Enough" gives one little trouble to keep and maintain but more than that brings anxiety and worry. This blessing should also not be misunderstood as counsel not to make an effort in life. Bhikkhus do not have to possess many things for happiness in their life but lay people need much more.

Lay people must make effort to obtain what is necessary for a happy life without poverty and

starvation. Everyone has to decide for themselves whether possessions will bring more happiness or more trouble. Being able to know this clearly is an aspect of wisdom.

Kata~n~nutaa: gratitude. Literally this is "knowing what has been done," that is, remembering what others have done for oneself.

The Buddha has said:

"Two sorts of people are hard to find in the world: one who first does (something kind or helpful), and one who is grateful and recognizes (that kindness)." Without this quality a person forgets parents, relatives, friends, teachers, and those who teach him Dhamma, he turns his back on them just when they could be helped by him or when they are in need of aid.

A selfish person seems to try to isolate himself from the world's web. "I alone am important," he says, and forgets all the benefit derived from others. On the other hand, the grateful person makes for harmony and peace. How many good things have we obtained through others in this life and how many

are we grateful for and then express our gratitude in speech and action?

Kaalena dhammasavana.m: "timely hearing of Dhamma," means that the occasion for hearing the teachings of the Buddha should be well-timed. Hearing of Dhamma should be opportune.

Obviously, the hearing of Dhamma will be more profitable if regularly attended to at times when one has healthy body and mind: when one is exhausted, except perhaps during disease or suffering, this may lead to sleepiness, and so it is not suitable.

Some of the excellent general occasions for the hearing of the teachings are:

1. Sacred days such as the Full Moons, or during Buddhist festivals.
2. When disease and suffering make one thoughtful enough to want to understand the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), and ready enough to find a way out from the sufferings.
3. When mind is specially inclined towards the teachings, as when one does concentrated meditation practice for some time.

4. When evil thoughts have invaded the mind but have not yet fully taken possession of it.
5. A special meaning of "hearing" these days is knowing Dhamma from book-study. In the Buddha-time knowledge was gained on by hearing but, now, it is more by way of books. This should also find a place here.
6. At the time of death, when concentration of mind can condition a happy rebirth or may even help to attain one of the paths and fruits.

Regarding the time of the day suitable, no definite rules can be laid down, for what suits one may not suit another. It is proper to take into consideration the following general points:

1. There should not be any undue tiredness of body or mind, for this distracts attention and makes one sleepy.
2. There should be sufficient freedom from personal business or domestic worries.
3. The mind should be in a receptive state.
4. The mind also should be free from the influences of all kinds of drugs and intoxicants at the time.

Timely hearing of the Dhamma is a great blessing, since because of it the five hindrances can be abandoned even while one sits there, and the ten fetters too, so that even the three kinds of taints may be exhausted and arahantship may be won through listening attentively. Even if such attainments do not occur, then one comes to know Dhamma which one had not heard before, while what one had heard is learned in detail. With such a store of Dhamma one can apply it to one's life for one's own benefit and the happiness of others. A great blessing!

Stanza IX: "*Patience, meekness when corrected...*"

Khantii: this important virtue, in fact one of the highest, can be translated as patience but it includes the virtues of forbearance, forgiveness and tolerance.

It finds expression as a serene attitude towards stresses in oneself and outside, which enables a person to accept with equanimity the flow of events. Because of this the impressions entering the mind from the sense doors cannot upset the peace reigning there, so one goes on serenely with the work in hand.

Though all sorts of upsetting situations occur and send their disturbing messages to the mind, it does

not become heated. In fact with even a little of this virtue the mind becomes cool, clean and calm, like a refreshing pool of crystal clear water, quite unlike the minds of most people which can rightly be compared to a pot of boiling soup or a cup of water with swirls of color in it.

A person who practices patience has a "cool heart," the mark of a person who has applied the Dhamma to his life. "Cool-heartedness," not worried, flustered or impatient, marks the good Buddhist, while "hot-heartedness" shows how little of Dhamma a person has in his heart.

Khantii is one of the *paaramitaas* (perfections) which one who aspires to Enlightenment must perfect to a far greater degree than just not being impatient or impetuous. This we know from that famous story of the Bodhisatta's life when he was the Preacher of Patience, a monk living harmlessly in the forest who was slaughtered by a maddened king, about which it is said in that story:

In olden times there was a monk,
Of patience he was paragon;
He kept his patience even when

The king of Kaasi murdered him.

Even if our patience is not tried by such extreme events, still we have to encounter heat and cold, hunger and thirst, various insects which attack this body, and the sharp words of others which seem to attack the ego; then there are occasions for being patient about time, and how many times for being patient with the frailties of other people? But the basis of all patience is to be patient with oneself.

Patience is thus the foundation of *mettaa* (loving-kindness). It is reckoned as a great power; and the strength of those who have patience is often praised in Buddhist writings.

Sovacassataa: the meaning given in the commentaries is "one who can easily be addressed, spoken to or advised" and it further means "a person who can be corrected." Also implied are the qualities of tolerance of criticism directed at oneself and courtesy and gratitude in accepting advice.

The commentary says that a person who is meek, when corrected, has the chance to learn Dhamma, which is the opposite of the person who is "difficult

to speak to." The latter "indulge in prevarication, silence or think up virtues and vices."

Prevarication is only a fancy word for lying, the method used by some people when they are admonished. Another way is sullen silence, while the third is blaming the adviser by charging him with faults or else praising one's own virtue.

People like this are difficult to train: others find them hard to get on with. One should examine oneself to find out whether or not one has the blessing of being meek when corrected.

Obviously, a gentle person will only need to be told to do a thing gently: he is like a well-bred horse, needing just a soft touch, - unlike an obstinate beast, which only responds to harsh treatment. He is a thoroughbred with the attributes of broadmindedness of outlook, instant acceptance of good advice, and habitual courtesy in manners and speech.

Sama.naana~n ca dassana.m: "seeing monks or holy men." In the ordinary sense *dassana.m* means "seeing" with the physical eye. But generally the expression signifies more than mere "seeing," even

when used in the restricted sense of seeing in the ordinary way.

The underlying sense is conveyed when the act of visual "seeing" has as its objectives holy persons of purity and real worth. "Seeing" is generally performed with the desire to pay respects to them. This is also the sense of the modern Hindi word *darshan*. For a Buddhist, however, it is not enough just to gaze with devotion and perform acts of worship. So the expression means much more than mere "meeting" or "seeing." It involves mind, speech and body in a harmonious synthesis:

- a. A desire to meet holy persons, particularly monks and nuns following the teachings of the Buddha.
- b. Making genuine efforts to visit them at their monasteries or making use of any opportunity available to pay one's respects to them such as when they are on their rounds for almsfood or during their visits to friends and relatives, or when one is able to receive them reverently at one's house.
- c. Deriving inspiration from their company.

There is no better company than holy persons, whose very presence spreads a purifying aura and inspires a constructive approach to one's problems. Such company is an antidote to evil ways of life besides leading one to discover for oneself spiritual treasures in due course.

In the deeper sense *dassana.m* means seeing with the mental eye, e.g., *~naa.nadassa.m* (insight through knowledge) and *dhamma-dassana* (rightly understanding the Doctrine). So in the deepest sense *dassana.m* means perception of the Noble Truths. All those deeper meanings can come about through simply "seeing the monks."

Kaalena dhammasaakacchaa: "timely discussion on the Dhamma."

As Dhamma is a profound subject it needs sincere effort to understand it properly and grasp it for practical use in life. This can be made easier through discussions with others who have a thorough knowledge of the theory and practice of Dhamma.

Discussions should be well-timed. The right times for discussions with intelligent, wise and experienced people should not be missed, even

though it means personal inconvenience. Still, one should remember that discussions would not be opportune if the convenience of the other person is neglected.

It is particularly timely to discuss the Dhamma when one's mind is troubled, either by defilements of the mind such as uncertainty, or by exterior troubles in the family, at work or in any kind of relationship.

Stanza X: "*Self-restraint and holy life...*"

Tapo: literally means "heat." Its brahmanical meaning was "ascetic practices," which the Buddha showed were useless for the attainment of deliverance. Though he denounced the torment of one's own body, the Buddha used this word to mean self-control, as with the restraint of one's sense faculties.

When these are restrained then such unwholesome mental states as covetousness and grief have no chance to appear.

But "*tapo*" was used in another sense by the Buddha to mean vigorous efforts, the sort which a bhikkhu

has to make if he is to win Enlightenment. It is the kind of effort which *burns up* the defilements.

Brahmacariya.m: holy life. The general Buddhist meaning is "the best life," but in some places it means "the Buddha's Dispensation" (*saasana*) while elsewhere it is "the monk's ideal life" (*sama.na-dhamma*). Here it can include these two besides the more common meaning of "leading a holy life" which implies abstaining from sex.

With *brahmacariya*, may also be included the practice of the Four Sublime States (*brahma-vihaara*), viz: *mettaa* (loving kindness), *karu.naa* (compassion), *muditaa* (altruistic joy) and *upekkhaa* (equanimity).

The word "brahmacariyaa," while including all aspects of Dhamma-practice in its scope, emphasizes moral purity. Through the study and practice of Dhamma, one attains self-control: and an important part of this is sex control, which energy empowers the clear meditative mind as well as providing the drive for beneficial social activities.

Sensual desire generally is a cause of many lives and much suffering. As sexual desire is a concentrated

form of sensuality, and, so the cause of much trouble, the Buddha has shown how it can be checked first by precepts (*siila*) and then through meditation. For the lay followers, sex is limited to that allowed in the third of the five precepts, while for bhikkhus complete sexual abstinence is necessary.

Bhikkhus are bound to practice it strictly and even lay followers may undertake the precept of sexual abstinence if they wish. Worldly life, though not much help for this practice, does not make it impossible. Buddhists observe this vow on the Uposatha days, and some, who are endowed with strong self-control and a firm determination to advance in meditation, practice it all the time while engaged in the general round of worldly duties.

Ariyasaccaana dassana.m, "seeing the Noble Truths," i.e., These are the Four Noble Truths which constitute the central pillar of the Buddha's Dhamma and of which all other Buddhist doctrines are a preparation or elaboration. The Four Noble Truths are the briefest factual description of experience during life. They constitute the unique and vital

discovery made by the Buddha which was announced by him in his very first discourse.

The truths are:

- I. That all forms of existence are subject to suffering, (this is the Truth of Suffering: *dukkha-sacca*).¹²
- II. That craving (*ta.nhaa*) is the cause of suffering (this is the Truth of the Cause of Suffering: *dukkha-samudaya-sacca*).
- III. That the removal of the cause results in the absence of the effect (this is the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering: *dukkha-nirodha-sacca*).
- IV. That the path is the means to attain to the cessation of suffering (this is the Truth of the Path, the Noble Eightfold Path, for the cessation of suffering: *magga-sacca*).

The eight steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are:

1. *sammaa-di.t.thi*: right view
2. *sammaa-sa"nkappa*: right intention
3. *sammaa-aajiiva*: right livelihood
4. *sammaa-kammanta*: right action
5. *sammaa-aajiiva*: right livelihood
6. *sammaa-vaayaama*: right (mental) effort

7. *sammaa-sati*: right mindfulness

8. *sammaa-samaadhi*: right concentration.¹³

These eight steps are usually grouped into the following three divisions:

A. *Siila* (morality): 3, 4, and 5.

B. *Samaadhi* (mental concentration): 6, 7, and 8.

C. *Pa~n~naa* (deep wisdom): 1 and 2.

Knowledge of these truths may be understood intellectual or by way of realization. The former variety of knowledge, as it is intellectual or hearsay evidence, only helps understanding the formulation of these truths, which still remain to be realized. The knowledge gained in this way remains limited as relative truth.

The knowledge based on direct perception is that of realization: it is the "knowledge penetrated by truth" (*pativedha-~naana*). The former type of knowledge is termed "mundane" (*lokiya*) and the latter "supramundane" (*lokuttara*).

As mundane knowledge, the Four Noble Truths are generally perceived as separate events; nevertheless, their understanding helps to dispel certain prejudices and wrong beliefs. In the supramundane stage all the

four truths are simultaneously realized: whoever realizes suffering, also realizes its origin, its cessation and the path to its cessation. Though at first one has an intellectual appreciation of them — for certainly this is also a blessing — here direct perception is meant, the former usually leading to the latter.

The expression means the perception of the Four Noble Truths at work in life. This insight results in the realization of the facts of (1) suffering (*dukkha*), (2) its roots in the cravings of *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* (greed, hatred and delusion), (3) its extinction through the exhaustion of the cravings, and (4) the technique of the conquest. Once direct insight arises, one arrives at the doorway to the Final Goal.

Nibbaanasacchikiriya: "the realization of Nibbaana." Nibbaana, the Final Goal, is a blessed state of freedom from desire, of freedom from greed, hatred and delusion, of perfect safety from the vicissitudes of existence, of bliss that is resplendent, of knowledge that is supreme, in brief, a state that is perfection itself.

In life, one is plagued by desires; in Nibbaana, all desires are extinguished and all clingings have been nullified. In life, one lives in a forest of conflicting views and theories: in Nibbaana all these vanish under the direct perception of truth, just as the dew vanishes with the direct touch of the sun's rays.

The state of Nibbaana which is supramundane (*lokuttara*) is beyond the power of language to describe, for words can only convey *relatively* true concepts.

Therefore, it is beyond the power of anyone, even the Supreme Buddha to describe or define Nibbaana, except by using negation and occasionally more positive imagery. Hence, the Buddha has not described Nibbaana at any length although he uses similes sometimes for effect.

The attainment of Nibbaana is the most excellent achievement, needing a strong determination backed by strenuous endeavors in the right way. These endeavors must be patiently and perseveringly directed towards the eradication of the roots of evil bound up with life, namely *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred) and *moha* (delusion). These evils, rooted in

ignorance (*avijjaa*) generate strong fetters (*sa.myojana*) which tie beings to the painful circle of suffering, the wheel of existence, the round of birth, death and rebirth. The fetters are ten in number:

1. *sakkaayadi.t.thi*: belief in the permanence of personality;
2. *vicikicchaa*: irrational doubts;
3. *siilabbataparaamaasa*: clinging to rituals and superstitions;
4. *kaama-raaga*: craving for sensual enjoyment;
5. *vyaapada*: ill-will;
6. *ruupa-raaga*: craving for existence in fine-material worlds;
7. *aruupa-raaga*: craving for existence in worlds without material form;
8. *maana*: conceit;
9. *uddhacca*: restlessness;
10. *avijjaa*: ignorance.

Those possessed of all the ten fetters are termed ordinary people (*puthujjana*). We are those ordinary people who are in the stormy ocean of existence (*sa.msara*), feverishly twitching to the tune of sensual cravings while tightly bound to the wheel of

suffering. We are prisoners in chains, chains riveted by our cravings.

The dissolution of these fetters is the highest aim of the Buddha's teaching. Though the effort needed for this is very great, the resulting fruit is sweet beyond compare. Once the right course is found, further progress is assured. The right method is mental culture through reflection, meditation and concentration. The resulting insight (*vipassanaa*) is the solvent of all fetters, dissolving them away.

The dissolution of the first three fetters makes one become a *sotaapanna* (stream-winner). This means success in shifting from the stormy ocean of life (*sa.msaara*) to the cool and steady "stream" that unmistakably leads to Nibbaana the release. This is the first stage of Nobility. With the attainment of it, one is known as an Ariya, a Noble One.

In the next stage, the next two fetters are weakened and the Noble One becomes a *sakadaagami* (once-returner) to this world).

The destruction of these two fetters makes the Noble One an *anaagami* (non-returner).

Freedom from all of the ten fetters makes one an arahant, a Perfect One, a Fully Liberated One. He has attained to the Highest: that is to Nibbaana, after death there is no more rebirth for him.

The Buddha is an arahant as he has destroyed all the fetters. He is more than that too, for he reached the goal by a longer and more strenuous path with the object of amply profiting the world through his supreme wisdom and compassion.

The Buddha and the arahants, unlike ordinary people, make no more mental-formations or kamma. They stand with rock-like firmness, unshaken by the winds and storms all around. They are beyond the clutches of any temptations: they are delivered of all evils, are perfectly pure and holy and full of supreme understanding. They have achieved the Goal, Nibbaana. They live only for the period necessary to expend their kammic momentum left from the past. At the end of that, as no more kamma fruits (*kamma-vipaaka*) remain, they attain Parinibbaana, no more to return to rebirth anywhere.

There are obviously two aspects of Nibbaana:

1. *Sa-upaadi-sesa-nibbaana*, Nibbaana with the groups of personality still remaining, such as the Buddha when he taught for 45 years, or an arahant living.
2. *An-upaadi-sesa-nibbaana*, Nibbaana with no more psycho-physical elements existing, i.e., the Parinibbaana of the Buddha or an arahant.

One often hears a strange question: Who or what attains Nibbaana after the final death? The question is meaningless as there are neither any kamma-resultants nor any of the five groups (*pa~ncakkhandho*) of the psycho-physical being left; so the question does not arise as to who or what "enters" Nibbaana. To explain this more fully one should know about one's "self" and what this means.

The Buddha's analysis of personality reveals five groups (*khandha*) as making up a human being: *ruupakkhandha* (physical body), *vedanaakkhandha* (feelings), *sa~n~naakkhandha* (perceptions), *sankhaarakkhandha* (mental formations and their fruits) and *vi~n~na.nakkhandha* (consciousness). A common classification is the grouping of these five into two sections: *naama* (mind, i.e., the psychological part of personality) comprising the

last four, and *ruupa* (body, i.e., the physical aspect of personality), the first group. All these are characterized with the three qualities common to all living beings (impermanence, suffering and not-self). And as there is nothing in the human person outside these five, a human being is in reality without a permanent ego-entity, self or soul. He is like a bubble of water, or a cart on the road, things which give the impression of being entities because of the combination of certain factors, but which have no permanent substance to endure forever.

There are two aspects of truth (*sacca*), namely,

- 1.the conventional truth (*vohaara-sacca* or *sammuti-sacca*) and
- 2.the ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca*). The former means "things as they appear" and the latter, "things as they really are."

The Buddha, in his discourses, while addressing ordinary people or while expounding the common-sense viewpoint, generally spoke of conventional truth. Thus in this sutta the term "*atta*" self; (see stanza 3) is used only as conventional mode of speech, meaning "the human being as he appears."

In the ultimate sense the personality is a flux, ever-changing and never the same even for two consecutive fractions of a moment. This is the doctrine of *anatta*. It is a unique Buddhist discovery — in fact the most revolutionary discovery ever made in the field of human personality. Without a proper grasp of its import, Buddhism will be understood only superficially.

The conventional recognition of a self as a convenient mode of speech, however, should not lead people astray into belief in the existence of a "higher self." There is no "higher self" or soul in the ultimate sense, for no "self" of any kind, higher or lower, here or hereafter, can be found. That is why the Buddha laid emphasis on "selflessness" (*anatta*) and classed it as one of the three fundamental characteristics of all living beings, including human personality.

The proper study for a man is himself, for once the emptiness of self is understood, all the rest becomes easy to grasp. As tersely explained in the *Visuddhimagga* according to ultimate truth:

- There is suffering but no sufferer,

- There are deeds, but no doer,
- There is Nibbaana but none to enter it,
- There is the Path, but no traveler on it.

Yet, with this direct view of truth, in which personality finds no foothold at all, the Buddha did not ignore the truth of the conventional self. He gave it the recognition it merited, and used it as a base for directing the individual ultimately to the realization of the truth of "non personality" (*anatta*). This is where the expression *attasammaapanidhi* "one's self rightly directed": (stanza 3) eventually leads. Thus, evil tendencies and practices (really existing because of the love for or lust about self) give way to the wholesome tendencies and practices, once the delusion of self is penetrated.

From the very start, one should know that the "self" is accepted merely as a convenient or conventional designation and that its apparent reality can certainly be understood as a delusion, once its non-existence in the ultimate sense is realized. The very fact of starting the life journey in this way becomes the "act of directing or setting oneself in the right course by oneself." Though there may be external help available, the emphasis is on the "right direction"

and self-reliance. All available wholesome assistance should be used, but not too much dependence should be shown to any aid apart from that springing from within one's self. So Nibbaana is not attained by any person (= self) in the highest sense.

Realization of Nibbaana means at least an actual glimpse of it, which can be had by no less a person than a *sotaapanna* (the winner of the stream leading to Nibbaana). It may here be pointed out that the expression "the realization of Nibbaana" implies that by one's own efforts one reaches the goal. Through determination and perseverance in the right direction the goal is reached, and not through grace: it is not a "Gift from the Heavens," but the fruit of one's supreme endeavors. In brief, the goal is one's own earnings: verily Nibbaana is well earned. Blessed is the person who earns it.

Stanza XI: "*Though touched by worldly circumstances...*"

Phu.t.thassa lokadhammehi citta.m yassa na kampati: "a mind which does not waver when touched by worldly conditions." Worldly conditions

inseparable from life are eight in number: gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain. While ordinary people grasp the pleasant halves of these pairs and reject the unpleasant (which means they use greed and hatred), Noble Ones, especially arahants, are not shaken by either of the halves. We, as ordinary people, should try to develop more equanimity towards gains and loss, and so on.

Asoka.m (sorrowless), *viraaja.m*, (unstained by passion) and *khema.m* (secure from sensuality) are the attribute, of an arahant. These describe the mental state of a Fully Liberated One. The mind of such a person is unique: free from disturbances, purified of passion and finished with sensuality; it is calm and serene, without the storms of desires and the waves of worries. The worldly conditions (*lokadhamma*) do not sway him: he stands firmly, witnessing but untouched by the changeful and sorrowful drama of life going on all around.

Stanza XII: "*Since by acting in this way...*"

This stanza concludes the sutta.

The fulfillment of these blessings is shown by:

1. invincibility everywhere
2. perfect happiness and security.

This is the sublimest of all attainments, the Everest of human achievements, Nibbaana in this life.

4. The Highroad of Blessings

i. The Thirty-eight Blessings

Stanza I

The Buddha was asked:

What are the highest Blessings in life?

The Blessed One replied: The Supreme Blessings are:

Stanza II

1. *Asevanaa ca baalaana.m*: Not associating with fools.
2. *Pan.ditaana~n ca seyanaa*: Associating with the wise.
3. *Puujaa ca puujaniiyaana.m*: Reverencing those worthy of respect.

Stanza III

4. *Patiruupadesavaaso*: Residence in a suitable locality.
5. *Pubbe ca katapu~n~nataa*: Having made merit in the past.

6. *Attasammaapa.nidhi*: One's mind properly directed.

Stanza IV

7. *Bahusacca~n*: Profound learning.

8. *Bahusippa~n*: Proficiency in one's work.

9. *Vinayo ca susikkhito*: Well-learned moral discipline

10. *Subhaasitaa ca yaa vaacaa*: Gracious kindly speech.

Stanza V

11. *Maataapitu upa.t.thaana.m*: Giving support to parents.

12. *Puttadaarassa sa''ngaho*: Cherishing wife and children.

13. *Anaakulaa ca kammantaa*: Business pursuits, peaceful and free from conflicts.

Stanza VI

14. *Daana*: Acts of giving.

15. *Dhammacariyaa*: Conduct according to Dhamma.

16. *Naatakaana~n ca sa''ngaho*: Helping one's relatives.

17. *Anavajjaani kammaani*: Blameless actions.

Stanza VII

18. *AArati paapaa*: shunning evil.

19. *Virati paapaa*: Abstaining from evil.
20. *Majjapaanaa ca sa~n~namo*: Refraining from intoxicants.
21. *Appamaado ca dhammesu*: Diligence in practice of what is Dhamma.

Stanza VIII

22. *Gaaravo*: Reverence.
23. *Nivaato*: Humility.
24. *Santu.t.thi*: Contentment.
25. *Kata~n~nutaa*: Gratefulness.
26. *Kaalena dhammasavana.m*: Timely hearing of the Dhamma

Stanza IX

27. *Khantii*: Patience
28. *Sovacassataa*: Meekness when corrected.
29. *Sama.naana~n ca dassana.m*: Meeting (seeing) monks.
30. *Kaalena dhammasaakacchaa*: Discussing the Dhamma at the proper time.

Stanza X

31. *Tapo*: Energetic self-restraint.
32. *Brahmacariyaa*: Holy and chaste life.

33. *Ariyasaccaana dassana.m*: Insight into the Noble Truths.

34. *Nibbaana sacchikiriya*: Realization of Nibbaana.

Stanza XI

35. *Phu.t.thassa lokadhammehi citta.m yassa na kampati*: A mind unshaken by the ups and downs of life.

36. *Asoka.m*: Freedom from sorrow.

37. *Viraja.m*: Freedom from defilements of passion.

38. *Khema.m*: Perfect security.

Stanza XII

Etaadisaani katvaana sabbattham-aparaajitaa sabbattha sothi.m gacchanti: Those who have acted in this way cannot be defeated and always live in safety.

ii. General Review

The thirty-eight blessings which are detailed in the Mahaamangala Sutta are not arranged in random order. Their arrangement is strictly logical and their sequence is natural and progressive.

Up to this point we have dealt with the various issues individually because an analytic study was

necessary for the proper understanding of the subject.

Now, with the perspective of the entire sutta, we are in a position to consider the subject as a whole. This enlarged view, while giving us a chance to appreciate the cultural integrity of the sutta, also gives an understanding of the synthesis of its thirty-eight constituents. These constituents are so arranged that they not only follow one another in proper sequence, but they also group themselves into categories which are themselves in the progressive order of development in Dhamma.

Before we pass on to a systematic classification of these blessings, it will be refreshing to read the following comments on the sutta, adapted from Shway Yoe¹⁴ who is quoting the Christian Bishop Bigandet:

"Within a narrow compass, the Buddha has condensed an abridgment of almost all moral virtues. The first portion of these precepts contains injunctions to shun all that may prove an impediment to the practice of good works. The second part inculcates the necessity of regulating

one's mind and intention for a regular discharge of the duties incumbent on each man in his separate station. Then, follows a recommendation to bestow assistance on parents, relatives, and all men in general. Next to that, we find recommended the virtues of humility, resignation,¹⁵ gratitude and patience. After this, the Teacher insists on the necessity of studying the Law, visiting the religious, conversing on religious subjects. When this is done, one is recommended to study with great attention the four great Truths, and keep the mind's eye ever fixed on the happy state of Nibbaana, which, though as yet distant, ought never to be lost sight of. Thus prepared, one must be bent upon acquiring the qualifications befitting the true sage who would remain firm, fearless, and unmoved, even in the midst of the ruins of the crumbling universe: the Buddhist sage ever remains calm, composed, and unshaken among all the vicissitudes of life. There is again clearly pointed out the final end to be arrived at, *viz.*, that of perfect mental stability. This state is the foreshadowing of Nibbaana."

iii. A Synthetic View

The ingredients of the Mahaa Mangala Sutta, because of their moral excellence and practical

appeal, are capable of many classifications. Thus, the thirty-eight blessings can be presented in a variety of combinations. The author, after thinking deeply over the possible groupings, has arrived at a pattern worked out by himself. This classification is based on practical considerations and is expected to be generally useful.

Before we present our own classification, it is proposed to offer another, the essential feature of which is the division of the sutta into the three classical sections, namely *siila* (moral culture), *samaadhi* (mental culture) and *pa~n~naa* (wisdom). The credit for developing this admirable classification goes to Mangala U Ba Than, the very honorific prefix to whose name is significant of the excellent work done by him in Burma in popularizing the teaching and the practice of the Mangala Sutta.¹⁶ He groups the first twenty-one *mangalas* under *siila* and divides them into five groups: these ensure the basic training of the individual as well as assisting with the discharge of his obligations in the social sphere. The next nine *mangalas* are classed under *samaadhi* as aspects of mental culture. The last eight *mangalas* come under

pa~n~naa and are either the practice towards or the fruit of wisdom and insight.

Steady and regular practice of the twenty-one *mangalas* grouped under *siila* brings the utmost happiness, prosperity and satisfaction possible in the human state. These admirable achievements are not only adequately stabilized and ensured against possible setbacks, but are also further enhanced by the practice of the fine *mangalas* grouped under *samaadhi*. The last eight *mangalas* grouped under *pa~n~naa* assist the progressive realization of the highest wisdom.

The above classification is schematically represented below:¹⁷

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. <i>Siila</i> : moral culture
(21 <i>mangalas</i>) | 1. Fundamental rules: M ₁ M ₂
M ₃ M ₄ M ₅ M ₆ |
| A. The preparation | 2. Essential training of the senses, body, mind & speech:
M ₇ M ₈ M ₉ M ₁₀ |
| B. Compulsory | 3. The foundation of the |

obligations	domestic order: M ₁₁ M ₁₂ M ₁₃
	4. Social welfare: M ₁₄ M ₁₅ M ₁₆ M ₁₇
C. Vigilance	5. Protection against evil: M ₁₈ M ₁₉ M ₂₀ M ₂₁
II. <i>Samaadhi</i> : mental culture (9 <i>mangalas</i>)	M ₂₂ M ₂₃ M ₂₄ M ₂₅ M ₂₆ M ₂₇ M ₂₈ M ₂₉ M ₃₀
III. <i>Pa~n~naa</i> : wisdom culture (8 <i>mangalas</i>)	M ₃₁ M ₃₂ M ₃₃ M ₃₄ M ₃₅ M ₃₆ M ₃₇ M ₃₈

iv. Our Classification

The Mahaa Mangala Sutta, a well and charted course of personal culture and progress, is an excellent guide for reaching even the highest goal. It is a four-sectioned ladder which helps one to climb step by step to the zenith of noble achievements.

The ideal of life is deliverance from fears and insecurities. This is achieved through steady strenuous effort, and righteous wayfaring in the world. Such a great venture as this obviously needs adequate preparation and thorough training: The

Mahaa Mangala Sutta indicates not only the course of the preparatory training but also safely guides the individual through the journey of life and ultimately leads him to the secure haven of Nibbaana.

The first five *mangalas* (1-5) provide material for the foundation of life's building. The sixth, (6) gives the necessary plan for the construction work, while the next four (7-10) complete the structure. In this way the building is made ready to house the other *mangalas*. This constitutes the phase of preparation.

The next phase is concerned with how the building already prepared is occupied. The first seven *mangalas* (11-17) of this, deal with the proper discharge of domestic duties and social obligations. The next three (18-20) are a matter of personal conduct, and the one (21) following these aims at conserving the progress hitherto achieved through the practice of all the twenty *mangalas* mentioned so far. The next five *mangalas* (22-26) are the cultivation of the higher virtues which are absolutely essential for venturing into the cultivation of the Dhamma's highest aspects. Thus, through the operation of the last sixteen *mangalas* the residence of life, prepared by the first ten becomes a workshop

producing the goods of worldly obligations and the cultivation of benevolent feelings. This is the phase of "wayfaring in the world which transforms the building into a temple of life."

The next stage is spiritual growth. This invites the occupation of the temple by the most refined and exalted *mangalas*. The cultivation of two *mangalas* (27-28) leads to ability in the practice of the spiritual life and the next two (29-30) make contact with those leading a religious life. Then four more *mangalas* (31-34) open the gates of realization of the Dhamma. And, the last four *mangalas* (35-38) constitute the Great Awakening which transforms the temple into a lighthouse for humanity. This is the ultimate benefit of Dhamma-practice, the signs of which are the invincibility of such a person and Supreme Bliss.

Schematically listed the above phases are:

I. The Preparation:

1. Laying the right foundation through
 - a. Suitable associations: $M_1 M_2 M_3$
 - b. A good place to live: M_4
 - c. Past merits: M_5

2. Right planning: M₆
 3. Right training: M₇ M₈ M₉ M₁₀
- II. Wayfaring in the world:
1. Basic responsibilities: M₁₁ M₁₂ M₁₃
 2. Social obligations: M₁₄ M₁₅ M₁₆ M₁₇
 3. Self-protection: M₁₈ M₁₉ M₂₀
 4. Conservation of personal progress: M₂₁
 5. Cultivation of higher qualities: M₂₂ M₂₃ M₂₄
M₂₅ M₂₆
- III. Spiritual growth:
1. Spiritual eligibility: M₂₇ M₂₈
 2. Contact with religious life: M₂₉ M₃₀
 3. On the path: M₃₁ M₃₂ M₃₃ M₃₄
 4. The fruit: M₃₅ M₃₆ M₃₇ M₃₈
- IV. The conclusion of life: The *summum bonum*:
1. Perfect invincibility of the person
 2. Durable happiness.

A comparison of the above classification with that of Mangala U Ba Than shows several points of contact. The major agreement is in the phase of preparation, which in both cases is taken up by the first ten *mangalas*. Also the terminal sections in both cases are identical.

An examination of our classification makes it evident that section one of the sutta is concerned with preparation for the second section, which in turn is a preparation for section number three. The fourth section is the final result.

Each of these sections has several stages. The last stage of the first section qualifies the person to enter the second section of the worldly journey: and the last stage of the second section brings the pilgrim right to the threshold of the third section. The final stage of the third section spells the supreme realization of the highest aim that people can aspire to. The fourth phase is the goal itself.

The traveler through the above sections is really a pilgrim who takes up the journey of life with a definite plan covering bodily, verbal and mental activities: his object is to make of life a happy and moral means to a glorious end. The Mahaa Mangala Sutta provides the map which takes the pilgrim safely through life's journey to the final destination so that he gains deliverance from *dukkha* and the delusions of existence.

The eleven stanzas, comprising the reply to the issue raised in the first stanza, are apportioned to the four sections as follows:

1. The Preparation: first three stanzas.
2. Wayfaring in the World: next four stanzas.
3. The Religious Life: next three stanzas.
4. The Highest Goal: last stanza.

The position of Wayfaring in the World between the stages of Preparation and that of the Religious Life, while it does not mean that marriage is essential for all people at some period in life, does lay emphasis on the cultivation of moral principles and in the discharge of social and familial obligations. According to the Buddha and in contrast with the four stages of Hindu life, marriage is not a compulsory institution, though it provides sometimes a fruitful field for the cultivation of certain virtues and so appears here as an intermediate phase which can be utilized as a training ground for entrance upon the third phase of spiritual values. Thus marriage is an optional part of the second section of life. As a means to a desirable end it is commendable, but if accepted as an end in itself, it clogs the wheels of progress and becomes a

sort of a labyrinth beset with passions and crowded with peculiar obstacles, which do not easily allow the pilgrim a chance to find the path leading to awakening. Therefore, those who can practice the necessary *mangalas* of this stage, as monks and nuns, for instance, without entering into matrimonial bondage, are free to do so, the emphasis being on the cultivation of the associated virtues and the adequate discharge of certain obligations expected of the pilgrim. However, in case marriage is excluded from the program, the question of obligations due to wife and children obviously does not arise, as the pilgrim is quite free from this burden.

5. Conclusion

Usually human beings are heavily burdened, fettered with the weighty chains riveted by themselves, the chains of fears and superstitions, dogmas and rituals. Egoistic tendencies worked by the forces of greed, hatred and delusion bring about this bondage. Bound by these self-created chains, human beings suffer repeated difficulties, hardships and miseries, which rob people of self-confidence and courage. The result is belief in prayers and priests, rites and rituals, sacrifices and sacraments, speculations and

the supernatural, all prompting slavish dependence on extraneous agencies and forces, imaginary or real. Thus, the mind of man is entombed by the prison walls of his own making.

The Buddha was moved by great compassion at the sight of the pitiable condition of humanity, drowning in its own blind beliefs. He sounded the clarion call of freedom and showed the right way of breaking through the self-made crust of superstitions smothering individual initiative, confidence and courage. His Mahaa Mangala Sutta is a masterly antidote to all blind beliefs and superstitions.

When approached to declare the *ma"ngalaani* or "auspicious signs," he enumerated instead the "acts of blessedness," thus bringing about a psychological revolution in the beliefs of many people.

Every section of the sutta is a storehouse full of practical wisdom. Precious ideas and valuable counsel are packed in every line in condensed form so that their expansion is really necessary. Just as letters were micro-photographed during the war to reduce freight in air shipment and then "blown up" before delivery, so the thoughts and ideas behind the

factors of the Mahaa Mangala Sutta have to be expanded for easy study and understanding.

It should, however, be pointed out that though the essentials of the enlarged picture will not change at different times and places, yet certain factors, such as the color of the picture and the texture of the materials used, may differ. That is why the practical exposition of the sutta is sure to vary under different circumstances, without altering the central values.

In the eleven stanzas of the sutta is given counsel which can make anyone an ideal citizen. There are instructions which excellently prepare people for a fruitful journey through life. Further counsel progressively matures the individual till he successfully passes from the worldly state to the sphere of higher virtues and certain spiritual experiences. These in due course lead to perfect liberation. Thus the phases of preparation, worldly life, religious life and spiritual consummation follow one another in logical sequence. In this way all the due obligations are adequately discharged. The ultimate fruits are flawless happiness and perfect security.

It is undoubtedly true that the sutta is an excellent moral foundation for children. But that is just a beginning. The sutta also is a cultural, moral and spiritual compass for guiding the ship of life through the stormy ocean of existence to the safe final haven of the Further Shore.

At every step in life, at every stage, and under all circumstances, the sutta has practical advice to offer, advice which if followed may be expected to lead to the effective solution of many complicated problems. The sutta provides unfailing guidance not only to a child at school or to youngsters in their teens but also to grown-ups, no matter what age and what their status or work, race or nation, creed or education. Homes, schools, universities, law courts, hospitals, factories, monasteries, government and business offices, laboratories and all the other places of human activity can derive substantial benefit from the teachings of the Mahaa Mangala Sutta.

A poor and humble person may gain from the practice of these golden precepts even more than wealthy man: a prime minister may benefit as much as any humble citizen, a new *saamana* (novice) as much as a senior bhikkhu, a laborer in the field as

much as a king on his throne, a school teacher, a compounder or a petition-writer as much as a professor or a doctor or a pleader. The sutta is a general prescription most excellent for the difficulties of everyone, for alleviating moral decay and for mending the spiritual fractures of all men and women, of all times, and places of all races and religions. Such is its grandeur! Such is the glory of this short discourse which may rightly be designated a universal panacea.

In the practical application of the teachings of the sutta is the effective solution of all problems whether personal or domestic, private or public, national or international. The benefit, however, is in accordance with the degree of practice, which if habitual leads to a mental state in which it is natural to distinguish between the *mangala* and the *amangala*¹⁸ practices and to flow only with the former according with one's practice.

Though the sutta is a part of the Buddhist canon, its contents breathe such a harmonious air that they are the property of the whole human race. In its sublime teaching the distinctions of creed, race and nationality vanish and the rigid frontiers of religion

melt away, making the peoples of the human race seem as members of one undivided family. Bound together by common problems and by the urge to find their solutions, mankind is certain to benefit from the wisdom enshrined in the sutta.

The teachings of the sutta are an excellent instrument for conditioning humanity in the direction of intellectual clarity and emotional purity towards efficiency in work and amity in human relationship.

The world today sorely needs such advice. Shaken by the two worst wars in history and tormented by the possibility of yet a third one, worse than any before, most of the world's peoples today are naturally thirsting for peace. To quench this thirst, apart from suitable economic readjustments, intellectual honesty and emotional strength are essential.

They are of paramount importance: in fact, much more important than the deluded trust in the strength of armies and the hollow hope in the potency of atomic and hydrogen bombs and other devilish weapons. It is our experience that wars, far from

solving the problems causing them, create more unsolvable problems in their wake. To go to war heedlessly is madness and a suicidal policy. Besides the fact of coming to blows is evidently an admission of the moral and intellectual bankruptcy among those nations which fight.

The trouble with the world today is more a matter of its individual human inhabitants than the objective world's state. The causes of these troubles are greed, hatred and delusion. These fires, within, manifest as conflicts, without, - unleashing manifold sufferings.

There can be no peace without moral and intellectual concord among mankind. There can be no real love in human relationships so long as the fires of hate, dishonesty, anger and greed fiercely burn in the human heart.

Like war, peace has to be won. The Mahaa Mangala Sutta of the Buddha shows the way to do it. It shows the way of genuine victory through non-violence and real love. Rather than conquering thousands and millions in battle, the Buddha teaches the conquest of self through self-culture and self-control. This is a victory well worth winning! It leads to peace, its,

substance is unshakable happiness and its fruit, perfect security.

Effective victory over self illumines every sphere of life: personal, family, social, national and international; also physical, mental, moral and spiritual. Thus, the Mahaa Mangala Sutta deals with the harmonious development of the whole man in his total environment.

There are thirty-eight *mangalaani* or acts of blessedness, each of which is designated the "best" or the "highest." In view of the fact that these acts include such different spheres as worldly pursuits, family life, religious practices and spiritual ideals, it may reasonably be asked as to why all of these are each called the best, as "mangalam-uttama.m."

The sutta deals with personal life as a whole. But, as life has different stages, different precepts condition each stage towards a wholesome state. Step by step the evolution of the individual proceeds, each step having some acts or blessings as unique to itself. As the individual progresses, his attention increases and his outlook is focused on different ends.

On looking back he may well feel like a mature person looking at the toys of his childhood. Certainly, what was highest or best then is not so for him now. And, it is true too that what he regards as the highest or the best will be rejected by a child. At the different stages of life different counsels are needed, the best for each phase of the journey. Just as man going off to market with a bag of charcoal on his back, on finding wool discards the charcoal, on finding silver discards wool, on finding gold discards silver, on finding diamonds discards gold, and on finding the secret of enduring happiness discards everything else, so too we successively shift the level of our outlook, focusing our consciousness to ideals higher and higher till the highest is reached.

The Mahaa Mangala Sutta gives the best counsel for each stage of life: it is thus that worldly felicity and spiritual bliss cease to be conflicting ideals. Every ideal that is good, is "best" in its own place. That is why each of the thirty-eight Blessings is the "highest" and the "best."

So great is the importance of the Mahaa Mangala Sutta that if one had to face a situation where it was necessary to surrender all the teachings of the

Buddha except a single discourse, one would do well to hold on to the Mahaa Mangala Sutta. Having this as a possession it would be possible, even quite easy to reconstruct the entire teachings of the Buddha.

This opinion is ventured to emphasize vividly the practical value of the sublime sutta, which provides an all-round and unfailing guidance for worldly promotion and spiritual salvation. The understanding and proper practice of the sutta would help the world more towards prosperity, moral excellence, harmony, peace, happiness and spiritual glory, than a hundred international conferences.

Because man has become more clever than wise, he has to face endless trouble today. Unless his cleverness is properly balanced by wisdom, there is every danger of his being wiped out of existence, not unlike the fate suffered by a monkey recklessly playing with a flaming cigarette lighter surrounded by open drums of gasoline. Certainly there is enough of the monkey still in man.

The Mahaa Mangala Sutta holds out the promise of evolving man towards true humanity. It makes of him a complete personality, physically healthy,

vocationally efficient, intellectually brilliant, socially benevolent, culturally talented, morally wholesome, materially resplendent and spiritually unexcelled.

The Mahaa Mangala Sutta is truly the

Hope Of The World

May all be well and happy!

Notes

1. This was held in the first year of the Buddhist Era, three months after the Final Nibbaana of the Great Master. No unenlightened persons sat in the Convocation which consisted of 500 arahants, who recited, classified and arranged the Teachings in seven months. Ven. AAnanda recited the suttas, including of course the Mahaa Mangala Sutta.

2. This must be a similar work to the book of the same name which is widely studied now in Thailand. It was written by Phra Sirimangalaacariya Thera of Chiangmai (northern Siam) and finished in C.E. 1528.

3. Mangalasutta Vannanaa by Ven. K. Gunaratana Thera. Published in Penang 1952.

4. Available from Buddhist Publication Society.
5. Strokes / in the Paali text indicate breaks for breath while chanting.
6. This refers to the time when he listened to the Buddha's discourses. He attained arahantship immediately before the commencement of the First Council — BPS ed.
7. See Ledi Sayadaw, *The Noble Eightfold Path and its Factors Explained*, BPS Wheel Publication No. 245/247, for a diagram illustrating this.
8. For details see the *Dhammapada* verses of the chapters on Fools, *Baalavaggo* and Wise, *Pa.n.ditavaggo*.
9. These are five obstacles blinding mental vision: lustful desire (*kaamachanda*), ill-will (*vyaapaada*), lethargy and drowsiness (*thiina-middha*), agitation and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha*). When these are present in the mind, discrimination, judgment and action become faulty.
10. What about concern for others? This is just the beginning stage of practice when one must be concerned with one's own good conduct. Later,

having developed in Dhamma, one can manifest compassion for other people.

11. In the days of the Buddha women were not as mobile socially as they are now, so he had no cause to say "cherishing one's husband and children" but this is obviously included here.

12. One should remember that the English word "*suffering*" does not include all *dukkha*. All experience is impermanent, unreliable or insecure and therefore *dukkha*. Pleasant experience too is *dukkha* but it cannot be called suffering.

13. For a systematic description of the path see Ledi Sayadaw, *The Noble Eightfold Path and its Factors Explained*, BPS Wheel Publication No. 245/247

14. *Shway Yoe, The Burman: His Life and Notions.* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1896) p. 571.

15. But "resignation" is not in the sutta, nor a virtue recommended by the Buddha. See stanzas VIII-IX.

16. The information given here is from conversations over a week between the author and Mangala U Ba Than at the former's residence during the summer of 1954.

17. "M" stands for "*mangala*" and the number following it represents the number among the 38 blessings as listed in Section I of this chapter.

18. i.e., inauspicious, evil, and not commendable.

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