

LAMPS THAT WILL NOT BURN OUT; FLOWERS THAT WILL NOT WITHER... :

Supreme bliss

Samangie WETTIMUNY



Following is an exclusive discussion on the Dhamma with renowned meditation Guru and the Spiritual Advisor of the Sri Kalyani Yogasrama Samstha, Most Venerable Na Uyane Ariyadhamma Maha Thera of the Na Uyana Forest Monastery, Kurunegala. Special religious ceremonies and Adishtana Poojas were held in the monastery last week to invoke blessings on all Sri Lankans to coincide with the Thera's 73rd Birthday and completion of 55 years in the Sasana.

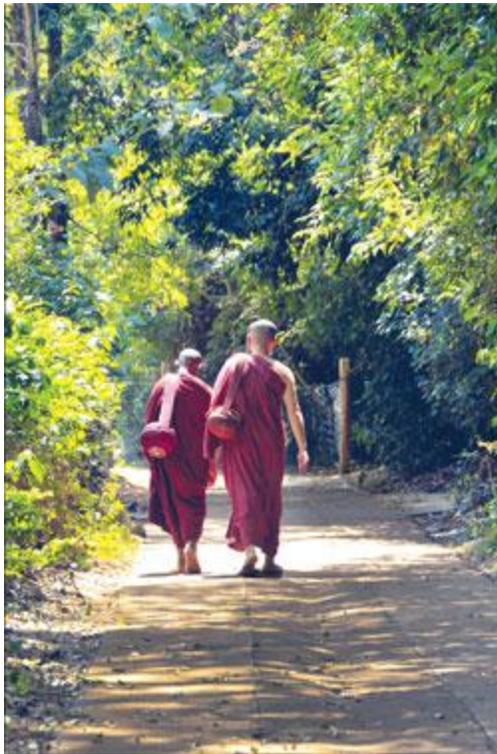
Q: When natural disasters strike thousands of people die at the same location. When an individual dies it is said that it is due to his past Kamma that he faces such a death. How can we explain people becoming victims to natural disasters and dying in thousands at the same location.

A: Even though they die at the same time, each individual has his/her own separate kamma. Though the exact time is not known, all these people are subjected to the resultant kamma. It has happened by the conglomeration of previous kammass committed vicariously.

Not all the people who belong to one family had been in the same family in all their previous births. But in different births they have committed in wrong deeds. For example one may kill ants by drowning them in water. When pesticides are used, insects die in large numbers. All these people have engaged in the same wrong deed though may be at different locations.

Q: During medical research, medicines are first tested on animals such as rabbits and monkeys in the laboratories. Thousands of animals die or get disabled as a result of being used for medical research. However if these medicines work well with these animals they are used to cure human sicknesses. Does using these

animals for medical tests involve committing a sin since the overall intention is to cure various diseases the mankind face?



Following the path of the Buddha
Pictures by Saman Sri wedage.

A: It has to be understood as follows. The medicine is tested on the

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animal with uncertainty. At the time it is being tested on the animal it is not certain whether it will work well with it or the medicine will cause its death/disable it. When medicine is given to the animal/when medicines are tested on it the person who is involved in the act is well aware of all these possibilities. He does not mind even if the animal dies. If the animal is cured by that, then it is used for the welfare of the human species. Here there is compassion for the human species, but non compassion for the animals that are being used for the tests.

As you walk on the road if you think "Let thousands of small insects may get crushed under my feet", you will be committing the sin of killing animals each time an insect gets crushed under your feet even without your knowledge. But if you think let no animal get crushed under my feet/, let no insect be a victim, even though insects get killed under your feet without your knowledge, you are not committing any Akusala as you did not have an impulse to kill somebody. It all depends on your thoughts (Chethana).

Q: Can a person get the full benefits of meditation while leading a lay life. Is it a must to enter the Order to get the full benefits of meditation ?

A: It is possible. It is not a must to enter the Order. One enters the Order to involve one's self in full time meditation - to engage in the three fold practice of Seela, Samadhi and Paggna throughout life. Such practices are equally necessary to lay persons as well. Even a lay person can achieve it and get its benefits to a certain extent.

The following story is ample proof of it.

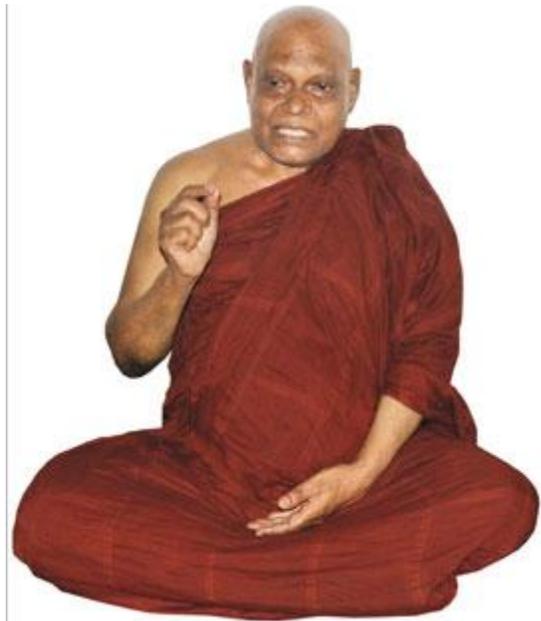
During the time of the Buddha sixty monks went to a remote village called Mathika for the Vas retreat. The villagers were very pious and prepared Kutis (places to stay) for them and made necessary arrangements to make their stay a pleasant one. The village was headed by a noble man called Mathika. His mother who was known as Mathika Matha was a very pious lady. One evening she went to offer the monks "Gilanpasa" (drinks offered to the Maha Sangha) and as she could not see any of them she was asked to ring a wooden bell in order to summon them. As she rang the bell all of them arrived from different directions. Mathika Matha inquired from the monks as to what they had all been doing at different places. They said that they had been practising the Thirty-two parts of the Body Meditation concentrating on all the parts of the body from top to toe.

As Mathika Matha too showed an interest to learn, the monks gave her necessary instructions. She practised it methodically and became Anagami. Through the development of her psychic powers, she checked whether the monks who were on the Vas retreat too had achieved a higher position.

Even if you properly observe the five precepts it will bring results. If you enter the Order, the possibilities are higher because you have more mental and physical freedom

On finding that they had not yet achieved Arahathood, she checked as to why they had so

far failed to achieve it. She understood that prior to entering the Order, these monks had spent luxurious lives and that their food patterns and types differ from each other. Hence she took necessary steps to provide each of them with dhana according to their tastes. Quite soon all these monks became Arahants.



Most Venerable Nauyane Ariyadhamma Maha Thera

This shows even a lay person can practise meditation if they are keen about it. However it should be practised properly for a long time whether one sees results immediately or not. Even if you properly observe the Five Precepts it will bring

results. If you enter the Order, the possibilities are higher because then you have more mental and physical freedom.

If you observe at least the Five Precepts properly, whether you get results immediately or not you become qualified to obtain good results one day.

Q: There is a common view that offering dhana to the Sangha would acquire one more merit than offering Dhana to the Buddha. However in one of his books, Rev.Rerukaane Chandawimala Thera had specifically mentioned that the supreme offering is the one made to the Buddha. Please explain.

A: In fact offering to the Buddha is incomparable. When Prajapathi Gothami, the foster mother of Prince Siddartha , offered a robe to the Buddha, the Enlightened One told her to offer it to the Sangha, so that the merit that she gains will be doubled.

It was with great devotion that she prepared the robe and once she finished the preparation, by that act alone she had gained merit of offering it to the Buddha.

What the Buddha wanted was to let his foster mother acquire more merit and to increase people's respect towards the Sangha by emphasizing their importance. The Buddha will attain Parinirvana in 45 years and the Sangha will be there to carry the teachings of the Buddha for over 5000 years.

A: Hence it is not proper to say that the Dhana offered to the Sangha is greater than the Dhana offered to the Buddha. The Buddha is called "Agra Dhakshi Nartha" which means he is supreme among the deserving nobility.

Q:The Buddha has said that those who have developed absolute faith in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha will never condescend to a birth in the animal domain or the world of demons.

A:Yes, if somebody believes in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and believes that he is following the correct path, due to their absolute faith he/she will never get a low birth for thousands of aeons.

Q: It is said that the lamps that were lit at the time of enshrining of the relics in Ruwanwelisaya will not be extinguished and lotus flowers will not wither and continue to exist through out the dispensation of Gauthama Buddha.

A: Yes. That is true. It is because of the determination power of the Arahants.

Q: If everything is impermanent according to the teachings of the Buddha can this really be so?

A: It should be taken like this. There is impermanence in the process of continuation of the lights. Millions of thought cycles associated with this light will arise and disintegrate indicating the impermanence of all phenomena.

But the lamps will not extinguish, flowers will not wither and clay that was mixed with sandalwood and perfume will not dry, because of the determination power of Arahants, supported by the determination power of gods and the king.

Q: Are there instances where people have witnessed the inside view of Ruwanweli Seya?

A: For those who possess psychic powers it will be visible. Gods and Arahants can see it. In the past it is said that King Bhathikabhaya who led the country in a virtuous manner got this rare opportunity.

He was deeply religious.

Once after observing Sil he was contemplating on the virtues of the Buddha and was determined not to get up from the Maluwa until he saw the inside of Ruwanwelisaya.

The Arahants felt his need and out of compassion took him inside using their psychic powers. The king was highly pleased with what he saw and as he came out he got a painter to paint what he saw on boards and displayed them on Maha Maluwa on every poya day, so that devotees could worship them.

No where else in the world had there been such a unique enshrining of the relics. The foundation sank to the ground nine times. The height of each foundation is 9 cubits (riyan). That means the height of the entire foundation is 81 cubits (riyan). No earthquake can damage the foundation. No one can break the strong walls.

Q: When Arahants attain Parinirvana it is said that their relics become crystals.

A: Those relics could take various shapes and colours as wished by these respective Arahants at the time of their Parinirvana. Normally Arahants may make such a wish so that people can worship them later. If they do not make any wish they will look like normal human bones.

The relics of Buddha are in three forms.

There are relics which are similar to green grams (Mun Piyali) in size and they are gold in colour. The second group of relics which are pearl coloured are similar to tiny grains of rice in shape and size. The third category relics had taken the size of mustard seeds and have the colour of "Da Saman" buds.

They are pleasing to the eye.

Q: We bestow merit on our dead relatives. Can they acquire this merit?

A: They can acquire merit only if they are in the group of "Para Dhatthupa Jeewi." There are gods called "Wruksha" and "Bhoomi Asta" who are keen to acquire merit even though they are not directly aimed at them.

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Part 2 of this interview will appear next week