The Problems of Life

by
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw
of
Burma

Ethical Dilemmas

by
Bhikkhu Pesala

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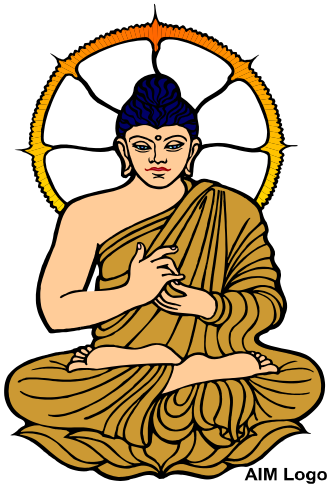

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The Problems of Life

Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

(Replies to Questions by Dr. U Myint Swe)

How Rebirth Takes Place

Q ACCORDING TO THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING of *"Vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādettha"* all kammic formations end in dissolution. Matter perishes and so does the mind. This fact is undeniable. How does a being come to a new existence in spite of the fact that mind as well as matter perishes as soon as a being passes away?

A OVER TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, the Lord Buddha taught about the process of continued existence from his own direct knowledge. There are three kinds of existence:

1. The existence having both mind and matter.
2. The existence having only matter.
3. The existence having mind only.

The existences having only matter or only mind can be known only through meditation *(bhāvanā),* they cannot be known by scientific experiments. However, if the manner of the mind-process in the existence having only mind is reflected on you can appreciate and understand the ability of mind. So the way to reflect is shown here in brief.

In the existence having mind only, mind *(citta)* arises and passes away without interruption from the moment of conception to the moment of death. The first *citta* arises and perishes and, without any interval, the second *citta* arises and perishes. *Cittas* continue arising and perishing in this manner so, after the disappearance of the former mind there is no base at all for the latter mind. However, the latter arises because of the impetus of the former. This is how the process of mind continues.

It is generally the case when thinking deeply that thoughts go on occurring without any interruption by ear-consciousness

(sota-viññāṇa), even though there are probably sounds at the time. So we can understand that it is the same in the case of existences having mind only. If we realise how the impetus of the preceding minds cause the arising of the following minds even before death, we can also understand that after death the rebirth-consciousness *(paṭisandhi-viññāṇa)* appears due to the mental impetus of the past existence, whether there is a physical base in the next existence or not. In other words, the decease-consciousness of the past existence causes the rebirth-consciousness of the next. This is a brief explanation to enable one to gauge the power of the mind.

Although both the mentality and materiality of a being perish at the moment of death, a new mind appears in the new body of the next existence through the impetus of the decease-consciousness. This *citta* clings to a certain object in the dying moment. This is known as death-proximate *kamma (āsanna kamma).* The death-proximate *kamma* is the bridge between death and rebirth, which is how rebirth-consciousness occurs.

When death is very near, the wholesome or unwholesome deeds one has done may appear before one's mind's eye. Objects associated with those deeds may also appear. Alternatively, there may be a vision of one's destiny. Although such objects may not be wanted, they cannot be eliminated at the moment of death. Among those who are seriously ill and in a coma, some behave strangely. Some show signs of pleasure and joy, others behave as if they are frightened or facing danger. Those who are close to the dying person usually report such events. Some people who were close to death, recover and then reveal who took them, where they went to and what they saw.

At the very moment of the decease-consciousness *(cuti-citta),* the person dies with his or her mind on one of the three signs. Death means the expiry of the last life-continuum. As soon as the decease-consciousness ceases, the rebirth-consciousness arises from the impetus of the decease-consciousness. The rebirth-consciousness arises in a new body in the next existence

conditioned by the sign seen just before death. Because of this relationship with the previous existence this rebirth-consciousness is called relinking-consciousness *(paṭisandhi-citta).*

To give an example: A man dreams of strange events and goes on thinking about them when he wakes up. The strange dream is like the object that one clung to in the past. Remembering his dream is like the object of rebirth consciousness. The above case is also like remembering an intention to do something when one wakes up.

If the rebirth consciousness arises in the fine-material plane *(rūpa-bhūmi),* its associated matter arises simultaneously due to *kamma*. If the rebirth-consciousness arises like this, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness also arise accordingly. This, in brief, is how a being is reborn.

Diseases Caused by Thought

QUIT IS FOUND THAT RICH PEOPLE, high-ranking officers and influential *bhikkhus* generally suffer from high blood pressure, coronary embolism, cerebral embolism, strokes and similar diseases. They are in bed for months suffering from those diseases although they are wealthy. However skilful the doctors may be, such diseases can rarely be cured. People generally assume, according to indigenous medicine, that these diseases are caused by mind and food from among the four causes of kamma, mind, climate and food. Is this assumption correct? In saying that mind causes these diseases, *bhikkhus* and others who use their brains a lot have veins that cannot return blood to their hearts. It is like garden plants that wither because of a shortage of water.

AREGARDING THE MODERN DISEASES mentioned above, the assumption that mind causes these diseases may be correct to some extent, but we should be more specific. Simply put, there are two types of mind: the hot mind associated with

passion and anger, and the peaceful and purified mind dissociated from passion and anger. The man who is over anxious about his business may suffer from the above diseases because of mind. The *bhikkhu* who has to attend to many affairs, such as looking after the monastery and pupils, giving discourses and writing articles, may suffer from the same diseases for this reason too. This kind of anxious mind may be hot because of passion and anger. However, one should not therefore assume that these diseases are caused by mind only. There are other possibilities: insufficient exercise, unsuitable food, old age and infirmity, or genetic weaknesses. The mind that is peaceful will not cause any disorder to the four elements in the body because one who practises insight meditation has four kinds of accomplishment called *iddhipāda,* which are mental powers.

The Buddha often taught that one who has developed the four *iddhipāda* can recover from diseases resulting from the four causes. One can live to one's full lifespan or even longer. Some diseases, from which meditators suffered for years, could not be cured by doctors, but were cured by insight meditation. This accords with the Buddha's teaching.

In the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Saṃyuttanikāya* the Buddha points out that a *bhikkhu,* having developed the four *iddhipāda,* can live to his natural lifespan, or longer if he wishes to. He also said, "Monks, the life of a monk is nothing but the four bases of supernatural powers *(iddhipāda)."* So it should be noted that no disease can trouble a meditator who is very intent on the practice of insight meditation. Meditation can eradicate diseases if it is practised to the fullest extent.

The Practice of Euthanasia

Q DOCTORS ARE SUPPOSED TO SAVE PATIENTS from the danger of death. Every good doctor wants his or her patients to recover their health. However, being human, doctors cannot always cure their patients' diseases as they would wish. There are many diseases that remain incurable. Some patients do not

pass away easily although they are suffering from deadly diseases. There are also many people who cannot enjoy their usual quality of life because of their afflictions. Some people think that their lives are not worth living. If some doctors, motivated by pity, help such pitiable individuals to die, do they commit the offence of destroying life or not?

To help a person to die because of an incurable disease is known as euthanasia or 'mercy-killing'. Some people find this practice acceptable, but others do not. Doesn't euthanasia make a patient die before the end of his or her natural lifespan? For example, if a doctor knows that a disease such as cancer is incurable and the patient asks the doctor for a speedy death, does the doctor commit the offence of killing a human being?

A ONE WHO ASKS A DOCTOR TO PRACTICE EUTHANASIA and the doctor are both guilty of the offence of killing. They make the patient die before the end of his or her natural lifespan.

It is pitiable to see a patient suffering from severe pain. If the patient dies sooner rather than later it may seem that he or she is free from suffering earlier. However, it is uncertain whether the patient will be happy after death. The Commentary on the *Peta Vatthu* of the Pāḷi Canon proves the point.

If a being passes away before his or her natural lifespan due to another's intervention, the killer has broken the precept to abstain from killing living beings. On seeing the unbearable pain of a patient, the first intention is to relieve him or her from suffering, but if we practise euthanasia, the second and last intentions will be those of killing. The last volition determines whether it is an offence of killing a living being. This is in accordance with the Commentary on the *Peta Vatthu*.

In the *Vinaya Piṭaka, Pārājika Pāḷi,* it says as follows:

There was a monk who was seriously ill in bed. When other monks saw him, out of pity they told him that it would be better to die than to live like that. The monk accepted their view and wanted to pass away as soon as possible. With this intention

in mind, the monk did not eat anything and so died in a short time. Then the monks who had made the suggestion became doubtful whether they had committed an offence of defeat *(pārājika)* or not, so they reported the matter to the Buddha. The Buddha decided that they had violated the third *pārājika* rule.

In this case, the monks had felt pity for the sick monk and so had suggested that it would be better to pass away. Their first volition was motivated by pity. However, their second volition was one of urging him to die. The Commentary explains that the second volition became effective after the first one had disappeared.

The answer to the question by Dr. U Myint Swe is similar to the above story. According to the Commentaries, five factors are necessary to fulfil the offence of killing living beings *(pānātipāta).*

1. It is a living being.
2. One must know that it is a living being.
3. There must be the intention to kill.
4. A verbal or physical effort must be made to kill that being.
5. The living being must die due to that effort.

If all five factors are present, then the offence of killing is committed. Thus, the patient requested the doctor to help him die. Out of pity, the doctor did so. The patient did die. In this case, both the patient and the doctor violated the first precept. Both of them committed the offence of killing a living being.

Some children may request a doctor to practise euthanasia for their mother or father. If the doctor does as requested, the children are guilty of one of the five heinous crimes *(ānantariya kamma).* How dreadful this is! Everyone should be extremely careful to avoid such heinous crimes. This is the answer to Dr. Myint Swe's first question.

The Practice of Vivisection

Q DISCOVERIES AND INVENTIONS have been made by scientists for the advancement of science and the welfare of mankind.

At the same time, their inventions prove how effective modern medicine can be. In making these medical advances they had to kill monkeys, rabbits, birds and other living beings. The progress that has been made in surgery and medicine is wonderful and the benefit to human beings is immeasurable. In working for the benefit of mankind, the researchers unavoidably violated the precept to abstain from killing. If so, in the matter of wholesomeness or unwholesomeness, which is the greater for them?

A THERE IS NO CLEAR EVIDENCE to show how advantageous it is to kill animals for the welfare of generations to come.[1] According to the nature of the mental process, at the time of killing the animals, the mental process is only on the action of killing. No mind can occur on two different objects. It is the researcher's intention to implement the invention that enables him or her to kill the animals so mercilessly. Thus the unwholesome process of mind is stronger than the wholesome one. So here, the unwholesome result will be greater than the wholesome result — this is vivid.

If one has compassion, it is quite clear if it should be done or not. How would a human being like to be killed for the welfare of other people? No one would agree to take part in such medical research. Thus it is undeniable that the unwholesome *kamma* is stronger than the wholesome *kamma* in such research that involves the killing of animals.

Extracted from "The Problems of Life"
by Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw
Translated by U Maung Maung Theinn

[1] Although those who support such medical research will be able to put forward a great deal of evidence of progress made due to such research, it is hard to quantify, and there is no evidence for what progress might have been made by investing the same amount of time and money in other areas of research (editor's note).

Ethical Dilemmas

Bhikkhu Pesala

PEOPLE ASK QUESTIONS for many different reasons. What I call a genuine question is asked because someone wants to clarify their doubts. Many people ask questions merely to state their own opinion. I am often caught out by such people because I assume that they want to know what the Buddha taught. Whatever people ask, I always give my candid opinion based on what I have read, and what I have heard from wise teachers, which is the best that anyone can do.

Buddhist monks should not misrepresent the Buddha, so I always check if I am doubtful about something. If anyone does not agree with my opinions they should carefully study the texts and Commentaries and come to their own conclusions. No one should state their own opinion as the teaching of the Buddha. They can express their opinion, but they should say, "This is what I think."

Only the Omniscient Buddha knows the precise cause of any particular result. A wise person should study the Buddha's teaching carefully before coming to any firm conclusions. Since we alone are responsible for our own actions, we should decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, after carefully considering the advice of respected teachers and religious leaders.

Is Abortion Always Wrong?

IS ABORTION ALWAYS WRONG? What if a woman is the victim of rape? Surely she shouldn't have to bring up a rapist's child?

ABORTION MEANS THE DELIBERATE DEStrUCTION of a human life, which is a serious unwholesome kamma, whatever the justification. Let us first be clear about the Buddha's teaching on causing abortion. If a Buddhist monk speaks in praise of causing abortion, or prescribes medicine to cause an abortion, and if a woman following his advice has an abortion, he is guilty

of the serious offence of killing a human being. He is no longer a monk, and must disrobe immediately. The same is true of speaking in praise of euthanasia, as mentioned above by the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw. No distinction is made between an adult human being and a foetus just after conception. The Buddha's teaching says that life begins at conception, so abortion is the unwholesome deed of killing a human being. You should have no doubt about this.

One who has realised nibbāna is incapable of deliberately killing even a snake or a scorpion, let alone a human being. All Buddhists should follow the five precepts to the best of their ability, though we accept that ordinary people will not have perfect morality. Nevertheless, one who has strong faith in the Buddha's teaching does not break the precepts even to save his or her own life.

A monk named Cakkhupāla made a vow not to lie down for the entire rainy season. He contracted an eye-disease, and the doctor told him to put in the eye-drops while lying down. Still he would not lie down, and he went blind, simultaneously gaining Arahantship. An ordinary person might say that he went blind because he did not take the medicine, but the Buddha pointed out the root cause. In a former life he was a doctor. When a patient he was treating refused to pay him, he prescribed one more course of medicine for her that made her go blind. Because of that evil kamma, he went blind in his final life as Cakkhupāla. His determination not to break his vow enabled him to attain Arahantship, so he put an end to suffering for ever. Going blind was inevitable for him because of his previous evil kamma. If he had taken the medicine, his kamma might not have given its result so soon, but there was no way he could have avoided it.

If a woman is raped, though she has done nothing wrong, she has to endure dreadful humiliation. If she accuses the man in court she is liable to be cross-examined by the man's defence lawyers, who will insinuate that she led the man on, and

consented to sex by inviting him into her flat, *etc*. If her behaviour was completely blameless, she still has to suffer. All this suffering has a cause that is hidden from our view. Those who do not believe in previous lives look for other reasons to explain why a woman is raped, such as provocative clothing or licentious behaviour. These may be contributory factors, but even nuns, old women, and children sometimes get raped. There must be some other reason why a particular woman falls victim to this awful crime.

Let us consider what happens to the rapist. If the prosecution case fails, does he get off completely free? Not according to Buddhism he doesn't. Whatever action we do, good or bad, will have a result. If a man commits rape, he is liable to be reborn in hell after death. There, he will suffer torment until most of his evil kamma has given its result. We can infer that when reborn again as a human being, he may be a woman who is the victim of rape or other sexual abuse.

This is a reasonable explanation of why an apparently innocent person has to suffer appalling injustice. Only a Buddha can say precisely what cause leads to what result, but there are many stories in the Buddhist scriptures where the punishment fits the crime very well indeed:

A man abused a Solitary Buddha, calling him a leper. He was reborn as Suppabuddha, a leper in the time of Gotama Buddha.

A goldsmith who committed adultery shamelessly was reborn as a goat, a monkey, then a bull; and was castrated on each occasion. Then he was reborn as the wife of Sakka for five existences, then he suffered as a king's daughter. Then he was reborn as a male deity, and finally he was reborn as the Buddha's cousin, Ānanda — and he was still rather popular with women.

Urged by his wife, a man beat his elderly and blind parents to death. After suffering in hell, he was reborn as Venerable Moggallāna, one of the Buddha's chief disciples. He gained Arahantship and mastered all of the psychic powers, but he

was beaten to death by robbers, as his psychic powers could no longer save him from the greater power of his previous kamma. Venerable Moggallāna was an Arahant, he had no anger whatsoever for the robbers who were beating him to death, but his previous kamma had to give its result.

In the time of a former Buddha, a jealous monk threw away the food given by his supporters for an Arahant, because he wanted to drive him away. In the time of the Buddha he became a monk, but he never got enough to eat throughout his life.

In the time of Buddha Sikhī a group of nuns paid homage at a pagoda. When they left, one bhikkhuṇī going in front, who was an Arahant, spat out a piece of phlegm. Seeing the spittle on the ground, a bhikkhuṇī who was following said, "What kind of whore would spit in a place like this?" In the time of Gotama Buddha she was reborn at the foot of a mango tree in the king's garden, and abandoned. King Bimbisāra found her and she was brought up in the royal household. Because she was found at the foot of a mango tree, she was called "Ambapāli." Due to her former practice of the nun's morality, she was extremely beautiful. When she came of age, all the young nobles vied for her hand in marriage, and were ready to kill one another to get her. To settle the matter amicably the ministers decided that she would belong to everyone, so she was established as a courtesan. Thus, due to abusing an Arahant as a whore, she became a prostitute. Wealthy nobles paid one thousand a night to sleep with her, so she became wealthy. She donated the Ambapāli mango grove to the Saṅgha, became a bhikkhuṇī at a mature age, and gained Arahantship.

All of these stories show that kamma is an almighty force. No one can escape its effects, not even an Omniscient Buddha. Though a Buddha or an Arahant does not suffer mentally when abused or beaten, he still has to endure the physical effects of previous kamma. Ordinary people have to suffer the results of previous kamma too, but they also suffer mentally. If they are not wise, they make fresh unwholesome kamma. Being abused

as a result of abusing others, they abuse the abuser in return, earning more abuse for the future.

Not everything is the result of previous kamma, but nothing happens without a reason. For some things, previous kamma is the only reasonable explanation.

If one aborts a foetus for any reason, one is making unwholesome kamma resulting in being aborted oneself in the future, or being killed early in one's life. If one has faith in the law of kamma, one will never do such a cruel deed to a defenceless foetus. Such actions are unthinkable for a true Buddhist. A Buddhist should carefully examine the facts, accepting the current situation as a result of previous causes, then act pragmatically with compassion, mindful of the inexorable law of kamma.

When the wife of King Bimbisāra was pregnant she had bad dreams and desired to drink the king's blood. Astrologers predicted that the child would kill his own father, so the queen tried to abort the child. All of her attempts failed, and the pious king had her guarded carefully to prevent any further attempts on his heir's life. The boy was named Ajātasattu — unborn enemy.

Misled by the wicked monk, Devadatta, Prince Ajātasattu, killed his own father as predicted. Though he realised his mistake after the birth of his own son, it was too late. He reformed himself and supported the Saṅgha to the end of his life, but inevitably had to suffer in hell after death due to the heavy kamma of killing his own father. Until he heard the Sāmaññaphala Sutta, he had many sleepless nights, but after gaining confidence in the true Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha he gained some peace of mind. He became a devout supporter of the Saṅgha, and after the Buddha's passing away he sponsored the First Buddhist Council at Rājagaha, but he was murdered by his own son.

So if a woman has an abortion or someone encourages her to have one, they both make heavy unwholesome kamma.

Social values in the West need to change. Men need to be more protective of women, and women should want to preserve decent sexual values, since they are the most vulnerable. Why do women allow themselves to be sexually exploited? Every woman who poses half-naked for a magazine, or who walks about improperly dressed, showing what should be seen only by her husband, is perpetuating unwholesome sexual morals. She is not asking to be raped, but she is using her femininity to manipulate men to do her bidding. Men can resist everything except temptation.

In civilized cultures, women do not travel alone, or sit alone with unrelated men. They keep their bodies well covered, and sexual exploitation is less common. To reverse social trends is now very difficult, but if the Buddha's teaching was widely accepted and practised, abortion would not be condoned, nor would it be considered as the best solution to an unwanted pregnancy.

What kind of sense does it make to kill thousands of babies in the womb, and then pay thousands of pounds for fertility treatment or surrogacy?

Is Disability the Result of Kamma?

ARE THE DISABLED SUFFERING from the results of evil kamma done in a previous life? England football captain, Glen Hoddle, lost his job because he gave his opinion on this question. Perhaps football players should not answer such questions, but monks should try to answer ethical dilemmas to arouse faith in the law of kamma. Right understanding of the law of kamma will help us to come to terms with suffering.

THIS IS WHAT THE BUDDHA SAID in the Lesser Discourse on the Analysis of Kamma: "Some man or woman is given to injuring living beings with the hand, a stone, a stick, or a knife. Because of such actions, on the dissolution of the body after death, he or she reappears in a state of deprivation, even in hell.

However, if not born in hell, if reborn as a human being, he or she suffers from poor health." (M.iii.204)

So congenital diseases are the result of bad kamma in a previous life. The results do not always manifest at birth, but can appear whenever the conditions are ripe, as illustrated by the story of Cakkhupāla given above.

However, the law of kamma is not fatalism. Not every effect is due to kamma from a previous life. If one treads on thorns, trusting in one's good kamma for protection, one will still get one's feet pricked. If one smokes, drinks too much, or eats unhealthy food, one will suffer from diseases. Good kamma in the present life can prevent past bad kamma from giving its results, but present bad kamma can help it to manifest to the full. A simile will clarify how past and present kammas function together.

A certain minister was the favourite of a king. He abused his privileged position by demanding bribes, confiscating others' property, and abusing young women. His victims dared not complain to the king, who would not tolerate any criticism of his friend. However, one day the minister did something to annoy the king, and the king had him thrown into prison. On hearing that the minister was in prison, one of his victims came forward and complained to the king. The king investigated the complaint, and finding it to be true, inflicted further punishment on the minister. Then everyone who had suffered at the minister's hands came forward, and the king had him put to death.

> "When a fool does evil deeds he does not realise their evil nature. By his own deeds the stupid man is tormented, as if burnt by fire." (Dhp v 136)

Past evil kammas cannot give their results if strong good kammas are now manifesting, but when present evil kammas are done, the door of opportunity is left open for the results of past evil to appear.

Conversely, one who does many good kammas in this life may still have to suffer due to the fruition of evil kammas from a previous life. However, when some good kammas begin to give their results, conditions will be favourable for the results of further good kamma to appear. Moving to a new country can bring many benefits.

Are True Buddhists Vegetarians?

Q ARE TRUE BUDDHISTS VEGETARIANS? The eating of meat inevitably involves the killing of animals, why do most Buddhists eat meat and fish? Shouldn't all Buddhists be vegetarians or vegans?

A INTENTION IS CALLED KAMMA. The Buddha permitted monks to eat meat and fish, provided they have not seen, heard, nor suspected that the animal was killed specifically to offer meat to them. This applies equally to fish, fertile eggs, and other living things such as lizards or insects.

In this world, the vast majority of people are not vegetarians. If monks had to be vegetarians, it would be difficult for them to propagate Buddhism. Although Buddhists should not kill living beings, they can eat the meat of animals killed by others, provided they are free from involvement on four counts:

1. They do not kill by their own hand.
2. They do not urge others to kill.
3. They do no condone killing.
4. They do not speak in praise of killing.

Even if Buddhists do not buy meat and fish, non-Buddhists, and even some Buddhists, will kill living beings for the sake of a livelihood. The unwholesome kamma of killing is made only by the perpetrator, unless one urges, condones, or speaks in praise of that action.

Growing vegetables also entails the deliberate killing of pests and insects that feed on crops, but by buying vegetables one is not condoning that killing. A Buddhist farmer might be able

to produce organic crops without the help of insecticides and pesticides, but his products are likely to be more expensive.

Vegetarians and strict vegans are blameless if they choose not to eat meat or dairy products, but we cannot say that meat-eating is blameworthy in itself, unless one is involved in killing. Butchers who sell meat are not directly involved in the slaughter of animals. Only those who sell livestock for slaughter, and those involved in slaughtering, are guilty of killing living-beings.

The majority of Theravāda Buddhists are not vegetarians, and some are certainly guilty of condoning killing. Mahāyāna and western Buddhists are often strict vegetarians. Many Buddhists are too fond of meat and fish, they should reflect mindfully while eating to be free from excessive craving. A varied diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and low in fat, is best for health. Vegetables are cheaper than meat and more healthy.

A true Buddhist should be content to eat any kind of food, mindfully reflecting, "I take this food, not for enjoyment, but only for the sake of nutrition." If vegetarians take food unmindfully with attachment to the taste, taking pride in being more virtuous than others, or have strong aversion to the smell or taste of meat, they will be making unwholesome kamma.

If you are still doubtful about this, please read the Āmagandha Sutta of the Suttanipāta (vv 242-255), where the Buddha Kassapa makes it crystal clear that immorality is stench, not the eating of flesh.

Are Tantric Practices the Buddha's Teaching?

Q ARE TANtrIC PRACTICES THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING? In his book (translated by Jeffrey Hopkins), "How to Practice, The Way to a Meaningful Life," His Holiness the Dalai Lama said:

> "For Buddhists, sexual intercourse can be used in the spiritual path because it causes a strong focusing

> on consciousness if the practitioner has firm compassion and wisdom. Its purpose is to manifest and prolong deeper levels of mind (described earlier with respect to the process of dying), in order to put their power to use in strengthening the realization of the emptiness. Otherwise, mere intercourse has nothing to do with spiritual cultivation. When a person has achieved a high level of practice in motivation and wisdom, then even the joining of the two sex organs or so-called intercourse, does not detract from the maintenance of that person's pure behavior..." (See related discussion on Tricyle)

ANO. THESE TEACHINGS ARE FROM HINDUISM, NOT BUDDHISM. According to the Vinaya rule, if a monk engages in any kind of penetrative sexual intercourse with a woman or a man, or even a corpse or an animal, whether he emits semen or not, he is defeated and no longer a monk. However, if a monk or nun does not consent to sexual intercourse, or was insane at the time, there is no offence.

If a monk engages in some other sexual contact, which falls short of penetrative sexual intercourse, he has committed an offence requiring a formal meeting of the Saṅgha.

If a monk thinks there is no danger in sexual intercourse, he should read the next question. Even if a monk says that sexual intercourse can be used for spiritual practice, it doesn't necessarily mean that he has himself participated in such practices. If he has, then he should be dealt with according to the rule. No one should make unsubstantiated allegations of defeat. To do so would lead to rebirth in hell. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread! Should One Criticise Shameless and Immoral Monks?

Does Hell Really Exist?

QDOES HELL REALLY EXIST? Where is it? Don't religions teach about hell just to scare the naïve away from evil deeds?

A THE BUDDHA DESCRIBED HELL in detail in the Discourse on the Foolish and the Wise (Sutta 129 of the Middle Length Sayings), and the Divine Messengers (Sutta 130). Hell *(niraya)* is mentioned in over 800 places in the Pāḷi Tipiṭaka. As in other religions, hell is the destiny of evil-doers who kill living beings, steal, commit adultery, tell lies, *etc*. The Buddha declared one of two destinations for one holding a wrong view: animal rebirth, or hell (The Dog-duty Ascetic, Sutta 57). A certain ascetic believed that by fulfilling the practices of a dog, he would be reborn in heaven. The Buddha said that if he fulfilled that practice he would be reborn as a dog, but if he held the wrong view that the practice lead to heaven, he would be reborn in hell.

The Incontrovertible Teaching (Sutta 60) makes it clear how an intelligent person should keep an open mind about things beyond his or her knowledge, and adopt a safe course of action based on reason. Is it wise to drink heavily just because one doesn't know for sure that one will get cirrhosis of the liver? After all, one is more likely to die from a road accident first!

Those who do not have faith in Dhamma will not be satisfied merely with statements from the scriptures, but that is a defect in their religious knowledge. If one studies the Buddhist scriptures carefully, and practises meditation, one will certainly gain faith in the Dhamma.

One with no scientific knowledge will not believe in the existence of atoms and molecules, and may think that scientists are talking nonsense, but with a basic scientific education one comes to have no doubt about the existence of atoms. With religious knowledge gained, one will have no doubt that there are heavens and hells, since the different characters of the pious and the wicked are obvious enough. Pious deeds and wicked deeds will certainly give very different results after death. Where are Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, and Adolf Eichmann now? Is there no result of evil deeds?