

IF WE LIVE FAR AWAY?

WHO AM I?

WHY DID "GOD" CREATE SO MANY RELIGIONS?

REINCARNATION?

QUESTION TIME

with

VENERABLE DR. K. SRI DHAMMANANDA

WHY MUST WE BE REBORN?

CAN WE VERIFY

WHEN DOES A SOUL ENTER A BODY?

Publication of the



Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society 佛陀教义弘扬协会

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Published for Free Distribution
Permission to reprint for free distribution can be
obtained upon request.

1st Print – November 2006 (3500 copies)
2nd Print – March 2008 (5000 copies)
3rd Print – December 2008 (3500 copies)

*The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society gratefully acknowledges
the efforts of **Mr. Vijaya Samarawickrama, Mr. Sumanananda
Premaseri and Mr. N.B. Dayananda** for compiling the Glossary and their
editing and proof-reading.*

Printed by Uniprints Marketing Sdn. Bhd. (493024-K)
(A member of Multimedia Printing & Graphics (M) Sdn Bhd)

ISBN: 978-983-2515-97-5

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FOREWORD

The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society takes pride in publishing "Question Time with Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda," a collection of some of the questions addressed to the Venerable at his Internet Website (www.ksridhammanada.com), along with his lucid answers in the Buddhist context.

This selection from the literally hundreds of questions received was made on the basis of the questions most frequently asked, those seldom asked, the unusual, the profound, matters of the moment, etc. These questions have actually been asked. Some might be considered "sensitive" but they have been frankly answered because, in Buddhism, the truth is most important. There is no room for mystery or secrecy. *Avijja* (ignorance), one of the principal perpetrators of *samsara* (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth), needs to be replaced with wisdom and understanding.

The particulars of the letter writers have been disguised under acronyms to respect their privacy. In the interests of brevity, good grammar and language, the original letters have been edited without any deviation from the perceived object and spirit of the questions raised.

In the preparation of this booklet, common *Pali* (ancient Indian dialect spoken by the Buddha – the Enlightened One) words have been freely used. The object is that practicing Buddhists should become familiar with *Pali* for the better appreciation of the *Dhamma* (Teachings of the Buddha). It was used to record the Teachings of the Buddha. All *Pali* words used here are presented in ***bold italicised*** type and where it first appears in the text, a brief and contextually relevant English meaning is given in *italics* in parenthesis. Additionally, a Glossary is provided at the end giving all the *Pali* words used, arranged in alphabetical order, followed by the common English meaning/s. We trust this will help you build up a vocabulary of *Pali* terms to better understand and appreciate the *Buddha's* Message.

Each letter received, and the answer that follows, has been printed on a new page. This has often left precious empty space on several pages. Selections from the *Dhammapada* (a line or stanza from the Buddha's Teachings), as translated by the Venerable Sri Acharya Buddharakkhita, have been quoted to familiarise readers with some verses from the *Khuddaka Nikaya* (Compact Collection) of the *Tiṭṭaka* (sacred Buddhist scriptures). We sincerely hope that these will inspire you to delve further into the *Buddha Dhamma*.

The Committee of Management
SASANA ABHIWURDHI WARDHANA SOCIETY
November 2006

Venerable Sir,

I have several questions to ask you regarding Buddhism. I hope that you are not too busy to answer the questions (detailed below) that I have.

Thank you.

Sincerely in anticipation,
AAA.

Dear AAA,

First, may peace, happiness and contentment be yours through the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Next, to answer your questions:

Question 1: The *Buddha* (The Enlightened One) said that we have to be satisfied with our condition. If we do that, there will be no improvement in this world, nobody will have the motivation to find new technology, science, etc. What does *Bhante* (Venerable Sir) think?

Answer 1:

Satisfaction with our condition is not equivalent to being lazy. This point must be seen in the context of distinguishing between our needs and our wants. Our needs are limited and must be fulfilled. However, our wants are infinite, dynamic and keep increasing and cannot be satisfied due to the inner craving within us.

In another context, is it wrong to be ambitious? No, it is not. However, we must know when to stop wanting as it is a desire machine within us that will never be satisfied, thus never being happy nor contented. Contentment produces happiness, but contentment is not equivalent to apathy or laziness and attributing everything to ***kamma*** (*good or bad action*) is not what the ***Buddha*** taught.

The Buddha did not teach fatalism, he taught us to be proactive. One needs to fulfill certain obligations to oneself and one's family to lead the lay life, to work energetically, filled with patience and observing the precepts.

The ***Buddha*** has taught us how to lead a worldly life and how to lead a life for spiritual development. We need to differentiate this properly. We need to earn, protect and enjoy our life in a proper manner to lead a worldly life without harming others until the time where we attain realisation of the true nature of our worldly life. At this point, we will renounce our worldly life for the spiritual life, thus reducing our greed, hatred, delusion and all the other bondages.

Question 2: If we find, for example, an ant dying because someone has stepped on it, what should we do? If we do nothing, it will continue to suffer. If we kill it right then, it will not suffer anymore. What do I do with an ant that is suffering because some one has stepped on it?

Answer 2:

Buddhists do not advocate euthanasia. Ending suffering in this lifetime by putting an end to that suffering life is not the answer as the being has to reap the fruit of the **kamma** in the next life. The suffering is merely postponed to a future birth, as the suffering must continue.

Beings are born and die in different life cycles and periods until **Nibbana** (*the ultimate liberation*) is achieved. If we see any being in suffering, we try our best to relieve that suffering. If we neglect to do that, it does not create any bad **kamma** because we are not responsible for that suffering being inflicted. We can only try to alleviate that suffering. If we cannot, we must move on.

Similarly, in a hospice we encounter many terminally ill individuals. You see so much suffering around caused by the devastating effects of cancer, paralysis, AIDS, etc that you could easily begin to feel remorseful, helpless and drowned by the magnitude of the suffering. But you must remain focused to do what you can do within your means or network and not succumb to helplessness if you cannot help everybody. It is important to remain positive within in order to help. Succumbing to a sense of helplessness does neither you nor others any good.

Question 3: How can we be devoted to our parents if we live far from them, like a wanderer?

Answer 3:

While the best thing would be to live close to our aged parents to help them physically, there are many other things we can do to show them our gratitude for their kindnesses to us when we were young. First of all, remember how when we were young, we always wanted our parents to talk to us, to show us that they cared for us? Well, now we can do that, by calling them on the telephone regularly, sending them little gifts or cash that they can show off to their friends.

Parents like to be proud of their children and talk about how good their children are. They need proof that their children are good and caring. The gifts need not be expensive. Even the occasional card saying, "I just thought I'd send this to you because I thought of you" is kind and considerate. We need not wait for special occasions. Of course, we should visit our parents as often as possible and let them know how much we miss them - Mom's cooking or Dad's advice.

Parents like to know that they are important in our lives. It is not good enough to say, "Ah, they know I love them. I don't need to show it all the time." Love and gratitude need to be physicalised.

Question 4: *Sakyamuni* (noble sage of the Sakya race) **Gautama** [the surname of Prince **Siddhata** (the given name)] **was a Bodhisatta** (one in his final birth before becoming a **Buddha**) **before being born in Lumbini** (birth place of Prince **Siddhata**). **Why did He marry Yasodhara** (given name of Prince **Siddhata's** wife)? **He is supposed not to have lust anymore. After getting married and fathering a child, He left His family and made them so sad. He is supposed not to hurt peoples' feelings. If you say this is due to kamma, I would like to state that He was a Bodhisatta before He became the Buddha. Why did the Bodhisatta leave His family and make them feel so sad?**

Answer 4:

Remember, as a **Bodhisatta**, Prince **Siddhata** was not perfect yet. He did have sensual desires – He became free of these only in the final moments before His enlightenment. He married to please His father and the society that required a prince should marry to produce heirs for the throne. When He left His wife and son, it was not an easy decision for Him at all.

He loved them both very much. He had to make that supreme sacrifice because He realised that He had to find the answer to the question of eternal happiness for humanity. It is like a man who decides to give up his family for some time to study medicine and become a doctor.

Such a person makes a great sacrifice, and the family also makes a sacrifice while he is studying.

However, when he graduates and becomes a doctor, the family enjoys his success and at the same time he is useful to others.

The **Buddha** is like that doctor. After His enlightenment, He helped His family to gain supreme happiness - something greater than the temporary comfort they would have got if He had simply become king. It can be seen that because He turned away from His family for a short time, millions of beings follow Him today. Would that have happened if He had become a king? Sacrifices have to be made if greatness is to be achieved.

Question 5: Why did “God” create so many religions?

Answer 5:

God did not create many religions in the world for them to hate each other or for him to assign to eternal heaven his favoured followers and condemn all other religionists to eternal hell for not following his religion.

For God who is supposed to be almighty, all loving and all embracing, this would be his biggest sin - not being able to love everyone for what they are.

Man, and not God, made the many religions in the world. This happened because man did not understand nature and the many phenomena on earth. Not being able to relate and answer these

situations, man believed there must be a greater external force beyond his comprehension that guides the earth. Thus, based on differences and blind faith, many religions arose to fulfill man's emotional need to reduce the dissonance.

God was mistakenly thought to have created everything - he had a hand in everything - the creation of man, the earth, the universe, sicknesses, earthquakes, rain, wind, etc. Over time, however, with more discoveries by science, God's originally vast 'role in creation' is diminishing over time. God merely becomes God of the Gaps - what man cannot explain with his limited frame of reference or knowledge is attributed to God. As time passes, this gap becomes narrower and narrower till one point where God will have no role to play in man's creation or destiny. Man created god and the many different religions, not the other way round.

Question 6: The world's human population is increasing by the second. On the other hand, the resources and the capacity of this world remain limited. Some day the world will be unable to cope with the situation. What will happen then?

Answer 6:

This is not the only plane of existence. The **Buddha** stated that there are thirty-one (31) planes of existence. As one plane increases in population, another reduces.

All planes are not static, but dynamic. All are subject to impermanence. At every moment each is rising or falling. When the earth fills with more people, the population has to reduce in another plane. The cycle will reach equilibrium but there will be a switch in that trend too.

Question 7: Imagine that now you are in a desert. In front of you there is an aquarium with a fish. You are very thirsty and hungry. The question is: If you drink the water and eat the fish you will be alive and have the energy to find a nearer village. If you do not eat and drink you will not see the sun anymore. You cannot just drink half of the water in the aquarium. And if you leave the fish in the desert, the water will evaporate and the fish will eventually die. What will you do?

Answer 7:

As a Buddhist, I understand that my life is unimportant if I compare it with the lives of others. I will, therefore, leave the fish and the water alone out of compassion for the fish, another living being. As you know, the **Bodhisatta** sacrificed his life many times before he became the **Buddha**. I too can sacrifice my life and hope to become a **Bodhisatta** some day.

We cannot say, "It is only a fish." If the fish dies because of my selfishness, my bad **kamma** increases. If I die and save the fish, I have developed understanding and will progress along the spiritual

path. Of course, yours is an extreme example, but we can show selflessness and compassion in our daily lives in many ways. By the good merits accrued within this life, you are building protection for yourself for this life and the next.

Question 8: If we do something wrong but we do not know that it was wrong (because nobody ever told us) are we wrong?

Answer 8:

Put another way, you are asking, if we do something wrong without knowing it is wrong, do we accumulate bad **kamma**?

Well, if we are unaware of the action e.g. if when driving at night we run over a snake and kill it, we do not accumulate bad **kamma** because there was no intention to kill.

But if we do anything wrong knowing that we are doing it for our benefit, whether it is killing, lying or stealing, then we are guilty because our actions deprive others of their peace of mind and happiness.

It does not matter whether we were taught about it or not. Certain actions are wrong and apply to all beings. **Kamma** is action and re-action. If you walk into a hole, you will fall in. You cannot say it is unfair because you were not looking and it is not your fault. Of course, the effect of the bad **kamma** depends on several factors e.g. the quantum of greed, hatred or anger involved; the amount of effort put in

to carry out the action and the degree of suffering which was created by the action.

Not all wrong actions bear the same **kammic** effect. Certain wrong actions (e.g. killing) are wrong in all societies and at all times. Others are wrong because of social constraints (e.g. stealing, speaking falsehoods) and can vary according to the place, the mitigating circumstances and period in which we are living. Bad **kamma** does not always produce identical consequences.

**Question 9: Have you ever thought, "Who am I?"
What is your opinion of this question?**

Answer 9:

We are only mind and matter. There is no I, you, me, mine or yours in the ultimate sense. Once we begin to understand this, our attitude towards others will always be positive, forgiving, understanding, etc.

We need to know we are only a passing phenomenon - rising and falling at each moment...living and dying daily, as do the thousands of cells within us. We need to meditate to understand ourselves better. Once we see ourselves from a spiritual viewpoint, we will see that there is no need to be angry, to hate or be jealous, etc. We thus begin to experience the joy of contentment, letting go, happiness, satisfaction, etc. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Dear Sir,

I have noted that the words "Reincarnation" and "Rebirth" are at times used inter-changeably and at times to mean differently. Can you clarify the Buddhist perspective?

I thank you for your reply on the difference between rebirth and reincarnation carried on your website. I took the liberty of forwarding it to a few of my friends and relatives, some of whom are Buddhists and some not. A friend, who is a Hindu, had a further query: "Why must we reincarnate or be reborn?"

Regards,
BBB.

Question 10: What is the difference between Rebirth and Reincarnation?

Answer 10:

Dear BBB,

You have asked an interesting question that addresses the fundamental Buddhist and Hindu thinking on life after death.

There is a very great difference between reincarnation and rebirth, although both concepts pertain to a being coming back to life in an endless cycle of existences called **samsara** (*cycle of birth, life and death*).

In reincarnation, a person is made up of two real entities called a body and a soul. In Hinduism, this

body is made up of material parts that break up at death and return to their original state, to be reused again to make up other material parts. The **atman** (soul) on the other hand, comes from **Brahman** (in Hinduism, the Creating Principle).

Once created, the soul is trapped within the material body and because of **maya** (delusion) it performs **kamma** that determines what kind of body the soul takes (human, animal or spirit) after death. Good actions result in good births, and evil actions result in births in unsatisfactory states. The aim is to replace **maya** with **panna** (wisdom) where one strives to free the soul from the body and attain reunion with **Brahman** in what is termed **mokkha** (final release).

In Buddhism however, while the terms **samsara** and **kamma** are used to describe the actions one performs which trap oneself in **samsara**, it is ignorance of the real nature of a person which causes him or her to act. Here ignorance means mistaking a combination of **mind** and **matter** for a personality or a self. What one mistakes for a body is not made up of matter, but a combination of a series of processes - **solidity, fluidity, heat and motion**.

We know from physics that what is called matter is really made up of atoms which in the final analysis are simply energy in constant motion. The ignorant mind mistakes this for real. This explains why a body grows imperceptibly into a child, an adult and an old man or woman. Everything is in a constant state of

change. What is mistaken for a permanent soul, on the other hand is termed in Buddhism, **mind**. Mind is also another constantly changing process of feeling, perception, mental habits and consciousness. These too are always in a state of change and, therefore, have no permanent reality. These two processes (**mind** and **matter**) then act upon each other, giving an **illusion** of a person, who in reality does not exist.

A being, ignorantly thinks it is a real entity and acts, thinking, "This is I, this is mine." Those actions lead to further actions in a never-ending stream. At death, the **matter** separates from the **mind**, but the mind does not stop - it simply moves on, creates another body, lives another life, dies and goes on.

What propels these processes from one life to the next is craving, the will to live. What "dies," because of the principle of change, is not exactly what is "reborn" although there is a continuity, just as in reality there is no body of water to call a "river," which is made of innumerable drops of water moving endlessly. We conventionally call it a "river" although in reality no such thing exists because it is always changing.

There is no permanent soul that goes from body to body. Buddhists therefore say there is no reincarnation, merely a continuation of a process of endless cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth. When this process of becoming is stilled, we call it **Nibbana** where there is no more craving to live, so there is no more rebirth.

Question 11: Why must we be reborn?

Answer 11:

Thank you for your continued interest in the subject. **Bhikkhu** (Buddhist monk) Buddhadasa's book, "**Why are we born?**" answers in detail your question on why we are reborn. The book is available at the Buddhist Maha Vihara bookshop at Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

The **Buddha** taught clearly that we are reborn, not reincarnated, as there is no soul migrating upon death to another body to "re-become".

In simple terms, the answer to why we are reborn lies in our craving. Craving arises due to ignorance. As long as we continue to be deluded, we cannot stop being reborn.

This subject matter can go into a schematic detail as we discuss **paticca samupada** (the twelve links of dependent origination) where we can understand clearly how one link gives rise to another and that in turn gives rise to another. The whole process explains why we are reborn. To stop being reborn, we need to reverse the links and extinguish "becoming" or being "reborn." The whole process can be stopped once we overcome ignorance, as you will see below:

Why is there birth? - *The subconscious process of becoming as a combination of mind and body causes birth. In other words, where there is this combination, there is birth.*

What leads to the formation of mind and body? - *Thoughts grasped by craving lead to the formation of **kammic** tendencies and lead to the mind-body combination.*

What leads to clinging? - *Craving leads to clinging*

What produces craving? - *Craving is produced by sensations or feelings*

What generates feelings? - *It is the contact of the senses with their objects that generate feeling*

Why is there such contact? - *The six sense bases are the causes of contact*

How do the six sense bases come into being? - *Psychophysical combinations bring forth the six sense bases*

How do the psychophysical combinations come into being? - *With the appearance of inactive or passive consciousness, the psychophysical combinations come into being.*

How does passive consciousness appear? - *It is the outcome of latent **kammic** energies*

How do **kammic** energies appear? - *Their appearance depends upon ignorance, a facet of craving*

I hope I have been able to clear your doubts on the subject with my brief answers above. Additionally, I have recommended Ven. Buddhadasa's book above

for further reading. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the *Dhamma*,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Just as a tree though cut down, sprouts up again if its roots remain uncut and firm, even so, until the craving that lies dormant is rooted out, suffering springs up again and again.”

Dhammapada

“Hard is it to be born a man; hard is the life of mortals. Hard is it to gain the opportunity of hearing the Sublime Truth, and hard to encounter is the arising of the Buddhas.”

Dhammapada

Venerable *Bhante*,

My name is CCC. I belong to the Lankarama Buddhist Youth Group for which you recently wrote such an enlightening article, which actually cleared many doubts for which I personally have been seeking clarification for some time.

There are several things that I am still not clear about however. One is about the existence of rebirth. You say that there is much evidence for it and that it is inevitable. However, I am wondering if there is anything in the Buddhist teachings that shows how I could verify this for myself. You mentioned hypnosis, for example. Has the **Buddha** explained any way of retrieving memories of some past lives, through a form of meditation perhaps?

Another point that I hope you can clear up for me is about how a soul enters into a new body. To the best of my knowledge, a foetus develops a personality and acquires a fully developed brain, around 4 - 5 months after conception. Would this not be the time when the new soul enters the body? My understanding is that a soul exists in a person's brain. The reason a being, animal or human, is different from a plant is that we possess a brain which harbours the soul, hence would it not mean that once a body develops a brain, a soul can enter it?

I hope I am not troubling you with these questions.

Sincerely,
CCC.

Question 12: How do we verify rebirth?

Answer 12:

Dear CCC,

May the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem bring you peace, happiness and contentment.

I have provided some answers below to your questions and hope you will understand them.

Problems and worries arise in the mind because we do not understand how it works. Meditation under a qualified master will help us recognise unwholesome states when they arise, and to remove them. Later, we become aware before they arise and can prevent them from arising. Once arisen, wholesome states can be maintained. The idea is to remain ever in the present moment, not worrying about the past or future.

There are some aspects of the Sublime **Dhamma** that cannot be verified by our limited faculties. In fact, the **Buddha** states that there are four great **imponderables** that cannot be understood by the worldling and which he or she should not waste time over. Only the enlightened mind of a **Buddha** is capable of seeing these phenomena. They are:

*When we will die
How we will die
Where we will die
Where we will be reborn*

On the other hand, the **Buddha** urges us to concentrate on the present moment of existence and to see its intrinsic unsatisfactory nature. We can easily verify that there is **suffering**, we can understand its **cause** and we can take definite practical steps (the Noble Eightfold Path) to eradicate suffering. The **Buddha** consistently refrained from explaining things unnecessary to follow the Path. It is for this reason that He did not explain the origin of life knowing that it will not help one to escape suffering.

However, if we use our common sense and observe how there has been a **continuity** of the 'process of life' from the moment we are born until we die, without a break, (e.g. like an electric current) we can easily conclude that the process must continue even when the body falls away.

The mind can be developed over many lifetimes to actually see past lives, but this requires much sustained strenuous effort. Memory of past lives can arise as a byproduct of mind development. But the primary aim of the method is not to develop the mind to see rebirth, but to purify it from all defilements. Some people, especially young children, seem to remember past lives spontaneously and some hypnotists are able to regress their subjects into past existences, but the **Buddha** teaches us to concern ourselves with purifying the mind at each current moment.

Question 13: When does a soul enter a body?

Answer 13:

To begin with, Buddhism clearly teaches that there is no such thing as a “soul” which enters a “body”. Both are nothing more than rapidly changing processes - mind and matter. They have extremely short life spans - no more than the duration of an “in breath” or an “out breath.” The rapidity of the process gives rise to the illusion of a permanent entity we call a **self**. So in our ignorance, we say a soul leaves a body at death. Actually, it is a process which simply continues when the physical body ceases to function.

According to this explanation, that which leaves at death is not exactly the same as that which is born, anymore than the flame of a newly lit candle is the same as the flame of the match used to light it. There is no enduring permanent entity recognisable in the process. However, because there is a strong urge in the dying person to continue living, there is ***bhava tanha*** (*the craving to exist*). Thus the consciousness of the life process moves on and looks for a new vessel to occupy. This *force looking for a new container* is called a ***gandhabba*** (*the force for a new life form*).

If at the time a woman conceives, as the result of the union of sperm and egg, the physical vessel is formed, if the conditions are right, the ***gandhabba*** occupies the newly-created vessel and we say an embryo has come into being. It is at that time that the being comes to be in a new life. Abortion is

unacceptable because there is a living being in the womb. Remember, the soul is not "harboured" in the brain.

With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the *Dhamma*,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

"He is indeed virtuous, wise and righteous who neither for his own sake nor for the sake of another (does any wrong), who does not crave for sons, wealth or kingdom, and does not desire success by unjust means."

Dhammapada

"Blind is this world; here only a few possess insight. Only a few, like birds escaping from a net, go to the realms of bliss."

Dhammapada

"A fool who knows his foolishness is wise at least to that extent, but a fool who thinks himself wise is called a fool indeed."

Dhammapada

Dear *Bhante*,

My name is DDD and I am a member of the Lankarama Buddhist Youth Group from Sydney, Australia, dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding of Buddhism in young people. I am writing for myself and on behalf of my colleagues EEE, FFF, and GGG. We are currently in the process of compiling a journal called "Footprints" which we hope will give our readers an insight into some issues of Buddhism that relate more strongly to their lives in today's modern environment, perhaps on *kamma* or rebirth?

Having read various articles you have written we would be delighted to include a contribution from you in our journal which, of course, is not for profit and will be distributed free of charge.

Yours sincerely,
DDD, EEE, FFF, GGG.

Dear DDD, EEE, FFF and GGG,

Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem to you all.

Please find below the article on rebirth as requested by you for use in your magazine. May you continue to do this *Dhamma* service happily out of loving-kindness and compassion. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the *Dhamma*,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Question 14: Could you share with us about rebirth?

Answer 14:

Rebirth

Unsatisfied desire for existence and sensual pleasures is the cause of rebirth.

Buddhists regard the doctrine of rebirth not as a mere theory but as a verifiable fact. The acceptance of the truth about rebirth forms a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. However, the belief in rebirth is not confined to Buddhists. It is also found in other civilisations, in other religions, and even among freethinkers. For example, **Pythagoras**, the Greek, could remember his previous birth. **Plato** too remembered a number of his past lives.

According to **Plato**, human beings can be reborn only up to ten times. **Plato** also believed in the possibility of rebirth in the animal kingdom. Among the ancient people in Egypt and China, a common belief was that only well-known personalities like emperors and kings have rebirths. A Christian authority named **Origen**, who lived in 185-254 C.E., believed in rebirth. According to him, there is no eternal suffering in hell. **Gorana Bruno**, who lived in the sixteenth century, believed that the soul of every man and animal transmigrates from one being to another.

In 1788, the philosopher **Kant** criticised the teaching on eternal punishment. **Kant** also believed in the possibility of rebirth in other celestial bodies. **Schopenhauer** (1788-1860), another great philosopher, said that where the will to live exists there must be continuity of life. The will to live manifests itself successively in every new form. The **Buddha** explained this “will to exist” as the craving for existence. And of course, the ancient sages of India taught transmigration of a soul from the earliest times.

It is possible but not very easy for us to actually verify our past lives. The nature of mind is such that it does not allow most people the recollection of their previous lives. Our minds are overpowered by the five **nivaranas** (hindrances): **kamacchanda** (sensual desires), **vyapada** (ill-will), **thina-middha** (sloth and torpor), **uddhacca-kukkucca** (restlessness and worry) and **vicikiccha** (doubt). We cannot visualise rebirths because of these hindrances, as our vision is earth-bound.

Just as a mirror does not reflect an image when it is covered with dirt, so the mind does not allow most people the recollection of previous lives. We cannot see the stars during daytime, not because they are not there in the sky, but because they are outshone by the sunlight. Similarly, we cannot remember our past lives as our minds are always over-burdened with many thoughts of the present day-to-day events and mundane circumstances.

A consideration of the shortness of our life span on earth will help us to reflect on rebirth. If we consider life and its ultimate meaning and goal, and all the varied experiences possible for a human being, we must conclude that in a single life there is not enough time for a person to carry out all that he or she can, or desires to do. The scale of experience and desire is infinite. There is a vast range of powers latent in human beings that we see and can even develop if the opportunity is open to us. This is especially true today if special investigation is made.

We find ourselves with high aspirations but with no time to attain them. Meanwhile, the great troop of passions and desires, selfish motives and ambitions, make war within us and with others and, they pursue us till the time of our death. All these forces must be tried, conquered, subdued and used. One life is just not enough for that. Therefore, to think or believe it is would be to make the universe and life itself a huge and cruel joke.

The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth should be differentiated from the teachings of transmigration and reincarnation of other religions. Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, does not subscribe to the existence of a permanent, God-created soul or an unchanging entity that transmigrates from one life to another.

Just as a causal continuity without a self or soul makes possible a relative identity, so death can result in rebirth without a transmigrating soul. In a single life, each thought-moment flashes in and out, giving rise to its successor by perishing. Strictly

speaking, this momentary rise and fall of every thought is a birth and a death. Thus, even in a single life we undergo countless births and deaths every second. But, because the mental process continues with the support of a single physical body, we regard the mind body continuum as constituting a single life.

What we ordinarily mean by death is the cessation of the body's vital functions. The physical body cannot support the current of consciousness, the mental side of the process, when it loses its vitality. But as long as there is a "clinging to life," (a desire to go on existing), the current of consciousness does not come to a stop with the body's loss of life. Rather, when death takes place, when the body dies away, the mental current, driven by the thirst for more existence, will spring up again with the support of a new physical body, one which comes into being through the fusion of sperm and egg.

Thus, conception takes place immediately after death without a break. The stream of memory may be interrupted and the sense of identity transferred to the new situation, but the entire accumulation of experience and disposition has been transmitted to the new being, and the cycle of becoming begins to revolve for still another term.

For the Buddhist, therefore, death does not spell either the entrance to eternal life or complete annihilation. It is, rather, the portal to a new rebirth to be followed by more growth, decay, and then another death.

While there is a mental continuum, however, at the last moment, no renewed physical functioning occurs in a dying person's mind. This is just like a motorist releasing the accelerator before stopping, so that no more pulling power is given to the engine. Similarly, no more material qualities of **kamma** arise.

Buddhists do not maintain that the present life is the only life between two eternities of misery and happiness; nor do they believe angels will carry them to heaven and leave them there for all eternity.

They believe that this present life is only one of infinite numbers of states of being and that this earthly life is but one episode among many others. They believe that all beings will be reborn somewhere in some form for a limited period of time as long as their good and bad **kamma** remains in the subconscious mind as mental energy. Although many eminent psychologists, like Carl Jung, have recognised the **Buddha's** teaching on the subject, the interpretation of subconscious mind in the Buddhist context should not be confused with that given by modern psychologists, since the concepts are not exactly synonymous.

What Is The Cause Of Rebirth?

The **Buddha** taught that ignorance of the real nature of existence produces desires. Unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth. When all unsatisfied desire is extinguished, then rebirth ceases. To stop rebirth is to extinguish all desires. To extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance. The worthlessness of

every rebirth, as well as the paramount need to adopt a course of life by which the desire for such repeated births can be destroyed, is understood when ignorance is destroyed.

Ignorance also begets the illusory and illogical idea that there is only one existence for human beings, and another illusion that this one life is followed by permanent states of eternal pleasure or torment.

The **Buddha** taught that ignorance can be dispelled and sorrow removed only by the realisation of the **Four Noble Truths**, and not through any other means. One must destroy all desire for the lower, personal pleasures and selfish craving and also persevere diligently in the practise of an all-embracing altruism in conduct, intelligence and wisdom to eradicate all ignorance.

How Does Rebirth Take Place?

When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form, which we call another life. The **kammic** force now manifesting itself in the form of a human being can also manifest itself in the form of an animal. This can happen if a person has no chance to develop his or her positive **kammic** forces. This volition, called craving (desire or thirst to live), does not end with the non-functioning of the body but continues to manifest itself in another form, producing re-existence. This is called rebirth or re-becoming. Buddhists do not call

it "reincarnation" because no permanent entity or soul moves from one life to the next.

Today, there are people in various countries who have spontaneously developed memories of their past births. The experiences of these people have been well documented in the media. Some of these people never accepted that there was such a thing as rebirth until memory fragments of their previous lives came to them. Much of the information they revealed about their past lives have been investigated and found to be valid. Through hypnotism, some people have managed to reveal information of previous lives. Certain hypnotic states that penetrate into the subconscious mind make the recalling of past lives possible.

Rebirth or becoming again and again is a natural occurrence not created by any particular religion or god. Belief or disbelief in rebirth does not make any difference to the process of rebirth or avoiding rebirth. Rebirth takes place as long as craving for existence, for sensual pleasures or attachment exist in the mind. Those strong mental forces prevail in each and every living being in this universe.

Those who hope and pray that they be not born again must understand that their wishes will not materialise until they make earnest efforts to eradicate their craving and attachment from their minds. Having seen and experienced the uncertainty and unsatisfactoriness of life under worldly conditions, wise people try to rid themselves of these repeated births and deaths by following the correct

path of mental purification. Those who cannot reduce their craving and attachment must be prepared to face all unsatisfactory and uncertain situations associated with rebirth and becoming again and again.

Reverend Sir,

I have been a practising Buddhist for some ten years now. I have learnt my Buddhism mainly from the many books/booklets written by you in simple language easily understood by me, a layperson. I am eternally grateful to you for them. However, due to my family commitments, I have never been able to attend even a single **Dhamma** talk.

I am writing to check something with you. An ex-colleague's husband, a Buddhist, once spent a month as a recluse in a temple in Thailand. Among the many things he claimed to have learnt there was that it is not necessary to offer incense at Buddhist altars for it was a wrong idea handed down by folks from the **Buddha's** time.

The story goes that once the **Buddha** was meditating under a tree. The place was infested with flies and mosquitoes that were bothering Him. In order not to kill the insects (one of the five precepts - not to kill), He burnt some incense so as to ward them off with the smoke. A few villagers passing by saw the **Buddha's** actions from a distance and from then, the practice of burning incense was passed down. I don't know how true this story is but I find it really amusing and presume that the villagers actually didn't understand the **Buddha's** intentions.

With **metta** (loving kindness),
HHH.

Question 15: Why is incense offered to the *Buddha*?

Answer 15:

Dear HHH,

Peace, happiness, good health and long life to you and your family.

I am surprised by the story you shared. The ***Buddha*** certainly did not light incense to keep insects away as he was not afraid of insects biting him. If you recall, the ***Buddha*** went forth fearlessly to tame **Nalagiri** (*the intoxicated elephant*), **Angulimala** (*the bandit*), to mediate between two warring countries, etc. One who has achieved enlightenment can allow one's body to be subject to decay, pain, etc but will not allow one's mind to be disturbed by it.

It is possible that the story related to you could have been misunderstood by the one who told the story or, the person who taught your friend's husband.

The offering of incense and flowers was an ancient Indian practice to pay homage to great teachers. The early Buddhists in ancient India adopted this good and valuable practice. When we offer incense, we chant as follows:

**Gandha Sambhara yuttena
Dhupenaham Sugandhina
Pujaye pujaniyam tam
Puja bhajana muttamam**

*[With perfumed incense,
made from fragrant substances,
I honour thr Exalted One, worthy of
respect,
Who dispels the darkness (of ignorance)]*

Additionally, when we offer incense, flowers and lights to remind ourselves that just as all these things are impermanent, so too will our bodies fade away. These offerings help us to meditate on impermanence. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the ***Dhamma***,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“The wise are controlled in bodily action, controlled in speech and controlled in thought. They are truly well-controlled.”

Dhammapada

“Walking upon this path you will make an end of suffering. Having discovered how to pull out the thorn of lust, I make known the path.”

Dhammapada

Dear Venerable Sri Dhammananda,

Good day. I am very happy to actually obtain your e-mail address. I have been bogged by some questions about what I want to do and what I should do. Well, I shall tell you a little about myself.

I am a Malaysian girl in my final year in Australia. Since it is my final year now, I am beginning to think about what I want to do in life, when I get out there in the world. I have always been thinking of working for NGOs and charitable organizations ... and in war torn countries using my skills to help them develop and build a better life. It has always been my dream subconsciously to achieve that.

The problem is that my family does not agree with my notions. They think that I should work in the real world. I do not want to go against their wish as I know they have sacrificed much to make me successful. I do not want to be unfilial and hurt them by doing what I really want to. But then, I am afraid that I would not be able to find fulfillment in my life.

I really wish I could get some guidance from you. I am at a crossroads and I do not know where I should proceed. Thank you for your time. I just need someone to listen to me and provide me with some help.

Thanks,
JJJ.

Question 16: Torn between my personal dream and my parents' wishes, what should I do?

Answer 16:

Dear JJJ,

I really sympathise with you over your dilemma but rest assured that you are not the only one in this predicament. In the past, parents even dictated what profession their children should follow and who and when they should marry.

In your case I would advise you to follow the middle path, and seek a compromise. That is, please your parents by following a profession that will make them happy. Remember that there are many well-paid service oriented jobs. Some NGOs, for example, pay salaries comparable with the private sector.

You can in the mean time do voluntary work with charitable organisations to gain experience and make contacts. You can eventually get a high paying job with the UN, for example, serving both your desire to help mankind and fulfilling your parents' wishes. This will take time of course, but patience is a virtue.

At the same time remember that serving mankind need not be dramatic, going into war torn areas and risking your life, but there are socially acceptable jobs like teaching, which is also serving mankind, without posing a danger to yourself. Over time you may be able to persuade your parents to allow you to follow your heart's desire, but do not go against them now. My advice is, make a choice that will eventually

create a win-win situation. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the *Dhamma*,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Dwelling in the cave (of the heart), the mind, without form, wanders far and alone. Those who subdue this mind are liberated from the bonds of *Mara*”

Dhammapada

“Realising that this body is as fragile as a clay pot, and fortifying this mind like a well-fortified city, fight out *Mara* with the sword of wisdom. Then, guarding the conquest, remain unattached.”

Dhammapada

“You yourselves must strive; the *Buddhas* only point the way. Those meditative ones who tread the path are released from the bonds of *Mara*.”

Dhammapada

Reverend Sir,

I am very disturbed by the latest development in Cambodia barring monks from taking part in this year's general elections.

As a Buddhist, I am inclined to say that monks should not be part of any political activities. As a Cambodian, I am tempted to say the monks should be allowed to take part in politics.

I am confused and tormented by this and would like to ask you if you would be so kind as to read the attached message and comment on it.

Respectfully yours,
KKK.

Question 17: Can the members of the *sangha* (Buddhist renunciates) become candidates in a general election?

Answer 17:

Dear KKK,

At the outset, thank you for your query and greetings of peace, happiness and contentment to you through the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem. Buddhist monks are members of a democratic society and can always perform their civic duties that are not prohibited by the *Vinaya* (Discipline Code for the Sangha Order).

First, we must ask ourselves why the **Buddha** instituted the **Sangha** Order. It was not to enable them to improve worldly conditions but to help them concentrate on their spiritual development and to be free from rebirth in this world of suffering.

They were forbidden to handle money and they had to rely on the generosity of others to get their daily sustenance. Therefore, if monks get involved in politics they are actually getting further immersed in social problems and not concentrating on their spiritual development.

The two do not go together. Of course a monk (or nun) is obliged to care for the welfare of lay people and be concerned about their wellbeing. This means that if he sees people being oppressed by a cruel government, he must speak up. But this has to be done by teaching the **Dhamma** to influence their thinking.

The monk cannot incite the people to violence or to struggle. Deeply motivated by compassion for **all** parties, he has to strive to replace the ignorance that causes immoral behavior with wisdom. He has to explain the **Buddha's** teaching on good governance as contained in the **Mangala Sutta** (*Discourse on Blessings*), the **Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta** (*Lion's Roar of the Universal Monarch Sutta*), etc. He can teach people about their constitutional rights but he himself cannot be involved in politics. There is nothing to stop him from disrobing and doing whatever he likes, but he cannot give the wrong impression about what the robe represents. He can

of course serve society by getting devotees to be active in community service and to help themselves, but like the lotus, he must not be defiled by mundane concerns. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem.

Yours in the *Dhamma*,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“Let a man guard himself against irritability in bodily action; let him be controlled in deed. Abandoning bodily misconduct, let him practice good conduct in deed.”

Dhammapada

“Let a man guard himself against irritability in speech; let him be controlled in speech. Abandoning verbal misconduct, let him practice good conduct in speech.”

Dhammapada

“Let a man guard himself against irritability in thought; let him be controlled in mind. Abandoning mental misconduct, let him practice good conduct in thought.”

Dhammapada

Venerable Sir,

Before I seek your guidance on certain issues, I want to extend my heartiest congratulations to you for your over fifty years of service for Buddhism and most importantly, for the good of mankind.

Over the years, my fellow gay friends and I have wanted to know the Buddhist view of homosexuals. Sadly, today's society seems to consider us who engage in abnormal sexual pursuits as "trash." Particularly in Asian countries, this stereotype image has led to discrimination against homosexuals at the work place, etc.

I know that religions like Islam and Christianity condemn homosexuality but, being a practising Buddhist, I have always wondered what the Buddhist stand is and there are many questions for which I am seeking answers. You have produced many great publications that explain the rationale and wisdom of Buddhism on a variety of topics. I have read many of them and also attended some of your **Dhamma** talks. I have even searched some Buddhist websites about this but have found no answers. May I suggest, Venerable Sir, that you consider writing a book/booklet, "Buddhism and Homosexuality" as I know there are other people like me out here with many questions, doubts and mixed feelings on the subject that could do with some sound Buddhist guidance. Further, such a booklet, I am confident, will help to correct society's attitude to the likes of me. For now, I have some specific questions below.

I end here with wishes of good health to you and may you, Venerable Sir, continue to guide us and show us the way to the **Dhamma** for many more years to come.

Sincerely, LLL.

Question 18: What is the Buddhist attitude towards homosexuality?

Answer 18:

Dear LLL,

Thank you for your e-mail. I am happy that you have brought up this matter as I realise how important it is in the context of what is happening today in the world.

As human beings, we have bodies that crave for all kinds of pleasures (not only sex) - for food, pleasant smells, sounds, etc. If we deny ourselves these as being sinful, then we repress natural desires. Instead of repressing these natural desires, we must seek to understand how and why they arise and to realise that it is not in our best interests to pander to physical desires. The victim of *maya* sees the body as real and craves to satisfy a longing for *kama* which covers all kinds of sensual pleasure.

As the being matures spiritually, *maya* is replaced with *vidya* (knowledge) and *panna*. With spiritual maturity, the body is seen as an illusion and the being naturally grows out of craving. Here we see the spiritually advanced being renounces sex upon maturity, just as a child stops playing with toys as he or she grows up.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with sex. What is wrong is attachment and slavery to it, in believing that indulgence in sex can bring ultimate happiness. This is the problem with the exploitation of sex by

the mass entertainment industry today - extending the myth that sex can bring lasting happiness.

The third of the Five Precepts we recite in daily Buddhist practice is: "I undertake the training rule to refrain from sexual misconduct." First, we note that there is no compulsion, no fear of punishment for infringement of any divine law but rather, when we recognise the danger of attachment to sex, we freely take the steps (training rule) to grow out of it, i.e. "I undertake." In short, homosexuality is no different from other forms of sexual activity. They all have inherent dangers of increasing *tanha* (craving) and must be avoided through the development of *Samma Ditthi* (Right Understanding) and by following the *Majjhima Patipada* (Middle Path).

Question 19: Is a Buddhist homosexual breaking the precept on "avoiding sexual misconduct?"

Answer 19:

What do we mean by "sexual misconduct?" Here we are referring specifically to behaviour that harms the person who performs the act, or the other party - not all sexual conduct. Sex is prohibited to those who choose to be celibate e.g. monks or nuns. These persons have voluntarily chosen to abstain from sex to better concentrate on their spiritual progress. In a sexual relationship, if the two parties are consenting adults, not under-aged, not "attached" (legally or otherwise) to someone else, there is no harm done.

In Buddhism, we do not consider any action "sinful" in the sense that we transgress a divine commandment. We act wrongly because of *avijja* (ignorance) and therefore we commit an **akusala kamma** (unskillful/bad action) that delays or interferes with our spiritual progress. In our ignorance about the real nature of things (in this case, our body) we act in ways that are detrimental to us from a spiritual point of view. Understanding and wisdom will help us refrain from harmful actions, both mental and physical.

In this connection, Buddhism does not recognise that marriage is a divinely ordained institution that suddenly makes sex permissible. Sex is a human activity that has nothing to do with heaven and hell. You will notice that sexual restraint is one of the Five Precepts observed by practising Buddhists. Killing is far more serious because you can hurt another being more viciously. Sex is a craving, just like craving for food, liquor, drugs, wealth, power, etc. Attachment to any of these constitutes **akusala kamma** because, if we really understand the nature of our bodies and how craving works against us, we will not indulge in it. Buddhism discourages any of these forms of craving because they will tie us down more firmly to **samsara**. Also, indulgence in sex can lead to other evils like anger, jealousy, remorse and guilt.

Question 20: If two members of the same gender fall in love with each other, are they wrong?

Answer 20:

You may see from the foregoing that **Buddhism does not see homosexuality as wrong and heterosexuality as right**. Both are sexual activities using the body, both are strong expressions of lust which increase desire for life and therefore trap us longer in *samsara*. When a couple (whether a man and a woman, two men or two women) fall in love, it arises out of the same human limitation of not seeing the body as empty of any ultimate reality.

Question 21: Does Buddhism condemn homosexuals/homosexuality?

Answer 21:

Buddhism does not condemn homosexuals in the same way as it does not condemn any wrongdoing. We act through ignorance of the true nature of things. Therefore, we are only guilty of *akusala kamma*. We have no right to condemn others. Our duty is to help others see that they are acting out of ignorance, to show how real happiness can be gained. We have no right to condemn those who think or act differently from us, especially when we ourselves are slaves of sensual pleasure in other forms. We know that when we point one finger at others, the other three fingers are pointing at us.

In summary, homosexuality, like heterosexuality, arises from ignorance. All forms of sex increase lust, craving and attachment to the body. With wisdom, we learn to grow out of these attachments. We do not condemn homosexuality as wrong and sinful, but we do not condone it either, simply because it, like other forms of sex, delays our deliverance from **samsara**. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

“From lust springs grief, from lust springs fear. For him who is wholly free from lust there is no grief, whence then fear?”

Dhammapada

“From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear. For him who is wholly free from craving there is no grief, whence then fear?”

Dhammapada

Rev. K. Sri Dhammananda,

I am a homosexual and I am suffering for it. I would be most grateful if you could advise me what should I do about it.

MMM.

Question 22: As a homosexual, I have suffered much. What should I do?

Answer 22:

Dear MMM,

You say you 'suffer' from being a homosexual. But have you asked yourself why you suffer? Is it because homosexuality itself brings suffering like AIDS or cancer or do you suffer from feelings of guilt because your sexual choice does not conform with what society has deemed as deviant behaviour?

You suffer because of what others think of you. This distinction is important because you must realise you are allowing external forces to determine your happiness or unhappiness. The Buddhist view of all sexual behavior is contained in the Third Precept: "I undertake the **training rule** to abstain from sexual misconduct."

Sexual activity is based on the use of the body to gain pleasure. Sex in itself is not sinful. What is wrong is the use of sex to exploit others - young children, the economically deprived and so on. It

does not matter if this pleasure is obtained through heterosexual or homosexual behavior.

Buddhism sees little difference between a homosexual who exploits others and a heterosexual who does the same, although public opinion seems to make heroes of the latter, calling them macho. We need to ask ourselves whether the sexual excesses of some public figures like footballers and film stars actually deserve so much publicity.

Sex is sex, regardless of how we derive pleasure from it! What we have to guard against is **attachment** to the body and the pleasure derived from it - gluttony and alcoholism can be just as harmful. The more we indulge in sex the more we become attached to our gross bodies and the more we are doomed to suffer in **samsara** thinking that our bodies are real. Sensible self-restraint of the body in all matters leads to freedom and spiritual development, free from guilt.

We must train ourselves not to be attracted to our bodies (although we must treat them with due respect) and to see our bodies, and those of others, as nothing more than receptacles for pus, urine, blood, saliva. We must not waste unnecessary time on useless guilt. Use your effort and energy to develop positive states of mind. As you see your body for what it really is, you will be able to transcend all your different desires. But you have to be patient and diligent. These things take time. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,
Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

Dear **Nayake** (leader) **Thera** (a respectful suffix added to the name of an elder monk),

I wish that this e-mail finds you in the best of health.

Some time ago, I read an article about a gay couple one of who was dying of cancer. It seems that the dying man got his lover to promise to kill him, when the suffering should become unbearable, to spare him the suffering. Eventually, the point was reached where the patient was barely conscious, hardly able to even move in bed. He requested the lover to "do it now."

Thereupon, the lover says, "I'm going to ask you twelve times. Blink twice if you change your mind and do not want me to help you die right away." The dying man blinks once each time in response to the question posed twelve times, signifying that he would rather die than suffer.

The question here is - "Although Buddhism does not encourage mercy killing, as no one has the right to take away one's life, if this situation arises where the dying lover acknowledges the fact that he would rather die than suffer, is it "okay" to perform mercy killing? Does it mean breaking the first precept?" If I am in this situation of being a lover to the dying patient, I will not know what to do - should I keep my precept of not killing or should I do it in the name of mercy killing?

I hope **Bhante** can provide me a clear answer to this possibility occurring.

Thank you.

Wishing you the best in health and happiness,
NNN.

Question 23: Can we perform euthanasia for someone who has requested it?

Answer 23:

Dear NNN,

Let us begin by emphasising that the matter does not pertain to gay lovers alone but to every creature that has life. Buddhists do not classify homosexuals as separate from the rest of humanity. In Buddhism, the taking of life for whatever reasons is not to be condoned. However, if killing occurs as a result of an unintentional, unmotivated act, then one is not held responsible (e.g. if a blind man kills ants by stepping on them without being aware that they are there). For the killing to be **kammically** complete, entailing retribution in this life or subsequent ones, many conditions must be present viz,

1. *There must be a living thing*
2. *Knowledge that it is a living thing*
3. *Intention to deprive that thing of its life*
4. *Effort to remove the life*
5. *Subsequent separation of the body from the life*

All these conditions are fulfilled in the story you mentioned, so the partner is responsible for having broken the first principle and he must bear the **kammic** responsibility for the deed. That said, we must now add that the intention to kill can be motivated by compassion or by hatred, which will of course determine the severity and the nature of the **kammic** effect.

In the case of mercy killing, also known as euthanasia, which is motivated by misguided compassion, the mind is not wholly polluted in that situation. Thus the bad **kammic** effect is reduced. It is a case of a wrong action done with a good intention. The action however is still wrong. The more we pollute the mind, the higher the degree of the bad effect.

If one murders an innocent person out of hatred or greed, then of course the effect is severe. In the example you gave, the person was motivated by compassion so the effect will be less severe. Notice we said "less severe," because there will be an effect, although there will be mitigating circumstances. Also, we must consider the value of the creative life which was deprived - is it a mosquito or an animal like an elephant, a horse or a cow that is especially useful?

The degree of effort taken and the intensity with which the mind is engaged influences the severity. Naturally, the killing of a human is most serious. Even then we must consider how innocent or how useful the human being is - a parent or a monk are high on the list. In your example, the person's consent was obviously given, the motivation was compassion (though misguided), so while all the conditions were met, the **kammic** effect is significantly reduced. A doctor who performs mercy killing cannot be put in the same category as say, a man who in cold blood murders his mother to get her money.

What this means is that not all similar actions bear the same **kammic** effect. The effects of weak **kammic** actions may be eradicated or counteracted by other good **kamma** so that the effects of the bad **kamma** have no chance to operate. In fact, only the harming of a **Buddha** or the murder of **arahats** (saints) and parents or causing a split in the monastic order are considered to be so severe that it is very difficult to escape the retribution. The effects of all other **kamma** can be reduced by purifying one's mind and actions - please refer to the story of **Angulimala**. In the case of suicide or euthanasia, we cannot make a blanket statement that all such actions are wrong because the mental state at the time of the one who performs the action must be taken into account. However, this is a complex issue we cannot discuss fully here.

Finally, mercy killing is not merciful at all. It may at best be referred to as a misguided sense of mercy, because depriving the life of another is not our prerogative - the sufferer must bear his own **kamma** patiently and with understanding and we cannot act as executioner. If we cut short the working of **kamma** in this life, we merely postpone its completion to another life. With the Blessings of the Noble Triple Gem,

Yours in the **Dhamma**,

Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda

GLOSSARY

All **Pali** words in this booklet are in ***bold italicised*** type and where the **Pali** word first appears in the text, a brief meaning in English is given in parenthesis. This Glossary of all the **Pali** words used are arranged in alphabetical order followed by its meaning in English.

akusala – *unskillful; improper; evil deed; demeritorious*

akusala kamma – *unskillful / bad action*

Angulimala – *the bandit who wore a garland of fingers*

arahat – *saint; perfect being; enlightened being; one who has attained the final and absolute emancipation unrestricted by gender, creed or age*

atman – *soul; the false sense of self*

avijja – *ignorance, the main root of evil and of continual rebirth*

Bhante – *Venerable Sir*

bhava – *state of being; existence*

bhava tanha – *the craving for becoming; craving to exist*

Bhikkhu – *Buddhist monk; male renunciate*

Bodhisatta – *one who has passed through many previous existences and stages of spiritual development and is in the last birth in which he attains his great destiny of Buddhahood*

Brahman – *the Creating Principle; Creator of the Universe (in Hinduism)*

Buddha – *The Enlightened One; The Awakened One*

Buddha Dhamma – *Teachings of the Buddha*

cakkavatti – *universal monarch*

Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta – *Lion's Roar of the Universal Monarch Sutta*

Dhamma - *Truth; the true nature; reality; the Teachings of the Buddha*

Dhammapada – *a line or stanza from the Buddha's Teachings*

gandhabba – *the force for a new life form*

Gautama – *the family name (surname) of Prince Siddhatta*

kama - *pleasures of the senses*

kamacchanda – *sensual desires*

kamma – *good or bad action*

Khuddaka Nikaya - *compact collection*

Lumbini – *birth place of Prince Siddhatta*

Majjhima Patipada – *Middle Path*

mangala – *blessing*

Mangala Sutta - *Discourse on Blessings*

Mara – *the Evil One*

maya – *deceiving; illusion, illusory; delusion*

metta – *loving-kindness; boundless love; the sincere wish for others' safety and happiness*

mokkha – *final release; release from; freedom from*

Nalagiri – *the intoxicated elephant*

Nayake - *leader*

Nibbana – *the ultimate freedom / liberation*

nivarana - *hindrance*

Question Time with Venerable Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

Pali – *ancient Indian dialect spoken by the Buddha*

panna - *wisdom*

paticca samupada – *the twelve links of dependent origination*

Sakyamuni – *noble sage of the Sakya race*

Samma Ditthi – *Right Understanding*

samsara - *the cycle of birth, life and death*

sangha – *the community of the Noble Ones i.e. Buddhist renunciates*

Siddhatta – *the given name, meaning "wish fulfilled," of the Prince Gautama*

sihanada – *lion's roar*

sutta – *discourse in the canonical texts*

tanha – *craving; attachment*

Thera – *Elder; a respectful suffix added to the name of an elder monk*

thina - middha - *sloth and torpor*

Tipitaka – *literally "The Three Baskets," the Buddhist holy scripture which is divided into the Doctrine, the Rules for the Sangha Order and the Higher Doctrines*

uddhacca-kukkucca – *restlessness and worry*

vidya - *knowledge*

vicikiccha - *doubt*

Vinaya - *the Discipline Code for the Sangha*

vyapada - *ill-will*

Yasodhara - *given name of Prince Siddhatta's wife*

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