

4. BIRTH.

Now we come to the subject of 'birth.' We'll take a comprehensive look at this matter. If we split up the main question there'll be just two points to consider: one concerning whether a person dies and then is or isn't born, the other concerning the sort of birth that's suffering, that's *dukkha* - something that should be studied and put an end to.

Looking at the first question, that is, when someone dies are they born again or not? This question has been around since the Buddha's time and was comprehensively dealt with then. It appears from the *Pali* that it was examined from every conceivable angle so that there arose views, opinions, conclusions of many kinds, but that there was no general agreement. Some people held that there was death and birth, some that there was wasn't, some that there was sometimes birth, others that there wasn't, and some held that one shouldn't declare on the subject at all. This was a big thing at the time of the Buddha.

As Buddhists which group would we belong to – to that which holds that there is death and then birth, or to that which says that there isn't; to that which holds that there's sometimes birth, or to that which says that that's not so; to that which holds that there's neither - neither birth nor no birth?

There are those, adhering to some other religion, who believe that there's a 'self' involved, and that it's this 'self' that gets born, while others of a different persuasion say that's not so; yet another group hold that this 'self' is sometimes born, while others hold that it isn't - and so on and so forth. But nobody seems to say what the Buddha said: that there isn't a 'being,' a person, that there isn't anyone doing the dying or being born, there's just a stream of conditions, of *idappaccayatā*, a stream of dependent origination, of *paṭiccasamupāda* flowing on.

Another, minor, question crops up here too, as to whether one is 'self-born,' or whether there's someone or something helping the process, something else causing birth to happen. Again, the Buddha didn't declare on that sort of thing, saying only that birth happens in accordance with the law of *idappaccayatā*, the law of nature.

There's also that sort of 'half-birth' called '*sambhavesi*' to be considered, in which one dies and, still to be born, wanders around searching for a place to be born into, then, when birth takes place one becomes *bhuta* - a 'fully born' being. But it depends on how the word '*sambhavesi*' is understood. *Sambhavesi* can refer to the mind not yet risen to the point where it (the mind) feels that it's 'me,' or that anything is 'mine' - the mind which will concoct, but which hasn't yet concocted the 'me' and 'mine' scenario fully. This can be called *sambhavesi*.

There's also the problem of what it is that actually gets born? People who follow the ancient doctrines of India say that '*viññāna*,' consciousness gets born, but the Buddhist religion doesn't include that kind of consciousness, it only deals with the six sense consciousnesses. If, however, we allow that consciousness is born, then in the Buddhist sense it would imply the concocting of mental activity in response to sense contact so that there occurs feeling, perception and thought, culminating in the 'birth' of the 'I' sense into the mind. This would be comparable to consciousness being 'born.'

There's still a large question to consider: some creeds, some religions have a fundamental belief that when a person dies they go to await judgement as to whether they should be born in an eternal hell or in an eternal heaven. They get judged just once and then go and take birth accordingly, so that one is, for instance, born into an eternal hell – and it is eternal - or, if one is to be born into heaven, then that will be for

all eternity too, without any further change. In some creeds, some religions this is believed in. As for other systems, they don't hold to that kind of thing, they don't have a death and then a waiting around for some eternal judgement to be made. There, we can see for ourselves what a complex matter 'birth' can become.

Now, concerning whether one is born or not: when we look at this in accordance with Buddhist principles, with the tenets of the religion as contained in the texts, then the question has to be considered from two angles: from that of those who use the language of supposition, and from that of those who use the language of ultimate truth. Simply put, it's said that a person who doesn't yet know the way things really are, who doesn't know that the 'self' is illusory, will use language in one way, while someone who has that knowledge will use language in another. All, or most worldly people will necessarily speak in the way of the world, in the language of supposition, and will accept that there's a 'self,' that there's a 'me,' a 'person' who dies and is then born. This has been repeated over and over again until there's hardly anybody who thinks that it can be any other way, and is useful on the level of *siladhamma*, on the level of morality, useful for people who have yet to realize truth. For those people the doctrine of rebirth is the better option, because it discourages wrong-doing and encourages the opposite - but it's not the truth. If we use the language of ultimate truth, then there isn't anything that could be called a 'self,' a 'person,' there's only the concocting of elements, of causes and conditions in accordance with the law of nature. But when we mention this people tend to misunderstand it, so we need to be careful, be reserved even with the ultimate truth, and we should talk about such things only when it's appropriate, only when the mind of the listener is elevated enough to understand properly. Usually it's more fitting to talk in a way which is going to be useful, and if saying that there is death and rebirth is useful, then that's what we should say.

Before the Buddha arose in India they held that there was death and then rebirth, that there was a 'self,' that it was consciousness that was reborn - that was the majority belief, because it was the most useful. Now, when the Buddha became enlightened, when the Buddha appeared it was into a society where this belief was firmly established, so, what was he to do? Well, he didn't try to put an end to the belief, rather he gave the appearance of subscribing to it by saying that in case one was to be born then one should know how to act so as to obtain the best kind of birth, that is, the suffering-free kind, and he then went about teaching the method of practise by which that could be attained. Thus - in conformity with the then generally held belief - teachings for obtaining the best kind of birth are everywhere in the Buddhist scriptures, but the true Buddhist message is that there isn't a being, a person, there's only an ever changing process of concocting, of compounding with nobody involved in it. People tend to grab at that process, call it a 'person' and say that it's born, ages, and dies, and that it's reborn - but here we need to ask if that sort of understanding can bring any real benefit; if people want to end suffering, to really not have any suffering then what sort of understanding should they have: that there is a 'self,' that there's a 'self' waiting to be born somewhere - or that there's isn't?

Right now, at this moment, there isn't a 'person,' a 'someone' who was born - but nobody understands this properly: that which was born, that which is sitting here in this place right now, isn't a person, it's really just a stream of *idappaccayatā*; all of these people sitting here aren't really people at all, they're just nature, just the *khandhas*, the aggregates, the *dhātus*, the elements, the *āyatana*, the senses concocting

together in accordance with the law of nature, and flowing on, continually changing, transforming - they aren't really 'beings,' aren't 'people' at all. How many of us sitting here now understand this correctly - how many? But if we don't understand it that's alright: first we hear it, and then, when we've taken it in we ought to be able to grasp that there isn't anybody living life, there's just something going along in dependence on the appropriate causes and conditions being present. Listen to the Buddhist teaching: there isn't a person; there isn't anyone to die, to be born, or be reborn, there's only the stream of concocting, the concocting of the *khandhas*, the aggregates, the *dhātus*, the elements, and the *āyatana*, the senses in accordance with the law of nature. Clinging to these as a 'being,' a 'person' is the starting point of suffering, of *dukkha*, because when there's a 'me' and a 'mine' then there will be the associated problems - that's the beginning of suffering.

But if this isn't understood it can't be of help. So, those who still think, still cling, still have the belief that there's a 'self' which was born, will die and be born again, and again, etc., what can they do to adjust their understanding? Well, they need to acquire knowledge of just one kind - the Buddhist knowledge that can quench suffering. Understanding, or clear knowledge concerning birth is important, if understanding is right there won't be any suffering at all, if wrong it won't correspond to natural truth and there must be *dukkha*. If there's a 'person' then there must be birth and death too; if there isn't then there won't be birth and death either. Ordinarily people think that there is someone living life, so they have birth, ageing, sickness, and death to deal with, and must suffer. If they have only that sort of knowledge they must, unless they can lift themselves up a level, experience suffering.

For this reason the Buddha is recorded as saying that if all beings would live with him as their *kalyānamitta*, their 'good friend,' then those ordinarily subject to birth will escape it, those subject to ageing and death will escape them, and those beings who experience sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, will escape from all of that too, that is, they'll escape from all the forms of *dukkha*. Now, any children sitting here probably won't understand how they could escape birth, ageing, sickness, and death, so, putting it in a way that will make it easier for them to grasp we'll say that it's the problems associated with birth, ageing, sickness, and death that can be escaped from - our problems are connected with birth, ageing, sickness, and death, in that those concepts cause us fear, anxiety, etc., cause us to suffer. If one can make an end of the problems that come from birth, ageing, sickness and death that's called 'escaping' from them. At present we still have the many problems associated with these concepts: we must get sick even though we don't want to be sick, must grow old even though we don't want to, and we'll have to die whether we want to or not, we're still selfish so we can still be alarmed by ageing sickness and death - in fact by any small thing associated with death. Well, how pleasant would it be to escape from all of that? That's the aim of *Dhamma* study: to know the *Dhamma* and be able to live without, to live 'above' the problems of life.

To sum up: since olden times there've been two schools, one teaching that there is death and then birth, and one that there is death but no subsequent birth. Now, which should we choose? We should choose the one that's useful to us. But we must choose for ourselves because nobody can help us: for those dwelling in the world the way of *siladhamma*, the way of birth is useful, and will also fit in with our thinking, because in truth we don't really want to disappear, we still want to be born, so then we, aiming for an elevated birth, will be inclined towards doing good and avoiding evil to whatever extent. Hence, there's some preliminary right understanding involved in regarding the concept of rebirth as useful for getting people

to do the proper thing. Both beliefs, however, are really incorrect, because the fact is that there isn't anyone to be born or to not be born. But at present people tend to think in the two ways mentioned. So, choose the way that's useful. Right now some people cannot, perhaps, understand that there isn't anyone who will be born or die, so we'll teach rebirth, and it becomes a matter of being born in a good or a bad way according to one's *kamma*, thereby encouraging people to behave. We don't object to people teaching in this way although, for the reasons already set out, it isn't the Buddhist religion.

Now, we'll look at the second question, that is, how many kinds of birth are there, and which kind is a problem, which isn't?

The word 'birth' is broad in meaning: the arising of anything is called 'birth,' as with an 'event,' an event is something insubstantial, a 'happening,' something that occurs - there is this kind of 'birth.' 'Matter,' or material things are 'born,' as with a stone, a clod of earth, or whatever, the arising of anything material is called 'birth.' A seed, a tree, a creeper, when they arise it's called 'birth' too. Creatures are 'born.' A person, a human being is 'born,' gods are 'born,' and so on. Thus is the 'birth' of material things and of things that are flesh and blood. But there's another kind of birth, a birth of something immaterial, something problematic - 'mental' birth. The arising of thought is called 'mental birth,' and, if the mind is defiled, has the *kilesa*, it's called the birth of the *kilesa*. Be aware that this mental birth, this birth of the *kilesa* is a problem. If it's only birth of something material - a plant, an animal, a person - and isn't concerned with the mental defilements it isn't a problem. Further, whether it's a full birth or not needs to be considered. Birth of an infant from the mother's womb isn't a problem because that sort of birth isn't a full birth: a child born from it's mother's womb cannot think about anything and thus cannot have *dukkha*; it must be able to think for the *kilesa* to arise into the mind - that would be called 'full' birth. If the baby doesn't have the thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' then it isn't yet called a 'full birth' and there's just been physical birth from the womb - dogs and cats are born in the same manner - it's when there are the thoughts of 'me and mine' that it's considered to be a 'full birth.'

We'll take some time to look over 'birth' as it occurs in the scriptures. The first kind of birth is that which takes place in water: all creatures, people, beasts, like cows, buffalo begin their lives as embryos in water in the mother's womb - this is the water-born. The second kind of birth is the egg-born, as in the case of birds. The third kind concerns the birth of micro organisms. Ordinary life arises in these ways: the water-born, in the case of people and beasts; the egg-born, in the case of birds and creatures that need eggs first, and the accumulation-born in the case of things that can hardly be seen but of which there are a great many - micro-organisms greatly outnumbering the visible kind, there being millions in even one drop of water.

Now, a fourth kind of birth is called *opapātika*, which is a kind of 'hidden' birth, one that doesn't need the help of a father or mother, and refers to one arisen in an already full-grown, mature condition without having had to grow up from childhood. This is known as *opapātika*. There are two explanations for this word: most commonly it's taken to mean the birth of a supernatural being, like an angel, a god, or of a *preta* ('hungry ghost'), a hell-being, or whatever: leaving this world one goes to be born as a god, etc., but without having to dwell in the mother's womb beforehand, without having to be born and go through the maturing process. But we don't explain it like that, we take it to mean birth in the mental sense, that is, there's thinking, concocting in whatever way which gives rise to a mental 'birth.' In this understanding there's no need for death to intervene, no need for anyone to die and

then be born. Further, if the thinking is base, low thinking, if, for instance one is thinking like a bandit then one is mentally 'born' as a bandit right there and then, while still in the same human body, so, think like a robber and be 'born' as one; think like a god and be 'born' as a god, but while still in a human body; to achieve 'birth' as a *Brahma* god develop the mind of a *Brahma*, that is, concentrate it, make the mind *samādhi* and be immediately 'born' as a *Brahma* god, and all without having had to bother with death. If the mind is *samādhi* then one has already been 'born' as a *Brahma*.

Which of these understandings would be useful? Think about it: that in which one needs to die first and then get born as a god, a hell-being, a *Brahma*, as something or other in another world that's very far off, or the instant, mental kind of birth, where one thinks in a certain manner and however one thinks one is born accordingly, right there and then. The second option is frightening because it happens easily and often, yet it's the better choice in that it's controllable: we could restrain the mind, not let it think in such a way that it takes a low birth, as a bad person, a robber or anything like that; we could cause it to think in an elevated manner and be born as a *pandit*, a noble being - such a birth would have value. Thus we let the mind think like a good person and become one, let the mind think in an unskillful, a low way and be born accordingly. We can control this kind of birth: *opapātika*: arising without a mother and father in the usual manner, without having had to be an infant first.

Thus, the Buddha's birth into the world wasn't about Siddhartha being born from his mother's womb, it would have a different meaning. When did the Buddha arise into the world? The usual answer would be that it was when he was born. In truth it wasn't like that, the Buddha arose into the world when he became enlightened; in the moment of enlightenment he was *opapātika*-born into the world. The 'birth' of the Buddha occurred when the mental defilements were destroyed and his condition changed to that of one who sees clearly, who is *sammāsambuddha*. Thus birth of the *opapātika* kind has great value and meaning, and might be very useful for us, inasmuch as it would allow the mind to operate in an increasingly correct manner.

Here 'death' and 'birth' would have the meaning of one mind quenching and a new mind arising, of one kind of mind quenching and a new kind being 'born.' This can be called 'death' and 'birth' but it doesn't require that the body die, enter a coffin and be taken off somewhere to be cremated. The mind is born and quenches, arises and passes away - it's the same thing as birth and death but this is a 'birth' we can control, that is, we can make it happen in better and better ways, we can control the mind so that it's born in a more elevated manner, so that the *kilesa*, the defilements decrease, so that there's more clarity, more 'enlightenment' every time mind is born. Train the mind to function in this way; control birth so that it's useful. We know very well which kind of birth it's our duty to arrange - a better birth, a better mental birth, meaning birth as a better human being, as a god, as a *brahma*, so, strive to develop a higher mental birth, one that's desirable and isn't a problem, one that doesn't involve suffering.

The birth that's undesirable involves the arising of the *kilesa*, because when they arise into the mind then one is low, like a bad individual, like a *preta*, an animal, a demon, but while still in this human body. The people sitting here, if any one of them thinks in a low manner, in a way that's hot for the mind they'll be born as hell-beings - although sitting here in this human form, inside, mentally they'll be in hell, or, if they think in an ignorant, foolish way they'll be born as animals - while sitting here in these bodies - or, if they feel excessive hunger for delight, for stimulation, then they're *pretas*, hungry ghosts - or, if they're unreasonably afraid, if they're cowardly,

then they're demons, *asuras* - while in this body, while sitting here. There's no need for anyone to die and be put into a coffin to be born in this way. Birth of this kind is a problem, is suffering.

Thus there are several kinds of birth, but for now we're concerned with the birth of the human mind in a desirable, in an increasingly elevated manner, and capable of quenching suffering. Birth in an undesirable way is that which is low, which is suffering. So, if the question is about which kind of birth is a problem, then it's the birth of suffering, of mental torment. Bodily pain, if it doesn't hurt the mind, isn't much. There's bodily pain which doesn't hurt mentally, and there's bodily pain which does. If the mind is weak, is foolish then even the prick of a thorn can cause mental pain. Someone with strength of mind won't suffer upon being cut or jabbed by a thorn. There's suffering for the mind whenever there's the arising of the 'me' thought, because then there's a 'me' experiencing life. The Buddha offered a useful analogy when he compared birth to two arrows: a child's toy arrow flies through the air, pierces one's body and hurts just so much, but if it's a large arrow with a terrible poison piercing one's body then it's going to hurt much, much more. Here the pain of the first sort doesn't provoke belief that it's 'me' who's experiencing it, so it just hurts a little - like the child's toy arrow would. But if the pain gives rise to the feeling of 'me,' then it's like being pierced by the second arrow with the poisoned tip.

Hence, we're aware of the sort of thinking that gives rise to 'me' and 'mine,' so don't allow it to happen and there won't be much *dukkha* to experience. One must meet with pain during life, just remember that pain is a feeling arising through the nervous system, a natural phenomenon, and don't allow it to be more than that, because if anyone thinks that it's 'me' who feels the pain then there will be suffering. Therefore, when there's pain, fever, or injury of any kind, consider that it's just feeling happening naturally by way of the nervous system, don't let it give rise to the 'me' who's in pain, or will die, or whatever, and there won't be much suffering - it will be like being hit by the child's arrow rather than by the poisoned one.

We're hit by the poisoned arrow when deep ignorance arises - when the defiled thinking that there's a 'self' occurs it's called *upādāna*, clinging, attachment to 'me' or 'mine,' born from ignorance. When anything comes to make contact with the senses and there's no *satipaṇṇā*, mindfulness and wisdom, only ignorance, then it can be a big affair, then the attractive becomes very attractive, the ugly becomes hateful, the fearful becomes the terrifying, and the 'self' on a big scale arises - clinging, *upādāna*, to 'me' and 'mine' occurs and there must be suffering. This matter is set out in detail in the formula of dependent origination, *paṭiccasamupāda* - briefly: when anything meets the eye, ear, nose, tongue or the body there's 'contact,' if at that moment ignorance is in charge there'll be one result, if it isn't and there's real knowledge instead, there'll be another. If the contact is ignorant there'll be ignorant feelings (of pleasure) arising into the mind, from that will be born *taṇhā*, ignorant desire, and whenever that happens there must occur the feeling of 'me,' of 'me' who desires, who'll get, take possession of whatever's being desired. It all comes from desire, ignorant desire for ignorant feelings born from ignorant sense contact. When there's ignorant contact foolish desire arises; foolish desire having arisen there will be clinging to 'me' and 'mine.'

This is a very important but difficult to understand matter. One should study for oneself within oneself why the feeling of 'me' and 'mine' arises - the 'me' and 'mine' that are suffering. Nervous disease, madness, even death happen because of clinging to the 'self' idea. This is the sort of birth that's a problem.

The birth of *dukkha* happens because the mind is ignorant and misunderstands: a sense object deceives and lures mind into the misunderstanding that there's a 'me' and a 'mine' - mindfulness and wisdom are insufficient so mind is deceived into feeling pleased or displeased and the defiled thinking of 'me' and 'mine' arises. This is the arising of suffering because it's the arising of clinging to the belief that there is a 'me' and a 'mine,' happening in dependence on some experience capable of causing it. 'Me' and 'mine' are *māyā*, illusion, not reality, but there is suffering. There's no need for an actual, real 'self,' only wrong thinking (that there is a 'self') is needed for suffering to happen.

If the natural form of *dukkha* arises then understand well that there doesn't need to be mental suffering too.

How do we quench suffering? If there's the arising of suffering how will we quench it? We can quench the symptoms, or we can quench the root cause. If we have a malignant disease we can fix the painful symptoms or we can fix the root of the pain – the disease. Anyone with wisdom will see that it's necessary to do something about the root cause of *dukkha*, because to just treat the symptoms won't put an end to it, we have to seek out the basic cause, fix it, and then it will end, will quench; we don't just cure the external effects, we cure the internal causes, the root cause too. Whether what arises will be suffering or not depends on whether we're foolish or wise: if the mind gives rise to 'birth' it will cause us to 'die' and that must be suffering, but if the mind sees how to fix the problem then it needn't give rise to suffering, and even pain, even fever or whatever, through knowing that it's simply just what it is, that it's really 'just like that,' won't create any suffering. Ordinarily, people can't do this so must experience suffering. They have the unknowing of *avijjā* ready in the mind to cause the feeling of 'I,' the habitual feeling that it's 'me' who will die one day, so they suffer. They're wary of death so they suffer - even though there isn't anything else happening to cause suffering, just being wary of death will be enough. The 'me' thought is always being concocted in the mind so there's always going to be suffering, quench it and there won't be. It's hard to understand, but suffering can arise even though there isn't a real 'self,' isn't a person to do the suffering. Suffering arises in dependence on causes and conditions in accordance with the law of nature: there's painful feeling in the nervous system and, given ignorance, then there's suffering; there isn't a real, thorough-going 'self' involved here but suffering arises through the ignorant mind believing that there is. Thus, suffering can happen regardless of whether there's actually a 'self' or not, so it can quench without there needing to be a real 'self' too. This is the meaning of *anattā*, of *suññatā*, the highest *dhmma* in the Buddhist religion, allowing access to the truth that whatever it is it's 'just like that,' just what it is operating according to natural principles. If a painful feeling arises we brush it off as being 'just like that,' a painful feeling arising through the nervous system in accordance with natural principles - there's no 'me' involved. The clever mind isn't concerned with the birth of 'my' pain, it doesn't allow the birth of 'my' pain, the birth of 'my' death, for that reason there isn't a 'me' who needs to die and pain is allowed to remain as just what it is – a feeling in the nervous system. If pain is such that death must happen then the body dies but there's no 'me' to make it into suffering - at the final second, when the body perishes there's no 'me' so there's no suffering either, there's just the mind without clinging. This is the ultimate *dhmma*, akin to the highest art, it's the most difficult, the highest ability that anyone can develop. Ordinarily artistic skills are hard to acquire, but the ability to quench the defilements, to quench suffering is - while still being within the limits of the do-able – yet more difficult. The Buddha didn't teach

the impossible. But we're lazy, we vacillate and say that it is impossible; we don't want to do it so we have to put up with suffering

If, however, it's allowed that this is possible then we should try. While in the human condition we can do this, we can control the mind, maintain it correctly so that it remains free of selfishness, free from the 'me' and 'mine,' and then any pain will just be bodily pain occurring through the nervous system according to natural law, and whether it disappears or ends in death it will be a matter of the aggregates, the elements, the senses - a natural affair. Don't allow it to become a 'me' and 'mine' problem and it won't result in the *dukkha* of the poisoned arrow variety, it will be like the childish arrow that merely irritates the flesh. This is the art that conquers suffering.

The birth of suffering is a low, a most unwelcome form of birth. We know that if the 'I' isn't born in the mind it won't happen, so we know that we can be suffering-free, that we can have the mind of an *arahant*, a mind without *dukkha*. The mind of a smart, worldly person will produce suffering, but will also be the kind of mind that can be developed, can be cooled. If we have the motivation then we can practise to develop mindfulness and the sort of wisdom that accords with the Buddhist principle of *anattā*, that there isn't a 'self' in the true sense, that the 'self' idea arises from ignorance, from the mental carelessness present whenever anything contacts the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or the mind: whenever sense contact occurs and ignorance is in charge the 'self' idea will be concocted, and then there can be love, hate, anger, fear, etc. - then there can be the various forms of suffering.

We know precisely where and when the arising of the defilements that cause suffering takes place; we have to be able to replace them with mindfulness and wisdom, with clear knowledge; this is the point we need to grasp.

When we know that there isn't really a 'self' at all then we don't need to ask about birth - is there death and birth? - there's no need for such a question because we know that the 'me' is a fiction, that there are only the *dhātus*, the elements of earth, water, fire, air, and of space, only the senses operating in dependence on the law of nature, there's no need to bring in the 'me' and the 'mine.' This is to access the final level of the Buddhist religion: that there isn't anyone who's born or dies. Hence we come to dwell above suffering, above *kamma* and it's fruit, above everything, and, should anything return to cause suffering we can brush it off, simply not accept it.

Thus we're able to put a stop to all deliberated actions, to *kamma* - if we understand that there isn't a 'me,' that there's only *suññatā*, voidness then we don't make any new *kamma* and old *kamma* cannot come to cause suffering. Whatever the *kamma*, if we allow it to fruit the result will be suffering. Now we can control suffering, not allow it to arise into the mind, so that *kamma* is then sterile and can't do anything to us - we're no longer the 'site' of suffering.

The word 'we' here means the 'mind,' in reality it's the mind that does the knowing, we just say 'we,' if we don't use this word there'll be misunderstanding. What suffers? The mind suffers, but we say 'we' suffer because we're accustomed to speaking in that way. But be aware that if there really does arise the feeling of 'we' then there'll be suffering. If not, then there's no way for suffering to happen, and no way for the problematical questions of death and birth to happen either; all of that's finished with.

We would take the liberty here of saying that people, no matter what nationality they are, what religion they hold to, what opinions they have, if they suffer it's because they go wrong when experiencing the world, and if they're going to quench their suffering then they'll do it through understanding how the non-arising of

'me' and 'mine' is achieved. Although they hold to another religion with another way of teaching, still the true quenching of suffering is in the quenching of the feelings of 'me' and 'mine,' so that there isn't a 'me,' a 'me' to die, a 'me' to be reborn. The mind is then free, pure. The pure, free mind doesn't have the feeling that anyone is born or dies; if mind arises it isn't the arising of the 'self' too; mind arises in dependence on causes and conditions, but the mind only arises, not the 'self' idea.

This is the deep truth of 'birth' - that there isn't a 'self' to be born or to die. But if anyone is still unable to understand this then they won't be able to practise it either, and, for them, it will be a matter of death and birth, of dying and being born, dying and being born, which is tied up with the doing of good, and the avoiding of evil activities. However, doing good, striving to do the right thing still won't put an end to suffering; striving to put an end to birth would be better: stopping the arising of the 'me' who's born and dies is something that can be developed until suffering is finally escaped from and one can come to the *lokuttara*, come to dwell 'above' the world. If we're still worldly, still *lokiya*, then, still having the 'me' sense, we won't be able to avoid birth and death, and we'll have to do our best to get around the problem by doing the right thing whenever possible, so that there won't be any suffering. But suffering there must be because there'll still be birth, ageing, sickness, and death to experience, and even though we do good, make merit in whatever way, we're still going to be faced with the problem of death. We need to transcend the 'self' belief that brings us into contact with birth and death - escape from the evil by way of the good, and then escape even the good in order to attain the *lokuttara*, to come to live above suffering, be without the 'me' who's born and dies and let the problems of death and birth go.

We've said a great deal about birth, in fact enough. We don't need to argue about whether birth follows death or not, just don't allow suffering to happen. If we still believe that we'll be born again then we need to behave in such a way that it will be a good birth, even so there will be suffering because there'll still be a 'self' to be born and die.

So, put an end to the 'self' feeling and put an end to birth and death, put an end to getting or not getting, to winning and losing, and so on, then there won't be anything to cause confusion. This would be dwelling above the world, reaching the final destination. Who'll reach it first? We should vie with each other to be first, because whoever attains it will be above and beyond suffering of all kinds.