

Living Inside a World of Stories



Upul Nishantha Gamage

The person known as 'I' cannot live without the story called 'my story.' We are always inside a world of stories about everything and everybody known to us. Ignorance and craving create these stories. As we are tricked by ignorance and craving into believing that happiness exists inside these stories, we become a character in a story that is in search of happiness. Though we think of acquiring happiness after reaching the end of the story, there is nobody who has reached the end.

Craving and ignorance do not let us put full stops to these stories. Even death cannot end the stories written by craving and ignorance. Death is not the end, but a beginning of another story. So the story continues in the next birth. We can live without creating stories only if we are mindful and heedful. If no story exists, the episode called death will not exist.



Published by
Upul Nishantha Gamage
Nilambe Deshana Publication Board
Buddhist Meditation Centre
Nilambe, Sri Lanka



Dhamma Dāna
For Free Distribution Only



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Light of Nilambe

Dhamma Dāna

In memory of our beloved father

K . A . Wijayasundara

May he attain Nibbāna!

with Love and Gratitude

and

This is to express our deepest

Gratitude to

*our loving mother **W. J .Dissanayake***

who devoted her entire life for

children's welfare. We wish her best

of health, happiness and long life.

Kumari Wijayasundara

Living Inside a World of Stories

Talk given by

Upul Nishantha Gamage

On June 23, 2013 (Poson Full-moon Day)

At Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre

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Published by

Nilambe Deshana Publication Board

Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre

Nilambe, Sri Lanka

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ISBN 978 – 955 – 44634 – 5 – 5

Graphic design by Chamara Illeperuma

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September 2013

Printer: Sanduni Offset Printers (Pvt.) Ltd.

No. 4/1, Sarasavi Uyana Good Shed Road,

Sarasavi Uyana, Peradeniya

Tel./Fax 081-2387777

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1. Significance of Poson full-moon day

Dear Dhamma Friends, a particular place, day and time is not necessary for acquiring a calm mind. However, a day like today (Poson full-moon day) is very important for Sri Lankan Buddhists, not merely nominally, but culturally and historically. Most of us accept unquestionably that the arrival of Arahant Mahinda caused a spiritual transformation in Sri Lanka, though diverse contradictory opinions exist. This does not mean that Buddhism did not exist in Sri Lanka before the arrival of Arahant Mahinda or before King Devanampiyatissa or before King Dharmasoka sent the Arahant Mahinda to Sri Lanka. We believe that the Lord Buddha paid three visits to Sri Lanka before the arrival of Arahant Mahinda. We also believe that there were some Sri Lankans back then who attained partial enlightenment and full enlightenment. Therefore, we may not have got the message of Buddhism or the message of calming down the inner self for the first time on a Poson full-moon day. However, Sri Lanka was declared a Buddhist country officially after the

historical arrival of Arahant Mahinda to this holy island on a Poson full-moon day like today. Therefore, today is a historically important day for Sri Lankan Buddhists.

However, we sit here not merely because of the historical importance of a day like today. I know that the Dhamma, its message and its path are more important than the historical matters to you. Even if no significant important historical event took place, we know the importance of being mindful, the usefulness of being heedful, and the value of enquiring into oneself. Events are associated with the past. But being mindful and heedful, and enquiring are associated with the present.

In the present, there are places with historical value. The sacred mountain of Mihintale is valuable to us because of the arrival of Arahant Mahinda. Otherwise, we would not give any spiritual and religious value to Mihintale. It would just be like any other mountain. Moreover, the Poson full-moon day could have been just like any other full-moon day. The sacred mountain of

Mihintale has become the religious centre of Sri Lanka because of the arrival of Arahant Mahinda. Moreover, the mountain of Mihintale and the Poson full-moon day have got a religious value.

The history has attributed a religious value to some places and dates. Such holy places and holy dates are associated not only with Buddhism but also with other religions. However, **such holy places and holy dates are not very much associated with the Dhamma, because the Dhamma is connected with the present, not with the past.** It is important to understand this matter clearly. History has made some places and dates in Sri Lanka glorious. We visit and worship such places. Such places give us goose pimples when we listen to stories associated with them, particularly because of the immense happiness that arises in us and our great respect for the Lord Buddha. It is possible to accrue lots of merits by worshipping such places.

2. The most valuable place for us to be

However, **the Dhamma gives a value to the present, to this moment or to 'here.'** You may be in the kitchen or in the courtyard or on the road or even in a very dirty place. Where you are at is not important for the Dhamma. Places that are important for history and culture are not important for the Dhamma. It is immaterial where you are to the Dhamma: whether you are at home or at a meditation centre or at a temple or on the road or in a bank or in a toilet or at a fair or in the office or on a bus or on an airplane. 'This moment and here' are the few simple words needed by the Dhamma. The Dhamma lightens 'this moment and here.' **The term 'here' means wherever you are at a particular moment. 'This moment' refers to the present.** The present is lightened by the Dhamma.

Therefore *Dear Dhamma Friends*, the Dhamma does not need immensely sacred places and holy dates. A holy date and a

sacred place alone cannot do anything. Just take this Nilambe Buddhist Mediation Centre as an example. Sometimes, you have arrived here with difficulty after spending a lot of time on the road. But this Centre does not give anything to you. None of us get anything from this Centre either. Sometimes, the calmness, quietness and simplicity that you experience here may not exist in other places. However, the Dhamma is not about the calmness, quietness and simplicity of a place. *Dear Dhamma Friends*, the Dhamma requests you to be mindful in the present wherever you are, because only a mindful person really hears the Dhamma.

3. What makes you a listener?

For instance, maybe we are at a place where the Dhamma is being preached. Maybe we are sitting right in front of the teacher and looking at him/her. We think that we are listening to the Dhamma, because we are sitting close to the teacher and

looking straight at him/her. If a photograph were taken, we could see our picture looking straight at the teacher. Someone who sees the photograph may also think that the person in the photograph is probably listening to the Dhamma. It is not possible to come to such conclusions. You need to be mindful and heedful. **The listener no longer exists in the absence of mindfulness and heedfulness. The listener exists only in the presence of mindfulness and heedfulness.**

Do you hear when you are not mindful? Do you hear what I preach when you are not heedful? No, heedfulness is needed for hearing. It is important to decide that: "I should listen to the discourse." Such a thought is necessary. When do you need to have such a thought? We may have made that decision about a month ago or even earlier. We may well have decided to listen to a discourse to be conducted by a particular teacher at a particular place on a particular date. This decision functions in our subconscious mind. Therefore, we do not plan anything else for that day and time. Sometimes, other needs may arise.

Someone may ask you to go somewhere. The moment you hear that someone is asking you to go somewhere, your subconscious mind reminds you about your decision on wanting to go to listen to a discourse. In this manner, the plan works.

We give up many other things and go to listen to the discourse as we decided earlier. You are sitting at a place where you can see the teacher. All these things are happening now based on the power of the intention you made some time ago. That intention has brought you here. That intention has made you give up other things. However, **that intention cannot make you a listener. That intention can only bring us physically here and make us sit.** That intention can give us the free time to come here. However, **if you are not mindful, heedful and attentive you are just sitting physically without listening.** One has to have the intention, 'I should listen' in the mind, at every moment, to be a listener. **Other thoughts should not arise**

while you are listening. Just see how difficult it is to listen properly.

How many thoughts that are not associated with listening are arising in the mind while you are listening? Suppose you remember some work that you need to do after the discourse. As soon as you remember it, the intention associated with planning it arises in the mind. **Two intentions do not function in a mind at the same moment. The functioning of 3 or 4 intentions at once in a mind is impossible.** Just see clearly that only one intention functions at any particular moment.

You are sitting inside the meditation hall. **The moment a new thought and an intention associated with a future activity arise in the mind, the listener disappears and the planner appears.** Although you are sitting here, you don't hear the discourse anymore. Intention, nothing else, makes an individual. A listener, a philosopher, a planner or a regretter is created by the intention. **You need to generate the intention**

over and over throughout the discourse that: “I must listen.” Moreover, you need to have the intention: “I must be mindful, I must be here, and I must be fully, not partially, alive with the present action.”

Only such an intention can create a listener. Only such an intention can make it possible to listen to a discourse. Only such an intention can retain the discourse you are hearing in your mind. Only such an intention can enquire about the Dhamma you have listened to. As a result of this effort, you may be able to understand what is being taught. Only listening makes comprehension and understanding possible. **It is not possible to retain the Dhamma in the mind if you do not listen, if you are not mindful, if you are thinking or planning or regretting about something else during the discourse. It is not possible to enquire about the Dhamma if it is not retained in the mind. It is not possible to understand the Dhamma if you don't enquire about it.** None of these things happen mechanically.

4. Experience hidden in the words

Listening to the Dhamma is different from recording the Dhamma. A recorder does not hear the Dhamma, but only a sound is heard. Sounds are recorded by a recorder. However, you don't listen to the sounds, but to their meaning. A recorder cannot understand the difference between the sounds and their meaning. Any sophisticated recorder records only the meaningless sounds.

However, a person who is listening mindfully and attentively may understand the meaning of the words s/he hears, because a Dhamma discourse is not about some words. A Dhamma discourse is about an experience, which is well beyond the words. An experience is not a word. However, we use words to talk about experience. We hear the words. Only a person who is mindful and attentive can hear the experience hidden underneath the words s/he hears.

The words we hear are like a letter inside an envelope. Sometimes, we cannot send a letter without putting it inside an envelope. However, the letter is not the envelope. If someone wants to read the letter, to know the message in the letter or to experience its usefulness, the envelope has to be torn open. Envelopes are beautiful. There are elegant and attractive envelopes in different shapes. Some envelopes are so valuable. No matter how valuable, beautiful, elegant and attractive an envelope is, if someone wants read the message in the letter, the envelope has to be torn open. There is no way to read the letter and its message without tearing the envelope. Therefore, **we need to be sharp enough to listen to the message and the experience hidden underneath the words we hear.** Otherwise, we have just listened to some words, read some words, retained some words and said some words to another person. That is all. Just see clearly what we have done by listening to a Dhamma discourse or reading a Dhamma book.

5. Retention and reiteration of words

We listen to some words or read some words. We may remember only some of the words in the paragraph that we have read or heard. We may remember 25, 30, 40, 50, 60 or 70 % of what we have heard or read. Venerable Ananda could remember 100 % of what he heard. Ordinary people like us may remember only 10 or 15 %. Just see how much you remember after reading a Dhamma book or listening to a Dhamma discourse. Sometimes, some words may be working in our head. We remember some words. We hear some of the words again and again. We remember some of the words or sentences that we have read again and again.

The first step is reading or listening. The second step is recalling what we have read or heard. We can remember over and over. If we do not remember over and over, the per cent retained in the mind diminishes. If we remember 50 % in the beginning, we may remember only 25 % a year later. In any case, if a person

asks you: “Did you attend that discourse? What did you hear? What was preached?”, then you say what you remember. When a person asks you: “What was there in the book you read?”, then you say what you remember. In this manner, you first read some words and then you retained some words. Afterwards, you reiterate some words. Words are retained. Words are reiterated.

6. Powerless exchange of words

Dear Dhamma Friends, an exchange of words takes place between a teacher and a listener or a writer and a reader. A listener has got some words from a teacher and a reader has got some words from a writer. We do not know what the teacher and the writer really gave us but we have got some words. We remember only a portion of the words that we have heard or read. Out of that, we can tell even a smaller portion of what we retained in our mind to another person. We stop at

that point saying: “What a splendid discourse or book that is.” Another person may say: “I too need to read that book or go to listen to that discourse.” The **exchange of words in this manner cannot reduce suffering, minimise suffering or end suffering.**

These words aren't a charm. The charms don't have meaning. It is impossible to get hold of meaningful charms. Just look at the charms used on serpents or ghosts. These charms are meaningless. There are charms in many languages. However, these charms may bring the expected results. A power of a word cannot reduce the suffering of a person. Reciting a charm does not reduce suffering, desire, foolishness and jealousy. There is no charm that can reduce jealousy, anger, rage etc. There may be charms that can reduce fever, but there are not any for reducing anger. There may be charms that can reduce shivering, but there are not any for reducing fear.

We think that the words are so powerful. Words are powerful but such power is physical. **As a word is something physical, its**

power is also physical. Within the physical limits, words have some power. One may ask for some money to buy some medicine or to pay off a debt or to pay the rent. If someone asks for LKR 50, that is something physical. Asking for money is also done by using physical words. After being asked for money, the lender may say: “I’ll give it to you in the evening.” When the borrower hears these words, s/he feels so relieved. This relief is not merely caused by the words. As the borrower has been promised some money, s/he can relax now. The lender may give the money in the evening. Afterwards, the relief the borrower feels becomes certain. But the lender may not give the money as promised. Then, the relief diminishes making the borrower feel even worse. A word can pacify a person or make a person restless. All this is physical.

7. Modes of communication

Physical words also have to be used to give a spiritual message. There is no other way of communication in the human world. However, it is not possible to think that the Lord Buddha used human language to preach in other worlds like heaven or the Brahman world. The Lord Buddha could have given the message through a different media. Those in the human world would not have heard anything. Even if there were a person close to the Lord Buddha at the time he taught the gods in heaven or Brahman in the Brahman world, that person could not have heard anything. If another language is used, we can hear it even if we don't understand the language. If someone says something in German, we hear it though we do not understand that language. If a different medium instead of words is used we don't hear anything. We hear only silence. We think that the Lord Buddha is silent. Or else, the Arahant is silent. The teacher is silent. According to our capacity, we feel the silence. However, communication takes place in a capacity

beyond ours. There is listening. Gods and Brahmans hear something that we don't hear.

8. Words, alive and dead

Dear Dhamma Friends, therefore, language is important. Words are important. However, the Dhamma is not about words. Where do words come from? Words come from an experience. All the advice given by the Lord Buddha comes to us from His experience and understanding, not through knowledge. Therefore, the words preached by the Lord Buddha are not merely words. The words are alive. There are two types of words: dead words and alive words. Dead words are merely words, nothing else. For instance, when we talk about an old story, some words are used. These words aren't alive. When we talk about an experience, we use both words and experience.

We need to be heedful enough to see and hear the experience. Otherwise, **we hear only the dead words, not the experience.** The words may be beautiful. Speaking style may be very charming, rhythmic and logical. That is all. We are not sensitive enough to perceive the profound message. *Dear Dhamma Friends*, there is no need to talk about this matter anymore.

9. Have we changed?

As a group of people who listen to the Dhamma frequently, discuss the Dhamma and read the Dhamma books, we need to see how much we have changed because of the Dhamma we have listened to and read so far. How many Dhamma books have we read? Writing Dhamma books is indeed a good act. Write down the titles of all the Dhamma books you have read on a piece of paper: Number them 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and so on. If you do that, you'll realize that you have read so many Dhamma books: maybe nine hundred plus or a thousand plus or even

more than that. It would be so nice if you could write down all the Dhamma discourses you have listened to and number them: how many telecasted discourses, how many broadcasted discourses, how many discourses you have listened to at the temple and meditation centres. See whether you have changed. We may even qualify for the trophy awarded to the person who has listened to the most Dhamma discourses or read the most Dhamma books. However, have we really changed? Why haven't we changed even after reading about 900 books? Is it because we haven't yet read the 901st book? We may have listened to about 5000 Dhamma discourses. Why haven't we changed? Is it because we haven't yet listened to the 5,001st discourse? As we think like this, we read the 901st book and listen to the 5,001st discourse. However, we intend to listen to the 5,002nd discourse too. We want to read the 902nd book too. Someone can become a library of Dhamma books. Yet, his/her inner nature deteriorates and collapses.

10. What makes you stand firm?

It is necessary to acquire a strong, meaningful and fruitful inner nature. Such an inner nature does not deteriorate and collapse. **It is the inner nature, not the backbone, which keeps a person upright without letting him/her fall down.**

The inner nature is the understanding. Only understanding can keep us still and prevent us from falling down, no matter from which direction and what type of hurricane approaches us. Physical vigour cannot do that. Physical vigour can do only very little. **The Dhamma is for acquiring a strong, meaningful and fruitful mind.** As a result, we can remain happily unmoved with things associated with pleasure; pleasurable people, pleasurable occasions, pleasurable environments. Under such circumstances, a person appears to be unmoved and stands firm without falling down. We say that we are supposed to live like that.

11. What do we always go after?

We go to any place where there is pleasure. Just see clearly. **We go in search of happiness all the time. When we go in search of happiness, unhappiness comes in search of us. When we go in search of gain, loss comes to us.** We never went in search of loss or unhappiness. We always looked for happiness. We always wished for gain. There is no room in any of our daydreams or wishes for loss or unhappiness. Who makes daydreams for becoming restless? The beginning of all daydreams is beautiful. Beautiful daydreams, beautiful expectations, beautiful wishes and beautiful goals are projected towards happiness and gain. Wherever happiness is, we go running to that place. Whoever has happiness, we go running to him/her. Whichever position has happiness, we acquire that position. Whichever furniture has happiness, we acquire that furniture. See clearly.

We are always on the move. This is not visible. Maybe, we are sitting on a chair at the office or lying in bed. No matter where we are, we are on the move in search of happiness and gain. **Can you find a single moment or one second that you are not on the move in search of happiness and gain?** Or else, a moment you are not wishing for anything, are not making plans for acquiring happiness and gain. We plan to keep the happiness and gain we experience all the time. We plan to experience the same happiness not only today, but also tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, not only tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, but also next week. **We move on this timeline to the future and to infinity while making plans, thinking and wishing for happiness and gain.**

12. Journey of the craving

Similarly, we think of ways of doubling the happiness experienced by us in the present. We think of ways of

increasing the gain 2- or 3-fold by tomorrow, or by next year. We have thoughts associated with happiness and gain to be experienced in the future. We make plans about that. We all are calm and quiet physically while carrying on a journey in search of happiness and gain. This journey is not physical. We start this journey with our mind. **Craving (taṅhā), nobody else, carries us on this journey.** Craving carries us on two journeys: one having the same happiness and gain as we already have and another having more happiness and better gains than what we experience in the present. These are the two kinds of attentiveness we pay attention to, in operation in our mind.

13. Raw materials for our stories

When we plan and make stories associated with these two journeys of craving, we need raw materials. We use individuals as raw materials. A child makes stories based on his/her parents: “They will buy certain things for me. They will take me

somewhere.” A child may need sports equipment, a beautiful dress or to go somewhere. This child makes a happy plan expecting help from his/her parents. A child cannot make his/her dreams come true without help, support and permission from his/her parents. So, a child makes a beautiful story based on his/her parents. This story is not about the child’s parents, but about the child’s happiness and gain. However, the parents are in it. Parents also make stories about their happiness using their children as raw materials. See clearly. As human beings, we make lots of stories. There is at least one person inside these stories. This person in our story may be an enemy. A fight with an enemy may be made into a story: how s/he fights, scolds and attacks us and so on, and what are the tactics and tricks to be used against them.

14. 'I' and 'my story'

In this manner, we are in a world of stories associated with searching for happiness and gain. This is not a world that can come true. There are some stories and dreams that may come true. Whether these stories come true or not, we are always inside a story. "I am always inside my own story. The person known as 'I' is always inside his/her own story." Just think about it. Ponder on it. The person known as 'I' cannot live without the story called 'my story.'

The writer of the story and the story are not two separate things, but one. In the absence of the writer, the story disappears and vice versa. A writer cannot be present at a place where there is no story. A writer exists because of a story. There is no writer if a story/article is not written. On the other hand, a story/article emerges, is written and completed only if there is a writer. Try to understand what I am saying without holding onto mere words.

A writer is always present inside a story/article. This is not about writing a story/article when the writer is outside the story. There are such stories too. However, **when it comes to a story about 'self', the writer is always inside the story. We are all inside our own stories.** 'I' is not a story we write while we are outside sitting on a chair and writing with a pen on a piece of paper placed on a table.

15. The biggest story

'I' is part of 'my story.' There are many more parts to it; my parents, my friends, my enemies, my job and so on. 'I' is a big story, even bigger than the Arabian Nights, which ends with the 1001st tale. The legend or the story called 'I' does not end like the Arabian Nights. We do not end it because there are so many stories. A mother and father make stories about their one and only child, his/her education, sports activities, beauty, marriage, and so on. Likewise, there are so many stories. 'I'

and the child exist in all these stories. At least we think that 'I' and the child exist in all these stories. Not only that, a person makes stories about his/her house; its value and beauty; the effort made to build that house; the comments made by others about the house; possible renovations to the house; another house that might be built in the neighbourhood.

16. Countless stories

In this manner, we are inside a world of stories. We write so many essays about everything and everybody known to us. Can we say that we have nothing to talk about, to write about and to dream about a particular person or place? **We are stuck inside a world of stories about everything and everybody known to us. As a result, we suffer.** Just put aside suffering. 'My world' is a world of stories, not the Earth. Even when there was no knowledge about the Earth, people wrote stories about their world. Just see clearly *Dear Dhamma Friends*. We live in a

world of stories. We make stories about money; the money we have got; the money we used to have; the money we want to get; the money we have spent; the money we want to spend. In this manner, we make up stories associated with the economy. Similarly, we make up stories associated with politics. These stories are not created only by economists or politicians, but by everybody.

In this manner, how many stories have we written in our mind? Inside how many stories do we live in? It is not possible to even think about it as there is a story inside another story, in which there is another story. A husband makes up a story about his wife. A wife makes up a story about her husband. Those who are unmarried make up a story about getting married. They make plans to accomplish that story. There are people, houses, furniture, vehicles, positions, money etc. inside all these stories.

17. Why do we write stories?

Having made up these stories, we go to a place where there is happiness. We make up all these stories to be happy. **We think that it is not possible to be happy without writing stories.** Therefore, we always start writing beautiful stories. Nobody starts writing an ugly story. Therefore, these stories are called happy endings. We expect a happy ending. We start writing stories expecting a happy ending. It is the same with stories written by children about their parents. It is the same with stories written by parents about their children, husbands about their wives, friends about their friends. Everybody writes stories about everybody else expecting happiness inside the stories, not here. We look for happiness inside a story.

18. The real truth about our stories

The Dhamma says that all of us live inside a world of stories or papañcha (proliferation of thoughts). If someone asks you

about another person, you give an answer, which is related to the stories you have created about that person. We don't have an absolute story about that person. We tell a story that we have created about that person. **It is the story that I have written about another person.** Is there any other way to talk about another person? No, there is no other way because we don't know.

If I have created a beautiful story about another person, then we talk about his/her goodness, virtuousness, kindness, generosity, patience, humility etc. **All these are conclusions drawn regarding another person based on a story we have created about him/her.** According to my story, s/he is humble. Another person may say something else about that person. A third person may have another story about that person. Which one is the true story? Is it the first, the second or the third story? Then we say that different people comment differently as we look at things from different angles. **Our comments are not based on what we see, but on what we look at from**

different angles. We have no clear or pure vision. We always look at a person through a story. If we comment based on what we see, then we can have an overall picture about a person, after taking the comments made by about 10 other people into consideration. When we try to do this, in the end, the person we create is not going to be a human being. You can do this as an experiment. It is impossible to create a living person in this manner.

If someone asks about this meditation hall, as different people see it from different angles, in the end, we can guess about this hall. However, it does not happen. **We don't talk about the way we see, but about the way we look at.** Therefore, the more we listen to others' ideas, the more we get confused, and we may find it more difficult to get a clear picture. As we see only what we want to see and what our mind wants to see, it is difficult to make a clear picture about anything/anybody. The mind can look at anything. The mind can see the beauty in anything ugly. It is not important to the mind whether

something is ugly or beautiful. **If the mind wants to see beauty in something, it sees beauty. If the mind wants to see goodness in somebody, it sees goodness. If the mind wants to see ugliness in something, it can see the ugliness in something beautiful.**

19. The role of craving and ignorance

Ignorance creates a story about the things chosen by the craving. We are just a character in a story created by ignorance and craving. We are just the pen/pencil regarding this story. We think that we are the writer, which is true up to a certain level. When we ponder on it, it is obvious that I am just pen/pencil regarding a story. **An invisible hand uses me as a pen/pencil and writes the story known as 'I'. Who does the writing? Ignorance and craving do that. Ignorance and craving obtain bits and pieces of information from others and create stories about each of them.**

As we don't like to be a pen/pencil, ignorance and craving string us along by telling us: "Your happiness is right here." There is nothing else that we are greedier for than happiness. There is nothing else that we cling to more than gain. Therefore, **we are tricked by ignorance and craving into believing that happiness exists.** Afterwards, we become a character in a story that is in search of happiness. We are not a character in a story that has already acquired happiness, but one in search of happiness. 'I' is a character in the middle of a story that is heading in search of happiness.

We think that we can acquire happiness when we reach the end of the story. There is no-one who has reached the end of a story. Has anybody reached the end of a story and end of happiness? There is no-one who says: "Everything I need is accomplished. I am so happy. I don't need anything anymore. I have got enough money. I don't need money anymore. I have met the person who I wanted to meet. I have reached the place where I wanted to go. I have got the house I wanted to build."

Craving and ignorance do not let us put full stops to these stories. There are no full stops, like the initial stories of the Arabian Nights. The remaining part of a story is left for tomorrow. We always have a dream of the remaining part of a story.

20. Suffering hidden inside stories

Dear Dhamma Friends, when we are in between two stories, when we dream about acquiring happiness and gain at the end of a story, unhappiness appears from somewhere and taps us. Unhappiness and loss find us. We don't have to go in search of unhappiness and loss. Nobody in the world has created stories about looking for unhappiness and acquiring losses. However, **unhappiness has infiltrated into our story from nowhere, though we did not leave any room for that to happen when we created those stories.** There is no room for suffering in stories created by parents about their children. These stories

seem protective. However, a story about unhappiness is written unknowingly – hidden from the writer and the pen. Writing the story about unhappiness has started. This story is true, unlike the story about happiness. A smile is a dream, but a tear is the truth. Suffering turns into a truth, a reality. As a result, one starts crying and sighing.

Dear Dhamma Friends, we were not born for crying, though we cried at birth. We were not born for suffering, though we have suffered all this time. **We were born for experiencing happiness and pleasure. However, the story about unhappiness unfolds. The story about unrest unwinds. There must be a mistake somewhere. We need to find out the mistake.** Otherwise we'll become a prisoner inside a story that we cannot end.

21. The story continues after death

Even death cannot end this story. See clearly. Death is not the end of this story. **Death cannot stop the story written by craving.** It would be nice if death could end this story of craving, this dream of ignorance. If it were so, there would not be anything better than death. But death is just another event in this story. **Death is another creation of ignorance.** Death is created by ignorance, and by nothing else. A list of things created by ignorance is given in Dependent Origination. Death is one of them.

The writer known as ignorance creates events such as the birth, becoming a youth, engaging in sports, studying, getting certificates, receiving awards, getting a job, making money, buying vehicles, getting married, having a happy married life, bringing up children, giving education to the children etc. All these are some events in the story of ignorance. In the end, death reaches us. We think that the story ends after death. No,

that is not the way. Death is not an ending. **Death cannot end the ignorance because death is also created by ignorance.** How is it possible for death to end its creator? No, it is not possible. So the story continues in the next birth. We are always at a point where we are trying to finish certain things that we could not complete in the previous birth. **We cannot complete these things even in this birth as new things are being added to the list.** We are always in between two stories.

22. Weeping and smiling in a dream

We start a beautiful story, which flows nicely. While we are in a beautiful dream, unhappiness, suffering and problems arise and disturb our beautiful dream without letting us dream. Nobody dreams in isolation. It is true that a dream is personal as it is impossible to get together and dream about something. Let's think that a dream is something personal. However, you are not the only person or thing in the dream as there are many

things-food, journeys, places, other people etc. - in it. How many people are there in my dream? How many things are there in my dream? Suffering can enter through these people and things.

As a result, it is the dreamer who suffers, not the characters in his/her dream. Suppose you dream about a friend who you respect a lot. As a result, you feel so happy. While you are dreaming, your friend falls sick or meets with an accident or dies in the dream. What happen to you then? We cry and suffer inside the dream. We may experience chest pains inside the dream. We grieve inside the dream. None of these things have actually happened to the friend that you dreamt about. Understand clearly. **If we create a dream about somebody, unhappiness enters through that person and stings us.** It happens because we grab the tail. If we grab the tail called happiness, unhappiness comes from behind and stings us. If we grab the tail called gain, loss comes from behind and stings us. All these things happen while we are dreaming. However,

we truly get hurt. That is where the problem lies. We truly cry. *Dear Dhamma Friends*, we giggle at a dream. **We feel happy, proud and elated over a dream created by ignorance.** We cry, weep, sigh and lament over a dream, a story and a papañca. There is nothing else here, but a person who weeps and smiles inside a dream.

23. No dreaming-No weeping

If you wake up or rather stop making stories about those who are around you- your mother or father, wife or husband, daughter or son-these persons exist but there are no stories associated with them. A house, a vehicle and a job exist, but no stories associated with them. “It is true that I have a job. But I do not make stories about my job. I do not have any dream about my job.” **Understand clearly that suffering does not exist at a place where there is no dream.** A smile or a tear does not exist at a place where there is no dream. Death does not

exist at a place where there is no dream as it is part of the dream. Death is an event in the dream created by ignorance.

A person who has awakened does not die. Only those who are in the slumber of ignorance die. Therefore, we do not say that the Perfected Ones (Arahants) have died, but they have attained Nibbāna (Parinirvāṇa). Parinirvāṇa is not an honourable term we use to refer to the death of a perfected person. We do not say that the monks eat alms food but that they partake of it, though eating and partaking are the same. We use such terms to show respect for them. Similarly, we say that the monks do not walk, but proceed; do not sleep, but repose; do not talk but preach.

24. No dreaming-No death

However, Parinirvāṇa is not an honourable term like ‘partaking’ or ‘proceeding’ or ‘preaching’. The Perfected Ones have awakened. They are already dead as far as what we refer to as

death is concerned. At the moment they became Perfected Ones, everything that was to die, died. **If they owned things, their ownership died when they became the Perfected Ones.** Nobody can become a Perfected One without the death of what is owned by him/her. In a sense, the Perfected Ones are dead. However, **the Perfected Ones really live. Though we live, we are dead. We live inside a dream. A person who is in a dream does not live. Only the Perfected Ones truly live, because all their dreams are dead.** No dream can kill them anymore. No dream can harm them. They may fall sick. They may seclude themselves. They may have to starve. They may be blamed. But none of this can make them dream again. Therefore, **only the awakened ones do not see death. Everybody else dies.**

Death is not the end but a beginning of another story. **If no story exists, the episode called death does not exist.** Therefore, the Perfected Ones do not die. **Those who live in the dream worlds die.** Also the characters in the dream worlds

die. When these characters die, we feel sad. When these characters distance themselves from us, we feel sad. If these characters scold us, we feel sad. However, if we analyse our sorrows, it is obvious that all these sorrows are merely dreams that we dream, nothing else.

Therefore *Dear Dhamma Friends*, mindfulness is very important, this moment is very important, 'here' or wherever you are now is very important. If you can be mindful and heedful without creating any story, if you can pay full attention to what is happening: What is happening to me? What am I hearing? What am I seeing? What am I remembering? If we are mindful about everything that is happening, if we do not create any dream based on any incident, a sufferer does not exist at that place. Death does not exist at that place. **A Dhamma discourse is a communication of a live experience devoid of death, suffering, unrest and dreaming.**

May the Triple Gem Bless You!!!