

The Triple Gem In Buddhism*

Deputy Prof. Dr. Phra Suthivorayan

1. Who was the Buddha ?

Literary sources available in both the Pali and Sanskrit texts give us the biography of the Buddha.¹ Among them, Pali Tipitaka, the original text of the Buddhism or Buddhist thought stands foremost. We can find the autobiography which was told by the Buddha himself in various parts of Discipline and Discourses of Nikāyas:

The birth, for instance, can be found in Mahapadāna Sutta of Dighanikāya.² The story of young life of Prince Siddhattha in Tikanipāṭa Anguttaranikāya,³ the cause of renunciation upto the attainment of enlightenment and story of Pancavaggi Bhikkhus in Pasarasisutta of Majjhimanikāya.⁴ The story from being renounced, practice of yoga till the Enlightenment of the Buddha in Mahāsaccaka Sutta of Majjhimanikāya.⁵ The biography from enlightenment upto the ordination of Sāriputta and Moggallāna in Mahāvaggakhandhaka of Vinaya.⁶ The Buddha's ministries can be seen in various suttas of Nikāyas.

The story of the Buddha before his passing away, the time of Parinibbana and after the passing away upto relic distribution to kings of various kingdoms can be studied in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of Dighanikāya.⁷ The First Great Council and the Second Great Council of the noble disciples are recorded in the 21st and 22nd khandhaka of Cullavagga, Vinaya Piṭaka.⁸ The pali commentary of Jataka also gives the full description of the life of the Buddha in the first chapter known as Nidānakathā.

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Among Sanskrit texts; Mahavastu, the first book of Lokuttaravadin,⁹ Buddhacarita,¹⁰ Lalitavistra,¹¹ and Saundranand,¹² of Ashvaghosa are the best texts of the source of biographical writing of the Buddha.

Among archaeological sources, there are many. Buddhist artifacts which are discovered in survey and excavation made by the archaeologists in India.¹³ The contribution of King Asoka the Great, such as Sanchi Stupa, Pillar Edicts and Rock Edicts and Minor inscription particularly at the places of Birth, Enlightenment, First Turning Wheel of Dhamma and Passing away of the Buddha, is an acceptable source for the Life of the Buddha and early Buddhism.

From the above mentioned sources, a brief biography of the Buddha may be drawn.

The Buddha, whose personal name was Siddhattha or Saddhartha in Sanskrit and family name, Gotama (SKT. Guatama), lived in North India in the sixth century B.C. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler of Sakaya kingdom in the land of Nepal. His mother was Queen Maya. After finishing his education on arts and sciences as taught in that time, he was married to a beautiful and devoted young Princess named Yasodhara. Later on, she became the mother of a son named Rahula. Having realized the reality of life and suffering of mankind, he decided to find the solution –the way out from this universal suffering. At the age of 29, he left his kingdom and became an ascetic in search of this solution in the area of Magadha state (Now-Bihar, India).

For six years, Siddhattha Gotama wandered along with the valley of Ganges as an ascetic, meeting famous teachers, studying and following their preachings and practices and submitting himself to vigorous ascetic practices.

They did not satisfy him. So, he liberated himself from all traditional theories and practices and went to search for his own way. It was, thus, that on the full moon a day of Visakha (May), seated under the Bodhi tree on the bank of Nerafijara river at Bodhagaya (Gaya-Bihar), Siddhattha attained the

Enlightenment at the age of 35. Then, he was known as “The Buddha” or “The Enlightened One.”

After the Enlightenment, the Buddha delivered his first sermon to the group of five ascetics in the Deer Park at Isipattana or Saranath near Varanasi. From that day for 45 years, he taught all classes of men and women, kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcastes, rich and poor, holy men and robbers without making any discrimination between them. He confirmed no difference of caste or social grouping and the way he preached was open to all who were ready to listen, understand and follow it.

At the age of 80, the Buddha passed away at Kusinagar or Kusinara near Gorakhpur in Uttarapradesh of India. It was wonderful thing that the Birth, the Enlightenment and Passing away of the Buddha took place in the same day of May (Visakha Purmima Day), he told his disciples, according to Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, that; “The doctrine and Discipline I have taught you, that shall be your Teacher when I am gone.”¹⁴ Few minutes before the passing away, his last words were: “Behold now, monks, I exhort you, subject to decay are all component things. Work out your salvation with diligence.”¹⁵

2. What is His Dhamma ?

(I) From His Own Lips to Scripture :

The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is called Buddhadhamma or the teaching of the Buddha, Buddhadhamma was divided by the Buddha himself into two; namely :- Doctrine (Dhamma) and Discipline (Vinaya). After the passing away of the Buddha, his disciples had convened the Great Councils at Rajagriha for the first time, at Vaisali for the second time and at pataliputra for the third time in India in the fifth, fourth and third century B.C. respectively. By these Great Councils the collection of Doctrine and Discipline of the Buddha was made into three parts known as Tipitaka or “Three Baskets of Teaching of the Buddha.” Tipitaka was classified into three collections :-

- 1) Vinayapitaka – collection of Discipline;
- 2) Suttantapitaka – collection of discourses and
- 3) Abhidhammapitaka – collection of sublime doctrine.

This Tipitaka was transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition (Mukhapāṭha) and later on, it was inscribed in palm leaves for the first time in the first century B.C. at Aluvihar of Matale Sri Lanka, in the time of King Vattagamani (C 29–17 B.C.)¹⁶

(2) Dhamma as Brahmachariya :

All teachings of the Buddha were called “Dhamma” or “Brahmachariya” for the first time by the Buddha himself as the word of acceptance of Koṇḍañña to be the first follower that “Come bhikkhu, well expounded Dhamma, practise supreme life for making an utter end of suffering.”¹⁷

When the Buddha was sending the sixty Arahanta followers to preach the teaching, he said; “O bhikkus, go to journey for happiness and welfare, of all beings, and the benefit of the world, Show Dhamma and proclaim Brahmachariya (Supreme life).”¹⁸ The Brahmachariya was explained by the Buddha as the Noble Eightfold Path in Mahāvagga, Sanyuttanikāya.

In Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, however, the Buddha had expressed the division of his Dhamma into two types, namely–Dhamma and Vinaya as below:

“Ananda, the Doctrine (Dhamma) and Discipline (Vinaya) I have taught and established to you that shall be your teacher, when I am gone.”²⁰

(3) Law & Value :

Doctrine is the truth of life and nature revealed by the Buddha in various discourses and the way leading to the extinction of suffering (Majjhenedhamma and Majjhimāpatipadā).²¹ Arahant Theras had put it into two baskets: Suttanta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka in the Third Great Council at

Patallputra in the time of King Asoka, the Great, about 3rd century B.C. Discipline, however, was collected in one basket known as Vinaya Pitaka since the time of the First Great Council at Rajagriha held after few months after the passing away of Buddha.

(4) Tipiṭaka : Sacred Texts.

(A) **Vinaya Pitaka** contains three parts; namely- (1) Suttavibhanga (2) Khandhaka and (3) Parivāra. Suttavibhanga is divided into two sub-divisions:- Bhikkhuvibhanga and Bhikkhunī vibhanga. Khandhaka is divided into two divisions as Mahāvagga and Cullavagga. But Parivāra is only one known as a Handbook of Discipline. Bhikkhuvibhanga is a collection of all rules for monks (227 rules) as well as Bhikkhunīvibhanga; a collection of all rules for nuns (311 rules). Mahāvagga and Cullavagga are the collection of tradition of monks and nuns in Buddhism. Mahāvagga consists of 10 khandhakas concerning with ordination, meeting for checking rules, Buddhist lent, Reminding together, skill affair, medicine, clothedonation after lent, yellow-robos, story of Campa, story of conflict at Kosambi, Cullavagga consists of 12 khandhakas concerning with Sangha Action, Punishment of Sanghādisesa rules, origin of mistakes, calming of mistakes, miscellaneous stories, residence, breaking of community, good habits, short reciting of Pātimokkha, story of the origin of Bhikkhunī, the First Great Council and the Second Great Council.²²

(B) **Suttanta Pitaka** contains of five nikāyas; namely -

1) *Dighanikāya* - a collection of long suttas -long discourses such as Brahmajāla Sutta, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta, etc. It consists of three parts -Silakhandhavagga, Mahāvagga, and Pātikavagga. The total Suttas are 34.

2) *Majjhimanikāya* - a collection of middle length discourses such as Mūlapariyāya Sutta, Culamālunkaya Sutta, Ānāpānasati Sutta, etc. It consists of three fiftifold groups (Pannāsaka) namely -Mulapannāsaka (the first fifty discourses),

Majjhima – Paṇṇāsaka (The second fifty discourses) Uparipannāsaka (The third fifty discourses). The total discourses are 152.

3) *Sammyuttanikāya* – a collection of grouped discourses such as Devatāsamyutta (a group of suttas concerned with questions and answers between gods and the Buddha etc, It is classified into 56 groups (Samyuttas) under the five titles; namely –

Sagāthā (Verses of dialogue), Nidāna (Dependent Origination),

Khandha (Five Aggregates), Saḷāyatana (Six sense – bases),

and Mahavāraṇasikāya (73 virtues partaking of Enlightenment). The total discourses in Saṃyutta are 7,762. .

4) *Anguttaranikāya* – a collection of gradual numbers of Dhamma from one to eleven groups and total 19,557 suttas.

5) *Khuddakanikāya* – a collection of supplementary texts which could not be classified in any of above Four Nikāyas. This collection is divided into 15 texts; namely –

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) Khuddakapāṭha, | (2) Dhammapada, |
| (3) Udāna, | (4) Itivuttaka, |
| (5) Suttanipāṭa, | (6) Vimānavatthu, |
| (7) Petavatthu | (8) Theragāthā, |
| (9) Therīgāthā, | (10) Jātaka, |
| (11) Nidessa, | (12) Paṭisambhidāmagga, |
| (13) Apadāna, | (14) Buddhavaṃsa, |
| (15) Cariyāpiṭaka, | |

Here there is a plenty of thousand Suttas.

(C) **Abhidhamma Piṭaka** is a collection of sublime, higher or extra doctrine in Buddhism. This collection contains with seven texts; namely –

- 1) Dhammasangani – the text of enumeration of Dhammas.
- 2) Vibhanga – the book of analysis of Dhammas.
- 3) Dhātukathā – the discussion of elements.
- 4) Puggalapaññatti – a description of individual compiled from Arigutta–ranikiya.
- 5) Kathāvatthu – discussion of points of controversy between the early “Hinayāna” sects and the defense of the Theravāda viewpoint, attributed to Moggaliputta Tissa, the President of the 3rd Council which was convened at Pataliputra (Patna) by the Emperor Asoka in the middle of the 3rd century B.C.
- 6) Yamaka – the “Book of Pairs”. Logical treatise on psychological subjects.
- 7) Paṭṭhāna – The Book of Relations. “Causation and the mutual relationship of phenomena are examined”²³ the total relation of Tipitaka can be understood from the following chart :

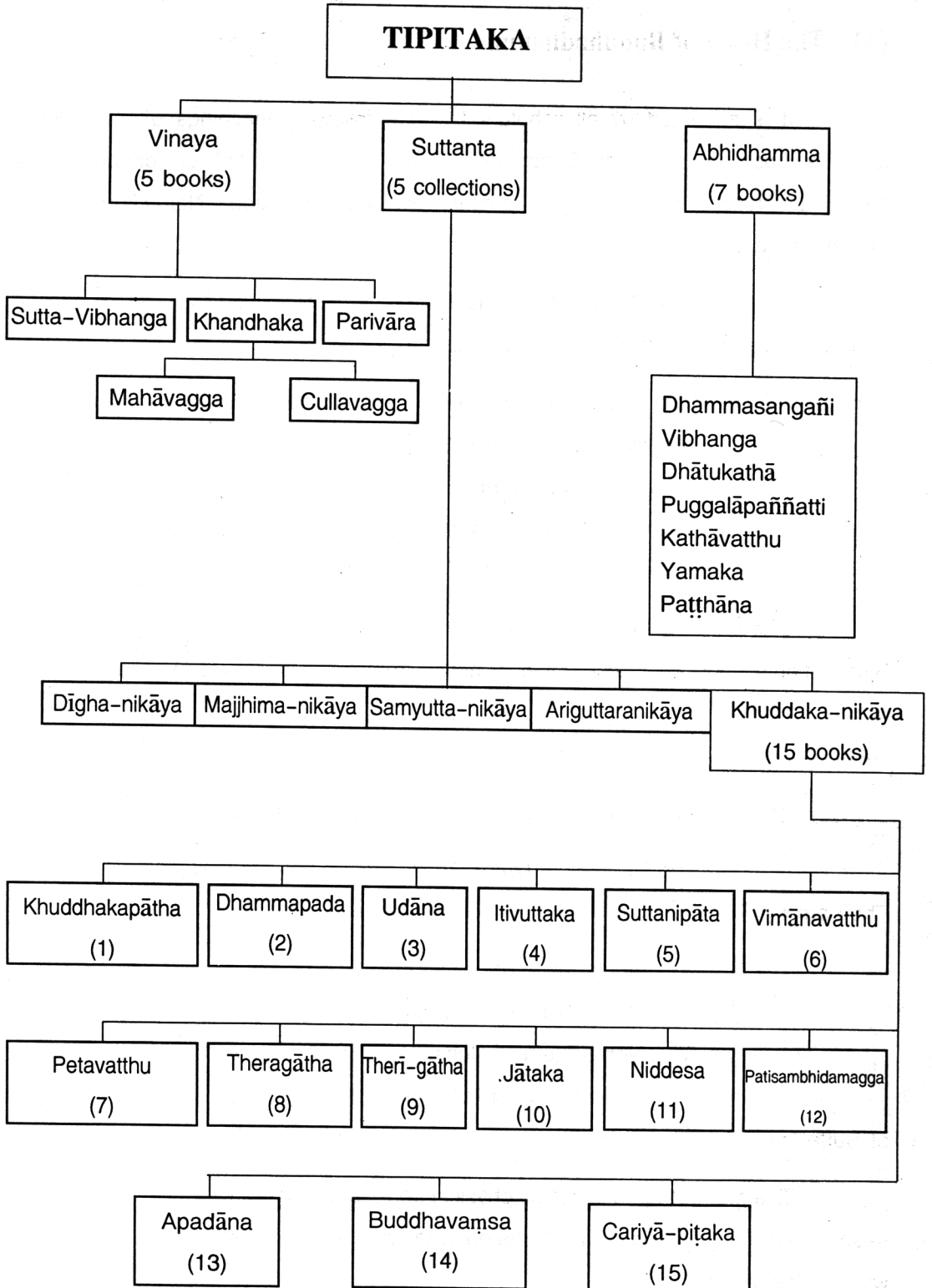
The Sacved Montra for Tipitaka Studies

–

Munindavadanam̐buja Gabbhasambhavasundarī

Panīnam̐ Saramam̐ vānī Mayham̐ pinayate manam̐.

Tepitaka Muni.



(5) The Heart of Buddhadhamma

It is accepted by all scholars that the following teachings of the Buddha are the basic principle of Buddhadhamma. They consist of Ovādapātimokkha, the Four Noble Truths, Ten Pāramitas, Patīccasamuppāda, Non-clinging, and the Appamāda.

1) The Ovādapātimokkha is the fundamental principle of Buddhism. The verses appear in Dhammapada like this;

Sabbapāpassa akaranam : *Not to do any evil :*

Kussalasū pasampadā : *To cultivate good :*

Sacittapariyodapanam : *To purify one's mind :*

Etam Buddhānasasanam 1: *This is the teaching of the Buddhas.*²⁴

This verse of the Buddha concerns with the action (kamma) in Buddhism. Bad action brings bad result. Good action reflects good effect. Volition in mind is the basement of all actions.²⁵ Purification of mind leads to the extinction of suffering which is the end of all actions.

So, Ovādapātimokkha is the fundamental principle of all Buddhas.

2) *The Four Noble Truths.* These are the basic teaching of the Buddhas. They are :

(i) The Noble Truth of Suffering,

(ii) The Noble Truth of Origin of Suffering,

(iii) The Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering, and

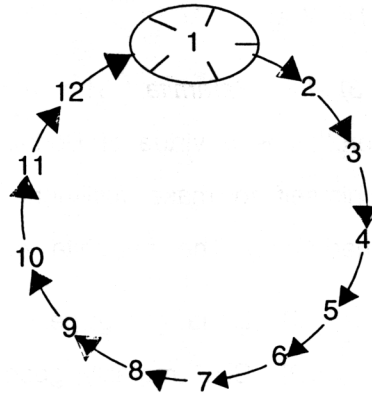
(iv) The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.²⁶

The first truth deals with all physical and mental problems of life which can be seen from the Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta on Dhammānupassanāsati patthāna concerning with Noble Truths.

The second truth is the examination and explanation of the Buddha how suffering arises through various causes and conditions known as Paticcasamuppāda or the Dependent Origination. Craving on of twelve links of Dependent Origination as in the chart is called the Origin of Suffering.

The Ring of Origin of Suffering.

1. Ignorance
2. Formation
3. Consciousness
4. Mind & Matter
5. Six sense - bases
6. Contact
7. Feeling
8. Craving
9. Clinging
10. Becoming
11. Birth
12. Decay, Death, Sorrow, Lamentation, bodily pain, mental pain, despair.



The third truth deals with the goal of Buddhist endeavour. It tells the truth that when ignorance is completely destroyed through true knowledge and when craving or selfish desire is eradicated and replaced by the right attitude of compassion and wisdom, Nibbāna, the state of perfect, peace, absence of defilements and freedom from suffering, will be realized.

The fourth truth gives the Buddhist way of life and contains the ethical teaching and practice of Buddhism. This way is called the Noble Eightfold Path, it contains of eight factors; namely

- 1] Right View or Right Understanding,
- 2] Right Thought or Right Determination,
- 3] Right Speech,

- 4] Right Action,
- 5] Right Livelihood,
- 6] Right Effort,
- 7] Right Mindfulness, and
- 8] Right Concentration.

This Noble Truth is the path leading to cessation of suffering known as the Middle Way

3) *Ten Paramita* The word “parami” or “paramitas” is translated as “Perfection.” It is a virtue of Bodhisatta or Bodhisatva in Sanskrit (a being who devotes himself to make fulfilment of perfection for attainment of Buddhahood (Enlightened One.) The paramita consists of ten qualities :

- 1] Dāna: giving; generosity.
- 2] Sila : morality; good conduct.
- 3] Nekkhamma : renunciation.
- 4] Paññā : wisdom; insight; understanding.
- 5] Viriya : energy; effort; endeavour
- 6] Khanti : tolerance; endurance.
- 7] Sacca : truthfulness.
- 8] Adhitthāna : resolution; self-determination.
- 9] Mettā : loving-kindness; friendliness.
- 10] Upekkhā: equanimity.

The illustration of effort to fulfilment of paramitas can be seen from the Jataka stories in Mahanipāta Jataka and its commentary.²⁸

4) *Paticcasamuppāda* or the Dependent Origination. The teaching is concluded in the word of Venerable Assaji that:

“Ye dhammā hetupabbhavā;
Whatever arise from the cause;

Tesam hetum Tathagato (ahu),

The Buddha told the causes of these things:

Tesañca yo nirodho ca,

And also about the cessation of these things,

Evamvādi Mahasamaṇo

Thus doctrine has the Great Sage spoken.”²⁹

This verse refers to the way of arising and cessation of Dependent Origination. The way of arising [Samudayavāra] was expressed by the Buddha in Samyuttanikāya like this :

“What, Bhikkus, is Dependent Origination [the Causal Law].” Dependent on ignorance arise formations; dependent on formations arises consciousness; dependent on consciousness arise mind and matter; dependent on mind and matter arise the six sense-bases; dependent on contact arises feeling; dependent on feeling arises craving; dependent on craving arises clinging; dependent on birth arise decay and death. There arise sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus arises the whole mass of suffering.

Through the total fading away and cessation of ignorance cease formations; through the cessation of formations; ceases consciousness; through the cessation of consciousness, ceases mind and matter; through the cessation of mind and matter, ceases the six sense-bases; through the cessation of six sense-bases, ceases contact through the cessation of contact; ceases feeling; through the cessation of feeling, ceases craving, through the cessation of craving; ceases clinging, through the cessation of clinging; ceases becoming; through the cessation of becoming, ceases birth; through the cessation of birth, ceases decay and death. Also cease sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Thus comes about the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.³⁰ [See Chart No.1 page 14]

The way of cessation of suffering, sometimes, was expressed by the Buddha on the point of suffering in the mind of human beings. Then, they search

the way of cessation of suffering by listening Dhammas from the good friend. By hearing doctrine, it generates faith; by faith, it generates satisfactoriness, by satisfactoriness, it generates joy; by joy, it generates equanimity; by equanimity, it generates happiness; by happiness, it generates concentration, by concentration it generates knowing things as they are; by knowing things as they are; it generates detachment; by detachment; insight on extinction of suffering [Khayañāṇa].³¹ [See Chart No.2]

In Nettipakaraṇa,³² it is said that Kusalasīla or moral conduct, A vipatisara or non-remorse and Vimuttiñāḍassana or insight on one's salvation are put in places of Saddha (faith), Passaddhi (calming) and Khayañāṇa (insight on extinction of suffering). [See Chart No.3]

In Dasuttarasutta, Dighanikāya, Venerable Sarīputta had analysed the way of freedom which is rooted from Yonisomanasikara (systematic thinking or wise attention)³³ as follows :

“Nine things greatly help nine things are to be developed.

“Which nine things greatly help ? Nine conditions rooted in wise attention (Yoniso–manasikara–mūlaka Dhamma); when a monk practises wise attention joy (pamojja) arises in him; and from his being joyful, delight (Pīti) arises, and from his being delightful, his senses are calmed; as a result of this calming (Passaddhi), he feels happiness (Sukkha), and from his feeling happy, his mind becomes concentrated; with his mind thus concentrated (Samadhi), he knows and sees things as they really are; with his thus knowing and seeing things as they really are (Yathabhutañāḍassana), he becomes disenchanted (Nibbindati); with disenchantment, he becomes dispassionate (Virajjati) and by dispassion he is liberated. [See Chart No.4]

These four methods of the way of arising and cessation of causality or Dependent Origination can be shown by the charts as follows :-

Chart No. 1 : Process of arising & Cessation

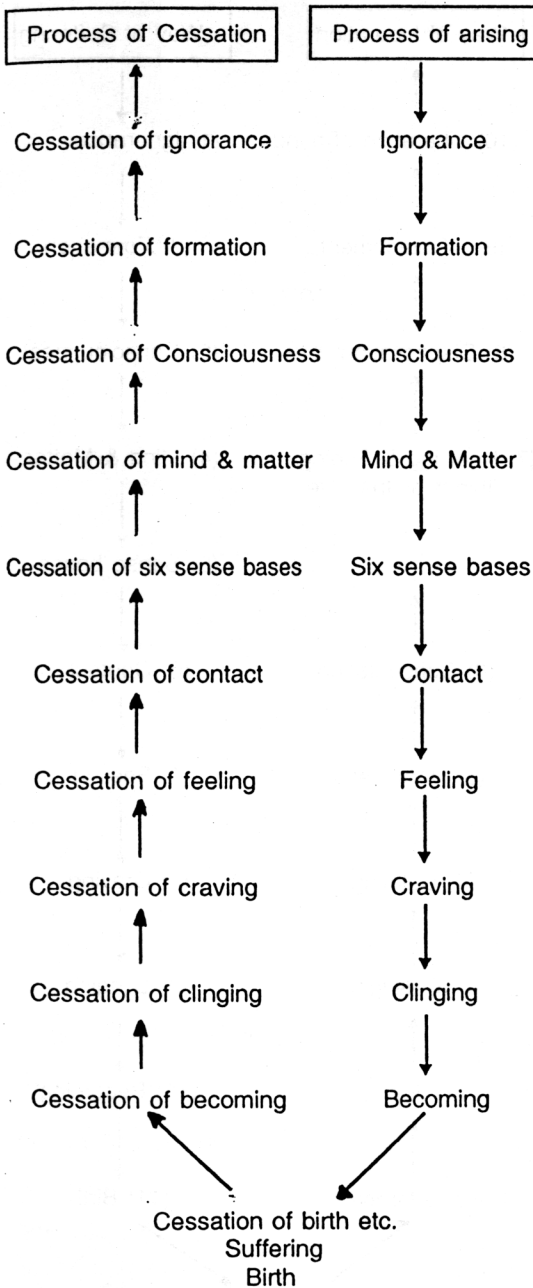


Chart No. 2 : Way of Suffering and Salvation.

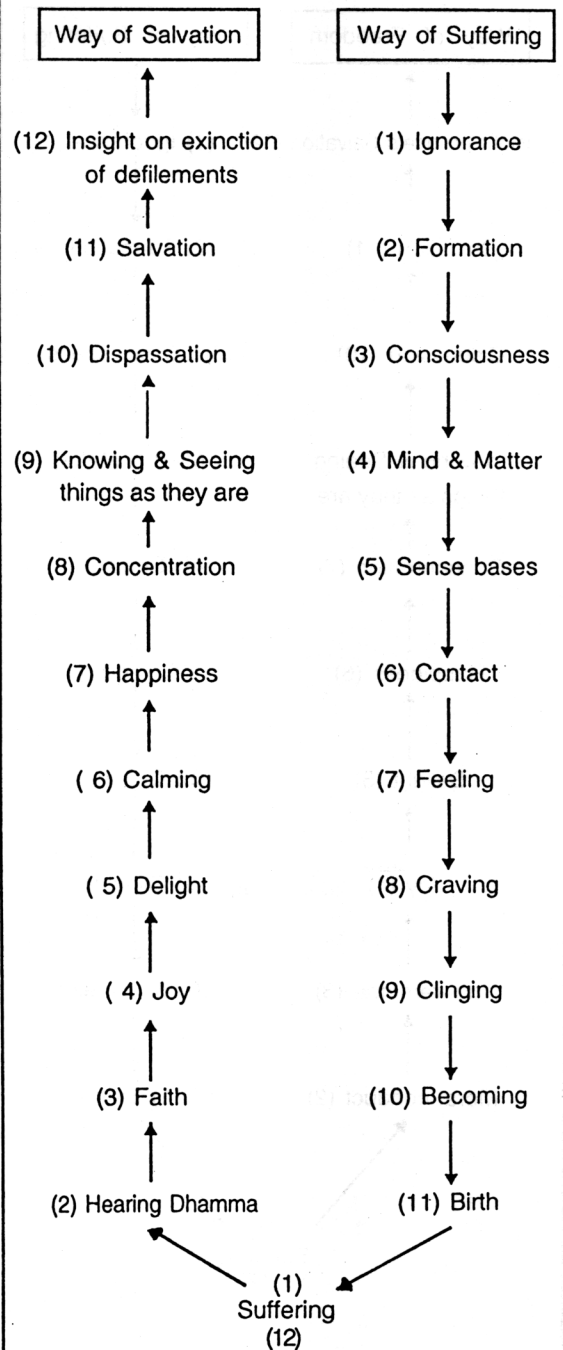


Chart No. 4 : Way of Suffering and Freedom

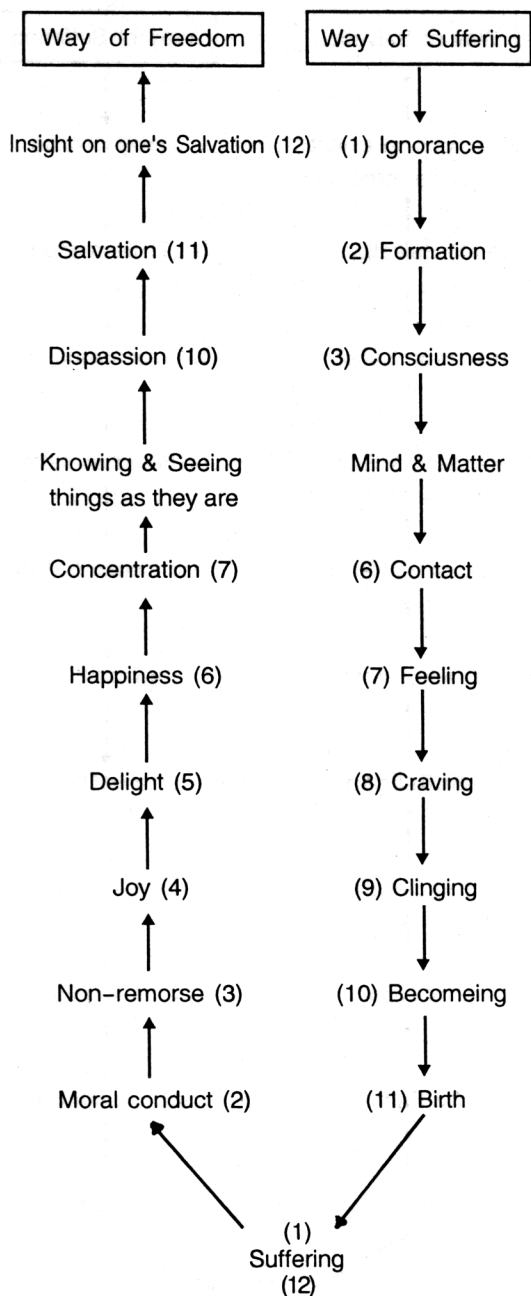
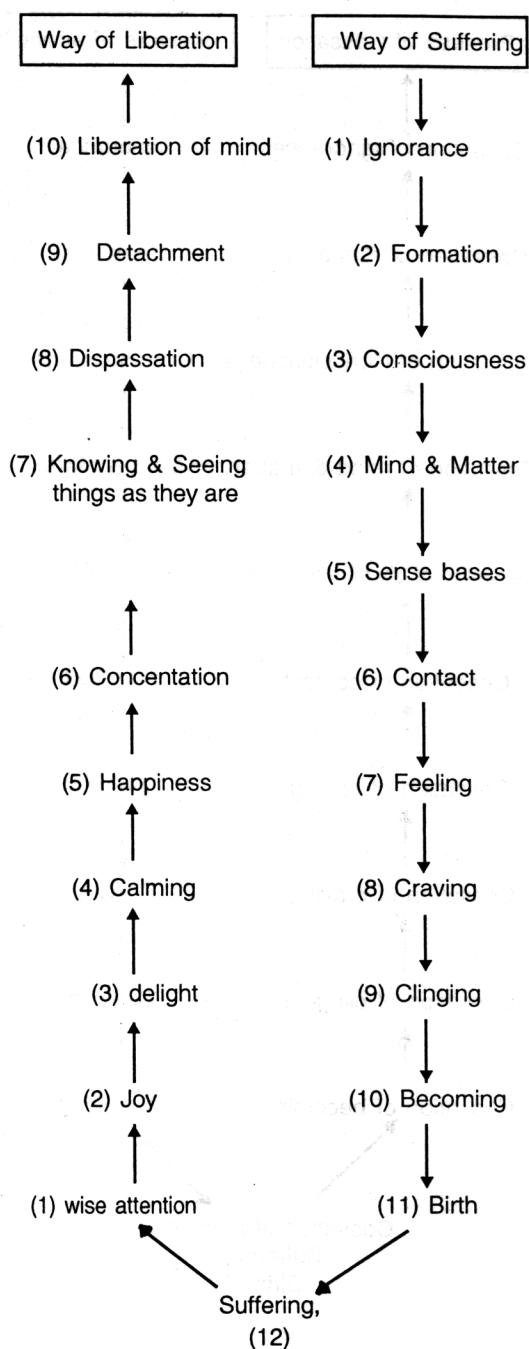


Chart No. 4 : Way of Suffering and Liberation



The doctrine on Patīccasamuppāda explains where suffering of life comes from and what is the aim of life. By the Law of Dependent Origination, life becomes suffered. Through the cessation of Dependent Origination, life becomes liberated. Through the cessation of Dependent Origination, life becomes to be freed, perfect and enlightened.

5) *Non-Clinging (Suññatā)* : There are another two ways of practice in Buddhism. The first way is called Sakkāya-ditthi-udayagāminīpatipadā the way leading to the arising of the clinging of mind and matter as “me” and “mine.” That selfishness is the view leading to the origin of suffering. The second way is called Sakkāyaditthinirodhagāminīpatipadā,³⁴ the way leading to the cessation of the clinging of mind and matter as “me” and “mine”. This right view leads to the cessation of suffering. Therefore, the Buddha said: “Sabbe Dhammā nālaṃ abhinivesāya.” One should not cling to all things (all bases) as “me” and “mine.”³⁵

6) *Appamāda* : Heedfulness. The word refers to living with right mindfulness, heedfulness, zeal, diligence, earnestness or carefulness.³⁶

Appamādo amatarri padaṃ;

Mindfulness is the path to the Deadless.

Pamādo maccuno padani;

Heedlessness is the path to death.

Appamattā na mīyanti:

The mindful do not die.

Ye pamattā yatha matā;

*The heedlessness are like the dead.*³⁷

In Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Buddha refers to Appamāda or heedfulness as the base and centre of all moral things just as the footprint of the elephant is the base of all animals.³⁸

Even few minutes before passing away of the Buddha, he had given the last words as below:

“Behold now, monks, I exhort you. Subject to decay are all component things. Work out your salvation with heedfulness.”³⁹

So, heedfulness or mindfulness (Sati) is the heart of the teaching of the Buddha.

3. What is His Order ?

The Order or the Sangha is the group or the community of the followers. The followers of the Buddha can be divided into two groups; household and homeless. The household may be men or women. The homeless may be Bhikkhus or Bhikkhunīs, Sarnaneras or Sarnanerls : (monks or nuns, novices or female novices). Therefore the Buddha's company consists of Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunis, Upasakas (faithful men), Upasikas (faithful women). The Sangha or the Order of the Buddha is classified into two groups:

(1) *Bhikkhu Sangha* –The community of the monks and nuns who are ordained by ordination tradition as permitted by the Buddha in Vinayapitaka. Discipline is the foundation of Bhikkhusangha (The order of monks or nuns). The continuity of this community has been done from generation to generation since the time of the Buddha in India up to now in the Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, etc.

(2) *Sāvaka Sangha* is the community of Noble Disciples. They may be household or homeless. All followers of the Buddha practised along with the Middle Way or the Noble Eightfold Path and then attained stage of Noblehood known as Sotapanna or Stream-enterer, Sakidagamī or One-returner, Anagamī or Non-returner, Arahanta or the Exalted One. They realized the truth and entered the stream of Nibbāna. They are called Sāvaka Sangha or Ariyasangha –the Order of Noble Disciples. This is the ideal community. The realization of Dhamma is the foundation of Sāvaka Sangha.⁴⁰

The unity of both brings happiness and freedom to the world; individual and social. Because the former is going on the path of freedom but the latter has attained the goal of the path of freedom. The order has done their duty on mission of Dhamma of the Buddha. The Sangha has to study, practise, realize and preach Dhamma of the Buddha to the world. So the people have called the order as Dhammadāyāsa, Sasanadāyāsa, Dhammaduta, who carry on the light of the Dhamma to the world.

The Benefit of Triple Gem ?

The Buddha says in the Dhammapada (Verse 188-192)

“Whoever goes to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha for refuge, that one sees the Four Noble Truths with his right insight; that is to say : suffering, the origin of suffering, the overcoming of suffering and the path leading to the extinction of suffering. That is the best safe and the sublime refuge. One who depends upon that refuge frees from all sufferings.”
