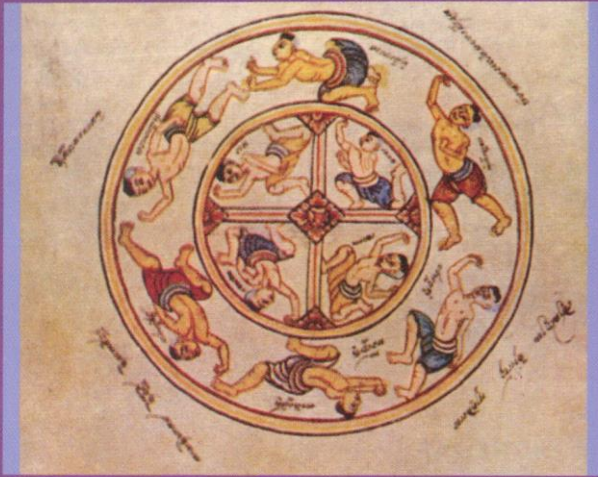




TEACHING DHAMMA BY PICTURES



by Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu



The traditional artist of Siam had little connection with the credo of the modern artist. He did not try to work in an original, individual style. He did not aim at expressing his own personality or his particular philosophy; in fact he rarely signed his name to the work. Even as an individual he may have been one part of a painting team, perhaps a specialist in painting architecture or figures.

But whether the artist worked alone or with others, his main intention was to communicate. In the basic sense of the word he made visible an important message by means of pictorial examples. This was his chief role whether he worked on a mural, the cloth banners which are hung in the wat on a certain occasion, or on the samut khoi, the paper manuscript.

The Chaiya manuscript is an extremely interesting one and its forty-seven pictures are an excellent illustration of the purpose of Siamese Buddhist painting and its traditional style.

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TEACHING DHAMMA BY PICTURES

Explanation of a Siamese
Traditional Buddhist Manuscript

by

Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu



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INTRODUCTION

The traditional artist of Siam had little connection with the credo of the modern artist. He did not try to work in an original, individual style. He did not aim at expressing his own personality or his particular philosophy; in fact, he rarely signed his name to the work. Even as an individual he may have been one part of a painting team, perhaps a specialist in painting architecture or figures. The murals seem to have been planned or directed by one person, and the wat records occasionally give a name, but a close inspection of the various scenes will reveal slight differences of line and technique like the differences in handwriting of individuals even if they are copying the same model.

We do know that more than one artist might work on a manuscript. A Triphoum, in the Berlin State Museum done by the order of King Taksin in 1776 records the names of four artists and four scribes, and with only a few exceptions, all of the figures in the numerous illustrations seem to have been done by the same hand, the buildings by another, etc.

But whether the artist worked alone or with others, his main intention was to communicate. In the basic sense of the word he made visible an important message by means of pictorial examples. This was his chief role whether he worked on a mural, the cloth banners which are hung in the wat on a certain occasion, or on the samut khoi, the paper manuscript.

The illustrator of a manuscript has one advantage over a mural artist in that a text will accompany the picture, and that the book will be used by a literate person. On the other hand, he has much less space than a mural artist and each small picture must score an important point.

The basic technique and elements of his art are the same as for the mural artist with the exception that he paints on sized paper made from tree bark instead of on a sized plaster wall.



He first studies the essential action of the story and then chooses the one or two scenes that are the most important to it. He must then compose figures, background and any details or symbols in a way that will make the meaning absolutely clear.

He will depend heavily on traditional poses and gestures of the figures which over the centuries have become clear symbols of a specific emotion, action or incident. Every Buddhist, of course, no matter what his native speech may be, can read the gestures portrayed by a Buddhist image like a universal sign language. In Siam, the gestures of the secondary figures are probably taken from the poses of the classical dance drama. Through the years a standardized alphabet of gestures has grown up, and the turn of the head, the position of the hands, feet, and body have become a recognized short-hand to convey grief, anger, love, battle, etc. The artist probably did not adopt this symbolism directly from the dance, but rather through the intermediary of the *nang* figure. Hundreds of these shadow-play figures cut from buffalo hide were needed to play out the story of the *Ramakien*, and no doubt they were designed and sketched out by the court artists who also worked on the murals and manuscripts.

Royal and religious figures are extremely stylized and are always shown in the traditional poses. These are superior beings and are therefore in control of their emotions; their faces are calm and impassive under all conditions. One must identify the character and the situation through dress, attributes and restrained gestures.

There are no such restrictions for the ordinary and still imperfect man. In the murals there is room to show all his normal activities: eating, sleeping, daily work, love and war. There is less space for him in the manuscript but when he does appear, he does so naturally as in Fig. 10, squatting with his fighting cock.

Another connection between painting and the dance or shadow play is that the action is presented as though it takes place on a stage. Usually the locale is indicated only by a few scenic props, some painted rocks, a small tree with paper flowers, and sometimes a canopied throne or gilded pavilion.



The style of the rocks and trees is often cited to prove Chinese influence. However, there is no philosophy of landscape painting as there is in Chinese art, and it has no importance in its own right. It is merely a background for the story and is often indicated by very simple rudimentary means. The Chinese style of the rocks and trees is often obvious, but they are probably motifs copied directly from the vast quantity of Chinese porcelain imported into Siam since the early Ayudhya period and which can still be found in most wats. It is borrowed stage scenery and has no influence on the style as a whole. One should also note that the Thai artist uses a brush made from bark or tree root and not the flexible modelling brush of the Chinese.

This is the basic style of traditional Thai painting and the style of the Chaiya manuscript. In this book, each small illustration teaches a Buddhist lesson in a manner that is striking, succinct, and logical. Fig. 2 is an allegory on the mind and body, or more specifically, on the difficulty of training the mind in the path of right thoughts, and the impermanence of the human body. The mind is represented by monkeys, and the body by clay pots. Both images are logical to the layman. The monkey is a familiar creature to him, a nimble, elusive and unpredictable one. As a symbol of his own undisciplined mind it is wryly amusing and perhaps all too apt. As for his body, only one among millions, it is as common as a clay pot, and like clay it can be easily shattered.

There are three human figures in the illustration. Two of them, the man carrying the clay pots and the man throwing a spear at the monkeys, are ordinary folk and are presented in a realistic manner both in costume and in pose. In contrast, the third man is the stylized figure of a noble huntsman shooting with bow and arrow. He is dressed in classical royal attire; his body with gracefully curved torso and a sharply bent leg is shown full front, his head and arm are in profile. This makes a dramatic silhouette and is exactly as it is portrayed in the shadow play figures. The juxtaposition of the noble and the ordinary hunters may be intended to convey the fact that physical vulnerability and the problem of mental discipline are common to all men.

Figs 6-9 are a series on the cycle of life, and craving is illustrated by an elephant who draws up water from three ponds, and who is swallowed by a frog, the frog by a snake and the snake by a bird. The artist here has



a special problem; he must produce a believable allegory out of unrealistic material. The action in the illustration must appear to be logical although it involves a great deal of symbolism and distortion of normal proportions.

Fig. 7 shows the frog that must swallow the elephant. If these two creatures were shown in correct relative size then the viewer would have a sense of reality and find the scene absurd. However nothing like this happens because the artist achieves a delicate balance of scale. The frog is shown smaller than the elephant, but much larger than relative size; he becomes a symbol and no question of the real capacity of his stomach arises for the viewer.

In Fig. 8 the frog is eaten by the snake, the snake by the bird, and the size of each adjusts to the situation. Finally, they are all shown within the bird like one of those sets of neatly nested Japanese boxes.

Fig. 9 shows exactly the same theme, but obviously by another hand. The bird is drawn very delicately and the composition seems to be planned for balance and decorative effect. Both Chinese academic paintings of the Bird and Flower classification, and Islamic miniatures have these characteristics. Could this artist be non-Thai? Chaiya, or its neighborhood has sizable Chinese and Moslem groups.

With Fig. 10 we return to Thai genre painting. To show man enslaved by his possessions, the artist paints a villager squatting on the ground feeding his fighting cock. The scene is a direct sketch from everyday life, and it would be instantly recognized by the Chaiya layman; it might also vividly remind him of certain arguments with his wife over time wasted and money lost in cockfight bets.

These small human portraits of ordinary activities are frequently tucked into the large mural paintings where they have the multiple purpose of filling the space, balancing the composition, and portraying the human world with its contrast between ordinary men and those farther along the road to enlightenment.

Fig. 11 combines several stylistic elements of Thai painting. The lion is in the Thai stylized and decorative manner. The rock and tree are the borrowed Chinese landscape unit. The man feeding the chickens is a



realistic sketch from life. If we add from Fig. 14, the classic pose and the traditional architecture then all the major elements of style are covered.

Fig. 13 shows four snakes representing the four kinds of attachment. This, I suspect, is done by the same artist who did Fig. 9. There is the same feeling over design and composition, and the same delicate lines. The snakes, very jaunty ones, are looped together in perfect symmetry like the links of a jewelry chain.

Fig. 19 is an incomplete picture. Its unfinished state may have some connection with an old tradition from the Northeast. There, an artist who paints a mural or a series of cloth banners begins with a ceremony in which he dedicates his work and his life to the Buddha. When his work is finished, then presumably the reason for his life is also finished, and therefore, he does not put in the last stroke that will complete the painting. It would be difficult to check this custom in the vast expanse of a mural, but occasionally one will notice in a cloth painting a gap in a line which seems to be deliberate. I do not know if this tradition is known in the South, but it seems doubtful that in a manuscript which is closely scrutinized an incomplete illustration would be an oversight.

We shall conclude this short survey of the Chaiya manuscript with some remarks about one of its most interesting illustrations. Fig. 38 is a representation of the ninth stage of knowledge. The ship (of the body) is crossing from the mortal world to Nibbana. The owner stands at the bow, sighting the shore, the captain (right mindfulness) steers from the stern. The crew and equipment are the necessary teachings without which one could not cross over re-birth.

While this is a complicated allegory and one of the most important lessons in the manuscript, it is also a charming naturalistic scene. The ship is a Malay junk with an ornamented bow and elevated stern structure. The owner seems to be a wealthy Malay adorned with gold jewelry and dressed in a kind of turban and sarong. The sailors are a raffish crew, one of them, hand on hip, leans very nonchalantly against the mast, and the captain is not so intent on adjusting the sails that he can't spare an admiring or flirtatious glance at the owner's wife seated in the upper cabin. This lady, incidentally, seems to be blonde.



Such touches of humour are a delightful characteristic of Thai painting. They are not to be considered as something disrespectful in a religious painting. Like the scenes of peasant life in many early Christian illuminated manuscripts they are a candid view of the world, and man's great faith and his small frailties are both a normal part of it.

The Chaiya manuscript is an extremely interesting one and its forty-seven pictures are an excellent illustration of the purpose of Thai Buddhist painting and its traditional style.

Elizabeth Lyons





TEACHING DHAMMA BY PICTURES

The use of pictures as a method for explaining the Dhamma (Buddhist Teachings) has been popular in Siam since the Sukhothai or early Ayuthia period. The manner of representation has undergone, of course, various changes through the years so that the pictures illustrate period art as well as Dhamma. Though there is still disagreement in fixing the date of some illustrations, the examples presented here are of the Bangkok period (about 100 years old). Three illustrated manuscripts of this period on Dhamma have been found in the town of Chaiya (Surathani Province) and the volume presented here is the largest of them. Upon examination, it was found that all three manuscripts have the same theme for their illustrations.

The illustrated manuscript reproduced here was, in the original, a traditional Thai manuscript called Samut Khoi which is a long roll of paper folded concertina-wise into leaves and then written on both sides. In this form, the illustration was presented first, followed by a few lines of explanation on a particular aspect of Dhamma such as Meditation and so forth. Cambodian script was used in those days for all religious works though the language is Siamese.

The pigments used were produced locally, most of them derived from native trees. The sequence of the illustrations has been rearranged here, for a more lucid presentation.





THE SIX ELEMENTS





1.

This is an illustration of the six Elements. Four human figures paying respect to the king represent the Four Great Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. (Or of Solidity, Cohesion, Temperature and Mobility, which are the marks of all matter.) The fifth element, Space, surrounds the others. The king is a representation of the sixth element, Viññānadhātu, the Consciousness-element. The king (or the mind) is shown as superior to and in control of the other four (Earth, Water, Fire, Air) elements which represent corporeality. Space should be regarded as beyond, and distinct from, the mind (nāma) and body (rūpa) elements, although some schools of thought regard space as an aspect of mind. According to this latter approach, only two elements are present—mind and body. However, there are also the three elements of rūpadhātu, arūpadhātu, and nirodhadhātu. Rūpadhātu is the element that has form and is composed of corporeal matter. Arūpadhātu is formless and abstract, while Nirodhadhātu is the cessation of nāma (mind) and rūpa (body) and is experienced as voidness. The space element should be regarded as nirodhadhātu, and not as rūpa or nāma. (The last three dhātus or elements, of form, formlessness and cessation, are not abstract ideas but relate to certain experiences won through the practice of calming, concentrating and enriching the mind with wisdom. In the same way, the first four great elements may also be experienced through mindfulness of the body.)





MIND AND BODY

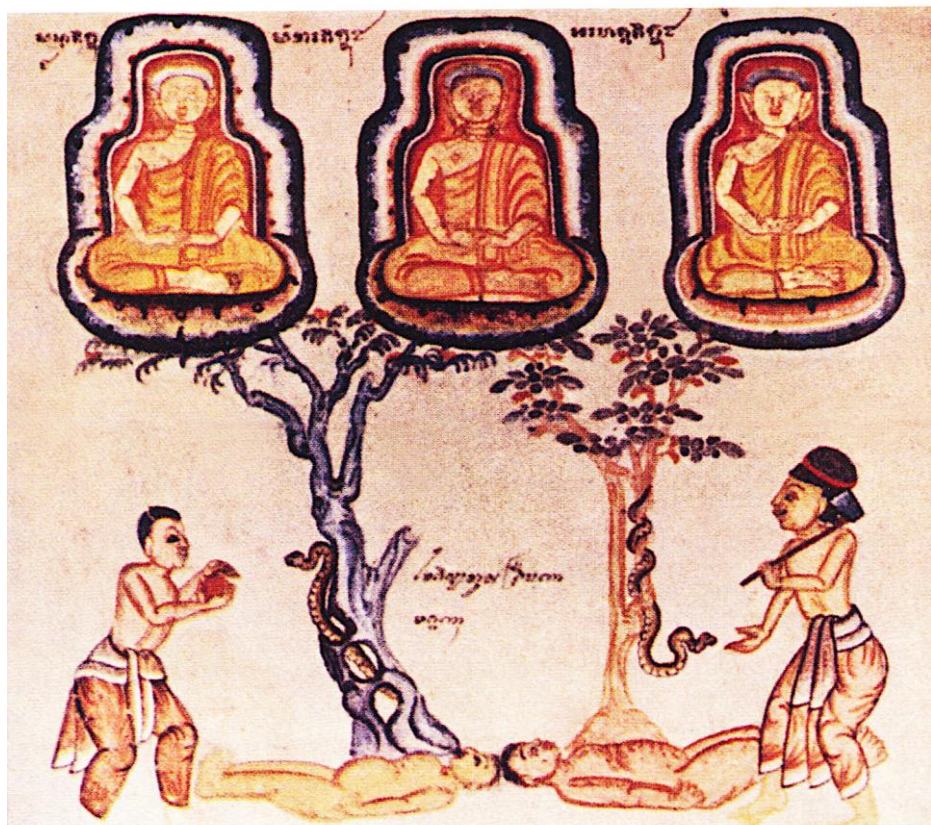




2.

Here the symbolism is also to illustrate body and mind. Body is represented by the earthen-ware vessels (carried by the man on the left) while mind is shown as the whimsical, swift and restless monkey. (The same symbolism of the monkey representing mind is found in the Lord Buddha's discourses (Sutta) as well as in the illustrated Wheel of Wandering-on as seen in Tibetan temples). The monkeys prove themselves adept at avoiding capture and the hunters have difficulty in spearing and shooting these agile creatures. The meaning is that the monkey (mind) is difficult to control. The body, however, is mere earthen-ware, and cannot move by itself; it is easily broken and fragile. The combination of these two make up a human being.





MIND-CONTROL





3.

In this picture, the trees having cavities represent bodies and the snakes depicted here live within these cavities, or, metaphorically, the mind lives in the body. Hence, the snake, a dangerous and poisonous creature representing the mind, should be trained and controlled. One means of control calls for restraint (symbolised by the weapons in the illustration), while at other times one must be indulgent, using kindness as a means to ultimate control. In short, both edges of the cut crystal must be used in taming the mind. The symbolism of the mind and the snake should not be taken lightly; both are potentially dangerous (leading one into pain and death. The snake's poison is craving (taṇhā) which in searching for pleasures and continued existence, is sure to kill one many times unless one takes firm steps to apply the antidote of Dhamma). The two corpses and three monks are a reminder that the mind is governed and subdued and death overcome through meditation.





THE WAY TO ESCAPE FROM THE FIVE AGGREGATES



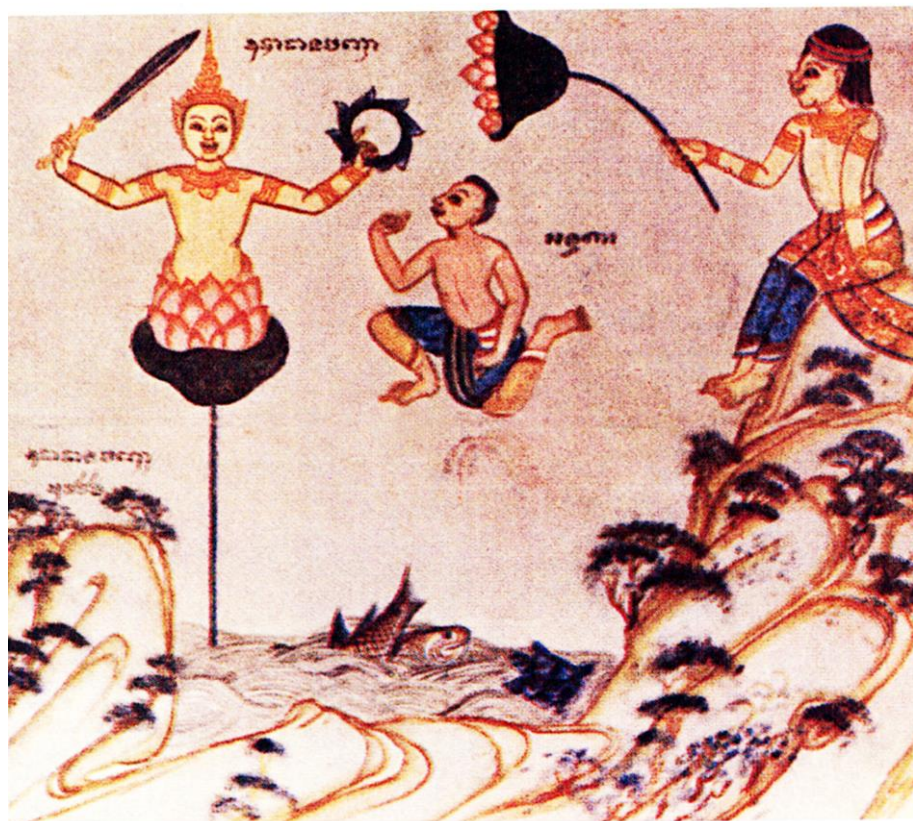


4.

There is a story here which one should know before studying the picture. A man who is fleeing from five thieves reaches a river where he discovers a floating corpse; he jumps onto it and crosses the river. Here instead of thieves, five birds have been drawn in the right hand corner and these also represent the five heaps (khandha) or aggregates: material quality (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), volitions (saṅkhāra) and consciousness (viññāṇa). All of these are characterized by grasping (upādāna) and are a complete analysis of one's self.

The rotting corpse, used to cross the river, is none other than one's loathesome and disagreeable body. (One should not suppose that the body in Buddhist Teaching is to be despised, nor are the consequences of doing so [self-torture] ever found in Buddhist Teachings. However, the true nature of the body has to be seen with insight—as it really is and not as one wishes it might be since everyone knows, when they think about it, that it is naturally subject to old age, disease and death.) The corpse however, is still useful in reaching the further shore of Nibbāna. The monks, and the lay people holding lotus blossoms are those who have realized the truth and recognized the dangers of the five heaps which constitute a 'person' and are no longer attached to them.





WISDOM SPRUNG OUT OF "THE MUD"

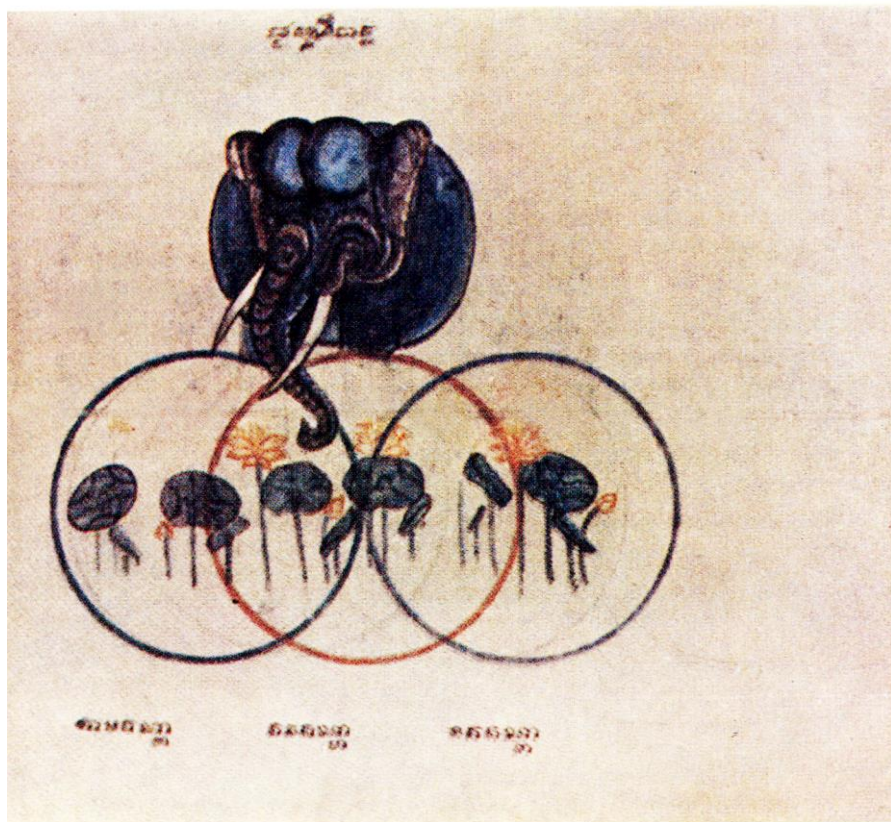




5.

This picture is another symbol of mind and body, or *nāma* and *rūpa*. The body here, is represented as mud beneath the waters while the mind is the lotus that springs from the mud. Unlike the loathsomeness of the body, the lotus is fragrant and pure. The turbulence of the waters and the fish therein are all the worldly desires which agitate the mind. The man emerging from the lotus is holding a disc and a sword which symbolize the wisdom that cuts off and removes all defilements (*kilesa*). Defilement here, is represented by the boy approaching the enlightened man who, triumphant, pays no attention. The man in the right-hand corner holding the lotus-fruit has practised meditation and has found the way out of the darkness, having seen for himself the Fruit of Dhamma.





THE THREE KINDS OF CRAVING





6.

In this illustration, an elephant symbolizing all beings, is drawing water from the three ponds of craving, namely : craving for sensual pleasures, for existence and for non-existence. The drinking of ponds represents our indulgence in the three cravings.





DEPENDENT ORIGINATION





7.

Here, all beings (the elephant) having consumed the three ponds of craving are consumed by craving, as the elephant is itself gulped down by a small green frog, a symbol of craving (since ordinary frogs can inflate themselves while this one has managed to gorge itself with all the cravings!) The sequence of events illustrates the teaching of Dependent Arising (Paticca-samuppāda). The water in the ponds is regarded as sensory contact (phassa) which gives rise to the three feelings (vedanā), which in turn leads to craving (taṇhā). Craving gives rise to grasping (upādāna) which leads to existence (bhava) and consequently causes birth (jāti).





DEPENDENT ORIGINATION (CONTINUED)





8.

The frog of craving (taṇhā) is now devoured by a snake (upādāna) or grasping) which in turn is eaten by a bird (bhava or mental becoming) while the bird perched on the reeds (which are fragile and hollow, being without heartwood as our bodies and without an abiding soul) symbolizes birth [jāti]. The roots of the reeds are being gnawed by four mice representing birth, old age, sickness and death, which events mark the passing of our lives.





DEPENDENT ORIGATION (CONTINUED)

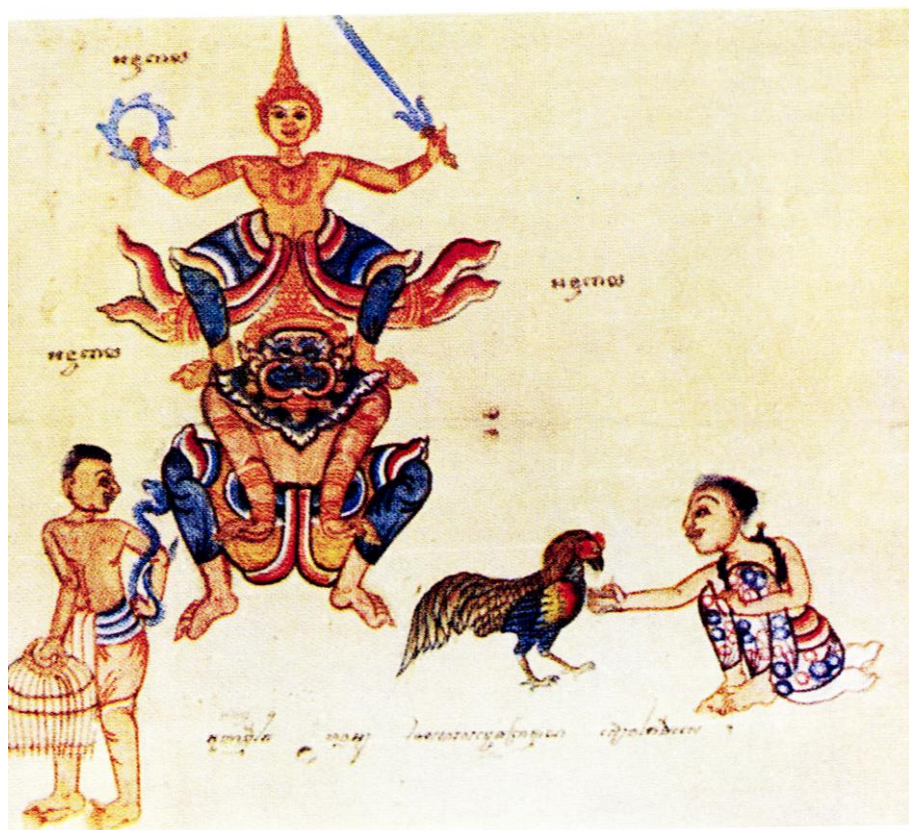




9.

The symbols here are like those of the last picture : the bird having eaten the snake, the snake the frog, the frog the elephant, and the elephant having drained the three ponds of water. This picture, although by a different artist is used here to show a similar thought.





IGNORANCE





10.

This is a representation of ignorance (avijjā)* and the method of overcoming it. The man in the middle of the picture straddles a demon, wielding a disc in one hand and a sword in the other. The demon is symbolic of ignorance, while the weapons represent wisdom and signify the victory of wisdom over ignorance. Both corners of the picture show different kinds of ignorance. In the right hand corner, the man feeding a cock indicates his attachment to his possessions and the fact that he has become a slave to them.

In the left-hand corner, the man holding a snake and a fishing basket symbolizes ignorance by mistaking the snake for a fish. Here a man is mistaking evil for good, or suffering for happiness.

* (Avijjā is not well translated as ignorance since this means not knowing at all. But avijjā means not knowing properly or completely, knowing mistakenly.)





IGNORANCE AND ITS RESULTS





11.

This picture is divided into two sections, the lower half continuing the theme of ignorance. The lower left-hand picture of a man feeding his chickens shows he has now become servile to his own possessions due to their abundant increase. The right hand corner illustrates the unfruitful practice of fire-worship. (A brahminical practice still used in India as a rite for propitiating the gods. Formerly, also in Siam, brahminical rites were popular, hence its inclusion here. It illustrates attachment to rites and vows (silabbata- paramāsa) which is an aspect of ignorance).

The top half of the picture depicts the result of ignorance : a man caught in the wheel of continuous rebirth. The sequence of a man being bitten by a dog, drowning, and confronting a lion, teaches that once caught in the wheel of life, one faces all manner of trouble, fear and death. But in his ignorance, the captive neither realizes the significance, nor the cause of his plight ; unsatisfactory experience (dukkha) has become a common part of his life.





IGNORING THE TRUTH

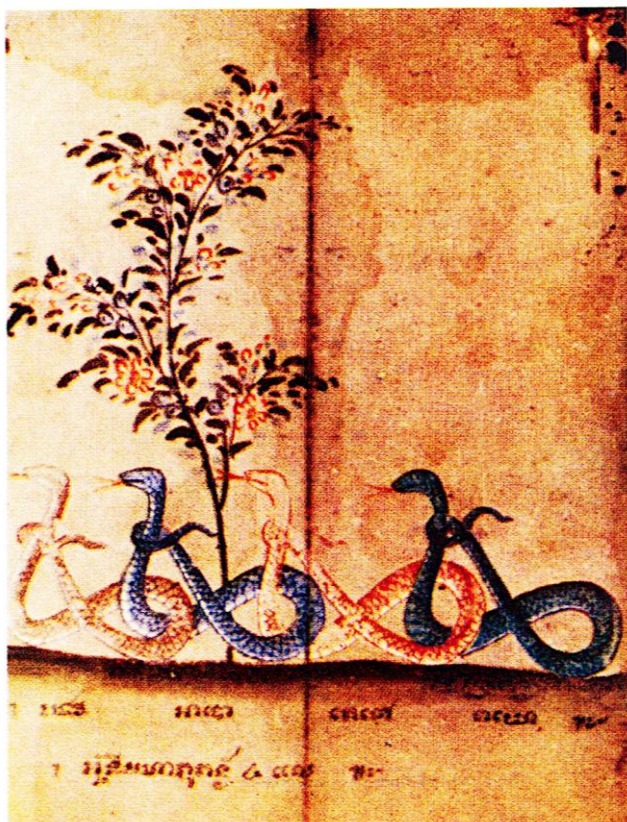




12.

Here, the boy facing the lion does not fear it because he is not aware of the real danger. The lion represents the defilements of greed, anger, ignorance and lust as well as birth, old age, sickness and death. The young man is incapable of appreciating the dangers confronting him because in his ignorance he still clings to the overt sensory perceptions of form, sound, taste, smell, and touch which are the bases for unsatisfactory experience. In contrast to this state of ignorance, the figure above does realize life's perils. Having comprehended these elementary causes, he points them out to the young man who still persists in ignoring the truth.





FOUR KINDS OF ATTACHMENT





13.

The four snakes in this picture represent four kinds of attachment :
 kāmupādāna (grasping arising from sense desires), diṭṭhupādāna (grasping at views philosophical and theological), sīlabbatupādāna (grasping at belief in the efficacy of rites and vows), attavādupādāna (grasping at belief in a soul theory). Any manner of attachment is, of course, the result of ignorance and like the entwinement of a snake. (It is noteworthy that these four graspings are shown by snakes looped and wound about each other indicating that all the graspings are interrelated. They illustrate very well the sense of being bound by or tied down to the ordinary round of life.)





UNDERSTANDING AND ATTACHMENT



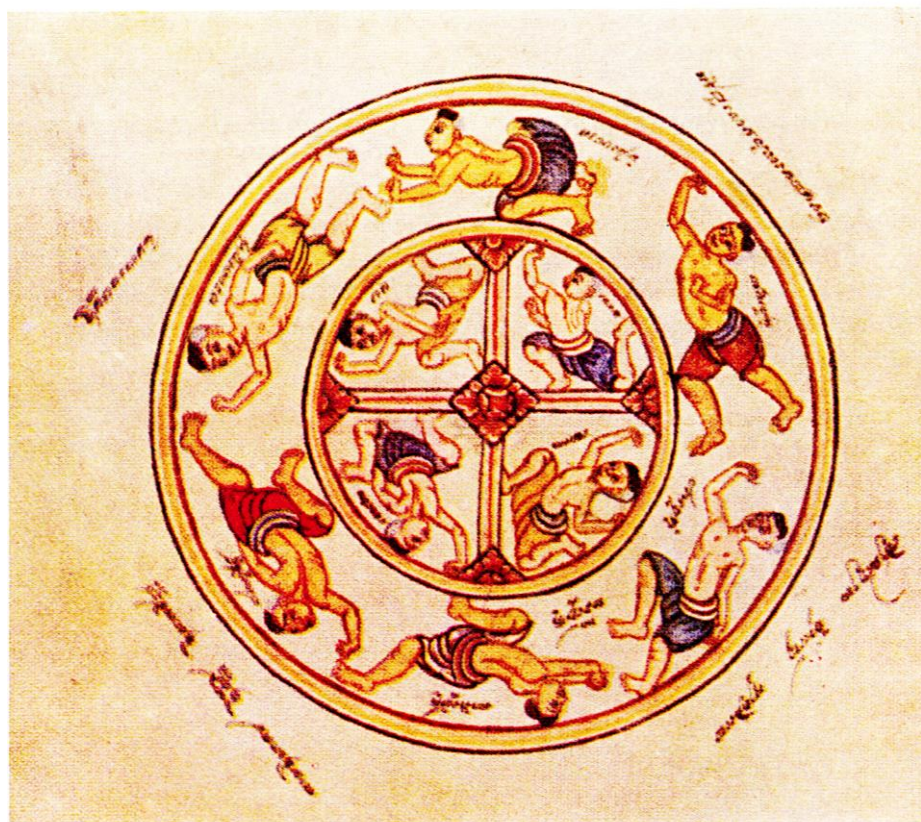


14.

The man standing complacently as if unaware of his danger, (on the left of this picture), is entwined by the four snakes shown in the last illustration. The wise man on the right sits freely in his palace and recognizing them, points to the four kinds of grasping.

(Grasping at belief in the soul or abiding self is the snake which is poised over his head, while in his left hand he grasps at sense-desires. His right hand lays hold of theological and philosophical views while he is hobbled and cannot walk along the Practice-path of Dhamma because the snake of belief in the efficacy of rites and vows has him by the heels.)





THE WHEEL OF WANDERING-ON





15.

The four men confined in the inner circle represent again the four kinds of grasping, while the six men in the outer circle stand for the five sensory and one mental perceptions (seeing, smelling, tasting, hearing, touching, and thought). These sense-perceptions are the causes of suffering and entanglement in the Wheel of Wandering-on (in birth-and-death).*

So long as the men do not realize the truth, they cannot escape being trapped. Held captive by misunderstanding their perceptions, men are also subject to birth, old age, sickness and death.

* This is portrayed in great detail in the paintings of the Wheel of Wandering-on originating in India but a tradition now confined to Tibet. Three Wats in Siam now also possess such paintings: Suan Mokkhabalārāma in Chaiya, Wat Khao Krailas, Hua Hin, and Wat Bovoranives, Bangkok.





OCEAN CLOSE TO THE EYE — UNSEEN





16.

The larger circle on the left with four men represent the wheel of birth, old-age, sickness and death. The fish in the smaller circle on the right are symbolic of all beings caught in the Wheel of Wandering-on.

Fish, in their natural habitat of water, do not recognize it as water because their environment has never changed so that they have no basis for comparison. Men too, are not aware of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) because they know nothing else. Water symbolizes the Ocean of Wandering-on, while the dry land close at hand, is Nibbāna that the fish never think of approaching, (as men do not think to ‘approach’ Nibbāna which is so ‘close’ to them).





EFFECT OF IGNORANCE

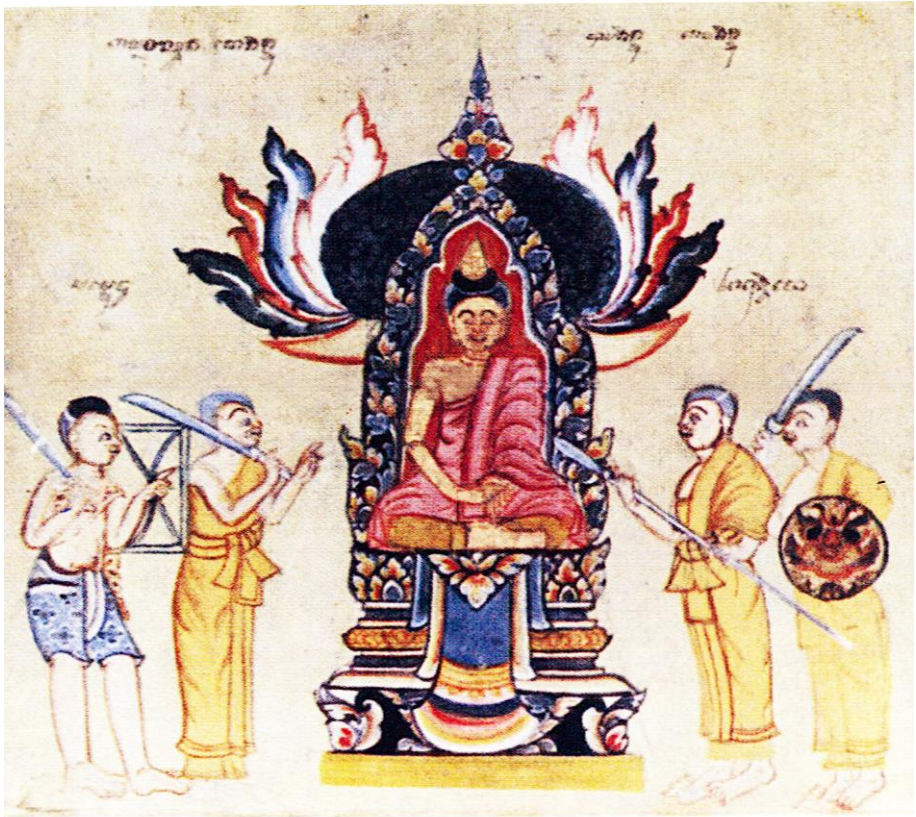




17.

The top part of the picture shows an elephant caught in the mud of ignorance. The harder the elephant struggles not knowing the correct way to free himself, the deeper he sinks. (This is exactly the same with many people who realize to some extent how they are trapped in their lives but who, as they fail to discern the causes of their troubles, cannot remedy them. The wise man standing nearby is detached from the turmoil and exhorts us to beware of this treacherous mud.) The two men at the bottom, are engaged in sawing through the tree of ignorance. Both of them wear crowns of high station signifying that no matter how high one's position, one is also subject to ignorance of the real condition of saṃsāra. Thus attaining freedom is not easy. The wise man, seated at ease, is one who has realized the truth, being detached and free.





WRONG PRACTICE OF BUDDHA — DHAMMA





18.

The Buddha, here representing the true teachings, is being attacked by three monks and one laymen. The fact that there is only one layman attacking the teachings indicates that many monks, once having been ordained in the Order, continue to follow false paths and are attached to ceremony. They are indifferent to the true teachings and prefer the Wheel of Wandering-on to Nibbāna.

(Monks, as they are more conspicuous than laymen and because they are supposed to be devoting their lives to the Three Gems, and because it is known that they have many precepts to keep pure, can attack the Dhamma by misconduct in a more violent way than is possible for laypeople.)





RIGHT PRACTICE OF BUDDHA — DHAMMA





19.

This picture illustrates the adoration of the Three Gems by four persons representing the four constituents of the Buddhist community : a monk (bhikkhu), nun (bhikkhunī), layman (upāsaka) and laywoman (upāsikā). For some reason or other, it has not been completed.





ACCEPTANCE OF THE DHAMMA





20.

The monk carrying a fan in this picture, shows acceptance of Dhamma for both thorough study (pariyatti) and practice (patipatti). (Study without practice produces the dry scholar for whom all wisdom is found in books. Practice without study though often accompanied by intense but blind faith, easily leads to taking a wrong path. These two are complementary aspects and if one or the other is lacking, it is not likely that one will be able to gain realization of Dhamma or penetration [pativedha].)





MEDITATION IN A SECLUDED PLACE



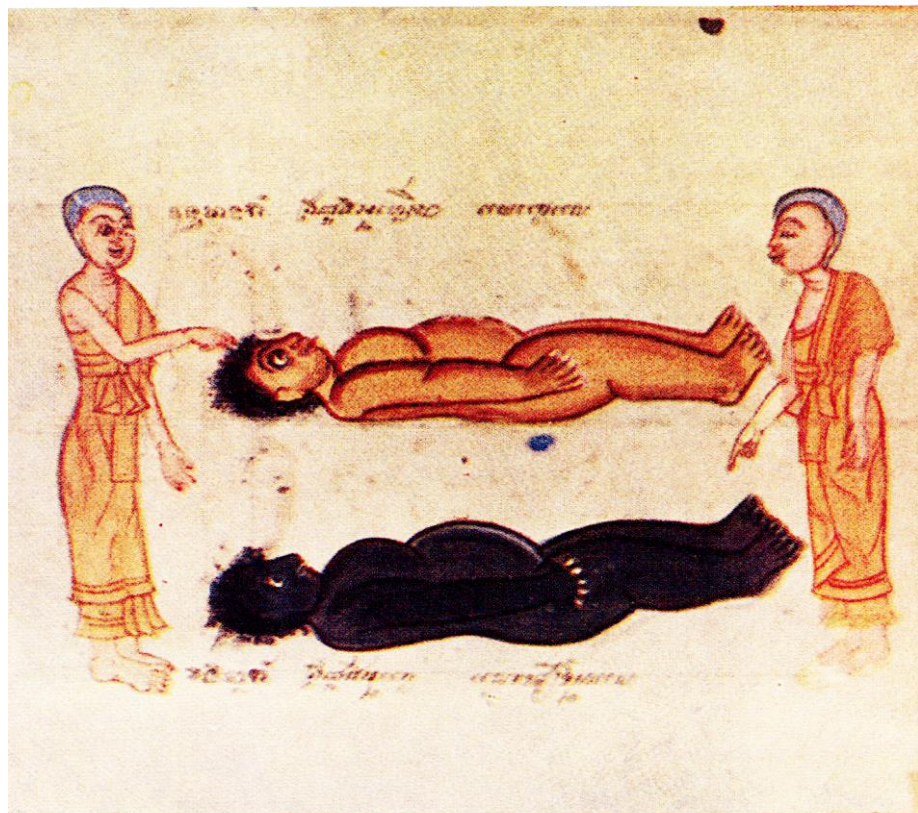


21.

This picture depicts meditation in a secluded place. According to the Pāli Canon, such a place is found at the foot of a tree, in a forest or cave, on a mountain, in a cemetery, jungle, or in a peaceful and secluded open space.

(The cultivation of solitude in living (kāya-viveka) is useful for the development of solitude of the heart (citta-viveka) when it is separated from the mental defilements, and this in turn leads on to the ultimate solitude, the final separation from all bases for future existence — upadhi-viveka.)





CONTEMPLATION ON CORPSES I-II





22.

At this point, we have reached the essential method of meditation taught through this book : reflection on foulness (asubha kammaṭṭhāna) or the use of corpses as objects for contemplation and realization of impermanence. (There are ten Reflections on Foulness given in the Discourses and in the “Path of Purification” *Visuddhimagga* each of the corpses varying according to the stage of decay reached. However, Teachers of meditation in Siam often teach that one should see one’s own body as though it were one of these corpses. Only then will one find Freedom (vimutti) from the idea that the body is ‘me’ or ‘mine’.) There are two corpses in this picture, and the monks are using both the bloated corpse (uddhumāta) at the top, and the livid corpse from green to blue-black in colour (vinīlaka) at the bottom, as objects of meditation. The purpose of this type of meditation is to lead the monk to the realization of the changeability and unwholesomeness of the body. Once this is thoroughly understood, a monk can no longer be attached to his body.

(The “Path of Purification,” Chapter VI says that the former type is suitable for one who is greedy about shape, form or figure since it makes evident the disfigurement of the body’s shape. The latter, the livid, is recommended for those greedy for the skin’s colour and complexion since the disfiguring of the skin’s colour is evident.)





CONTEMPLATION ON CORPSES III-IV





23.

Above is seen a festering corpse (vipubbaka) while below is a cut-up corpse (vicchiddaka). Both are being used as objects of meditation. (The former suited to those keen about the body's smell when scents and perfumes are used, since it makes evident the foul stench of this sore, the body ; while the latter is useful for those who think of the body as 'one thing', since hollowness and lack of singleness becomes evident in the cut-up corpse.)





CONTEMPLATION ON CORPSES V-VI





24.

The corpse in the top part of this picture is called ‘the gnawed’ (vikkhāyita) or one which has been dismembered and gnawed by dogs. The one below is called ‘the scattered’ (vikkhittaka), or a corpse that has been separated and scattered by its exposure to nature and beasts. (The gnawed is suited to those who lust after accumulation of flesh in such places as the breasts since it makes plain how such prized flesh-masses come to naught. ‘The scattered’ should be used by those who are greedy for grace of limbs for it can be seen how without grace are scattered limbs.)





CONTEMPLATION ON CORPSES VII-VIII





25.

The corpse at the top is known as ‘the hacked and scattered’ (hatavikkhittaka), and the one below is called ‘lohitaka’ or a bleeding corpse. (The first is recommended for the use of those who have greed for the beauty of the body as a whole since it makes evident the disintegration and alteration of the body. The bleeding corpse is suitable for one greedy in seeing elegance of ornaments and fine cloth since it shows the body’s repulsiveness when smeared by blood.)





CONTEMPLATION ON CORPSES IX-X





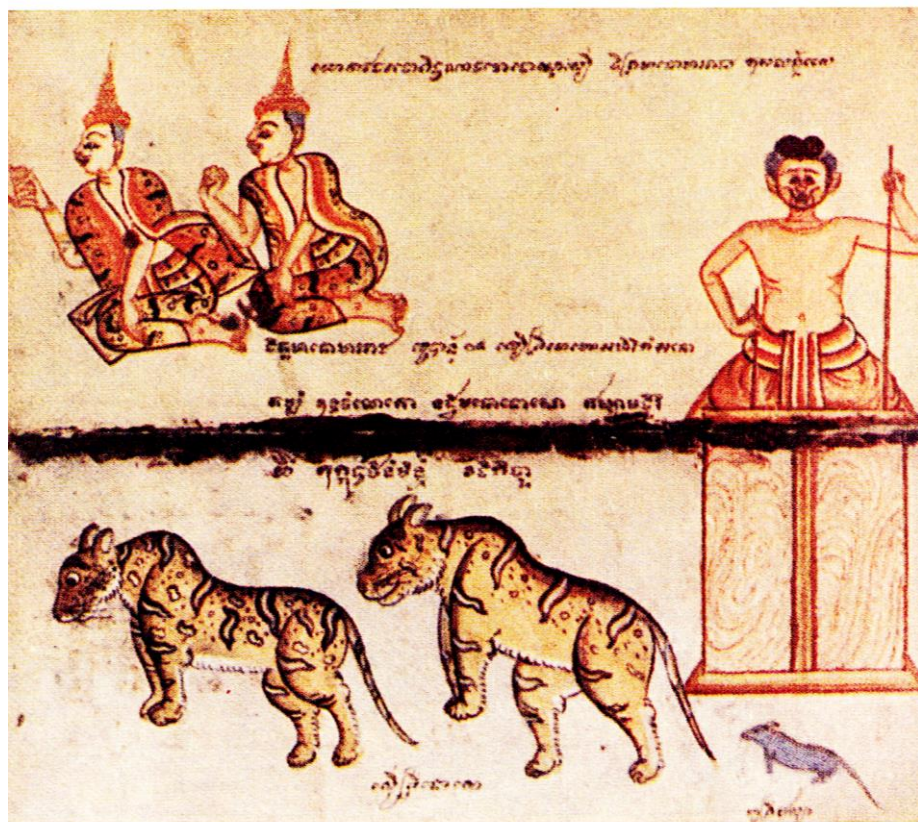
26.

This picture completes the sequence of the ten objects of contemplation of the foul by illustrating a worm-infested corpse (pūluvaka) at the top, and the bone's remaining from a corpse at the bottom (aṭṭhika).

(The first of these suits those who think that ‘this body is mine’, for having this sense of ownership over the body they must be rather disillusioned to see a corpse shared with many families of worms. As the “Path of Purification” also says: “This body is shared by many and creatures live in dependence on (all parts and organs) and feed (on them). And there they are born, grow, old and die, evacuate and pass water; and the body is their maternity home, their hospital, their charnel ground, their privy and their urinal...” The last of the ten reflections upon foulness is for those who are greedy about having and seeing fine bones, especially teeth, since the repulsiveness of bones is evident.

(If one passes over these pages quickly or finds them of little interest, this will reveal the fact that one has little inclination to face the true nature of one’s body but instead prefers to be deluded. One who is earnest in the practice of Dhamma finds these subjects of great interest since they help to eliminate greed, making him dispassionate regarding the body, which does not in any case, ‘belong’ to anyone.)





THREE ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

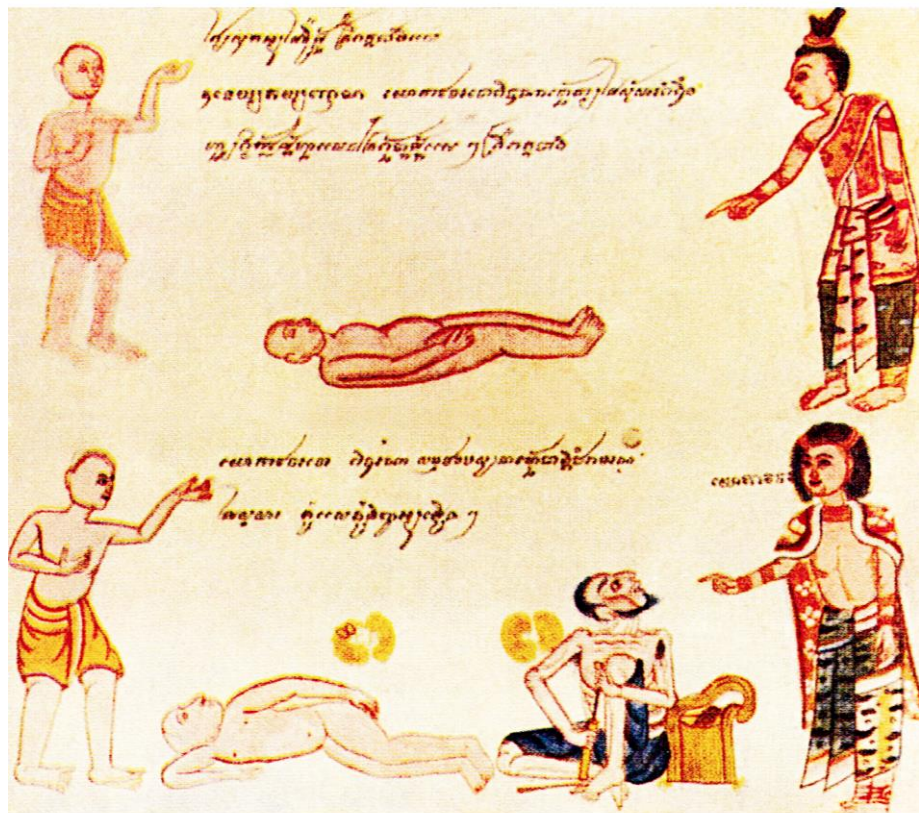




27.

This picture deals with the three essentials for the successful practice of Dhamma. They are: preference (chanda), energy (viriya), and self-confidence (vesārajja). Preference here is expressed by two Devas holding gems or diamonds in their hands. The man working the bellows is an expression of the energy and action necessary to create the fire, which in turn, is powerful enough to melt any material. The next part of the picture shows a mouse chasing two tiger and is an example of self-confidence. For if we wish to practice Dhamma, we must be confident and resolute in fighting the tigers of the defilements.





SAMMASANAÑÑA AND UDAYABBAYAÑÑA





28.

Having already expressed preference, exerted the necessary energy, and having replaced fear with self-confidence, one is in a position to attain knowledge (ñāṇa). Illustrations twenty-eight to thirty-eight depict the various stages on the path of achieving knowledge (by which one should understand is meant not book-knowledge but ‘experience of the truth’ in one’s own mind and body).

The first part of this picture deals with knowledge derived from the contemplation of the rising and ceasing of all forms of existence (udayabbaya-ñāṇa) while the bottom half is related to knowledge achieved from the preparatory stages of meditation called the ‘thorough-knowledge’ (sammasana-ñāṇa) of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self-ness which precedes the attainment of insight.

Having already considered the truth pertaining to birth, old age and death, the standing figure on the bottom right hand side has consequently attained spiritual wisdom (paññā). The child on the left is a representation of birth, the old man sitting and mashing his betel nut symbolizes the limitations of old age, while the corpse in the centre is death as well as the realization and appreciation of death arising due to thorough knowledge. By the attainment of this knowledge, one can clearly see and understand the quality of impermanence (aniccā), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and selflessness (anattā). However, in the achievement of insight, (vipassanā-ñāṇa), knowledge of the foregoing three characteristics (tilakkhaṇa) is not counted as the first step (i.e. it is not included as one of the nine levels for arriving at insight.)

The top part of this picture is concerned with the first stage leading to attainment of insight (udayabbayañāṇa). At this point, one concentrates only on arising and cessation (symbolized here by the boy and the corpse). Reflecting on arising and cessation, one progresses from thorough knowledge which considers the whole process of birth, old age, and death.

Naturally broader in scope, the latter knowledge offers general and unspecific impressions while if we compare the knowledge of rising and ceasing with sammasana-ñāṇa, it can be seen that the former is more specialized and exact.

(For these knowledges explained in detail, see the “Path of Purification” —*Visuddhimagga* translation from Semage, Colombo, Ceylon, Chapter XXI.)



BHAṄGAÑĀṆA AND BHAYAÑĀṆA





29.

The lower half of this picture is an allegory on the knowledge consisting of the contemplation of the dissolution of all forms of existence (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). This is the second stage of insight-knowledge. The picture shows a wise man meditating upon a corpse. Here, the aspirant ignores the rising aspect and devotes his mind exclusively to the aspect of cessation in order to discover, more profoundly, that all things are continuously ceasing. The top part of the picture illustrates the knowledge of fearfulness (*bhaya-ñāṇa*), or the insight derived from concentration upon the fearfulness of all compounded things (*saṅkhāra*).

The three thieves stand for the three states of existence (*bhava*); *kāma*bhava, *rūpa*bhava, and *arūpa*bhava or sensual existence, the existence of subtle form, and formless existence all of which are fearsome, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of soul or self. They are not therefore to be desired.

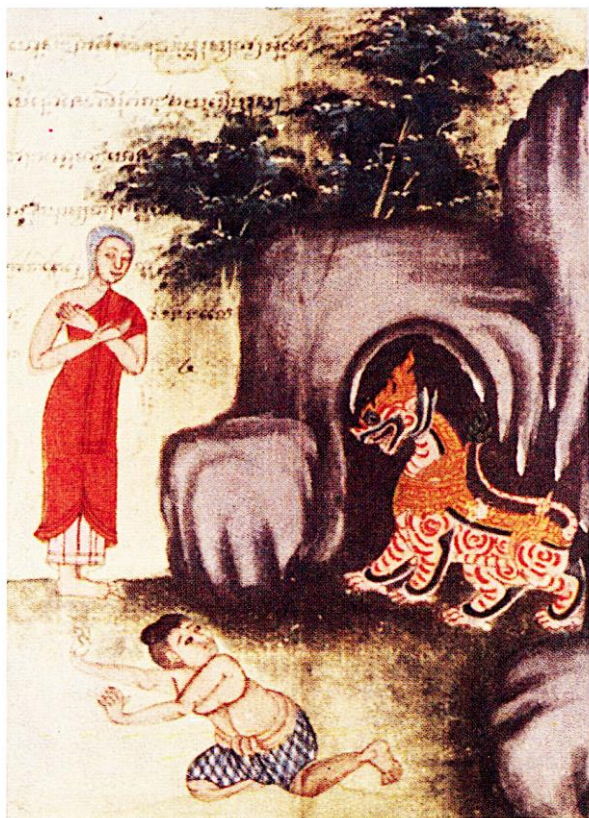
(Sensual existence includes:

Human birth and animal conditions which are well-known to us, besides a number of other states, all woeful such as those of the hungry ghosts and of the hell-wraiths which of course are normally invisible. Also found here are the six celestial heavens of sensual pleasures.

In the second state of existence are the various levels of Brahma-worlds corresponding to attainment of mental absorptions (*jhāna*) beyond the range of sensuality in which form is very subtle.

The formless types of existence correspond to the formless attainments (*arūpa-samāpatti*) in which there is only the experience of subtle mentality (*nāma*), beyond the range of any sort of body (*rūpa*).

Birth into all these states is governed by the kamma or intentional actions of the individual. All these states of existence, heavens and bells included are impermanent.)



BHAYAÑÑĀ (BY ANOTHER ARTIST)





30.

This picture also illustrates the theme of the knowledge of fearfulness but is by a different artist. Here the boy (or the immature person) is frightened by the lion while above the aspiring monk, (who stands for the mature person able to face unwelcome but true facts) realizes the fearsomeness of all compounded things.





ĀDĪNAVAÑÑA AND NIBBIDĀÑÑA





31.

The top half of this picture illustrates the fourth stage in insight meditation, knowledge consisting in the contemplation of danger, ādīnava-ñāṇa. Having arrived at the third stage of knowledge, one realizes that all compounded things are the source of misery and should be feared just as meeting with a lion should be dreaded. The corpse in the foreground reminds the aspirant that all compounded things are the source of danger. (There is nothing which is compounded, such as mind and body, can be any sort of refuge as they are menaced by decay and death.)

In the lower half of the picture, the burning house illustrates the fifth state of knowledge (nibbidā-ñāṇa) or knowledge derived from the contemplation of aversion. The aspirant, once having witnessed the house of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self-ness go up in flames, will now avoid and fear all compounded elements. ('House' is often used as a symbol for the body which is burning all the time with change and decay, and burns after death upon the pyre.)





MUCCITUKAMYATĀÑĀNA





32.

Rāhu, the celestial monster who was said to be the cause of eclipses by eating the moon, is the central character in illustrating the sixth stage of knowledge, *muccitukamyatā-nāṇa*, or the desire for deliverance. The aspirant to this knowledge, symbolized by the moon, seeks to escape the destruction imposed by the celestial monster who represents the round of rebirths (*samsāra*). This picture is popularly used on the gates to Siamese monasteries to remind the faithful to free themselves from the round of rebirth.

(This may be compared with the more complicated Wheel of Wandering-on (*samsāracakra*) which is found in the entrance of the great majority of Tibetan Buddhist temples where it fulfills the same function — a reminder and a warning of the perils of the Wandering-on.)





MUCCITUKAMYATĀÑĀṆA



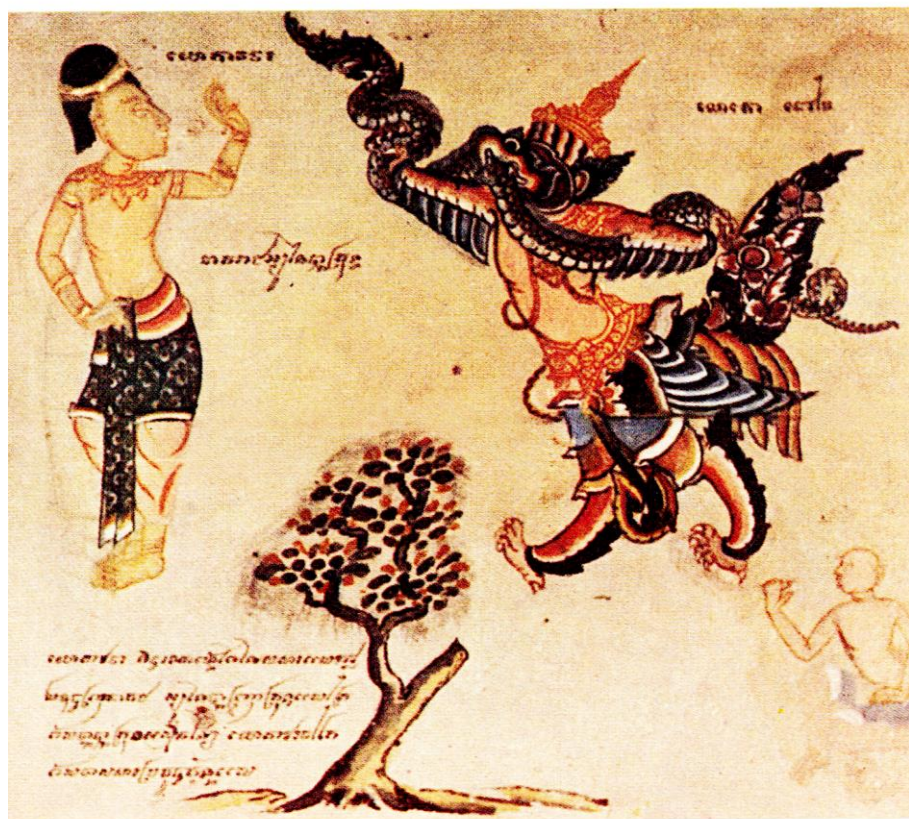


33.

Identical with the theme in picture No. 32, this illustration shows a frog trying to escape from the mouth of a snake, thus symbolizing our efforts to seek release from the unsatisfactory nature of the world.

(Below a bhikkhu sits upon a throne-like seat in a wild, rocky place. This kind of spot is suitable for seeking release while the throne-like seat indicates the exalted nature of one who strives sincerely for that release.)





MUCCITUKAMYATĀÑĀṆA





34.

Desire for deliverance, in this case the sixth stage of knowledge, is shown by a different symbolism, by a serpent attempting to secure its freedom from the garuda (a mythical bird akin to the roc of Arabian legends).





MUCCITUKAMYATĀÑĀṆA





35.

The same theme of desire for deliverance is repeated here. The cock in its cage at the top of the picture, and the fish hooked while swallowing the bait at the bottom, both illustrate confinement, and the need of those upon this path of knowledge to Enlightenment, to be free from worldly confinements and entanglements.

(This picture, the three above and the one over the page. [altogether five pictures] stress the great importance of this stage of knowledge. Ordinary people not understanding the state of the world and of their particular bits of it — mind and body — have therefore no reason for desiring deliverance, but once the true state of the wandering-on in birth-and-death is appreciated then this knowledge becomes foremost in the heart.)





MUCCITUKAMYATĀÑĀṆA AND PATISAÑKHĀÑĀṆA





36.

The barking deer caught in a snare desires freedom, once more emphasizing the importance of the sixth stage of knowledge. The bottom half of this picture depicts the seventh stage of knowledge, that derived from reflective contemplation, *patisankha-nāna*. This picture is related to the tenth in the first part in which a man mistakes a snake for a fish and carries it home holding it very unwisely so that it may strike and kill him. Here, however the man has the snake firmly gripped by the neck and is being told of its danger by a wise man, so that he wants to be rid of this poisonous snake of the mental defilements (*kilesa*). But before he can get rid of the snake, he must first weaken it by seizing its neck tightly, thus freeing it from his arm. Next he must raise it above his head, swinging it rapidly until the snake weakens. Close to death, the snake can be easily tossed away ; or it can be beaten to death afterwards. Paying respects to the Triple Gem is one way to reduce the influence of defilements (and others are Giving, Keeping the Precepts and development of the mind by meditative practice). All such worthy practices should be accumulated in opposition to the power exerted by the defilements.





SAṆKHĀRUPEKKHĀṆA





37.

Sanikhārupekkhā-ñāna : The knowledge of equanimity in respect of all compounded aspects of existence. Previously, the aspirant was attached to the phenomena of existence : his body (rūpa), feeling (vedanā), memory (saññā), volitions (saṅkhārā), and consciousness (viññāṇa), which he mistook for his ego or personality. By placing confidence in the reality of these false impressions, he was a victim of the process of existence (bhava). No longer held captive by them, he has become indifferent to their pressures and confinements. Like the man in the illustration who watches his former wife making love to another man, he is free from emotional distress and involvement. He is completely unaffected and indifferent.





SACCĀNULOMIKA—ÑĀṆA





38.

Saccānulomikā-ñāṇa : The ninth stage of knowledge derived from conformity with truth. The ship represents the body (rūpa) and the owner of the ship, standing at the bow is mind (citta).*

The ship is crossing from the burning world of mortality to the other shore of Nibbāna, which is represented by the Three Gems to which the owner of the ship (mind) points. The crew and equipment aboard are the various teachings necessary to cross the seas of wandering-on in birth-and-death (saṃsāra). The Noble Eight-fold Path and other necessary Dhamma such as faith (saddhā), or wisdom (paññā) are essentials required to guide the ship across. Of these teachings, Right View (Sammādiṭṭhi)** is the most important.

The importance of right view and wisdom is shown by the bird perched atop the mast of the ship. Should the ship go astray, the bird is sent out to establish the correct course. This practice of using a sea-bird for navigational purposes dates back to the time three or four thousand years ago, when compasses and other navigational instruments were not available. Steering from the stern of the ship is the captain who represents Right Mindfulness [Sammāsaṭi].

(* The same symbolism is used for nāma-rūpa, or mentality-materiality in the Wheel of Wandering-on.)

(** Right View (or understanding) is that which leads one inwards to Nibbāna after seeing which it should be translated as : Perfect View. Other views (philosophical, or theological) lead one upon other paths and are called Wrong Views, or those which lead astray from Nibbāna. These latter may, nevertheless, result in good for gaining rebirth as man or as a celestial being. Other factors of the Eightfold Path are 'Right' or 'Wrong' for the same pragmatic reason.)





GOTRABHŪÑĀṆA





39.

This picture illustrates maturity of knowledge (gotrabhū-ñāṇa). Here the aspirant points to the Three Gems upon the ornate throne and signifies that he has finally taken Nibbāna as the object of his meditation. At this stage, he is prepared to transcend the ‘family’ (gotra) of ordinary mortals and progress into the realm of the Noble Ones (ariya), which term also means those who have developed.*

* See illustration No. 41.





GOTRABHŪĀÑĀṆA

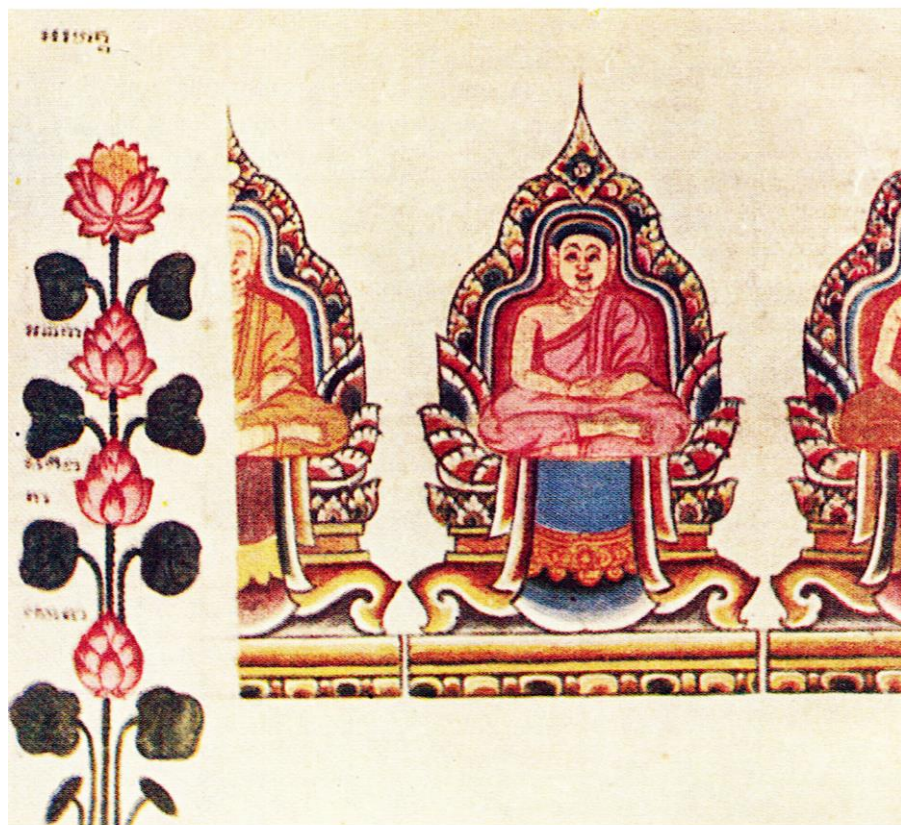




40.

Maturity of knowledge is also the subject in this picture. Here the cow which represents the ordinary person, is free from its pen because now it has mindfulness (symbolised by the rope), and is thus free from the round of rebirths. Upon leaving its enclosure mature knowledge arises. Freedom has been secured through the use of mindfulness and wisdom symbolized by the sharp-edged spear so that the cow is prepared to abandon its common worldliness for the supermundane of Nibbāna. A dramatic transformation is shown in the upper picture where instead of a penned cow, a man upon the supermundane path flies effortlessly, holding two lotuses in his hands. (Perhaps symbolizing purity and compassion.)





ATTAINMENT OF NOBLE FRUITS





41.

After attaining maturity of knowledge, one arrives at magga-ñāṇa or knowledge of the path leading to Nibbāna, following upon which one attains phala-ñāṇa (Fruition-knowledge), which is recognition of the Path.

Magga-ñāṇa and phala-ñāṇa are obtained through the process of :

1. stream-entering (sotāpanna)
2. once-returning (sakadāgāmī)
3. never-returning (anāgāmī)
4. Arahantship (arahatta)

The four stages of this development* are represented by the four levels of lotuses in the picture and by the seated monks. The fully opened and blooming lotus stands for the Arahant or completely Enlightened One.

* (The ancient Discourses describe four kinds of Noble Persons each of which has penetrated to Nibbāna, their experiences being of varying depth so that they destroy to a different degree various aspects of the defilements.

A *stream-enterer* is one who has just entered upon the realm of the Noble Ones and is sure in any case to attain Nibbāna. A *once-returner* still has sufficient defilements to ensure his rebirth once amongst men, while a *never-returner*, once his physical body has died, can no longer be reborn to this state of being but will attain Nibbāna while existing in the upper realms of the Brahmaworlds called the Pure Abodes (suddhāvāsa). The *Arahant* (one who is accomplished) is the last of the four Noble Ones. He has made an end of the mental defilements and so come to the end of being driven onward in birth-and-death. He has reached complete purity and knows the bliss of Nibbāna. Although monks are shown as attaining these four stages since they have the greatest opportunity to do so, these attainments are also open to diligent laypeople.)





FOUR STAGES OF KNOWLEDGE





42.

This is another way of explaining the four stages of knowledge leading to Nibbāna. Knowledge in conformity with truth (saccānulomikā-ñāṇa) is illustrated by the man (lower left-hand corner) who has just found a precious stone while plucking lotuses at a lotus pond, while the man holding the gem (bottom right) symbolizes the attainment of mature knowledge (gotrabhū-ñāṇa). At top-left the man joyfully raising the gem above his head signifies Knowledge of the Path (maggā-ñāṇa), and the man top-right appreciating the flawless quality of that gem symbolizes phala-ñāṇa or Fruition of the Path.





NIBBĀNA





43.

The monk reclining at ease surrounded by the beauty of many flowers is a representation of Nibbāna which is beyond the preceeding knowledge, (and is adorned with the beauty and fragrance of wisdom and compassion). There is no longer concern with appreciation or admiration of the gem since the final stage has already been attained. (Hence in the two pictures below, the gem has been cast upon the ground while one enlightened being joyfully investigates the world, the other sits tranquilly in enjoyment of inner peace and clarity. It is noteworthy that of these two figures, one is not a monk, thus illustrating that the highest goal is not only for those who practise in the homeless life.)





FREEDOM FROM CLINGING

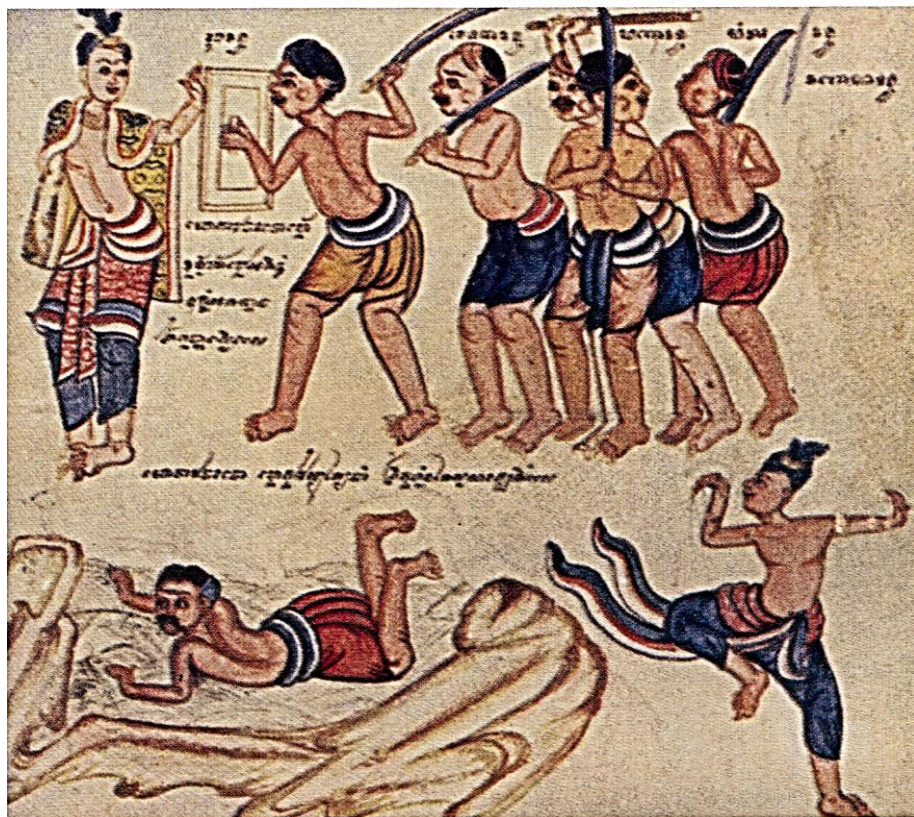




44.

This picture points out the contrast between freedom and clinging : sensuous grasping (kāmapādāna), grasping at view (diṭṭhupādāna), grasping at belief in the efficacy of rites and vows (sīlabbatupādāna), and grasping at belief in a soul theory (attavādupādāna). These four kinds of grasping are represented by the four snakes that entwine and overcome their victim. One must, therefore, use the sword of wisdom to subdue grasping. One method of employing the sword is through meditation on corpses. Once relieved of the burden of grasping and attachment one attains absolute freedom as expressed in the grace and delicacy of the dancer in the right hand corner.





FREEDOM FROM ATTACHMENT





45.

The figure drowning in the sea of saṃsāra, the wandering-on, is contrasted with the wise and free man whose dance symbolizes release and liberation. The top half of this picture contrasts freedom and ignorance. Ignorance in this instance is defined as one's grasping or attachment to the constituents of one's own personality (upādāna-khandha — the five aggregates or heaps), which are here portrayed by five thieves.





NIBBĀNA AND SAṂSARA





46.

The hooked fish and the man struggling to stop himself drowning here express the bondage of saṃsāra. Contrasted to this state of turbulence are the four men at the top who have become Noble disciples. Seated tranquilly around the Three Gems that signify Nibbāna, they are at last released from the unsatisfactoriness of the world.

(This unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) is of course not ‘out there’ in the world, but lies in the hearts of all unenlightened persons being the result of their defilements.)





THE VALUE OF BUDDHA—DHAMMA





47.

The woman here represents the weakness encountered when confronting the Five Heaps or Aggregates personified by the five thieves. Lacking the courage to resist, and unable to help herself, she must depend on or seek help from someone else. In this case, religion or the Dhamma here represented by the monk, is the source of sufficient strength to subjugate the Five Heaps. Once she embraces and follows the Practice-Path, she frees herself from the threat of the Five Heaps. Deliverance from danger and fear is dependent upon realization and practice of the Dhamma. Realization is the ultimate goal and practice of Dhamma is the means whereby one may help oneself.

(Translated by Sulak Sivaraksa and Don Sweetbaum. Explanatory portions in brackets have been added by Ven. Bhikkhu Khantipalo.)





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The Author



This book contains a collection of forty-seven pictures illustrating various points of Dhamma. They are reproduced in colour from a manuscript about one hundred years old found in Chaiya, Southern Siam.

In the present publication the pictures have been rearranged for a more lucid presentation so that they now fall into two groups, the first illustrating the dangers and shortcomings of attachment to Samsara, and the second illustrating the practices leading to Enlightenment and Nibbana.