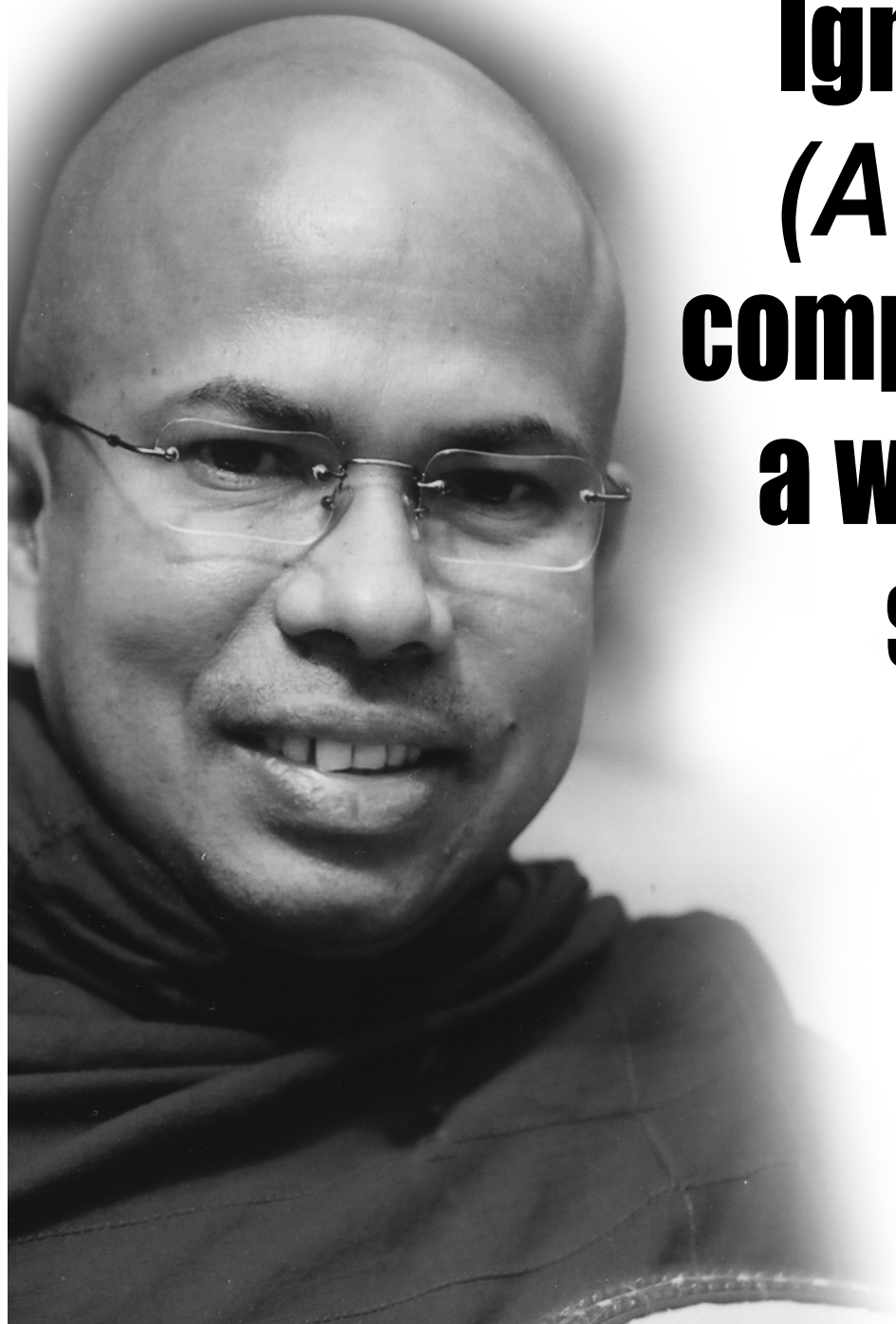


Ignorance (Avijja) is comparable to a wakeless sleep



When we read and listen to the dhamma, we come across a lot of Buddhist phrases and terms which are being misrepresented most of the time. Some phrases and terms are being used to denote different meanings according to different contexts. This has led to the distortion of the Buddhist teachings to a great extent. In this discussion, Kiribathgoda Gnanananda Thero explains the true meanings of some of the commonly used Buddhist concepts and phrases in detail.

Question: Venerable Sir, the phrase *Majjhima patipada* (The Middle Path) is used in different contexts to denote different meanings in the present society. Some individuals use this phrase to denote how they proceed with their normal affairs without going into extremes. As a result, the profundity of this Buddhist phrase has lost considerably. What does this phrase really mean?

Answer: The Middle Path is none other than the "Noble Eightfold Path" (*Ariya Attangika Magga*), namely, Right View (*Samma Ditthi*), Right Thought (*Samma Sankappa*), Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*), Right Bodily Action (*Samma Kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*Samma Ajiva*), Right Effort (*Samma Vayama*), Right Mindfulness (*Samma Sathi*), Right Concentration (*Samma Samadhi*). The middle Path has been clearly explained in the *Dhammacakka Sutta*.

Question: What is the true nature of Avijja (Ignorance)?

Answer: Avijja is an inconceivable condition.

I believe it is neither a fake sleep nor a real sleep. It is deeper than a real sleep. A person could be woken up from a real sleep. A person in fake sleep pretends to be asleep. Therefore, that person may be awakened from sleep. If it is a real sleep a person is capable of perceiving the world on waking. A person with Avijja (ignorance) falls into a far deeper sleep than a real sleep. This state is analogous to a person in a "coma". A person is alive, but in a state of coma. This person breathes; his/her heart pulsates; blood circulation takes place, even though other bodily actions do not function. A person could live in a coma for many years. Ignorance has the hallmarks of a state of a coma. It is a very daunting task to transcend "Ignorance"

Question: Is "impermanence" (*anicca*) a scary phrase?

Answer: Not at all. Some are scared to talk about Impermanence. Some are apprehensive about "repulsiveness" (*Asubha*). Generally, human beings are scared to perceive the truth. This fear existed among the people during the time of the Gautama Buddha as well. Allegations were made against the Buddha that the Buddha undermined the livelihood, marriages and births of people. The cause for these allegations was, again, the "Ignorance". The word "impermanence" creates a psychosis in human beings that are unable to seek the understanding of life. Such a human being dislikes Morality (*Sila*) and the Restraint of Senses (*Indriya Samvarya*) due to bleak mentality. Some say "We are not worried as we do not commit any sinful acts".

In reality, it is no easy task to proceed on the dhamma path. One has to contem-

plate the nature of impermanence, non-self, becoming otherwise (*viparinama*), and change constantly. One needs a lot of merit to achieve this. We cannot come to a conclusion that a particular being is devoid of merits. Human nature is very complex and human beings possess latent skills and good fortune. Merit - based good fortune paves the way for a person to approach the Buddha's dispensation with the help of noble friends. One has to go for the refuge in the Triple Gems to achieve this.

The Gautama Buddha proclaims, "Monks, there will be occasions where there will be no one to point out reality. But, a being will have been born with a mindset to comprehend the reality. This being will possess good fortune. However, he will not have access to reality. This era will dawn at some point in time in the future".

This shows the possibility of the existence of people with merit based good fortune who could comprehend the reality, no matter the era is. However, the darkness of Ignorance shrouds the light of realization.

Question: There are hidden talents in children today. Some are of the opinion that today's children are more intelligent than those who lived those days. How could we look at this exceptionality in terms of the Buddhist doctrine?

Answer: This situation prevails all over the world. When demerit becomes prevalent in beings, greed (*lobha*), hatred (*Dosa*), and wrongful view (*Michcha Ditthi*) dominate the world. Then, the greed would exceed the limits of means to satisfy it. Immorality would take root in the society. Bond between parents and children would be lost. Moral standards in children would be lost. This is a state of insatiability based on unrighteousness.

When hatred dominates a society, people attempt to spread wrongful views (*Michcha Ditthi*) through cruel means. This is happening right now. We are at the door step where the life span of man is getting shorter and shorter. Life span of man will reach 10 years one day in the future. People will get married when they reach 05 years old. By this time, food such as ghee, butter, gingely oil, jaggery and salt will disappear from the planet. Consumption of salt would become unpalatable and people would begin to consume rough type of food.

The concept of "merit" will disappear from the man in the ten-year-life span period. Gem studded, gold plated weapons are available today in order to kill human beings. These are innovative weapons which are in high demand today. Why do we need weapons? Aren't those for assassination of humans? Can you notice how the foundation is being gradually laid for a world without the concept of "merit"? Verbal and mental unwholesome deeds will become a commonplace. Intention for committing wholesome deeds will also disappear completely. A person who respects parents, adults, and teachers will be ridiculed.

This state of affairs will surface among the clergy as well. Righteous monks and their followers will also be subjected to ridicule. Immoral clergy will become a praiseworthy lot. Man with a ten-year-lifespan will not be considerate about his parents, kith and kin. They will live with a mentality of animals. Hatred will be prevalent among them. Sadistic mentality will dominate this society. Even in the society today, we can see how this brutal mentality is gradually spreading. Reprisal attacks take place on the part of many terrorist organizations. Terrorists go to the extent of killing their own people when they oppose the acts of terrorism. This type of action would bring about hatred between parents, between parents and children, and among other family members as well. At this stage, urge to kill another human being will be strongly felt. With this brutal mentality, human beings will be tempted to handle various types of weapons which could be remotely controlled. Right now, man keeps developing such technology.

Most important and scary part of the Buddhist teaching which deals with a situation like this is the next era where man perceive each other as creatures and kill one another. The teaching indicates, "Reptilian minded man will kill one another for a period of seven days. Only a handful of men will survive. Those survivors will look into the causes led to this carnage, in order to rebuild the world. Sadly, this will only happen after a colossal damage to human beings"

Seven day carnage means a rain of arms. Some will survive by means of hiding from the arms rain. After seven days, those who survive will come out of their hiding to cry and embrace one another in shock. Then, they will consider the consequences of killing and use of arms. This is how moral qualities are gradually integrated into their lives.

Question: Is this the era that the Maitreya Buddha is supposed to be born?

Answer: Yes. During this era, man's life span will lengthen gradually. Ultimately, Life span will extend up to 80,000 years. The Maitreya Buddha will be born in this point in time.

Now it is clear that the world is progressing towards an era where the life spans of man will be a maximum of ten years. When we compare the present day with the time of the Buddha, we notice that the life span of man has gradually shortened to a great extent.

Some of the Arahants (monks who attained the forth stage of enlightenment) enjoyed longevity up to 160 years. For instance, Arahant Bakkula lived 160 years, Arahant Anuruddha lived 150 years, Arahant Maha Kassapa lived 130 years, Arahant Ananada lived 120, and Arahant bikkhuni Vishahka lived 120 years.

When we observe the deadly diseases people contract at young ages today, we

Ven. Kiribathgoda Gnanananda Thero, Mahmevnaava Asapuwa
(Buddhist Monastery), Toronto
Translated by Athula Sibera