

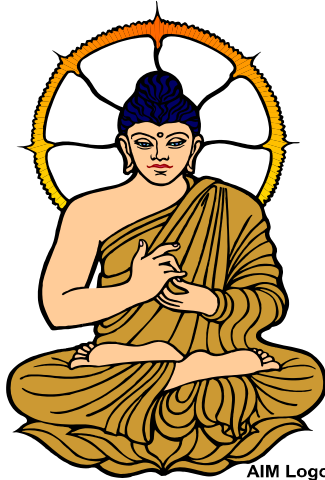
The Way Down to Hell is Easy



by
Bhikkhu Pesala

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© Latest Edition July 2013

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Association for Insight Meditation

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Introduction

“The way down to Hell is easy.
The gates of black Dis¹ stand open night and day.
But to retrace one’s steps and escape to the upper air—
that is toil, that is labour.” (Virgil, the Aeneid)

In most religions, Hell is conceived of as a place of incessant torment where non-believers and evil-doers suffer for their wickedness. Buddhism contains similar teachings about various heavens and hells, with examples of deeds leading to different destinies. However, its final aim is to attain the transcendental bliss of nibbāna, which is not a place of blissful enjoyment like heaven, but the highest possible spiritual achievement of eternal liberation from suffering. Final liberation is attained by the total destruction of craving and ignorance.

Buddhists are very fortunate to have a well-preserved and consistent record of the Buddha’s teaching over a period of forty-five years. More than two thousand five hundred years after the Buddha’s demise, these teachings are still easily available, with an extensive commentarial literature to explain and analyse the meaning. All of the Pāḷi texts and many of the Commentaries have been translated into English. A patient student of Buddhism can learn sufficient Pāḷi to clarify doubts about the accuracy of available translations by referring to the original texts with the help of a dictionary.

The problem is, perhaps, that there is too much to learn, so the average person does not have sufficient time to read more than a fraction of the Buddha’s original discourses. People are so busy with acquiring the knowledge needed to survive in the modern world, that they seldom have adequate knowledge of Buddhism. Having read many books and articles on modern physics, biology, genetics, and psychology, their thinking is often more in line with materialism than with Buddhism.

¹ Black Dis is the Guardian of Hell. (Virgil, the Aeneid, Penguin Hutchinson Reference)

I will try to rectify this imbalance by gathering, in this pocket-sized booklet, quotations and key passages from the texts, so that the reader can know something of what the Buddha taught about heaven and hell.

All Buddhists should ensure that they have rightly grasped the Buddha's teachings. Misrepresenting the Buddha does serious harm to Buddhism, and to the welfare of humanity as a whole, but most of all to oneself. If one does not know what he taught, one should try to learn more. If one does not believe what he taught, then one has not found the right path. If one believes that he did not teach what he did teach, that is a wrong view. If one declares that view, it is wrong speech. The Buddha declared one of two destinations for one who clings to a wrong view: animal rebirth, or rebirth in hell. Wrong views should be removed by discussing the Dhamma and reading Dhamma books.

Realms of Existence

Six kinds of existence are described in the Buddhist texts: celestial, human, animal, hungry ghosts, jealous gods, and beings in hell. Living beings can be reborn in any of these realms after death, depending on the kamma they have done during life. The last thought-moment before death determines one's destiny in the next existence. This last thought-moment depends on those preceding it — powerful kammas, kammas done close to death, and habitual kammas have the strongest influence.

The primary aim of Buddhism is to realise nibbāna and eradicate the egoism that is the root of the ten evil deeds: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, abusing, idle chatter, covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views. Only human beings and deities have the potential to realise nibbāna and attain the first stage of enlightenment, which is called Stream-winning. Since egoism, doubt, and wrong views are eliminated at this stage, such an individual can no longer be reborn in the four lower realms of animals, hungry ghosts, jealous gods, and

hell. They can only be reborn in heavenly realms or as human beings until their final liberation from suffering.

An ordinary person who has not yet attained nibbāna is always in danger of being reborn in the four lower realms after death, due to the prevalence of evil kammās. Pious Buddhists protect themselves by avoiding evil deeds, by taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha, and by doing wholesome deeds whenever they can. The only guarantee, however, is to practise insight meditation until one realises nibbāna, thus permanently eradicating the tendency to do evil deeds.

How Can Anything Be Proved?

Modern thought stresses rigorous scientific methods. Recent research into the MMR vaccine suggests that it might be linked to autism. Most leading scientists are convinced that there is no link, but further research might prove them wrong, so many parents are not convinced even by overwhelming scientific evidence. One has to win over hearts as well as minds.

Criminal proceedings use logical reasoning to ‘prove beyond a reasonable doubt’ that the defendant committed a crime, and the jury makes its decision based on the evidence presented in court. Scientific and legal arguments are fair methods, but neither are infallible. History shows that ‘truths’ are routinely shown to be erroneous.

To prove the existence of heaven and hell is impossible using such methods. Science cannot measure mental phenomena, and logical reasoning cannot analyse what is beyond its scope. To arrive at religious truths we have to use an introspective method. The Buddha always urged his disciples to practise meditation. Those who have never practised meditation seriously cannot comprehend what is beyond their personal experience. “Only seeing is believing” as the saying goes. In the Vinaya Mahāvagga it says that when the Buddha was about to teach the Dhamma, he thought, “This truth that I have realised is very profound. Though it is sublime and conducive

to inner peace, it is hard to understand. Since it is subtle and not accessible to mere intellect and logic, it can be realised only by the wise.”¹

Many great thinkers such as Confucius, Plato, Shakespeare, Newton, Voltaire, Freud, Jung, and Einstein, have thought deeply on the meaning of life, and have put forward various theories. However, not one of them was an Omniscient Buddha. Gotama the Buddha discovered a different method that is not based on logical reasoning, but on introspective meditation. He developed very deep concentration, called *jhāna*, by means of which he attained psychic powers. With these powers, he could recollect his previous lives, and the lives of other beings. He could see other realms of existence such as heavens and hells, and he could see beings dying from one existence and being reborn in another due to volitional activities, called *kamma*. He did not prove the existence of these realms by well-reasoned arguments, but personally realised them through deep concentration. Many who met him became convinced of their existence when he demonstrated his psychic powers, or when celestial beings came to pay homage to him.

Many of the Buddha’s disciples, like Venerable Moggallāna, had similar powers, and could see these things for themselves too. His greatest disciple, Venerable Sāriputta, had no such psychic powers, but was famed for his powerful intellect. On one occasion, Venerable Sāriputta declared in the midst of the Saṅgha, “It is clear to me, Lord, that there never has been, never will be, and is not now another recluse or brahmin who is wiser or more enlightened than the Blessed One.”²

The Buddha replied, “You have spoken boldly with a bull’s voice, Sāriputta. You have roared a lion’s roar of certainty. How is this? Have all the Arahant Buddhas of the past appeared to you, and were the minds of those Blessed Ones open to you, so as to say: ‘These Blessed Ones were of such virtue, such was

¹ *“Adhigato kho myāyaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacaro nipuno paṇḍitavedanīyo.”* (Vin. i. 4).

² D.iii.9. Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Sāriputta’s Lion’s Roar.

their teaching, such was their wisdom, such their abiding, such their liberation’?”

“No Lord.”

“And have you perceived all the Arahant Buddhas who will appear in the future?”

“No Lord.”

“Well then, Sāriputta, you know me as the Arahant Buddha, and do you know: ‘The Blessed One is of such virtue, such is his teaching, such his wisdom, such his abiding, such his liberation’?”

“No Lord.”

“So, Sāriputta, you do not have knowledge of the minds of the Buddhas of the past, the future, or the present. Then, Sāriputta, have you not spoken boldly with a bull’s voice and roared the lion’s roar of certainty with your declaration?”

Venerable Sāriputta then gave the simile of the fortified city. Although he had no direct knowledge of the minds of any Buddhas, he did have personal knowledge of the Dhamma such that he could utter this lion’s roar. If one carefully examined the wall of a great fortified city to check that not even a cat could get through it, then stood at the city gate watching all those who entered and left, one would know that whoever entered or left the city did so by means of the gate.

Venerable Sāriputta rightly inferred the great powers of the Buddha from his profound knowledge of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha, having practised that Dhamma and personally experienced the bliss of nibbāna by attaining Arahantship. In the rest of the Discourse, Venerable Sāriputta went on to expound the great powers of the Tathāgata.

This “Discourse on Serene Faith” shows the way to prove something by inference. Some things beyond our personal direct knowledge should be accepted, and we should change our behaviour, speech, thought, and view accordingly, having inferred the right conclusion. A hardened sceptic may say, “How can we believe that Sāriputta had gained Arahantship?”

or “How can we know that the discourses have not just been made up by someone?” As long as they do not practise the Dhamma properly, they will never be able to gain confidence in it, because it is beyond logical reasoning and speculation.

Studying the original discourses will help, but there is no substitute for personal realisation. At least one should practise to the level of Purification by Overcoming Doubt. Then one will infer, “This is surely the teaching of the Blessed One.”

Pious Buddhists have little difficulty accepting the Buddha’s teaching, because they have confidence based on long experience of practising generosity, morality, and meditation. They correctly infer that evil-doers go to hell and that the pious go to heaven. This is not blind faith, but confidence based on their experience of non-remorse and clear thinking due to their blameless life-style.

However, Buddhists who are not so pious, and most non-Buddhists, entertain doubts about the Buddha’s teaching, and so worry about their destiny after death. They lack confidence and have a guilty conscience due to defects in their morality. Ironically, their defective morality is a result of lack of confidence in the Dhamma.

We can draw an analogy with keep-fit enthusiasts and sufferers from obesity. Those who have been lazy and indulgent for years, lack the confidence to change their diet and lifestyle. However, keep-fit enthusiasts do not need to worry about their health and weight. They can eat whatever they like, and naturally choose healthy food. Even if they sometimes eat unhealthy food, they do not gain weight because they are always physically active. Similarly, those who have right view do not easily do immoral deeds, because they believe that evil deeds lead to hell. If they do sometimes err, they are ashamed and contrite. Those who hold wrong views, easily do immoral deeds, and find it hard to do wholesome deeds. If blamed for their shamelessness by the pious, they make further evil kamma by lying, and by declaring their wrong views to deflect criticism.

The Incontrovertible Teaching

This important discourse is found in the Middle Length Sayings (Sutta 60). While touring among the Kosalans, the Buddha arrived at the village of Sāla, where the householders came to greet him and sat down at one side.

He asked them, "Householders, is there any teacher agreeable to you in whom you have acquired faith supported by reasons?"

They replied that there was not, so he advised them to undertake and practise the incontrovertible teaching.

"Some teachers say that there is no other world, no future result of actions done in this life, and no recluses who have knowledge of the other worlds. Some teachers teach the opposite view. Those who hold the first view are likely to do evil deeds and not to do good deeds, since they do not see any danger in evil or any benefit in renunciation and purification.

"Since there actually is another world, they hold a wrong view and have wrong thought. If they declare their view they have wrong speech. They are opposed to those Arahants [like the Buddha] who know that there is another world, and convince others to accept what is untrue. Thus any virtue they might have had is destroyed, and all these unwholesome states arise because of wrong view. A wise man considers thus, 'If there is no other world, this person will be safe enough, but if there is another world he will arise in a state of suffering, even in hell, and now he is blamed by the wise as an immoral person of wrong view, a nihilist. However, if there is another world, he is unfortunate both here and hereafter. Those who accept that there is another world are fortunate both here and hereafter.'"

This is just a brief synopsis to convey the drift of the discourse, one should read it carefully. It is obvious from this discourse that the Buddha knew that there were other worlds, such as heaven and hell, and that the good and evil deeds of living beings led to those destinies.

A wise person is right to be sceptical about religious teachers who do not practice what they preach, but to dismiss all religious teachings without investigation is folly. One should weigh up religious teachings in the light of one's own experience and come to the conclusion: "immorality leads to suffering here and hereafter."

Fools and Wise Men

This discourse from the Middle Length Sayings (Bālappaṇḍita Sutta, Sutta 129) describes how an evil-doer suffers when he sees a criminal being punished because he knows his own crimes may be discovered and lead to the same result. The Buddha vividly describes the suffering of hell, where the evil-doer is reborn after death. The next discourse, the Heavenly Messengers (Devadūta Sutta, Sutta 130), describes how Yama, the judge of the dead, questions an evil-doer after his death, and casts him into hell.

There are so many other references throughout the Tipiṭaka, that one should have no doubt that these hells really do exist. It is therefore becomes important to answer the question, "Who will be reborn in hell?" A wise mariner plots his course and prepares his ship for hidden and potential dangers, as well as for visible and existing ones.

Who Will be Reborn in Hell?

We can distinguish five different cases:

1. Those who will definitely be reborn in hell, whatever they do until their death.
2. Those who will definitely be reborn in hell, unless they reform their character, or change their view.
3. Those who are likely to be reborn in hell.
4. Those who might be reborn in hell if they are heedless.
5. Those who cannot be reborn in hell ever again.

1. Those Who Will Definitely be Reborn in Hell

Some individuals will definitely be reborn in hell after death, and there is nothing they can do to avoid it. Whatever good deeds they do can give their results in the present life, or at some time in the future, but in the next existence, their heavy evil kamma has to give its result. These heavy evil kammās are:

1. Killing one's own mother.
2. Killing one's own father.
3. Killing an Arahant.
4. Drawing blood from an Omniscient Buddha.
5. Causing a schism in the Saṅgha.

In countries where euthanasia is legal, children are in grave danger of killing their own parents.

2. Those Who Must Reform Their Character

Several individuals are in serious jeopardy. Unless they reform their character or abandon their wrong views, they will definitely be reborn in hell.

1. One who claims to be bhikkhu, though he is not.
2. One who falsely accuses a bhikkhu of defeat.
3. One who claims that there is no harm in sensual pleasures.

If a monk falls into one of the four offences of defeat — sexual intercourse, stealing, killing a human being, or making a false claim to supramundane attainments — he must disrobe immediately, and cannot re-ordain. If he does not admit his offence, and remains as a monk, he will definitely be reborn in hell after death. If he disrobes, he may escape from rebirth in hell. If someone takes on the appearance of a monk, without undergoing formal ordination, and continues to pretend to be a monk, he is presumably in the same predicament.

If anyone groundlessly accuses a monk of committing one of these four offences, or insinuates it by saying, "You are not a monk," they are also certain to fall into hell, unless they realise their error and ask for forgiveness. It is like the serious crime of perjury.

The third case is holding a serious wrong view. A monk named Arittha was a bit too clever. He held the view that the soft touch of a woman was no different to the soft touch of a pillow. The Buddha warned him and had the monks ostracise him for his wrong view.

Others who hold serious wrong views fall into this category. Those who repudiate the Buddha, Dhamma, or Saṅgha, materialists who say that there is no life after death, sceptics who say that nothing can be proved, *etc.*, are all in serious danger of falling into hell. Unless they reform their attitude, they will definitely fall into hell after death. Without giving up that view, they cannot possibly gain confidence in the Dhamma. Lacking confidence in what is true and right, how can they give up wrong doing and learn to do skilful deeds? If they do abstain from evil, or do good deeds, it is only for fear of blame or desire for praise, which are not the noblest of motivations. They always crave sensual pleasures, and see no danger in them. A true Buddhist abstains from evil and does good in private as well as in public.

We can compare those who hold wrong views to smokers or alcoholics, who find it impossible to give up their addiction. As long as they think only of the pleasure that their addiction gives them, they are trapped. However, if they focus only on the suffering it causes, they can start to reform. Once free, they will never want to regress.

Many religions teach that all non-believers, including followers of other religions, will fall into hell. Buddhism is different. It teaches that those who deny moral responsibility will fall into hell. Genuine religions teach their followers to abstain from evil deeds such as killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and drunkenness. Non-Buddhists who abstain from these evil deeds will probably go to heaven, while others, including Buddhists, who do these evil deeds will probably go to hell. However, since few are wholly good or totally depraved, the future is uncertain.

3. Those Who Are Likely to be Reborn in Hell

Those who kill living beings, steal, commit adultery, tell lies, abuse or slander others, and take intoxicants, are likely to be reborn in hell, but it depends on many factors. How often they do evil deeds, how serious those evil deeds are, and how often they do skilful deeds.

Drinking alcohol is not serious evil kamma in itself, but it opens the door for many serious evil kammās such as killing, stealing, lying, abusing, and adultery. A drunkard is so deluded that he or she can do many evil deeds without even being aware of them.

Telling jokes and useless stories can also lead to hell, because it encourages defilements to flourish. It is like pouring petrol on a fire. What everyone needs is the cool water of Dhamma to extinguish the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. Even the mental evil kammās of covetousness, ill-will, and wrong view are serious enough to lead to hell, so one should be very wary of verbal evil kamma, which will urge one to do further evil kamma.

Anyone who has no faith in Buddhism, nor any other religion or philosophy, will inevitably do many evil deeds by body, speech, and thought. At the moment of death, when the mind is weak, a sign of one such evil kamma will appear, which will send the dying person to hell.

4. Those Who Might be Reborn in Hell

Almost everyone, at one time or another, has committed the aforementioned evil deeds. If one lives heedlessly, enjoying sensual pleasures as much as possible, even though one generally observes the moral precepts, one is unlikely to escape from rebirth in hell.

The average good person who does not have a deep understanding of Buddhism will be strongly attached to material things. If a thief steals their property or a libertine seduces their spouse or daughter, they will be very angry for

weeks, months, or years. They may want to kill the person who has wronged them. Hatred, anger, or jealousy can certainly send one to hell. Let alone such serious wrongs, even if someone insults them, ordinary good people are likely to bear a grudge.

So you can see that the average good person still has a distinct likelihood of being reborn in hell. Having been reborn as a human while the Buddha's teaching is still alive, it is not enough to be an average good person. One must strive hard to understand the Dhamma properly, and practise wholesome deeds such as charity, morality, and meditation with enthusiasm, firmly believing in the benefits of virtue. Everybody should strive to gain insight knowledge to eradicate greed, hatred, and wrong view, otherwise they will have many regrets when death draws near. Any evil karmas that they have done will then get a chance to mature and send them to the lower realms or straight to hell after death. The predicament of an ordinary person is like that of a monkey sitting on a branch; when the branch breaks he will fall straight to the ground. The Noble Ones are like birds sitting on a branch; when the branch breaks, a bird can fly away wherever it wishes.

5. Those Who Cannot be Reborn in Hell

Every Buddhist should be striving hard to attain the secure status of a Noble One in this very life. Even lifelong observance of the five precepts is not a secure refuge from suffering. Pious people may cling to relatives or possessions at death, or they may have mental evil karma that can cause rebirth in the lower realms. Once reborn as an animal, the latent tendency to follow lust, hatred, and delusion is given free reign. Wise human beings can restrain their lower instincts thanks to moral and religious teachings, but animals are not so restrained. They are facing downwards, so the possibility of rebirth in higher realms after death is negligible for animals.

The attainment of insight knowledge is superior to the observance of moral conduct. By attaining the relatively low

stage of purification by overcoming doubt, one can dispel the deeply-rooted personality-belief and become a lesser Stream-winner. Lesser Stream-winners can avoid rebirth in the lower realms, as long as they have not committed any heavy unwholesome kamma.

One must continue to cultivate insight until one's dying breath, which entails constant and unremitting mindfulness. There is no other way. Taking refuge and undertaking to observe the five precepts is the first step, but an ordinary person will not be able to avoid the ten unwholesome kammās completely unless he or she also practises constant mindfulness.

Please check this out for yourself. Even if you have already gained mundane right view, which means firm confidence in the law of kamma, how often do you have ill-will or covetousness? You may always speak the truth, but do you never abuse or slander others? To meet someone who never indulges in idle chatter is extremely rare. It takes a very high degree of mindfulness to control one's speech perfectly. The Noble Ones are rarer and more precious than emeralds and rubies. If you are fortunate enough to meet one, always remember their flawless morality and noble speech, and try to emulate it. Revere them like deities since they show you the sure way to heaven by their impeccable character.

A Debate With A Sceptic

Though the pious will have faith in heaven and hell through reverence for monks and the Buddhist texts, the sceptical may still have some doubts. They should read the Pāyāsi Sutta, which is the twenty-third of the Long Discourses. This delightful and witty teaching was not given by the Buddha, but by Venerable Kumāra Kassapa, who was singled out by the Buddha for his great eloquence.

Prince Pāyāsi, who was living at Setabyā, a prosperous place, enjoyed royal powers over its population given to him by King Pasenadi of Kosala. He held the evil view, "There is no other

world, no spontaneously reborn beings, no fruit or result of good or evil deeds." Hearing that Kumāra Kassapa had come, Pāyāsi went to debate with him, defiantly stating his wrong view.

Kumāra Kassapa began by asking, "Are the sun and the moon in this world? Are they celestial or terrestrial?"

Prince Pāyāsi had to answer that they were celestial, not terrestrial. So Kassapa said that this was evidence that there are other worlds besides this one.

Then Prince Pāyāsi said that when evil-doers were about to die, he approached them and asked them to come back and tell him if there is really was a hell.

Venerable Kassapa asked the prince if a condemned prisoner would be granted leave by his executioners to go and say goodbye to his relatives. Prince Pāyāsi replied that they would just cut off this smart-talker's head, they would not let him go. Venerable Kassapa said that those reborn in hell would be given no chance to return to say that they had been reborn in hell.

Then Pāyāsi said that good people never returned from heaven, though he asked them before they died to come back and tell him. Kassapa explained that a man who had fallen into a cesspit, would not want to plunge into it again after cleaning up, and the human realm seems like a cesspit to deities. Again, he explained, a single day in Tāvatiṃsa is a hundred years on earth, so those good people would have to remember to return immediately, or else Prince Pāyāsi would be long dead.

Then Prince Pāyāsi asked, "Who told you that the heaven of Tāvatiṃsa exists, and that those beings are so long-lived."

Venerable Kassapa replied that Prince Pāyāsi was like a man born blind who refused to believe sighted people who told him about coloured objects, about the sun and the moon, because he could not see them.

Prince Pāyāsi had to admit that a blind person would not be correct to assert that these things do not exist, just because he cannot see them.

Then Prince Pāyāsi argued that although virtuous recluses and priests say that heavens exist where virtuous people go to after death, they do not kill themselves so that they can take rebirth there sooner.

Kassapa explained that to do that would be like a pregnant woman cutting open her womb to enable her son to inherit his father's wealth. She would destroy her own life and her son's life too, through her impatience.

Then Prince Pāyāsi described various experiments that he had carried out on convicted criminals to see if he could see their soul coming out at death.

Venerable Kassapa asked Prince Pāyāsi if he had dreams when sleeping in the park during the day. He admitted that he did. Then Venerable Kassapa asked if servants who watched over him could see his soul entering and leaving his body as he dreamed, to which he replied that they could not.

In many such ways Venerable Kumāra Kassapa teased and ridiculed Prince Pāyāsi for his foolishness in trying to prove something that was impossible to prove by scientific methods. He urged him to give up his wrong views, likening him to a pig farmer who had picked up a load of dung while on a journey. Taking off his sarong and wrapping the dung in a bundle, he carried it on his head, telling passers-by that he was taking it home for his pigs. It began to rain heavily, but the foolish pig farmer struggled on with the bundle of wet dung on his head, oozing and dripping slurry all down his face and body. He scorned passers-by who ridiculed him for carrying such a bundle when it was raining cats and dogs. He told them that they were the ones who were crazy, since the dung would be useful for his pigs.

Prince Pāyāsi was loath to give up his wrong view, since he was afraid of looking like a fool, but Kassapa gave further similes until he eventually conceded defeat and took refuge, saying that he had only been so stubborn to test the wit of Venerable Kassapa.

Prince Pāyāsi failed to gain full confidence in the Dhamma. Though wealthy, he grudgingly told a servant to give poor quality almsfood and cloths. After death the servant was reborn in Tāvatisa, but Prince Pāyāsi was reborn in a lowly celestial mansion with no attendants.

A Psychological Approach

Modern psychologists often dismiss heavens and hells as medieval superstitions. They argue that medical research has revealed the causes of physical and mental diseases such as bacteria, viruses, genetic defects, nutritional or hormonal imbalances. Before these modern discoveries, people attributed diseases and insanity to evil spirits, witchcraft, or other demonic forces. People used to explain famines, disasters, and plagues as God's punishment for wickedness, because they were not aware of things invisible to the microscope. However, the microscope does not explain the root cause of suffering, it only explains the proximate cause. Medicine can only treat the symptoms of suffering, but the practice of Buddhism can remove its cause.

Psychology still has a lot to learn from religion. Confession, chanting, and fasting might not be easy to explain, but the Buddhist approach is an empirical one. If it works, use it, even if you don't fully understand why it works. The mind has the power to heal the body, and the sick mind can be cured by the healthy mind.

Not all diseases can be cured through meditation, and one must still take medicine, change one's diet or take exercise, but food and climate are only two of the four nutriments. The other two, mind and kamma, are also very significant. Negative thoughts and unwholesome kamma destroy health and happiness, and lead to hell. Positive thoughts and wholesome kamma cure disease, gladden the mind, and lead to heaven. Next time you feel depressed, just try cleaning and rearranging your living or working space, and see what a difference it makes. Do some

chanting, radiating loving-kindness to yourself and others. After an hour or two, you may find that your mental attitude is totally transformed.

Any kind of wholesome kamma will change your mental state immediately. Practise generosity, reaffirm your determination to observe morality, practise meditation, pay homage to virtuous monks or to a Buddha image or pagoda, do something to help others, read a Dhamma book, discuss the Dhamma, etc.

Doing wholesome kamma is a practical way to get out of the hell of depression and enter the heaven of non-remorse. If you cultivate a lifelong habit of performing wholesome kamma you need not worry about falling into hell. Every day that you accumulate wholesome kamma, leads you closer to heaven. When you have a sufficient store of wholesome kamma, you will not find it difficult to gain deep concentration. The concentrated mind can see things as they really are. When you see things as they really are, you will not be attached to anything, but will become fearful of the cycle of existence. When deep insight arises into the unsatisfactory nature of existence, the mind will become disgusted with mental and physical phenomena, and leap forward towards detachment and liberation.

Practise mindfulness meditation constantly to gain right understanding, and put an end to rebirth in the lower realms of existence for ever. Do not crave for heaven, but work hard to avoid rebirth in hell.

“Some are born in a womb;
evil-doers (are reborn) in hell;
the virtuous go to heaven;
the Arahants attain nibbāna.” (Dhp.v.126)

